CHAPTER ONE

Models of Schooling

I go to school. I enter and I say, “Good morning, teacher.” He gives me a kiss and says hello to me. My slave gives me the tablets, the case; I take out the stylus and sit down at my place: I erase and copy according to the model. Afterwards, I show my writing to the teacher, who makes every kind of correction. He asks me to read and then I give [the text] to another pupil; I learn the colloquia and I recite them. “Give me a dictation,” I ask. Another student dictates to me. . . . When the teacher bids them, the little ones engage in letters and syllables, and one of the older students pronounces them aloud for them. Others recite in order the words to the assistant teacher and write verses. Being in the first group, I take a dictation. Then, after sitting down, I study commentaries, glosses, and the handbook of grammar.

In this version of the Hermeneumata, grammar occupies the rest of the pupil’s morning; he is asked to identify parts of speech, conjugate and decline words, and scan verses.¹

The Hermeneumata (also called Colloquia), school handbooks in Greek and Latin that most likely derived from third-century Gaul, describe, among other things, a day in the life of a student in antiquity and were studied in schools, as the text quoted above says explicitly.² They are preserved in medieval manuscripts in eight different versions: the Eastern Greek teachers who composed them drew from a “deeply rooted school tradition, with which they themselves grew up.”³ These schoolbooks are composed of one or more of four parts: a general glossary, a glossary divided by topic, vignettes of everyday life, and short texts, such as fables of Aesop. School exercises analogous to all the elements but the vignettes

¹ See Goetz 1892 (Hermeneumata Einsidlensia, pp. 225–26). Goetz published various versions of what are known as Hermeneumata Ps. Dositheana. See also Dionisotti 1982. I did not translate the text where it is obscure and incoherent.

² The original language probably was Greek, which was translated into Latin: simultaneous teaching in both languages was a common feature of Western schools. The content of the texts reveals that these books were meant for different age groups: students of elementary, grammatical, and even rhetorical schools.

³ Dionisotti 1982: 90.
have been preserved by the sands of Egypt, but the vignettes are the most seductive part of the *Hermeneumata*: their vivid picture of the day-to-day routine of a student in antiquity seems largely plausible. They continued to exercise a fundamental influence on students learning Latin up to the first part of this century: the *Colloquia* composed on the model of the ancient ones by the French schoolmaster Mathurin Cordier in the sixteenth century enjoyed a long-lasting popularity.4

In evaluating the characteristics of ancient schooling that emerge from the *Hermeneumata*, the papyri, and the literary sources, it is important to bear in mind that what now seem integral aspects of modern education are relatively recent developments. It was only in the nineteenth century that mass schooling, institutions for teachers’ education, and a discipline of psychology emerged, and only at the beginning of the twentieth century that the responsibility for institutionalized education was assumed by the state. The modern institution of schooling—particularly in urban environments—is permeated by an utter verticality: students are ranked within classes, classes are ranked according to levels, and separate schools are ranked as conveying a primary, secondary, and tertiary—or higher—education. Even though schools may differ qualitatively, they are invariably characterized by some idea of permanence and possess an existence somewhat independent from that of those who organize them and administer the teaching. Traditionally, historians of education have maintained that students pursued a full course of literary instruction in antiquity in a somewhat similar system, passing through three successive stages supervised by separate teachers: they learned reading and writing in elementary school, grammar and poetry at the school of the grammarian, and the art of speaking in the school of rhetoric.5

The *Hermeneumata*, however, evoke a considerably different paradigm of schooling. In the version quoted above, primary and secondary students are together in one room, while instruction is imparted by a teacher, an assistant teacher, and older students: altogether, by our standards, a chaotic environment in which concentration would have been challenged and the rumble of intellect must have been boisterous. But in order to evaluate the picture realistically, two points must be borne in mind. First, this environment, which appears quaint and unconventional, continued long beyond ancient times. It is remarkably similar to that of the one-

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4 Cordier’s *Colloquiorm scholasticorum libri quatuor* passed through innumerable editions; cf., e.g., J. Clarke, *Corderii colloquiorum centuria selecta* (New York, 1809), with an English translation. I owe this information to Whitney Bagnall.

5 On teachers at the various levels, see below, Chapter 2.
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room schoolhouse of the nineteenth-century American frontier, where the curriculum from first to eighth grade was covered by a single teacher, some teachers were hardly qualified to teach, and “education ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous.”

Second, we need to consider how prevalent the model of schooling offered by the Hermeneumata was in antiquity; its vignettes suggest some stability, a specific building where instruction is imparted, and teachers with distinct identities.

The evidence of attested schools in the Greco-Roman world is admittedly thin: texts and archaeological excavations have revealed only isolated instances of schools that can be identified as such with assurance. But is this due to an actual shortage of schools, or to the fact that schools were physically makeshift affairs that did not leave many traces, and that teaching and learning often went on in various ways and in different environments, without much advertising? Recently it has been argued that an extensive network of schools was indispensable in antiquity for the diffusion of literacy beyond a privileged minority.

Clearly mass education and majority literacy did not exist in antiquity. But if one wants to gain a balanced view of the ancient educational scenario, it is essential to be alert to all the possible, and often unfamiliar, ways in which education may have been structured. It is thus preferable to adopt a broad definition of “school” based on the educational activities of teaching and learning rather than on the identity of the person imparting the instruction, the teacher-student relationship, and the premises in which teaching took place.

In what follows, I primarily focus on schooling in Egypt in the Greek and Roman period by evaluating not only the few explicit references to existing schools in papyri but also various learning environments suggested by excavations and finds of school exercises. In light of the frequent complaints about the lack of evidence for schools, an inquiry of this kind deserves much attention. Literary sources will also illuminate various school structures in the Greek East, particularly at high educational levels. The extant evidence challenges not only the rigid and uniform organization of ancient schooling that past historians of education have pronounced the norm, but also the recently proposed, more realistic model of

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7 Harris 1989: 16 and passim. Harris alludes occasionally to alternative systems of teaching and learning but does not explore this possibility.
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a two-track system, which had some validity only in certain geographical environments. The picture that emerges is one of great variety. Its outlines depended on several factors: not only educational stages, but also urban education versus education in the country, economic and social status of the pupil, and purely situational circumstances. One unifying aspect was the fact that schools did not usually have an existence separate from individual teachers, and even at high stages of education a teacher was responsible for finding suitable accommodations: if he decided to move somewhere else, a school ceased to exist. This increased the power that a teacher in antiquity exercised over his pupils. There was no external structure on which a student could rely, no authority higher than that of the teacher, and no external control besides that of parents. Since a school was a teacher, logical corollaries were the impermanence of the institution and the vulnerability of students to lack of stability and to change. One aspect that needs to be noted, moreover, is that the sources do not transmit examples of schools named after women teachers. This is not too surprising, considering that the evidence of schools named after male teachers is rather meager anyway. But it is difficult to know whether this fact has a meaning beyond the chance of the finds, and whether the few women teachers mentioned in the papyri taught groups of students from different environments who were unrelated to each other, or were in charge of the children of a single family.

REFERENCES TO SCHOOLS IN GRECO-ROMAN EGYPT

The few extant direct references to schools in Greco-Roman Egypt occur in letters and documents on papyrus; at no point do school exercises mention the specific localities where they were written. In the papyri, schools are usually called didaskaleia, “teaching places”—occasionally grammatodidaskaleia when primary instruction was imparted—the same term that designates schools in the literary sources. Most of the time schools were identified by the teacher who provided the instruction. In the second century B.C.E. a school named after the teacher Tothes was located in Memphis, according to a papyrus found among the papers of Ptolemaios,

10 See Booth 1979a and b.

11 Of course, there were exceptions. In a monastery one surmises that some instruction was continued after the death of the monk who was in charge of it.

12 But see the exceptional case of Hypatia, who assembled around herself a number of students; cf. below, Chapter 3, note 16.

13 Cf. below, Chapter 3.
who lived as a recluse in the temple of Sarapis, where he protected twin girls who had found refuge there.\textsuperscript{14} The school of Tothes appears in a confused dream that Ptolemaios narrates to a friend in a letter: the twin sisters had called him from there as he was passing by; after he told them not to become discouraged, Tothes himself brought the girls out to him.\textsuperscript{15} It is likely that this school, which apparently was housed in some kind of building, was an elementary school. Another school that surely provided instruction in elementary letters was located somewhere in the Fayum in the first century C.E.: named for the teacher Melankomas, it is in fact designated in a letter with the unambiguous term \textit{grammatodidaskaleion} (“elementary school”).\textsuperscript{16} Two more intriguing references to primary schools involve the metropolis of Oxyrhynchos in the fourth and the seventh centuries. A papyrus that contains reports to an official lists repairs to several buildings and mentions the school of the \textit{grammatodidaskalos} (“elementary teacher”) Dionysios, which was situated under the western colonnade with other buildings, such as the temple of Fortune, the temple of Achilles, and the office of a surgeon.\textsuperscript{17} The teacher Dionysios, who appears to be responsible for the repairs to the building, which had become run down, must have rented the school space from the city. Another papyrus, dated to C.E. 610, mentions an elementary teacher as a guarantor of a steward’s work contract and calls the school where he tendered his instruction “the Southern School.”\textsuperscript{18} This unusual designation is tantalizing: not only does it indicate that there were at least two elementary schools in Oxyrhynchos at the time, but it also suggests that perhaps this school, which was named not after a certain person but according to its location, was not organized by a specific teacher and sponsored privately but was a public institution.\textsuperscript{19}

Schools of advanced education were also called \textit{didaskaleia}. A papyrus found in Oxyrhynchos that is part of the \textit{Acta Maximi} alludes to their existence in this city.\textsuperscript{20} In this speech, an important personage—perhaps the prefect Gaius Vibius Maximus—is denounced on account of his rela-

\textsuperscript{14} See UPZ I.78.9–14. On Ptolemaios and the twins, see below, pp. 87 and 188–89.
\textsuperscript{15} Not only do Ptolemaios’s dreams heavily reflect reality, but the very fact that he mentions a school named after a certain teacher vouches for the credibility of this allusion.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{SB} III.7268. On this school, see also below.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{P.Oxy. LXIV}.4441, col. IV.18–20, dated to C.E. 315–316.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{P.Oxy. LVIII}.3952; the term used, \textit{scholeion}, does not occur anywhere else in papyri.
\textsuperscript{19} On the existence of a “public grammarian” in Oxyrhynchos in the third century C.E., see below, pp. 54–55.
tionship with a certain seventeen-year-old boy who was constantly in his company and followed him in his travels so that he no longer attended “the schools (didaskaleia) and the exercises proper for the young.” Thus in the papyrus, didaskaleia are considered as localities set aside for education, where a young man ought to spend his day. Schools that imparted some kind of professional education, about which not much is known, were also designated as such. The only reference comes from a Ptolemaic papyrus, which preserves on the back official instructions and letters copied for practice and alludes to students of a school again named after a teacher, Leptines.21 That these were adult students is disclosed not only by the fact that they are addressed as andres, “men,” instead of paides, “boys,” but also by the verb used to exhort them to work hard, which is the more dignified ponein, “work,” instead of the usual philoponein, “pay attention.” It is likely that these “pupils” were officials who received some kind of literary instruction.

While surveying references to teaching and learning situations, mention should be made of the term schole, which occurs both in the Hermeneumata and in the papyri, but with a different connotation in each. In the Hermeneumata, this word is always applied to a place where instruction is given: the pupil is described as entering specific premises, which in one case are located on the second floor of a building: “I went straight along the arcade that leads to the school (schole) . . . when I reached the stairways, I climbed the steps.”22 The word schole, which in Greek originally meant “leisure,” was then applied to that for which leisure was employed, especially learned discussions and lectures, and was also used for a group to whom lectures were given.23 In the papyri this term indicates both the activity of learning and a group of students who congregated to receive instruction. In the second century C.E. in Hermopolis, Heraidous, the daughter of the local governor, needed “material suitable for schole such as a reading book.”24 For Heraidous, going to school meant learning at home with a private tutor—an arrangement that must have been popular among children of the elite, both male and female. Groups of advanced

21 P.Paris 63 of the second century B.C.E. On this papyrus, see below, pp. 189 and 216.
22 See Stephanus, Paris Lat. 6503; Dionisotti 1982: 111. In the Hermeneumata Celtes, the word schole is used interchangeably with akroateion, “room for lectures,” which is glossed as “auditorium.”
23 In the fourth century C.E., the poet Ausonius mentioned the original etymology of this word in an epistle written to encourage his grandson, who had reached school age, Ep. 22.6–7.
24 See P.Giss. 85. On Heraidous, see below.
male students, called *scholai*, followed the classes of teachers of rhetoric in Alexandria. In the second century the private teacher Didymos was heading a *scholē* that the student Neilos had decided to attend for lack of a more prestigious one. Later, in the fifth century, the grammarian Flavius Horapollon is described in a papyrus as having a *scholē* in the capital, where he taught grammar and philosophy.

The relative infrequency of the references to schools in papyri is at first surprising when they are compared with the numerous references to teachers. This seeming paradox is partly offset by the fact that the papyri gloss teachers with a professional title only in order to distinguish them from other community members with the same name; they do not describe the professional activities of these individuals. There is no doubt, however, that this paucity of references is also a reflection of the fact that schools were not always present institutionally in specific buildings designed for educational purposes. Particularly at the lower levels, ancient schools may often have lacked formal settings.

**School Accommodations**

In exploring school accommodations in antiquity, it is necessary to be alert to a vast spectrum of situations: besides occupying a private or public building, a school could have been located within the perimeter of an ancient temple, in the cell of a monastery, in a private house, or even in the open air, at a street corner or under a tree. Teachers took advantage of the various opportunities offered by the place where they lived to set up a “school” whose characteristics varied according to their personal circumstances. Particularly at high educational levels, as a teacher moved up the ladder of recognition, the location and arrangement of his school often changed for the better. I shall identify various school accommodations on the basis of archaeological remains and finds of exercises. I intend only to suggest a range of possible situations rather than to give a complete and detailed account.

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21 On Didymos and Neilos, see below, Chapters 2 and 4.
22 See Cribiore 1996a: 19 and 169 n. 22.
23 Cf. below, p. 46.
24 In this area it is important to use some caution. Attempts to identify the archaeological contexts of exercises are sometimes unconvincing because the provenance of many exercises is uncertain.
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In the Egyptian language, the term used for school is the equivalent of “a room for education.” This expression, which came into existence in the Middle Kingdom, had a long life and passed into Coptic. Even though this term clearly alludes to specific and confined premises in which education was imparted, nevertheless it is difficult to identify such places. Demotic education was centered on the temples, but information concerning the exact localities used for this purpose is scarce. Scholars have attempted to visualize which parts of a temple would be more suitable to gather and instruct a group of students effectively. The temple of the goddess Hathor in Dendera in Upper Egypt, for instance, seems to offer an appropriate place: the square vestibule is a large, cool room surrounded by columns and provided with enough light. On the walls are inscribed names of festive days and lists of various parts of the country that brought offerings to the goddess, which could have been used as teaching material. It is impossible, however, to go beyond the domain of speculation.

Finds of Demotic school exercises point to the presence of schools for Egyptian scribes in various parts of Egypt. Sometimes the context suggests a bilingual education. A large number of Demotic school ostraca, together with some Greek ones, were discovered in the village of Narmouthis in the second century C.E. in a building inside the temenos ("precinct") of a pharaonic temple, at the southeast corner. A Demotic ostracon says explicitly: “Go to the southern part so that you can devote yourself to study every day.” Another ostracon appears to suggest some connection between the school and the temple, since it reveals that the correction of schoolwork was done in the temple itself. The same school apparently also offered some instruction in Greek: the exercises that are preserved...

30 Demotic was the Egyptian script that was adopted starting in the Hellenistic period. It was more cursive than the older “hieroglyphic” and “hieratic” forms.
33 Bresciani, Pernigotti, and Betrò 1983: no. 3. More than 600 of the ostraca from Narmouthis are entirely in Demotic, while 350 are Demotic-Greek and 70 are Greek-Demotic.
34 Ibid.: no. 10: “If a boy who makes mistakes in the words does not correct them when he goes to the temple for the correction, this boy does not cultivate writing. His mind will dictate mistakes to his hand, and he will often make them.” An actual connection with the temple, however, is not certain.
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are written in fluent hands; they might have been practice exercises for Egyptian-speaking scribes who were learning some Greek without following a regular curriculum. The bilingual program must have been unusually heavy; a Demotic ostracon with the categorical statement “I will not write Greek letters; I am stubborn” preserves the complaint of one student. Evidence of Demotic educational texts in other villages of the Fayum district in central Egypt, such as Soknopaiou Nesos and Tebtynis, also shows the existence of Demotic schools associated with priests running the local temple. In both places a limited number of Greek school exercises were found. It is difficult to reach a clear understanding of the curriculum of these schools and to know to what extent they provided a bilingual education, since most of the evidence is unpublished.

Some connection—albeit tenuous—between school and temple can be observed in the fourth century C.E. in the village of Kellis in the Dakhleh Oasis. A mud-brick structure within the precinct of the temple of Tutu yielded fragments of several inscribed wooden boards of a scholastic nature, an ostracon with an exercise, and a number of reed pens. These objects were found in the rooms of the main structure that were divided by a partition and provided with benches in the fourth century. While it is tempting—albeit too speculative—to suppose that these alterations were due to the need to adapt the rooms to school use, the atypical concentration of objects connected to learning and writing point to a place where Greek literary instruction was given.

Greek education in Egypt may have also taken advantage of the cool, private spaces provided by pharaonic tombs. In 1828, during his journey in Upper Egypt, Champollion explored a series of tombs of the Middle Kingdom built in the rocky hills in Beni-Hassan. In one of these tombs, which was covered with painted scenes, a syllabary of the Greco-Roman period written in red letters occupied an extensive space on one of the walls. This syllabary included biliteral and triliteral combinations of consonants and vowels in seven long rows. Syllabaries were fundamental

36 See Bresciani, Pernigotti, and Betrô 1983: no. 5.
37 See van Minnen 1998b.
38 The educational material found at Soknopaiou Nesos is mostly mathematical; the well-written tables of numbers perhaps served the needs of common people.
39 On one such board containing a Homeric exercise, see Hope and Worp 1998, with bibliography about the excavations.
40 See J. F. Champollion, *Monuments de l’Égypte et de la Nubie*, vol. 2, ed. G. Maspero (Paris, 1889), 459–60, no. 10. It is not specified where the syllabary was found, but it probably was not very far from the entrance, which could provide light.
to teaching reading, and children trained themselves by pronouncing aloud the syllabic combinations that usually were inscribed by teachers on models. This particular syllabary was like a permanent model that provided a suitable decoration to a “room for education.” The voices of children learning Greek syllables—ba-be-bi-bo—and so on—must have echoed amid the silence of a glorious past.

Later on, in early Byzantine times, the ancient tombs with which the hills around the city of Thebes in Upper Egypt were honeycombed became homes for anchorites. When an anchorite attracted a special reputation for sanctity, and pilgrims started to visit his abode, other buildings and rooms were added, and a monastic community was formed. In these monasteries some instruction in reading and writing Coptic and Greek was necessary, because monastic centers attracted people of every age and level of literacy, among them some male children. Even though in the small monasteries around Thebes schools were not organized on the grand scale of the Western monastic centers, education left definite traces. Thus the excavations of the monastery of Epiphanius yielded some Greek school exercises and a notable number of Coptic exercises. While there are no specific indications of the finding-places of the latter, the Greek exercises were mostly discovered in cells outside of the boundary walls. Cell A, for instance, where a teacher’s model containing maxims from Menander was found, was apparently the abode of a monk named Moses who copied a large number of liturgical and Biblical texts into Coptic and Greek. Not far from the monastery of Epiphanius was the monastery of St. Phoebammon, which was built on the ruins of a pharaonic temple. Here, too, the excavations yielded some Greek and Coptic school exercises that testify to the existence of some kind of school. It is suggestive

41 Cf. below, Chapter 5.
45 See ibid.: no. 319.
47 See C. Bacharly, Le monastère de Phoebammon dans la Thébaïde, vol. 2 (Cairo, 1965); Cribiore 1996a: nos. 19, 20, 21, 22, 61, 163, and 164.
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that a hexameter verse containing all the letters of the alphabet scrambled and a separate Greek alphabet were painted in red ochre in the doorway of the vestibule leading to the Southern Hall of Offering of the ancient temple. Perhaps classes were held in the vicinity.

The evidence provided by Didaskalos—A Schoolmaster—a mime of the third-century B.C.E. poet Herodas, who was connected with both the southeastern Aegean and Alexandria—might be useful with regard to school accommodations. Even though it is recognized that the poetry of Herodas was sophisticated and addressed a cultivated public, this poet’s use of topoi (“commonplaces”) and set characters allows one to retrieve some reality.48 In this mime, the school of Lampriskos is situated in some kind of building: the mother of the undisciplined student Kokkalos laments that her son can hardly recognize where the classroom’s door is (8–9). Lampriskos may have used his own quarters to instruct the children, or he may have rented some space in a private house. In Greco-Roman Egypt, classes at every level of education must often have been held in private houses.49 Comparative evidence of ancient education from the third millennium B.C.E. to medieval times often points to schools situated in domestic quarters. But direct evidence of private spaces used for education is rarely found, and it is not known whether parents provided space for free or not. A Ptolemaic papyrus refers to a school of medicine that seems to have been of considerable size and that was held in the private house of a doctor, where Greek slaves followed lessons in Egyptian medicine.50 A Greek teacher, who had learned Demotic, taught these apprentices to read and write in Egyptian and presumably to understand the doctor’s treatises. In general, however, one has to resort to imagination and to comparative evidence to visualize the possible accommodations of schools situated in private quarters. In the Egyptian countryside, the houses of people of common means display narrow and badly lit rooms, which would not have been ideal for reading and writing.51 The homes of

49 On classes held in domestic quarters in Mesopotamia, see Gadd 1956: 25–26. Cf., in early medieval times, the evidence from the Jewish community in Cairo, Reif 1990: 152.
wealthy inhabitants, on the other hand, may have offered suitable quarters for teaching the children of the owner and perhaps some of their friends. Houses of the upper class, which appear more often in urban than in rural contexts, were of much larger proportions and possessed internal courts and towers. Great houses in Roman Africa show a variety of spaces that could be used in private and public life.\textsuperscript{52} Thus, for instance, the House of Europa at Cuicul shows a very large vestibule, where the stairs could have served as a dais for the owner or a schoolmaster. In these houses, another room suitable to be a classroom was the exedra, the decor of which—mosaics and theatrical masks, for example—often alluded to cultural pursuits. Evidence of patrician houses used for education in the Roman world supports this assumption. Thus, in the grand house of L. Albucius Celsus in Pompeii, graffiti on the walls of an exedra painted in bright yellow show that classes attended by the children of Albucius and perhaps some of his slaves were held there. One of the graffiti says explicitly, “If you do not like Cicero, you will be whipped,” testifying to less-than-gentle teaching methods.\textsuperscript{53}

In the *Hermeneumata*, the word “step” (*bathmos*, which is glossed with the Latin *gradus*) suggests that classes could have been held outside.\textsuperscript{54} Open-air teaching, which was more common at an elementary stage, must have been a solution frequently adopted in Egypt, with its mild climate. In the Mediterranean world, teaching outside was not unheard of. The arcades that surrounded some squares could have been used for this purpose, and in large cities such as Alexandria or Oxyrhynchos, the main streets had vaulted colonnades. Evidence from Pompeii again offers suitable comparanda: graffiti mark the sites of two elementary schools, one under the arcades of the *Forum* and the other under the colonnades of the *Campus*. The place where the first school was situated is marked by murals that depict students holding their tablets on their knees, together with passersby peeking at their work.\textsuperscript{55} But apparently privacy was not or could not be a priority for teachers. The first-century C.E. Greek writer Dio Chrysostom, who grew up in Bithynia in Asia Minor, uses teachers

\textsuperscript{53} See Della Corte 1959: 626–28. On punishment, see Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{54} See Dionisotti 1982: 99 line 22.
\textsuperscript{55} See Della Corte 1959: 621–24; and Bonner 1977: 118 fig. 11. Also W. Harris, “Literacy and Epigraphy, I,” *ZPE* 52 (1983): 109. Cf. Augustine *Conf.* 1.13, a much commented-upon passage, where spaces used for teaching were apparently screened by some sort of awning.}

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and students as examples of individuals who managed to do their jobs in the midst of great turmoil. After describing flute and dance teachers who held a school in the streets, without being distracted by passersby and their noise, he goes on by saying, “But this is the most extreme case of all: the elementary teachers sit in the streets with their pupils, and nothing hinders them in this great throng from teaching and learning.”

In the Mediterranean world, open-air classes could also have been held in the country, without the minimal structure that a colonnade of a city street could provide. In the fourth century B.C.E., the poet Aratus composed an amusing epigram lampooning the teacher Diotimos: “I lament for Diotimos, who sits on stones teaching the children of Gargara their ABCs.” Since Diotimos was known as a composer of epic works and epigrams and was probably at least a grammarian, Aratus’s epigram was surely a joke that made fun of elementary teachers. Nevertheless, it is likely that teachers conducting school in the open air were not an unfamiliar sight. This kind of informal accommodation probably existed since time immemorial. Thus on fifth-century Attic vases, a school is often defined by the presence of a tree beside school objects.

Many primary teachers in Egypt may have set up school in the open air, with a large tree providing welcome shade—a familiar scene on today’s campuses in the warmest days of spring. In Egypt, moreover, students often used writing materials such as broken vessels, which could be picked up anywhere outside where people threw them away. The British papyrologist J. G. Milne, on finding a group of clay sherds that contained school exercises that were all discolored in an unusual way, imagined that a schoolmaster of Thebes “had taught his classes in the open air near a rubbish heap, on which material for writing exercises might be obtained in plenty, to be thrown away again as soon as used.” But of course, this rather sensational interpretation is not necessary: it is more likely that a teacher provided his class with ostraca found in one spot. In Upper Egypt students also employed flakes or slices of white limestone for writing: did they have teachers who, like Diotimos, set up school “on the rocks”? For

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57 See *Anth. Pal.* 11.437 and *SH* 392–395. Gargara is a mountainous site on the gulf of Adramythium.
58 See Alan Cameron, *Callimachus and His Critics* (Princeton, 1995), 6–7. On jokes directed at elementary teachers, see below, p. 59.
59 See Beck 1975: pls. 22.114 and 16.84.
teachers who plied their trade outside, the term *chamaididaskalos*, “a teacher sitting on the ground,” was an appropriate designation. This term appears for the first time in copies of Diocletian’s *Edict of Prices* in the late third century with the Latin equivalent of *magister institutor literarum*—that is, an elementary teacher—and after that it occurs in later writers and papyri. This designation, which resurfaces from the late Roman period, codified an established situation in which elementary teaching was characterized by precarious conditions: lack of proper seating meant lack of external structures.

The term *chamaididaskalos* provides graphic evidence that elementary teachers in general were not endowed with the imposing chair that usually serves to identify teachers in visual representations. But a digression is useful at this point. In school scenes depicted on fifth-century B.C.E. Athenian vases, common iconographical motifs were followed in the representation of teachers and students: teachers were portrayed sitting on chairs, and students were shown standing in front of them. The most comprehensive of these school scenes appears on a Berlin cup by Douris (Figs. 1 and 2). On the exterior of the cup, a bearded teacher sits on a high-backed chair holding a roll that is inscribed with a hexameter with a Homeric flavor; a boy is standing before the teacher, probably reciting by heart. On the other side appears another teacher: he looks younger, does not have the beard that was a symbol of seniority, and is sitting on a backless stool. He is probably an assistant teacher, a *hypodidaskalos*, and he is holding an open notebook of tablets that curiously resembles a modern laptop computer. A pupil—a boy standing in front of him—is waiting for the teacher to finish writing something on the tablet, perhaps the model of a text. This school scene is completed by the presence of tutors—pedagogues—overlooking the instruction. Variations of this scene on numerous Attic vases and cups all show that a chair was an indispensable motif in portraying a teacher, even more than the rod that male teachers used as an instrument of punishment. An amusing scene on


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Figures 1–2. School scenes on a vase from fifth-century Athens (Douris cup, 490–480 B.C.E.).
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Figure 3. Playing school: a scene on an Attic cup shows two boys with tablets and a papyrus roll moving toward the “teacher” (ca. 460 B.C.E.).

Figure 4. Early Byzantine tablet with bronze handle: verses from the Iliad.

a cup by a follower of Douris that makes fun of a school situation, for instance, shows on the interior a boy going to school, holding by the handle a notebook of tablets that resembles a modern briefcase (Fig. 3; and see Fig. 4). On the exterior of the cup, two other boys are proceeding to school: one is holding a book roll and the other tablets. These boys move toward the sitting figure of another, who has a rod in his left hand.

63 ARV 524 no. 25; Immerwahr 1964: 21; Beck 1975: pl. 11, 58, 59, 60. See p. 154.
and holds on to his chair with the right: the boy is “playing teacher” and is sitting on the symbol of his power.

The same iconographical motif used to depict male teachers can sometimes be identified in scenes that show women as protagonists. A young woman, for instance, is depicted in the women’s quarters: she sits on a chair holding out a book roll, while another figure—a boy reciting—stands before her (see Figs. 5 and 6).64 This woman, who is represented as too young to be the boy’s mother, looks like the female equivalent of the beardless instructor on the Douris cup. Girls playing and holding flowers and fillets appear on the other side. Another tantalizing representation that one is tempted to identify as a “school scene” located in a domestic setting appears on a vase of the Hermitage Museum (Fig. 7).65 Whereas in the scene on the top of the vase, a child’s punishment takes place at the hands of a woman who is hitting a young boy with a sandal, the learning situation depicted on the bottom shows a woman sitting on a particularly imposing chair: she is listening as a girl reads from a book roll, while another girl is perhaps reciting, and a third girl moves toward the group, holding an open notebook of tablets. The mandatory presence of a chair continued to identify male teachers in later art in scenes that appear in Roman sarcophagi of the imperial period: teachers are always portrayed as sitting, while their pupils—boys and girls—are standing.66

It should be noted, on the other hand, that in the visual evidence mentioned above, the educational levels of students and teachers are not always clear, and no pupil is unambiguously portrayed as receiving the rudiments. Chairs, *thronoi*, are often associated with male teachers outside primary education in the literary sources.67 It is thus conceivable that the presence of chairs was mostly associated with the more stable conditions of schooling beyond the elementary level. As a rule, in fact, open-air accommodations did not apply to advanced education, which needed less precarious and distracting settings and happily did without the company of dogs and goats that roamed freely outside. Grammarians and rhetors used the accommodations that their personal circumstances afforded them. The teacher Didymos mentioned above probably gathered his pu-

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64 See Immerwahr 1973: 144–45, fig. 1, plates 31.4 and 32.
66 See Marrou 1937: 27–45.
67 See in Plato *Prt*. 315c, Hippias sitting on an imposing chair as he gives a lecture surrounded by his pupils sitting on benches, and the formidable portrait of a teacher of rhetoric in Libanius *Chria* 3 (Foerster vol. 8).
Figures 5–6. Athenian cup: sitting woman with a book roll listens to a boy reciting; girls are playing on the other side (ca. 460 B.C.E.).
pils in a rented room or even in his own residence, since he had just arrived in Alexandria from the country. Much later, the grammarian Horapollon, who was a distinguished teacher and also taught at levels more advanced than grammar school, may have rented a private room or may have even used a public space.⁶⁸ In a papyrus, the school of Horapollon is said to

⁶⁸ See above, and below, Chapter 2.
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have met “by the academies,” an uncertain location, apparently in a prominent place in the city. In Alexandria the remains of a limestone building dating from the time of Horapollon and located next to the theater and the baths have been identified as perhaps being the site of a school. A central auditorium with the dais for the teacher (or speaker) and seats all around is flanked by two sets of smaller rooms provided with seats. The design of this building is unique and suggestive, but it may not have catered exclusively to educational needs; it may also have served as a lecture hall. In any case, a range of possible scenarios is suggested by the literary evidence. Thus, the disparate accommodations used by Libanius in his career were apparently correlated to his success. When he was a young and popular teacher of rhetoric in Nicomedia, Libanius was entitled to hold classes anywhere, even in the baths (Or. 1.55). But his position became less secure when he moved to Antioch, and at first he had to use his own house to teach the fifteen students whom he had brought with him. Even though moving to another room on the fringe of the square immediately brought him more students, he was not satisfied, since the other sophists who kept classes in the temple of the Muses were far more successful. But, in his own account, his earnest address to the Muse Calliopewas conclusive: in a matter of a few days he was able to establish a school in the City Hall and became the official sophist of Antioch. Libanius’s vicissitudes show that teachers of advanced education were at the mercy of the available accommodations and had to provide for themselves almost as much as the humble primary teachers.

THE GYMNASIUM

The question of where education took place brings us to the delicate problem of the role of the gymnasium as an academic institution in Egypt. Starting from the fourth century B.C.E. in Athens, gymnasiums were not only places of athletic activity but also centers of intellectual pursuits. In Athens, philosophers brought their followers together in the Academy and the Lyceum. Isocrates mentions with indignation that other teachers of lower standing gathered their pupils there “discussing the poets, espe-

70 Though this was an actual location, Libanius often calls his own school Mouseia, e.g., Ep. 37.5.4 and Or. 11.139.7.
71 See Or. 1.101–4 and Ep. 88.

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cially Hesiod and Homer, saying nothing original about them, but merely reciting their verses and repeating from memory the cleverest things that others had said about them in the past.”  

But it is particularly from the third century B.C.E. on that inscriptions testify that gymnasia were centers of intellectual and educational activity in Attica and in several parts of the Greek world. Numerous inscriptions in Hellenistic gymnasia preserve lists of victors in agones—contests not only in gymnastics but also in poetry or other academic subjects—and occasionally the inscriptions themselves testify that teachers tested students by examination in the gymnasium.  

Moreover, gymnasia hosted conferences and displays by local or itinerant scholars and poets. Nevertheless, it is not entirely certain that regular educational instruction went on in the gymnasia, and it is particularly doubtful that they were centers for advanced education, the equivalent of modern universities.  

In the Ptolemaic period, gymnasia existed in Egypt not only in large centers but also in the most hellenized villages, wherever Greeks established communities of sufficient size. In the Roman period, on the other hand, they appear to be present mostly in the nome capitals—metropoleis. In the gymnasium, local male youths received athletic and military training, and the Greek members of the elite gathered to socialize and to pursue intellectual activities. Festivals with gymnastics displays and celebrations of every sort were held around gymnasia. Membership in the “metropolitan class” was granted to individuals who could show Greek ancestry on both maternal and paternal sides, and parents belonging to this class registered their children with the gymnasium officials as soon as they reached fourteen years of age. Though most of these applications refer to boys, two, both originating from Oxyrhynchos in the third century, show families registering girls and trying to secure for them a privileged status.  

We do not know whether this registration automatically brought these girls participation in the activities of the gymnasium as it did for boys. In the capital and in the metropoleis, the gymnasium was always an impos-

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72 See Isocrates Panath. 18; cf. also 33.
73 See, e.g., SIG 578.34, where it is said that the elementary teachers who used to test the children in the gymnasium were to change location.
75 Delorme (1960: 316–24) is in favor of the idea that gymnasia were the equivalent of modern universities. Contra, Harris 1989: 134–35.
77 See Perpilou-Thomas 1986.
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ing building with lecture halls, baths, and ball-courts, on which considerable sums of money were expended for works of maintenance and improvement. In the third century C.E. in Antinoe, for instance, where excavations unearthed the magnificent remains of a gymnasium, the roofs of the colonnades and entrances were decorated with gold leaf.79 In the first century C.E., repairs were done to “the great exedra” of the gymnasium of the large village of Aphroditopolis, which had more than one of these large halls that were used for conferences.80 Everywhere the gymnasium existed, it was the focus of the cultural life of a community. But were the Egyptian gymnasia real academic institutions? No evidence supports such an assumption: no libraries or areas that could be identified as classrooms have been found in their perimeters.81 Moreover, there are no documents that disclose how the gymnasia functioned, even though gymnasiarchs, their leaders, are often mentioned: their title, however, is used as a status designation, and nothing is known of the specific duties they performed. It should be noted that women also may have served in this office: two examples—though not completely unambiguous—are known for Egypt, and women gymnasiarchs (gymnasiarchis) are present in Cyrene and particularly in various localities of Asia Minor.82 At any rate, the location of a gymnasium in a particular place may serve as a hint that a school was situated in its vicinity. The school of the grammarian Horapollon, for instance, which was located “by the academies,” may have taken advantage of a well-frequented neighborhood.

The Structure and Organization of Schools

Lack of uniformity characterized not only the ways in which schools in antiquity were set up and the more or less informal places where they were situated, but also the way teaching was structured from bottom to top, the identities of the teachers offering various layers of instruction, and the internal organization of the class. Ancient schools were knowledge-oriented and provided a rather uniform instruction, which was distinguished in recognizable intellectual steps. Though the content of the primary level of education might have depended to a certain extent on

79 See Bowman 1990: 143–44; and P.Köln. I.52.
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local circumstances, knowledge provided at higher levels was unfailingly consistent: students at the grammatical or rhetorical stage anywhere in the East would have been easily able to compare their work. It was probably the homogeneity of the intellectual contents that brought about attempts in the past to resolve a conflicting evidence of schooling by imposing a single organizational model with a strict distinction between primary, secondary, and rhetorical schools, headed by their respective instructors. The fact that the literary sources seem to endorse such a division is not particularly binding: the ancient writers allude more to the contents than to the actual organization of teaching, and they did not have any interest in nuances of schooling and in arrangements that concerned the lower classes and the periphery versus the great centers of learning. Only recently has the traditional scheme been challenged. It has been successfully argued that in Rome during the first century C.E., a two-track system prevailed that served different segments of the population: while schools of elementary letters provided a basic literacy to slaves and freeborn individuals of the lower classes, schools of liberal studies offered a more refined education to children of the upper classes who either received the first elements at home or entered right away into a grammarian’s school that also tendered instruction in basic letters. The presence of this socially segmented arrangement of schools can be verified in the great cities of the Roman Empire, from which most of our literary sources derive. But we should beware of regularly replacing one inflexible model of the educational system with another that is only apparently less rigid. This new interpretation of some of the literary sources is particularly valid insofar as it shows that the organization of schooling was not monolithic. On the other hand, both in large centers and primarily in the periphery, there must have been situations that did not follow the two principal models of schooling. The literary sources and the papyri, in fact, testify to much variety in school structure in accordance with situational circumstances, convenience to parents, and availability of teachers.

The school of Libanius in Antioch, for instance, exemplifies a schooling system that corresponds even less to the traditional scheme and that perhaps existed in some large cities, such as Alexandria, where successful instructors acted as powerful magnets. This school, which provided instruction only to male students and primarily at the rhetorical level, sometimes seems to have addressed the needs of boys at the primary and gram-

83 Booth 1979a: 1–14; and 1979b: 11–19.
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Libanius's own son learned the rudiments at the hands of teachers who worked as grammarians in the school, and other students in their early teens engaged in grammatical studies with the same instructors, who prepared them to enter the rhetorical course proper. Thus, a student such as Bassianos studied grammar and the poets with the Egyptian grammarian Kleobulos, who, in the words of Libanius, taught him to "move his wings" (Ep. 155). An organization with all three levels of schooling combined must have been atypical, however. The Hermeneumata, which sometimes show incongruities and conflations of various scenes that are useful in suggesting different arrangements, present three models of a school: a primary school where initial notions of grammar were also given; a school that imparted full elementary and grammatical instruction; and a grammar school that also catered to some elementary students and to older pupils who started rhetoric. This last type is only apparently similar to Libanius's school: whereas in Libanius's school, the first two levels were preliminary to learning advanced rhetorical skills, the third model described in the Hermeneumata is essentially a grammar school where some older male students started to read the works of orators such as Demosthenes and wrote preliminary rhetorical exercises. It is in a school of this type that Augustine received a smattering of rhetorical instruction.

Though the school exercises of Greco-Roman Egypt are in general devoid of any frame concerning their creation, occasionally they offer some information through their content, showing that the boundaries between the functions of the elementary schoolmaster and the grammarian were porous and sometimes nonexistent, and one single school imparted instruction to students of different levels. An Egyptian papyrus roll of the third century B.C.E., which is usually called Livre d' écolier, "a student's book," from the title of the edition, offers the clearest example that grammarians sometimes also imparted instruction in primary letters. The first exercises on the roll, which address students at primary levels who did

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87 Vossing (1992), who also shows Augustine providing instruction to children at lower levels of education in his initial career.

88 See Cribiore 1996a: no. 379: it probably served a teacher’s need rather than a student’s. The provenance of this papyrus is unknown, but the level of instruction implied probably refers to a city school.
not know how to read and write, are followed in regular progression by more advanced ones. The roll ends with a series of passages that are hard to understand, full of abstruse and difficult words and constructions—exercises that were good stepping-stones for children of the elite, whose language was shaped by the grammarian.

An early Byzantine tablet shows that the situation was unchanged many centuries later, and that grammarians did not shrink from offering primary education (Fig. 8). This tablet, which was found in Antinoopolis, contains a maxim written as a model by the teacher Flavius Kollouthos:
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“Letters are the greatest beginning of understanding.”89 The teacher’s own letters stand out: they are very large, graceful, and easy to read. This teacher then signed his model, perhaps in order to show the student that an exercise needed to be identified.90 The rest of the tablet’s surface is occupied by the wavering letters of a pupil who appears to be far from “understanding” and only able to copy characters that did not yet make much sense: he painfully reproduces the maxim several times in two distinct columns—perhaps imitating the mise en page of a papyrus book—and brutally truncates the words, without showing any knowledge of syllabic division. The honorific title Flavius, which distinguishes the teacher who wrote the model, shows that he was at least a grammarian, imparting the first rudiments of learning to a child of privilege.91

At a later time, in the sixth century, the teaching activity of the lawyer and poet Dioskoros of Aphroditopolis is again evidence that education primarily responded to need. Among his documents and poems, several papyri were found that testify that Dioskoros fulfilled a teaching role at various levels. These texts include metrological tables (sometimes associated with primary education); conjugations, the Iliad, and elementary Homeric exegesis at the grammatical level; and preliminary rhetorical exercises and Isocrates at the rhetorical level.92 It is impossible to know—and not very important to a degree—whether Dioskoros was the teacher of his own children when he resided in Antinoe or whether, on his return to his hometown, he taught some children of the elite of Aphroditopolis: as a man of culture he might have naturally fulfilled that role.93

It is not easy to know in every case whether the evidence considered above presupposes the existence of a real two-track system in which education was neatly diversified on a social basis, or whether these—as in the case of Dioskoros—were all situations dictated by special circumstances. All these exercises, at any rate, probably originated in large centers, which could provide and support a variety of specialized teachers. In Egypt, metropoleis such as Alexandria, Oxyrhynchos, Hermopolis, Antinoopolis, and Heracleopolis, and exceptionally large villages such as Aphroditopolis, offered secondary instruction. As a rule, only one grammarian

89 See Cribiore 1996a: no. 160.
90 Many exercises, in fact, display the signature of the student who wrote them. On names of students appearing in exercises, see Cribiore 1996a: Appendix 2.
91 On the title Flavius, see below, p. 61.
92 See Fournet 1999: 688–90, and passim. A Greek-Coptic glossary also addressed learners.
93 Cf. below, p. 106.
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could be found in these centers at a time: only Alexandria, and Hermopolis in the fifth century, where two grammarians are known, are the exceptions. Teachers of rhetoric were even more confined to large centers: small towns could not supply a steady stream of pupils and could not fund a chair.

It is in the villages and towns of the Egyptian countryside that we should expect to find a variety of informal schooling, since local teaching was a function of need, expectations, resources, and teachers’ inclinations. Far from the large educational centers, a fluid understanding of literacy and letters would sometimes raise the substance of elementary teaching to approach the instruction normally given in secondary schools. Thus, in two Egyptian towns, Karanis and Theadelphia, which would not support a grammarian, some students wrote exercises that traditionally belonged in a grammar school: copies of grammatical treatises and lists of difficult Homeric words, which were rendered into a more current form of Greek.94 Two different scenarios are equally plausible—both strategies devised to avoid sending one’s male children away to study too soon: either itinerant teachers were hired by upper-class families to impart some sophisticated skills to their offspring, or local elementary teachers were able to stretch their teaching functions to serve the needs of privileged students.

The latter seems to be the case of the primary teacher Melankomas mentioned above, who appears in a private letter sent by Sarapion to his friend Ptolemaios (SB 111.7268):

Sarapion greets his dearest Ptolemaios. Since you are my friend in the Arsinoite and I rely on you alone because of the affection that you have felt toward me for a long time, I have to ask you something in this letter. I am thoroughly in anguish because of some problems of geometry that I was given and, with your help, I would like not to be ignorant in this matter. Therefore, as I asked you in person, now I also beg you to give the man who brings you this letter that very papyrus about which you talked to me, out of your friendly feelings. Feel assured that this favor will not be in vain, but I will hold it in due account for when you will need me. Do then what you think is right. I hope you are well.

This letter was sent from the Herakleopolite nome, where Sarapion lived, to a village or town in the Arsinoite, and precisely—as the address specifies—to the school of the elementary teacher Melankomas, which Ptole-


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maios apparently was still attending. The two lads were friends from school
times: they were—to use an expression coined centuries before by the
Greek writer Lysias—“friends by education.”95 Apparently Sarapion had
moved, perhaps to pursue a more advanced education in a larger center:
he was in fact studying geometry, a discipline traditionally associated with
secondary schooling and distinguished from arithmetic, which was the
province of the elementary teacher.96 Sarapion’s handwriting, visible in
the final greeting, is minute and fast, and reveals a considerable familiarity
with the pen.97 The exact circumstances are unknown, but for some rea-
son Sarapion, who was oppressed by the typical anguish of the conscien-
tious student, urgently needed a certain book of geometry. It seems likely
that Melankomas, the primary teacher who kept this book in his school,
was an elementary teacher whose functions were somewhat fluid.

The relatively low number of students at the same level in a given school
and the lack of sharp distinctions between educational levels call for fur-
ther reflections on the organization of classes. When schools included stu-
dents of different levels and abilities, it seems unlikely that they occupied
separate rooms. In the version of the Hermeneumata quoted at the begin-
ing of this chapter, elementary and secondary students are shown as
working together in one room. Even though the principal instructors are
the teacher and an assistant teacher, the hypodidaskalos, older and more
able students also discharge some teaching functions by dictating a text
and helping the primary students learn their syllables. Other versions of
these schoolbooks that present novices together with advanced students
who were learning rhetoric point to common spaces used in education.

Since in antiquity the concept of paradeigma, “example,” governed fam-
ily life and intellectual pursuits, this school structure, where more capable
students contributed to the success of the enterprise, was partly dictated
by the desire to exploit competition among the students, as well as their
imitative skills. In antiquity, age differences were not emphasized as they
are today.98 An indistinct period of immaturity led to the time when a
youth was finally accepted as a full member of society. It is also possible,
moreover, that the ages of some of the students at different levels who
worked together in the same environment were not sharply differentiated,
since there were not definite age limits for admittance to a certain level.

95 Lysias (ca. 459–380 B.C.E.) 20.11 (For Polystratus), ek paideias philos.
97 The rest of the letter was penned by a professional scribe according to a common usage.
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The school of Libanius, which was divided into five classes, called sym-moriai, accommodated students in an open space, one large lecture hall.29 This was also the arrangement in the school of Ulpianus of Ascalon, the old teacher of Libanius, and in the school of Zenobius, Libanius’s predecessor in Antioch (Or. 36.10–11). To serve the needs of his crowd—“herd” (agele¯) or “flock” (poimnion)—Libanius also employed assistant teachers who prepared students to enter the top class, which was taught personally by him. Information about the size of this school is especially welcome because no other such evidence exists in the Greek world. Apparently the number of Libanius’s students oscillated at the different moments of his career: though he had eighty pupils in Constantinople, the number went down to fifteen when he had just arrived in Antioch (Or. 1.37 and 101; Ep. 405) but rose again to about eighty per year when he became public teacher of rhetoric.100 Repeatedly Libanius calls his school choros and dubs as koryphaios, “chorus leader,” the older student who represented his classmates and could even do some teaching when the teacher was sick.101

A confirmation that ancient schools of any level were not usually divided into separate classes comes from the school exercises of Greco-Roman Egypt. Even though, as a rule, students did their work on individual material such as a piece of papyrus, an ostracon, or a tablet, occasionally pupils of various levels of ability shared some writing materials. In the first or second centuries b.c.e., for instance, when the student Maron wrote and signed a passage from a lost tragedy of Aeschylus, on the left side of the same papyrus one of his schoolmates, who had just learned to wield a pen, copied a few verses from Homer.102 Both students studied together in Oxyrhynchos or in its vicinity, in a school where learning the poets was a priority from the start. Students, moreover, often shared notebooks made of several tablets bound together, which did not belong to them but were the common property of a school.103 A late Roman or early Byzantine notebook of five waxed tablets, for instance, displays the work of novices writing alphabets and practicing their names, and the writing exercises of students of superior ability—perhaps apprentice

100 See Petit 1956: 84.
101 See ibid.: 21–22; cf., e.g., Libanius Ep. 1408: the student Basilides is “leader.”
102 See Cribiore 1996a: no. 250.
103 On this, see below, p. 157.
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scribers—who copied in fluent letters parts of documents. All these students worked together in a school that offered diversified instruction that depended on the local notion of what constituted literacy.

Uniformity and consistency did not characterize the organization of ancient schools even in large urban environments. But particularly in towns and villages that were away from the main centers of education, teachers did not follow fixed schemes; rather, they catered to the population according to its needs and their own capabilities. Far from conforming to prearranged educational models, teachers aimed at leading each student up to the level of literacy demanded by that pupil’s place in the social and economic pyramid and his or her future role in the community.