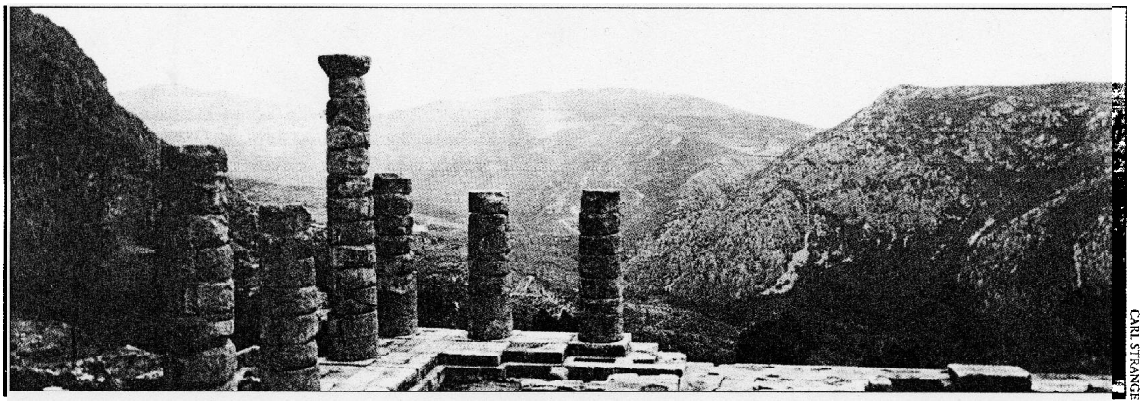

CARL STRANGE

CHRYSOLORAS'S GREEK

THE PEDAGOGY OF CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

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This essay does not purport to offer new information about the educational mission of Manuel Chrysoloras; rather what I hope to do, by argument from a certain organization of familiar facts, is remind all of us teachers of classics, no matter at what level we work, school or university, that the *continuity* of the classical tradition, especially on the Greek side, owes much to enthusiastic teaching. In this regard, I wish to recall the cultural impact of the founder of Greek studies in the Western Renaissance, Manuel Chrysoloras, as a protreptic model for us today.

As we arrive at the beginning of the 21st century in the United States, it is more than apparent that the knowledge of Ancient Greek is becoming a rare form of learning, and few students in schools or even in universities pursue Greek at all. Empirical data do not tell the entire story of the decline of Greek, as any classicist knows well from personal experience with dwindling numbers students in Greek. The numbers themselves paint a grim enough picture, however. As reported in a 1997 article by Richard LaFleur, Greek has declined from its position of .335 per cent of all university enrollments in 1960 to .113 per cent of all university enrollments in 1995, i.e., 16,272 students of Greek out of a total college population of 14,389,000 ("Latina Resurgens: Classical Language Enrollments in American Schools and Colleges" 126). Even in the face of declining student numbers, Hanson and Heath in *Who Killed Homer?* point to, by contrast, the robustness of scholarly publication in the field:

> Between 1971 and 1991 the number of classics majors dropped by 30 percent, as did Greek enrollments in the decade from 1977 to 1986.
>
> Of over one million B.A.'s awarded in 1994, *only six hundred* were granted in classics, meaning that

there are now five or six classics professors in the country for every senior classics major, *over thirty articles and books each year for every graduating senior.* (3, original italics)

As research and publication in classics advance vigorously, ironically, at the same time, the basic transmission of the essential linguistic underpinning necessary to continue the authentic classical tradition declines and falters. In school classics, for certain, Greek is the weaker sister: 114,000 National Latin Exams in 2001 to a mere 1,134 National Greek Exams makes the point (*The National Latin Exam Newsletter,* Spring 2001; "2001 ACL/NJCL National Greek Exam-List of Prizes"). In respect to Greek, then, it may be only a slight exaggeration to suggest we are returning to a situation very similar to that of the end of the Middle Ages when Greek was almost unknown among educated Westerners.

Then there was a renaissance or the Renaissance, at which time a wider knowledge of Greek was reintroduced into Italy and from there progressively spread through the educational structures of Europe. Classics flowered and peaked in the nineteenth century, but the latter twentieth century has witnessed a severe decline in the study of classics, especially of Greek. Many cultural issues are involved with this decline of Greek, but here we will examine factors arising within the field of classics itself and remedies that may be found in the history of our own discipline.

The particular ideological basis for contemporary American classics derives, in the main, from a disciplinary reorganization in the Enlightenment under the German conception of *Altertumswissenschaft. Altertumswissenschaft* was the response of classical scholars of the German Enlightenment to a perceived need for a reorientation of classical studies toward the new empiricism, progressive science and encyclopedism that was embedded in Enlightenment thinking. The two chief figures of Enlightenment classics, who were to leave their indelible mark on the future direction of classics as a discipline, were the art historian and archæologist, J. J. Winkelmann (1717-68), and his slightly later philological counterpart, F.A. Wolf (1759-1824) who originated the term, *Altertumswissenschaft* (Pfeiffer 167, 173, 175). Winkelmann was seminal to the future of classics by applying the rationalistic, system-building spirit of the Enlightenment to the study of ancient art. He personally visited the current excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum; he went on to Pæstum and Agrigento; he placed great importance on the empirical aspect of the study of art. Winkelmann's publications developed a more comprehension view of Mediterranean culture and its relationship to Greece and Rome than had the older classical humanism. Art and archæology were not longer oddities in an antiquarian corner but become central issues in a progressively developing science of Antiquity.

Next, Friedrich August Wolf was "[t]he last and greatest of Winkelmann's followers..." (Pfeiffer 173). Probably best remembered for his Homeric studies, Wolf's most lasting contribution to the discipline of classics overall was his rationalistic, organic and scientific vision of the field "for which he invented the comprehensive term 'Altertumswissenschaft' (Pfeiffer 175).

Winkelmann and Wolf together laid out first a practice and then a theory of classics that endures to this day as a comprehensive and progressive study for all aspects of the ancient world that touch on the Greece and Rome. Given a research impetus by this systematic and scientific orientation, the discipline engenders constant, specialized investigation as its quintessential nature, and systematic production of new knowledge is privileged over individualistic or eccentric interests (Pfeiffer 175). The Enlightenment project of a *science* of Antiquity won over less organized or more individualistic models (e.g. the nineteenth-century British pattern or earlier Renaissance amateurism) and classical scholarship has become bureaucratized along methodological lines. What counts as significant knowledge or practice in classics still has to be justified by the touchstone of *Altertumswissenschaft* in order to be acceptable for rewards in the arena of cultural significance.

This new science of Antiquity had a mission to recover lost aspects of the classical World through philological reconstruction and archæological excavation. How was this scientific perspective of *Altertumswissenschaft* different from earlier views; or, put another way, what important aspects of an earlier era of classics lost ground to the consolidation of *Altertumswissenschaft* as the dominant model for classics in Germany (and by adoption of the German model in the U.S.)?

A pointed example of an earlier and radically different viewpoint is suggested by E.R. Curtius in *European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages,* remarking on the ahistorical valuation of the *auctores* by the mediæval guardians of the tradition:

> All *auctores* are of the same value, all are timeless. No distinction is made between Augustan and late Antique literature, or between Theodulus and the early Christian poets. The passage of time only increases the list of *auctores.* (51)

Of course, such ahistoricism of the Middle Ages was challenged in the Renaissance when classical Latin literature was clearly distinguished

from Medieval through the rigorous stylistic canons of the Neo-Ciceronian movement. *Studia Humanitatis* of the Renaissance produced serious scholars, to be sure, but that period was also well furnished with the amateur classicist soldier, statesman or cleric; the world of classics was not restricted to a small cadre of specialists working under a fairly cohesive, professionalized disciplinary ideology. Certainly, transmission of the classical tradition (*teaching*, if you like) was the dominant mission and practice of classicists in both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance because of the pragmatic demands of society for competent Latinists in the professions. *Altertumswissenschaft*, on the other hand, with its emphasis on systematic accumulation of new knowledge came at a moment of the decline of Latin as a universal academic language and provided the ideological platform for a narrowing but "intensive professionalization of the field" (Selden). As the *science* of Antiquity vied to imitate the aims of the natural sciences within German university model (transferred to American graduate school in the late 1800's), the research motive (*Wissenschaft*) moved forward to challenge, and ultimately to displace, transmission of Greek and Latin via teaching as the major mission of classics at the university level. Teachers, the prior guardians of the classical tradition, (with the pragmatic need for Latin in wider society receding) were reduced in status vis-à-vis the creators of new knowledge while research, the practice of science, reaped rewards as the primary mission of the reformed, German universities.

Placing research ahead of teaching of the tradition may have been culturally appropriate in the nineteenth century, given an adequate number of readers of Greek and Latin at that time, but perhaps this priority is no longer the only measure of good health for the discipline. As Hanson and Heath report on disparity between teaching and scholarship for the year 1992, with Greek enrollments falling to under .2 of a percent of all university enrollment in the U.S.: "In the single year of 1992, classicists published and reviewed 16,168 articles, books and monographs... The work of over 10,000 individual scholars appeared in nearly 1000 different journals" (1). Yet, the scientific demand for new knowledge, fueling the ideological engine of "publish or perish," continues to drive its practitioners even when there are no students for them to teach.

How can the cultural significance of transmission, particularly the transmission of Greek, be recovered within classics community so that Greek will survive and even thrive? Or to ask the question another way: Can *Alterutumswissenschaft* as virtually the sole context for contemporary Hellenic studies be challenged? I think that reference to founding figure of the recuperation of Greek in the West may offer some guidance on this point.

The Greek teaching of Manuel Chrysoloras at the *Studium* in Florence from 1397 to 1400 especially, (and then in Pavia from 1400 to 1403) will serve as forceful tribute to the revolutionary cultural force of teaching as *Traditio*. In fact, according to R. R. Bolgar in *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries*, the very direction of the Renaissance education and culture was determined by the pedagogical practice and methods of this Eastern diplomat: "Pedagogically, the Renaissance began with Chrysoloras" (268).

Chrysoloras's fame was achieved as a teacher of Greek, not as a *Wissenschaftler*; In *Scribes and Scholars*, Reynolds and Wilson remark that 1397, the year Chrysoloras began his lectures in Florence "*is ... a*

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date of fundamental importance in the cultural history of Europe..."(131, my italics). Chrysoloras, of course, did write, but of what he published, much was not specifically academic: some encomiastic epistles, a *Comparison of the New and Old Rome;* his scholarly output (probably not enough for tenure today at many major research institutions) was basically a few translations and one short teaching text, the *Erotemata,* a brief, but culturally important introduction to classical Greek in catechistical form, the first beginning Greek primer generally available in Europe since the end of Antiquity (Pfeiffer 53). Chrysoloras's personality and oral teaching in Florence, however, set off a revolutionary resurgence of classical Greek in Italy and from there eventually to the rest of Europe: His instruction and influence via students such as Leonardo Bruni, translator and later Chancellor of Florence, and famous pedagogue Guarino da Verona (who studied with Chrysoloras in Constantinople), accomplished no less than the revival of Greek studies, after centuries of loss, in the curriculum of Western education, restoring to the Classical tradition its bilingual heritage, so copiously illustrated in the *Institutio Oratoria* of Quintilian (Bolgar 268-271). Chrysoloras's Byzantine method of instruction, i.e., to comment on a text from both an idiomatic and rhetorical direction (*Methodice*) and on the informational or historical side (*Historice*), remains standard today in commentaries on classical texts (Bolgar 270).

Chrysoloras's example demonstrates the dynamism and influence of pedagogy as a major contributory force in the development of culture; it further suggests that enthusiastic teaching can contribute to the revival of Greek now just as it did in the Renaissance.

The decline of Greek today has no less serious cultural implications than the lack of its knowledge at the beginning of the Renaissance. A recuperation of the intellectual worthiness of teaching Greek, the cultural and academic import of the pedagogical endeavor, must be re-inscribed as a one of the central aims of classics if it is to survive in its traditional, language-based form. Contemporary cultural conditions require some modification of the 19th- and 20th-century orientation of classical studies as primarily a scientific enterprise. To be sure, the Philodemus Project should advance and the new interpretive disputes over recent Posidippus discoveries offer any Hellenist the excitement of cutting-edge research, but these scholarly activities alone will do little to create new readers of Greek. If a readership of ancient Greek is to develop in contemporary America, then the useful scientific aims of high Enlightenment *Altertumswissenschaft* need to be balanced with the historically prior and intellectually legitimate claims of enthusiastic promotion and transmission of the Greek language and its literature through the voices of living teachers, in the Renaissance manner of Manual Chrysoloras. According to his model, excellent teaching of Greek must be viewed as a culturally significant activity (dare I suggest equally as important) along with research scholarship. Notably, Ian Thomson in an article in *GRBS,* "Manuel Chrsoyloras and the Early Italian Renaissance," stresses the culturally determinative direction of Chrysoloras's pedagogy:

> From at least the eighteenth century, when scholars first began to discuss the "Italian Renaissance" as a cultural phenomenon, the importance of Manuel Chrysoloras, the first notable professor of Greek in Western Europe, has been widely recognized. Writers such as ... Jacob Burckhardt... and Remigio Sabbadini have given him deservedly honorable mention as *the teacher* of a number of influential humanists, whose interest in classical studies did much to bring about the Renaissance as a whole. (63, my italics)

What lessons, in summary, can we take from the example of Chrysoloras for application to our own age? First, we notice that the continuity of Hellenic studies from old Byzantium to Western Europe rests on a teacher and the transmission of the tradition through personal *teaching.* As we a have seen, Chrysoloras diffused a knowledge of Greek primarily through passing it to others. Second, we can appreciate that Greek studies in the West were motivated, picked up and carried on by *Latinists.* That is a message to contemporary Latin teachers to embrace an enthusiasm for Greek as the many important Latinists of the Renaissance did, to reflect on the Hellenic background of Latin Literature and actively point this out to students, to include some Greek in all Latin classes as appropriate to the topic. And third, we can see that teaching itself, transmitting the Hellenic tradition from one living person to other living persons, is a *crucial and significant praxis* in the work of high culture; pedagogy, too, requires appropriate, professional rewards as highly valued, intellectual work along with research and publication. Our discipline needs to take vigorous steps to balance rewards for transmission of learning with those for the advancement of new knowledge.

Of course, nothing here is really new, but perhaps the recollection the *hero ktistes* of the recovery of Greek in the West will stimulate revised thinking on the contemporary classics scene about the determinative cultural value of the example and voice of the living teacher for the future direction of Greek.

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