



## A CALL FOR GREEK IN SCHOOL RECOVERY OF A RENAISSANCE TRADITION

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*H*ere I will address first the present-day absence of Classical Greek programs from American schools, particularly schools in Texas, and then a strategy for revivifying Greek in conjunction with Latin instruction.

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In 1917, James Allen in the preface to his textbook, *The First Year of Greek*, reporting on the decline of Classical Greek as a subject in American schools wrote: "However regrettable it may seem, during the past decade or so Greek has come to be in this country largely a college subject" (Preface v). Indeed, the situation remains so today. Try to find a school with a full Greek program or examine the number of students participating in the National Greek Examination, fewer than 900 in 1997, according the latest data available on the NGE internet site. The decline of Greek programs and numbers of classics majors at the university level, appropriately lamented by Victor Hanson and John Heath in *Who Killed Homer?* is truly outdone by the long-standing, virtual extinction of Ancient Greek in American schools (1-5).

Both empirical and anecdotal evidence confirm that Homer truly is dead

and has been for some time at the secondary level. In "Greek 2000—Crisis, Challenge, Deadline," the late Ed Phinney reported that in reference to the National Greek Examination for 1994, he sent out 61 questionnaires to institutions that ordered the examination with a return rate of 50 high schools.

I do not wish to claim that the National Greek Examination is taken by all high-school students of Greek, but I think I am correct in saying that the majority take it. Of the 50 schools, 36 (72%) were private, 14 (28%) public. In the 50 schools, there are 59 teachers of Greek. The overall enrollment in Classical Greek, levels 1-4, is 929 students. (407-408)

These numbers hardly indicate robust health for Greek at the secondary level, and even if we can add in those schools unreported in "Greek 2000," possibly another 40 as an upper-end estimate, we are still left with only a hypothetical 100 schools around the U.S., offering freestanding Greek programs.

Even fully alive Greek programs at elite private schools struggle to keep up enrollments and maintain good health. Dr. Lee T. Percy, whose classics department at Episcopal Academy (Merion, PA) offers three years of Greek, recently reported in an email exchange: "As you know, Greek hangs on by a thread in most schools where it's offered. At Episcopal this year we have 4 students in Greek 1, 5 in Greek 2 and 6 in Greek 3. That's about normal for us—when we set Greek up as a separate course, we thought we might have about 20 students in the three levels." The target of 20 students per level has yet to be achieved at Episcopal, it seems.

Yet in distinction to the limited study of Classical Greek in schools, Latin is strong, even growing as noted by Richard LaFleur in his 1997 article in *Classical Outlook*, "Latina Resurgens: Classical Language Enrollments in American Schools and Colleges" (Vol. 74.4, Summer 1997). Notably, Latin is robust in the South where almost no high school Greek is to be found: "As a whole, the South and West are not areas where Greek is available at the high-school level. Neither is the West strong in Latin, but the South is very strong in Latin" (Greek 2000" 410). Immediately the question arises concerning how Latin can be so strong in the South with

little or no reference to the original Hellenic background out of which Latin literature and intellectual culture evolved. Where is Greek in Southern schools? Or as "Greek 2000" presents the issue: "It would seem that interest in Greek could be more widely cultivated among students in the South, particularly in those states where Latin is strong like Tennessee, Texas, and Florida" (410).

One obvious reason why Greek is not being cultivated lies in the practical difficulties that arise in founding a new curricular program. From my personal experience, I can remark that my own approach to Greek, until recently, has been to think in terms of the ideal, freestanding, Greek program. Following the model of a vigorous program, such as the one at Fordham Prep (four years of honors Greek with a total of 80 students), I had advocated a two-to-four-year course sequence with a full complement of eager participants (email from Christopher Lauber). Clearly, the full-program approach works well in schools with a strong classical tradition or the resources to support smaller class sizes. In other less supportive circumstances, Greek faces true obstacles. For example, I had set up a small Greek program with a two-year sequence, at a school on the East coast where I was teaching, only to have it closed by the school's head because of tutorial-size enrollments, a typical administrative response. I discovered that building a full Greek program *ab ovo* requires either a strong student base or the financial commitment to support small groups. Moreover, there are the issues of field politics to consider: Whose course may lose enrollments when students go over to Greek, or will Greek cut into advanced Latin enrollments? In short, pushing a new, Greek program may lead into two of the thorniest areas in education, finances and turf. In order to sidestep such potential problems, more recently I have tried the non-credit, lunch-meeting tactic, with student attendance unhappily dropping in proportion to other established, extracurricular options. Of course, this extracurricular route can be successful where students are motivated to stick to Greek without course credit, but this direction proved unworkable in my present teaching situation since students typically take seven credit-carrying classes

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and have little desire for another challenging academic opportunity, particularly with no credit on offer.

Despite setbacks, however, I was left with the strongest determination that Latin students should have the opportunity to discover at least some of the intellectual power of Greek and its influence on Roman literature. Yet like most teachers of Latin I have held to a self-limiting vision of Latin as pedagogically distinct from Greek. That typical pedagogical separation of Latin from Greek is amply confirmed by deliberate wording in the recent *Standards for Classical Language Learning* where literally dozens of references are made to the

not its Hellenic predecessor, and often they wish Latin teachers to privilege the relationship of Latin to these modern languages.

It is evident, then, that teachers of Latin need to see themselves more fully as classicists, rooted in an historic, Greek and Latin philological tradition, if they are to reclaim, for the future, a portion of the historical role of Greek in Roman education, reintroduced into the West in the Renaissance. By focusing on their own bilingual Renaissance heritage, Latin teachers can lead the recovery of a fuller classical program in schools. A Greek sub-curriculum, well planned and tightly integrated with

Latin, can offer the student an introduction to Greek without sacrificing the momentum of the Latin curriculum. (In fact, I have found that offering simple Greek as an extra-credit option in Latin class has improved the pace of Latin by giving weaker students a chance at a higher grade: Their effort in Latin improves as they feel success with easy Greek.)

My first move toward integrating Greek



collocation, "Greek or Latin" and only a few to the phrase, "Latin and Greek" (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 38, 40, 41, 42). The framers of the *Standards* obviously expect that teachers will teach Latin as a discipline separate from Greek and that students will learn just one or the other. A further pressure, promoting pedagogical segregation of Greek from Latin, may arise when Latin teachers find themselves situated in Foreign Language departments whose pragmatic aims and functional practices tend to diverge sharply from the more literary and historical perspective of traditional, Græco-Roman classics. Our colleagues in modern languages most naturally connect Latin with its living descendants,

with Latin began as a pact with myself to push Greek forward as a central feature in my work and thinking. Since I recognize the tendency for teachers to think and talk most about the subject that they teach daily, I needed to be more involved with Greek as a focus for conversation and to be perceived by students and colleagues as energetically involved with Greek language and literature. Thus, I determined to read Greek daily, to affiliate and go to conferences where Greek is discussed, to publish in areas of Hellenic studies, to explore digging at a Greek site and to talk about these interests at school. Finally, I resolved to incorporate more Greek into my Latin curriculum as enrichment. The Greek

alphabet was already a standard extra-credit feature in my Latin 1 and 2 classes, and I needed no administrative authorization (avoiding those pitfalls of introducing Greek as a freestanding course) to augment the Latin curriculum, where appropriate, with reference to parallel Greek linguistic points or literary background. To suggest to my students and colleagues that something new was afoot, I put a pile of Greek books on my desk and filled up a board with pithy quotations from such notable sources as Aristotle, Democritus, Antisthenes, the New Testament, and the Delphic Oracle. Also, I published in my syllabus that Classical Latin would be taught "with special attention to the Greek background," and I announced this goal to parents with an general explanation of the significance of Hellenic cultural influence on Rome.

My aims are modest and at this point experimental. (For a more ambitious model of combining Greek with Latin, see "High School Greek," *Athenaze Newsletter*, Fall 1995): My students will not be reading Pindar, Plutarch or Demosthenes, but at least Latin 1's will know their alphabet, be able to recognize names of mythological figures and see some basic Greek words which come into English. They can use the etymological section of the *Oxford English Dictionary* when Greek is involved, an accomplishment beyond many university-educated adults. Latin 2's will appreciate the article, declensions, something of the verb and be able to read short, easy sentences on their own and follow easy passages from the New Testament with coaching from the teacher. Latin 3's and 4's will be able to follow collocations in Greek literary texts or commentaries which bear on the Latin works that they are reading. For all these students, Greek will not be a mysterious script but a real language that they realize stimulated Roman thought and can be studied in its own right at university. I hope that a seed of interest, planted in school, will grow to strengthen the Greek side of classics at the college level.

I want to do more with Greek in my Latin classes, and I hope all of you will consider working with Greek in your Latin classes, as well. Perhaps together we can make Homer live again as we reawaken a small bit of the

Renaissance in the 21st century when Greek returns to school. ✽

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\* I wish to thank the following individuals for their help and advice during my preparation of this paper. Because of the nature of the topic, much of the research has not been through conventional, formal publications but has relied on personal knowledge of individuals uniquely connected to teaching of Greek in schools. Particular thanks are due to Ginny Lindzey, editor of *Texas Classics in Action*; Professor Gilbert Lawall of the University of Massachusetts; Dr. Lee Percy, Chairman of the Department of Classics, Episcopal Academy, Merion, Pennsylvania; Mr. Christopher Lauber, Registrar and Greek instructor at Fordham Preparatory School in New York City; Mr. Charles Novo, Chairman of the Department of English at St. Agnes Academy, Houston, Texas. A previous version of this paper was presented orally at the TCA annual meeting, Oct. 30, 1999.