

GRACE IOANNIDOU

SELECTION OF LITERATURE EXTRACTS
IN SCHOOL MANUALS

Abstract

The questions raised already by O. Guéraud and P. Jouguet are still tantalizing contemporary scholars. This paper attempts to discuss them once again. It focuses on guessing the criteria that lead to teaching in a classroom a particular selection of literature extracts and on whether the compilers of school manuals had immediate access to complete literary works.

The paper concludes that the criteria by which the extracts were chosen for educational purposes were very precise and persistent throughout antiquity. It also concludes that it is highly unlikely that students and teachers in Egypt used anthologies and not whole works as their only source of literary knowledge, since it cannot be proven that there was some kind of “archetype” anthology, from which all school texts and quotations were drawn.

Keywords

School manuals, literary extracts

School manuals recovered in Egypt are a good example of purposefully chosen excerpts in antiquity, aiming at teaching young students writing and reading and at introducing them to Greek history and the current ideals of their community. Therefore, their study might reveal some of the principles and aspirations of the Greek society in Graeco-Roman Egypt. I will limit myself to examining one of the most renowned papyri, a teacher’s manual of the III century B.C., found in the Fayoum and published by O. Guéraud and P. Jouguet¹. I chose it not only because it is in good condition and fairly complete, but also because even though we have at least 419 school text papyri, they are not teachers’ books, but mostly school exercises². However, judging by literary references and the abundant school material that has survived, teachers’ manuals must have had more or less the same structure throughout Graeco-Roman antiquity into the Byzantine era.

¹ O. GUÉRAUD-P. JOUGUET (éds.), *Un livre d’écolier du IIIe siècle avant J.-C.*, Cairo 1938.

² T. MORGAN, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, Cambridge 1998, p. 312, table 14.

The questions that were raised already by the first editors of the manual and are still tantalizing contemporary scholars, are:

1. What were the criteria that lead to teaching in a classroom a particular selection of literature extracts?³
2. Where did the compilers of school manuals find their material? Did they have immediate access to complete works, or did they merely make use of anthologies and gnomologies? Did the students, or even their teachers ever study a whole work?

What kind of literary texts did the compiler deem fit for a manual? The anthology contains no prose. This is in line with most of the other school text papyri. At this stage of education at least, poetry was deemed more proper for instruction, because it was enjoyable to the pupils whilst also conveying moral lessons⁴. The value of studying poetry was of course not underestimated, even at more advanced levels of education. Even the virtuous Plutarch, writing three centuries later, despite his warnings for caution about the choice of the texts that should be taught to children, believes in the merits of teaching from poetic works. In one of his works, *How adolescents should listen to poetry*, which is laden with quotations, many of them identical to the ones used by Plato⁵, he recognizes the pitfalls of poetry, which contains «both good and bad medicine»⁶, but admits that teaching philosophical precepts to youngsters could become more efficient if one uses known and pleasant poetic works as a starting-point⁷.

³ This question has been previously posed by several scholars, e.g. by J.A. DAVISON, *The study of Homer in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, in *Akten VIII. Int. Congr. Wien, 1955 (MPER NS. 5)*, Wien 1956, pp. 51-58 and esp. 52-53, and R. CRIBIORE, *A Homeric writing exercise and reading Homer in school*, «Tyche» 9 (1994), pp. 1-8.

⁴ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* I 36.

⁵ A. SCHLEMM, *De fontibus Plutarchi commentationum "De audiendis poetis" et "De fortuna"*, in *diss.*, Göttingen 1893, shows that Plutarch is using as examples the same Homeric verses as Plato.

⁶ In this passage the author cites the well-known *Odyssey* verse δ 230: cf. Plutarch, *Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat* Steph. p. 15.c.5-8: οὐ γὰρ μόνον ὡς ἔοικε περὶ τῆς Αἰγυπτίων χώρας ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τῆς ποιητικῆς ἔστιν εἰπεῖν ὅτι φάρμακα, πολλὰ μὲν ἐσθλὰ μεμιγμένα πολλὰ δὲ λυγρὰ τοῖς χρωμένοις ἀναδίδωσιν.

⁷ Plutarch, *Quomodo adolescens poetas audire debeat* Steph. p. 36.d.436.e.1: τὸ γὰρ οὕτω συνάπτειν καὶ συνοικεῖν τοῖς δόγμασιν ἐξάγει τὰ ποιήματα τοῦ μύθου καὶ τοῦ προσωπείου, καὶ σπουδὴν περιτίθεισιν αὐ τοῖς χρησίμως λεγομένοις· ἔτι δὲ προανοίγει καὶ προκινεῖ τὴν τοῦ νέου ψυχὴν τοῖς ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ λόγοις. ἔρχεται γὰρ οὐκ ἄγευστος αὐτῶν παντάπασιν οὐδ' ἀνήκοος ...

It seems that school practice had taught the educators what Aristoteles says in his *Poetics*, i.e. that poetry is far more important and more philosophical than history (of which, incidentally there is no evidence in school curriculums), and not because of the use of metre, but because of its universal character⁸. This universal character can be subtly conveyed to the children. Besides, let us not ignore that poetry is easier to memorize and recite.

Now, let us turn to the individual texts selected in the manual. Overall, it seems that the texts quoted are in accordance with the taste and practice of its time.

The first text that follows the word-lists is an excerpt from Euripides *Phoinissae*, vv. 530-534. Since the pupils are not yet very competent, the words are separated into syllables and the verses are divided into two halves at the caesura. Euripides, as we know, is the poet antiquity loved to quote above all. His *Phoenician Women* though surpasses every other work of his in the number of times it is quoted⁹. Its subject, which deals with the Theban cycle and covers the same ground as Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, its reference to love for one's country and to parental love and its abundance of gnomic sayings make it an ideal source for use in school. Thus, this particular quotation serves five different purposes:

1. It helps improve the newly acquired knowledge of syllabification
2. It improves reading skills
3. It teaches metrical rules
4. It gives scope for reference to other well-known works, such as *The Seven Against Thebes*, or even the *Iliad*, especially the scene of the *Teichoscopia* episode.
5. It conveys a strong moral message: In this passage Iocasta speaks to her son Eteocles and tells him: «but experience has something to say wiser than youth. Why, my son, do you so long for Ambition, that worst of deities? Oh, do not; the goddess is unjust; many are the homes and cities once prosperous that she has entered and left, to the ruin of her worshippers». One need not expand any further¹⁰.

⁸ Aristot., *Poet.* 1451b 4-7: ἀλλὰ τούτῳ διαφέρει, τῷ τὸν μὲν τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν, τὸν δὲ οἷα ἂν γένοιτο. διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποίησις ἱστορίας ἐστίν· ἢ μὲν γὰρ ποίησις μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου, ἢ δ' ἱστορία τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον λέγει.

⁹ On the role of the *Phoenissae* in Greco-Roman education, see R. CRIBIORE, *The grammarian's choice: Euripides Phoenissae in Hellenistic and Roman education*, in Y.L. TOO (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Leiden 2001, pp. 241-260.

¹⁰ B. DUBOIS, *La présence d' Euripide au programme des écoles hellénistiques*, «Paedagogica Historica. International Journal of the History of Education» 2, issue 1 (1962), pp. 22-30.

The second poetic passage comes from Euripides' *Ino*¹¹ fr. 420 Nauck and serves the same ends. It is a very well-known passage, which, even though it has come down to us as a fragment, was quoted by numerous writers in antiquity¹². It translates: «Do you see how small the things are that bring down tyrants whose power has long increased, and how one day brings some down from a height, and lifts others up? Wealth has wings! Those who once had it, I see dashed from their hopes, backs laid to the ground»¹³. Once again it is impossible to overlook the moral lesson of the passage, which, moreover contains a proverbial phrase that found its way to Arsenius' *Apophthegmata* and Stobaeus' *Anthologium*, a maxim easy for students to memorize: ὑπόπτερος δ' ὁ πλοῦτος.

Next in the manual comes Homer. The passage cited is from *Odyssey* ε 116-124. Homer understandably is by far the most frequently cited poet in antiquity. His educational value was so highly esteemed, that, according to Porphyry¹⁴, some cities required by law that schoolchildren recite by heart the *Catalogue of Ships*. Homer was the symbol of Greek culture, studied and held in awe throughout antiquity, and perhaps to the present day. From Alexander, who carried his *Iliad* on his campaigns, to the cynic Cercidas who asked to be buried together with *Iliad* books A and B, to the Byzantine scholars, Homer exercised the most powerful of influences. We hardly need expand on this.

We have a large number of Homeric extracts in school texts¹⁵. Of them the greatest number (almost 88%) come from the *Iliad*, whereas a mere 12% are extracts from the *Odyssey*, but this is the case for all extant papyri containing Homer, not just school texts¹⁶. Most of the passages come from the first books.

¹¹ D. BRAUND, *Plutarch's Pyrrhus and Euripides' Phoenician Women: Biography and tragedy on pleonectic parenting*, «Histos» 1 (1997), pp. 113-127. For *testimonia* and for a discussion on how often Plutarch (largely in the *Moralia*) and his contemporaries, especially Lucian, drew upon the play, cf. D.J. MASTRONARDE-J.M. BREMER (eds.), *The Textual Tradition of Euripides' Phoinissai*, Berkeley 1982, pp. 402-429.

¹² For the attestations of the fragment, cf. GUÉRAUD-JOUGUET cit., p. 16, of the edition princeps.

¹³ Translation from the Loeb edition, C. COLLARD-M. CROPP, *Euripides VII, Fragments* Cambridge, MA, 2008.

¹⁴ Eustathius 263.33.

¹⁵ Cf. MORGAN, *Literate Education* cit., pp. 313-317. Cf. also CRIBIORE, *A Homeric writing exercise* cit., p. 4.

¹⁶ For further information, see M. HASLAM, *Homeric papyri and transmission of the text*, in I. MORRIS-B. POWELL (eds.), *A New Companion to Homer*, «Mnemosyne», Bibliotheca Classica Batava Supplementum, Leiden 2005, pp. 55-100. MP³ contains 1018 *Iliad* fragments and 138 *Odyssey*.

It appears, however, that in the Ptolemaic period the distribution was slightly more even, because we have more Ptolemaic papyri that contain passages from the second half of both the Iliad and the Odyssey. Our text, as is to be expected in this early period, contains a number of variants.

This somewhat irreverent excerpt, in which Calypso is telling Hermes that the gods envy goddesses who take in their beds mortal men, makes the answer to the first question, *i.e.* to the detection of the criteria that lead to teaching in a classroom a particular selection of literature extracts quite hard. The only flimsy criterion one could name would be the sheer pleasure of the scene and a kind of introduction of the young students to the adult, sexually active life.

The presence of the next two texts is rather surprising, because one would not have thought they belonged to any canon. The first has been quite recently attributed to Posidippus¹⁷. It celebrates an Alexandrian monumental fountain, which is elaborately described. The spectacular monument also housed a statue of Arsinoe II, surrounded by the Muses.

The next epigram¹⁸ probably celebrates Ptolemy Philopator, who had erected a temple dedicated to Homer and had literary aspirations himself.

The two epigrams are referring to illustrious monuments of the capital and are characteristic pieces of Alexandrian poetry. Thus, we can clearly discern the reasons why they belong to a school curriculum. Besides introducing the pupils to a modern genre, the literary epigram, they pay homage to the ruling Ptolemies, who actively encouraged arts and letters, as well as the acquisition of Greek linguistic skills by as large a portion of the population as possible. Their policy in this respect was very successful and its results are obvious in the resilience of the Greek language even during the Roman and Byzantine periods. One of the measures for promoting Greek education and creating a network of competent scribes was the exemption of teachers from the salt-tax¹⁹. A third service rendered by such contemporary texts was to inform and impress the population of the hinterland by allowing it a glimpse of the glory of Alexandria²⁰.

¹⁷ AB 113 = SH 978, translated by F. NISÉTICH, *The poems of Posidippus translated by Frank Nisetich*, in K. GUTZWILLER (ed.), *The New Posidippus. A Hellenistic Poetry Book*, Oxford 2005, pp. 41 f.

¹⁸ *Adespota papyracea* (SH) fr. 979.

¹⁹ PHal 1260-264. On the subject, see W. CLARYSSE-D.J. THOMPSON, *Counting the People in Hellenistic Egypt*, vol. 2, *Historical Studies*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 125-132.

²⁰ On the subject, cf. D.J. THOMPSON, *Posidippus, poet of the Ptolemies*, in GUTZWILLER cit., Oxford 2005, pp. 269-283. Cf. also UPZ I 78. 28-39.

The next three extracts in the anthology derive from New Comedy. These are two adespota²¹, perhaps extracts from the same text, and Straton's²² *Phoenicides*,²³ also anthologized by Athenaeus²⁴. New Comedy was also a pillar of the education, due to its eloquence²⁵ and its accurate portrayal of characters and emotions²⁶.

So, the first question, *i.e.* whether the extracts are selected on specific criteria has been answered. The criteria are very precise and persist throughout antiquity.

To sum them up, the following could be listed as criteria:

1. The extracts help improve the newly acquired knowledge of syllabification
2. They improve reading skills
3. They teach metrical rules
4. They give scope for reference to other well-known works
5. They convey a moral message
6. They serve as propaganda of the regime and convey news to the people
7. They produce pleasure

What remains to be examined is whether the selection is drawn from anthologies and other preexisting compilations and whether the education the Greeks received in Graeco-Roman Egypt was fragmentary to the point that, except for the rare exception of a very learned person, they never studied a text as a whole. Is it true that a Graeco-Egyptian pupil «was not learning a great deal of literature [...] nor was he reading enough to learn much about style or to appreciate the language of these writers, let alone their construction of a narrative, evocation of a world or insight into character»? Is it true that «education

²¹ *CGFPR* fr. 289a and 289b.

²² Sometimes considered as representative of Middle Comedy.

²³ *CGF* fr. 219.39 = fr. 1 Koch.

²⁴ Ath., *Deipnos*. 9.29.18.

²⁵ Cf. *e.g.* Dion. Hal., *Imit.* 31.2.11: Τῶν δὲ κωμῶδῶν μιμητῶν τὰς λεκτικὰς ἀρετὰς ἀπάσας· εἰσι γὰρ καὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασι καθαροὶ καὶ σαφεῖς, καὶ βραχεῖς καὶ μεγαλοπρεπεῖς καὶ δεινοὶ καὶ ἠθικοί.

²⁶ Cf. *e.g.* Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* I 8.7. Also Plutarch, *Ar. et Men.* comp. 854 a-b: ὁ δὲ Μένανδρος μετὰ χαρίτων μάλιστα ἑαυτὸν αὐτάρκη παρέσχηκεν, ἐν θεάτροις ἐν διατριβαῖς ἐν συμποσίοις, ἀνάγνωσμα καὶ μάθημα καὶ ἀγώνισμα κοινότατον ὧν ἡ Ἑλλάς ἐνήνοχε καλῶν παρέχων τὴν ποίησιν, δεικνὺς ὅτι διὴ καὶ ὅποιον ἦν ἄρα δεξιότης λόγου, ἐπιῶν ἀπανταχόσε μετὰ πειθοῦς ἀφύκτου καὶ χειροῦμενος ἅπασαν ἀκοὴν καὶ διάνοιαν Ἑλληνικῆς φωνῆς.

in provincial Egypt is quite different from its counterpart among elite *literati* at Rome, Alexandria or Athens, despite the fact that it looks superficially similar ...»²⁷? These inferences are a good example of piecing together bits of information, in a way that is certainly plausible, but not unique, because things could be interpreted differently, in a comparably satisfactory manner²⁸.

It is more than probable that during their ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία²⁹, students probably read just fragments. We tend, however, to forget that reading and writing were not the only tasks performed at schools. There was, one imagines, a lot of oral instruction as well. Of course, the content of school manuals was probably the material to be copied, syllabized, memorized, recited and discussed. However, it seems logical that any teacher would have to explain orally the context of the passages. Consequently, the teaching of the various authors expanded from the part to the whole. The expansion was even greater, when a child reached the level of secondary education. One of the Oxyrhynchus papyri of the II/III century A.D.³⁰ preserves a letter from a mother to her son, telling him that she had enquired about his studies and had found out that he had reached the 6th Book of the *Iliad*. We can, consequently, safely conclude, that at a more advanced level of education, children went past the stage of reading from extracts and studied complete works. We also see that, whilst access to whole works was probably not possible in every remote village, it was apparently not that difficult in larger centres. Indeed, we have private letters on papyri mentioning copying and acquiring books³¹, which shows that they were

²⁷ MORGAN, *Literate Education* cit., pp.109-110.

²⁸ Cf. M.R. FALIVENE, *Greek anthologies on papyrus and their readers in early Ptolemaic Egypt*, in *Proceedings of the 25th International Congress of Papyrology, Ann Arbor 2007*, Ann Arbor 2010, p. 212: «But like documents, literary papyri were not, as a rule, found in isolation, and should we succeed in retracing the company they once kept – that is to say if we retrieve the original unity of a number of book-rolls once belonging to the same collection – we might then have something to say about the quality and purpose of that collection: the intention and circumstances animating it, causing this particular collection to exist. This in turn would tell us something specific about the level of Greek literacy and the readership habits in one place at one time in Egypt».

²⁹ On primary education in antiquity, cf. e.g. H.I. MARROU, trsl. G. LAMB *A History of Education in Antiquity*, London 1956 and R. CRIBIORE, *Writing, Teachers and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, Atlanta, 1996; EAD., *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, Princeton 2001; B. LEGRAS, *Education et culture dans le monde grec. VIII^e siècle av. J.-C. – IV^e siècle ap. J.-C.*, 2nd ed., Paris 2002; J. CHRISTES-R. KLEIN-C. LÜTH (Hrsg.), *Handbuch der Erziehung und Bildung in der Antike*, Darmstadt 2006.

³⁰ POxy VI 930.

³¹ POxy VIII 1153.3-4, II cent.: ἐ]κομισάμην διὰ Ἡρακλᾶτος τὰς κίστας, [σὺν] τοῖς βιβλίοις,

not such a rarity. It is also possible, although there is no papyrological evidence, that even the local Gymnasia might have had some kind of a library³². Numerous papyri containing exhaustive lists of books survive to our days³³, and they are certainly referring to whole works and not extracts³⁴.

However, if we suppose that access to complete works was not impossible, how do we account for the existence of many varying anthologies, collections of hypotheses³⁵, gnomologies and glossaries³⁶? The fact that such works were so numerous indicates that:

1. They were a useful aid in teaching, not necessarily because teachers did not have access to complete works. Especially glossaries were of great educational help: we should keep in mind that, at least by the Roman period, Greek classical or classicizing authors presented a huge linguistic problem to the Greek-speaking world.
2. They were an easy way to help someone appear informed and cultivated.

Let me briefly give you a few facts about the sources of a Graeco-Egyptian lexicographer of the 2nd century A.D., Julius Pollux. His primary sources for the *Onomasticon*, which, of course, has survived in an abridged version, are around 150³⁷, and cover almost all literary genres. They include philosophy,

ὡς γράφεις, A.D. and POxy XVIII 2192.28-44, 170 A.D.: Ὑψικράτους τῶν κωμωιδουμένων ζ ποιή/σας μοι πέμψον. φησὶ γὰρ/ Ἄρποκρατίων ἐν τοῖς/ Πωλίωνος αὐτὰ βιβλί/οις εἶναι. εἰκὸς δὲ καὶ ἄλλους/ αὐτὰ ἐσχηκέναι. καὶ λόγῳ /ἐπιτρομὰς τῶν Θερσαγόρου/ τῶν τραγικῶν μύθων ἔχει. / (hand 3) ἔχει δὲ αὐτὰ Δημήτριος ὁ βιβλιοπώλης, /ὡς φησὶν Ἄρποκρατίων. ἐπέσταλκα Ἀπολλωνιδῆι πέμψαι μοι ἐκ τῶν ἐμῶν/ βιβλίων τιν[ὰ ἅ]περ παρ' αὐτοῦ εἴση/ Σξε[λ]εύκου δι[τὰ] τῶν χρόνων [. . .] ἐὰν εὐρίσκησ μεθ' ἃ ἐγὼ κέκτημαι ποιήσα[ς]/ μο[ι] πέμψον. ἔχουσι δὲ \και/ οἱ περὶ Διό/δωρ[ον] ὧν οὐ κέκτημαί τινα.

³² LEGRAS, cit., pp. 102 ff.

³³ For ancient lists, cf. e.g. R. OTRANTO, *Antiche liste di libri su papiro*, Roma, repr. 2000.

³⁴ Cf. e.g. PVindob Gr. inv. 3996, A list of books from Arsinoites, early 1st cent. A.D., naming explicitly all the books of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and several works by Callimachos, Pindar, Hesiod, Sappho, Aischines and Demosthenes.

³⁵ Cf. M. VAN ROSSUM-STEENBEEK, *Greek Readers' Digests?: Studies on a Selection of Sub-literary Papyri*, «Mnemosyne», Bibliotheca Classica Batava. Supplementum, 175, Leiden 1997.

³⁶ Cf. MP³, LDAB, CPP.

³⁷ For possible sources, besides the ones Pollux explicitly mentions in his *Onomasticon*, cf. R. TOSI, *Polluce: struttura onomastica e tradizione lessicografica*, in BEARZOT-LANDUCCI-ZECCHINI (edd.), *L'Onomasticon di Giulio Polluce tra lessicografia e antiquaria*, Milano 2007, pp. 3-16. On the sources of the 8th book, cf. P.A. TUCCI, *ibid.*, pp. 103-137; also G. ZECCHINI, *Polluce e la politica culturale di Commodo*, *ibid.*, pp. 22-25, and F. LANDUCCI, *ibid.*, pp. 155-157, especially for Theopompus. Cf. also S. BUSSES *Marcatori e criteri di estetica in Polluce. La dinamica della scelta lessicografica*, Bari 2011, pp. 86-89.

poetry, rhetoric and history. They start from Homer and go on to the 2nd century B.C. He has about 2500 references to these sources. Is it conceivable that he took all this material from anthologies? We must also keep in mind that the rare whole works on papyrus have been recovered from the *chora* and not from Alexandria. The social status to which readers of books belonged is of course another subject³⁸. I should guess though that the great mass of people learned their Homer mainly from festivals, by listening to the *homeristai* reciting³⁹.

To conclude, I do not believe that anthologies were the only source of literary knowledge in Egypt, since it cannot be proven that there was some type of “archetype” anthology, from which all school texts and quotations were drawn.

The fact that the distribution of the authors used in schooling in a large extent coincide with the distribution of the authors preserved in other papyrus texts that have come down to us, does show of course that there was an immense interaction between education and literary taste and both mirror the socio-political interest of their era. This interaction is evident even in the modern era, in which unlimited access to information is possible. A brilliant example of how strict this canon is furnished by David Lodge’s novel, *Changing Places*. In the novel, during a game, a young and upcoming American professor of English, Howard Ringbaum, confesses he has never read *Hamlet* and he consequently loses his tenure. This shows that the current canon, or literary taste, does not allow deviations. Not having read *Hamlet* in the 20th century is like not having read the *Iliad* in Graeco-Roman antiquity. This literary taste was certainly responsible for the elimination of works and this taste was also responsible for the contents of the anthologies. However, what remained was enough for Alexandria-educated Dioscoros to draw from and also enough for a lot of classicists to the present day.

Democritus University of Thrace, Greece
griannid@gmail.com

³⁸ Cf. e.g. H. MAEHLER, *Byzantine urban elites and book production*, «Dialogos» 4 (1997), pp. 118-136.

³⁹ Cf. e.g. SB 4.7336, Oxyrhynchus or Arsinoites, 3rd century A.D. A list of payments to contributors of religious festivals, where ὀμηρισταί figure twice, among heralds, comedians, dancers, athletes and readers.

