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**Culture on the Social Ladder  
from the Greek Tradition to the Christian *Paideia***

**Abstract**

*In the culture of ancient Greece, the term Paideia (Greek: παιδεία) referred to the upbringing and education of an ideal member of the polis. However, the period from Homer's epic poetry (9th or 8th century BCE) to the Peloponnesian War (5th century BCE) differs notably, concerning the forms of Hellenistic culture after the emergence of Christianity (especially from 2nd to 9th century AD). For that reason, it is necessary to consider what significance Paideia had in different historical periods of Greek culture. In addition, the discussion of Paideia cannot exist in the abstract form of conceptual analysis without taking into account the real historical figures who contributed to the survival of Greek culture in the Roman and early Christian periods. This paper aims to examine the role of Greek culture in the social life of the early Christian Romans. We will try to achieve this through a detailed analysis of the panegyrics (Greek: πανηγυρτζ). Panegyrics are eulogies that educated pagan thinkers addressed to Roman emperors. Following the panegyrics, we will examine the influence of the Greek tradition on the distribution of the social roles in the upper classes in the Roman Empire. At the same time, by analyzing panegyric, the socio-cultural context of early Rome, and the demands that social betterment placed on pagan thinkers, we will introduce new elements of Christian Paideia concerning her classical predecessor, thus showing what such a transformation essentially entailed.*

**Keywords**

*Paideia, early Christianity, Christian Paideia, panegyric, Constantius, Julian the Apostate*

**1. Introduction**

Ancient Greek cultural and traditional treasury epitomise the foundations of today's world. Whether we talk about science, imbued with critical thinking and detailed axiomatization of almost everything, political and social norms, standards of public behaviour and individual participation in collective decision-making, architecture, sculpture, or poetry – Greek roots, and our cultural fathers are all around us. However, Greek culture is not tied to a segregated conceptual bubble but has undergone various historical transformations through seismic wars, economic wiring through maritime excursions to other continents, impetuous changes of rulers, and a wider range of socio-political circumstances that have befallen it. Our goal is to reveal at least a small part of the lively Greek culture through the periods in which Athens was no longer the meeting point of the educated world. We will carry out this objective by focusing on the most peculiar concept of ancient Greek culture and education, *Paideia*.

Following the footsteps of the epistemically cynical Socrates, we will primarily try to come to the pertinent definition of *Paideia*. Therefore, in the second chapter, we will confront the viewpoints of the two greatest authorities on *Paideia*, Werner Jaeger and Henri-Irénée Marrou. After examining

the conceptual foundations of Greek culture and education, we will move on to the specific figures who kept the *Paideia* torch unquenchable. In the third chapter, we will elucidate biographies of Greek thinkers who converted to Christianity. Through the cultural and spiritual pathways of Justin Martyr, Saint Clement, and Gregory the Wonderworker, we will display the resilience of Greek culture in the ever-changing circumstances of the Roman Empire. After that, in the fourth chapter, we will focus on a new and alluring phenomenon, panegyrics. Through the analysis of the panegyrics of Themistius, Nilus Dionysius, and Libanius, we will demonstrate how pagan thinkers, educated in Greek culture, managed to occupy important social roles around the Roman emperors, Constantius and Julian.

In this paper, however, we will focus on more than just the fragments of classical *Paideia* that survived into the early Christian period and thus enabled the continuity of Greco-Roman philosophical thought. If we followed such a research route, our work would be downright trivial, offering already-known answers to frequently asked questions. Therefore, we will present new Christian elements as a consequence and emergence of the classical *Paideia*. This way, we will obtain a dissimilar perspective of continuity and reinvigorated research parameters that will lead to significant and original results for our hermeneutical efforts. This turn of events requires that in the third chapter, we analyse the conversion of the Christian martyrs in more detail. The conversion was not the only novelty that Christianity brought in comparison with the cults of the Roman Empire, but only an overarching phenomenon that contained a constellation of new elements. In chapter four, we will further relate panegyrics to the Christian thinkers from chapter three and highlight the key elements of *Christian Paideia* in them. Moreover, in the fourth chapter, we will examine in more detail whether the aforementioned new facets of *Christian Paideia* influenced the socio-political order in the arena of the Roman Empire differently than the classical ones.

Finally, in the concluding remarks, we will summarise the transformative nature of Greek culture embodied in *Paideia* and give further research guidelines, both for auxiliary periods of early Christian Rome and for a seemingly changed portrait of the panegyric and *Paideia* today.

## 2. (Not)defining *Paideia*

Very often, the meaning of the term *Paideia* is taken as self-evident and as something that does not require a clear and precise definition. According to *Second Sophists*,<sup>1</sup> *Paideia* is a key element of Greek culture in the Roman Empire (Borg 2008: 32–38). If we approach the definition of *Paideia* statically, then it means education and integration into higher strata of society that arises as a consequence of this type of education. However, if we approach it as a dynamic concept, then *Paideia* means the whole cultural context conditioned by the Greek identity in the Roman era.

*Paideia*'s perspective in the discussion of the late ancient culture, identity, and communication of the classes of people who led the Empire represents a useful angle for exploring the nature of political power and social elite. However, the ancient meaning of the term is not clear enough, it is very difficult to define *Paideia* because it can mean the moral standard, culture, and civilization of its time. What further suggests is a wide technical spectrum of application

of the term, from literature, art, athletics, and mythology to religious expertise and medicine (Elsner 2013: 137).

### 3. Jaeger's *Paideia*

It would be unusual to consider the educational process by which Greek culture, and tradition were formed and not to consult the insights of Werner Jaeger. His three-volume series on the history of education, which begins in ancient Greece, is entitled *Paideia*. However, if we are looking for a definition, we will not be happy here either, since Jaeger does not provide any special definition of *Paideia*, except for a broader framework in which he considers it as an ideal of Greek culture. Jaeger says that it is difficult to avoid modern expressions such as civilization, culture, tradition, literature, and education when we talk about *Paideia*. However, none of these concepts covers the full meaning but represents only one aspect of *Paideia* (Jaeger 1986a: 8–9). In addition, Jaeger describes in detail the technical aspects of the educational process, curricula, and educational institutions in the ancient Greek history of education (Jaeger 1986a: 32–46). Jaeger's *Paideia* is a celebration of the place of the Greeks in the history of education, their culture, and the unique position of Hellenism in establishing the foundations of education. Also, Jaeger speaks extremely positively about Plato's model of education through moulding the character of the young generations. It is clear that for Jaeger the ancient world represents a model for every subsequent cultural formation. On the other hand, while establishing the discourse of education in Plato's philosophy, as the essence of Greek thought and the cultural shaping of modern youth, Jaeger translates *Paideia* as humanism (Jaeger 1986b: 16).

It is not enough to characterise *Paideia* only as education, it is necessary to examine what kind of "education" leads to virtue. Virtue, or *aretē* (Greek: ἀρετή), is the moral standard and central ideal of Greek culture. Thus, the needed education contributes to cultural formation and civilizational values through moulding citizenship by looking up to the ancient Greek tradition (Elsner 2013: 139). In addition to considering *Paideia* in terms of syllabus, as a concept of inestimable importance for schools, universities and the inclusion of humanism, Jaeger sheds light on the model of a good ruler. Plato's *Republic* is a specific type of *Paideia* for rulers. A good ruler must find a balance between the true leadership of Pericles and the military autocracy of Dionysius. As we have already mentioned, from Homer to the Peloponnesian War, Greece went through various turbulent periods in which it lost everything worldly; state, power, freedom and citizenship in the classical sense. The only thing that could never be taken away from the Greeks was *Paideia*, the paradise of humanity and the specific spirit of Hellenic culture (Bassett 2008: 213). The catastrophe of the fall of Athens, as well as the ethical and religious ascent after that, Greek medicine, the formation of guardians and

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Second Sophists, such as Nicetas of Smyrna, Aelius Aristides, Dio Chrysostom, Herodes Atticus, Favorinus, Philostratus, Lucian, Polemon of Laodicea, and Plutarch, represent Greek thinkers who played important intellectual roles from the reign of Nero until 230 AD.

Due to their profiling and the period in which they lived and wrote, they represent important figures based on which we can follow the transformation and adaptation of *Paideia* in Greco-Roman society (Bowersock 2002: 17–26).

rulers represent the reading of the ancient past as a cypher for issues of education and culture in the present.

#### 4. Marrou's *Paideia*

In addition to Jaeger, who certainly represents the most prominent interpreter and propagandist of *Paideia*, it is necessary to mention the French historian Henri-Irénée Marrou. The main difference between Jaeger and Marrou is their understanding of the *akmē Paideia* period (Greek: *ακμή*). Jaeger considered the zenith of *Paideia* to be a modelling of the internal form and character of a human in Hellenism, while Marrou moved the most significant period of *Paideia* to the Roman Empire (Marrou 1982: 16–37). Therefore, Marrou was focused on studying the figures of *Paideia*, such as Gregory of Nyssa and St. Augustine, that is, the Greek-Latin side of antiquity. Based on the civilization of *Paideia*, transferred from the ancient roots of the Hellenistic world to Rome and early Christianity, Marrou reconstructs the cultural human in Roman art.

For Marrou, the Hellenistic sage is a cosmopolitan, a citizen of the world as the ideal of a human free from the totalitarian pressures of city life. The cosmopolitan is aware of himself, his possibilities, needs, and rights. Such a cosmopolitan transition allows for a broader view of the concept of *Paideia*, devoid of geographical foundation. *Paideia* is no longer just a technique by which a child becomes a man, but now something that has been perfected and represents the best definition of the core of education – humanism (Marrou 1982: 24). The ideal of wisdom, constructed from the transition from Greek to Roman *Paideia*, takes into account the whole of man; his soul, reason, senses, character, and mind. By focusing on essential moral training through literary culture and tradition, Jaeger emphasises the collective idea of civilization, while Marrou focuses on personal development, alluding to specific Hellenistic philosophers and late-ancient intellectuals (Elsner 2013: 148). Also, Marrou considers the church fathers and the religion of culture as a new niche of *Paideia*, which becomes a sacred concept, the nobility of the soul, and the spiritual dignity of the religious kind (Marrou 1982: 47–52). The early Christian philosopher is the man saved by the Muses, the radical shield of *Paideia* as the ideal of education that not only preserves the themes of humanism, such as civilization and culture but raises them to a new level of salvation and purification. In Marrou, Hellenistic culture becomes the equivalent of religion, as the only true, unspoiled value necessary for salvation, which we can see in the following quotation:

“Free, utterly free, faced by the crumbling walls of his city and abandoned by his gods, faced with a world with no end to it and an empty heaven, Hellenistic man looked vainly for something to belong to, some star to guide his life – and his only solution was to turn in upon himself and look there for the principle of all his actions.” (Marrou 1982: 226)

From Marrou's writing, we can see that *Paideia* is a classical education for a higher group of people, who put themselves in the noble service of a higher power, the state of Rome and the Catholic Church.

If we return to the main problem from the beginning of this subchapter we will realise that neither Jaeger nor Marrou provides an explicit definition of *Paideia*. For both, it represents the cultural premise of ancient literature, the history of education, and the social relations of the elite. However, Marrou

boldly extended the domain of *Paideia* to early Christianity and the Roman Empire. The (non)defining of *Paideia* enables us a broader view and the possibility of considering instrumental arguments that would be specific to a concept burdened with meaning and not just a technical focus. *Paideia*'s myth of surviving Greek cultural identity by following the collapse of Greek political influence is a fitting slogan for a concrete focus on pagan thinkers in the 2nd century BC.

## 5. Early Christian *Paideia* as a Biography of Conversion

When historians talk about the transition from the ancient Greek tradition to the early Christian world, they are often talking critically about the marginalization of Greek culture, and focus on Christian ideals that dictate that education and wisdom are the characteristics of evil. This is best seen in Celsus's parody of the first epistle to the Corinthians:

“Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near. For these abilities are thought by us to be evils. But as for anyone ignorant, anyone stupid, anyone uneducated, anyone who is a child, let him come boldly.” (Gemeinhardt 2012: 88)

However, although Christianity was anti-elitist and critical of the view of philosophy as a practice for the elite, Celsus creates a distorted picture of the social, cultural, and educational reality of early Christianity. From Origen's answer to Celsus we can recognise that *Paideia* remained very much alive in the Roman Empire:

“How then is it reasonable for Celsus to criticize us as though we asserted, ‘Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near’? On the contrary, let the educated, wise and sensible man come if he wishes, and nonetheless let anyone ignorant, stupid, uneducated, and childish come as well. For the Word promises to heal even such people if they come, and makes all men worthy of God.” (Origen 1980: 19)

So everyone is welcome in Christianity, including widespread intellectuals educated in Greek culture. Many thinkers have indeed converted to Christianity but at no time have they rejected their previous education. On the contrary, many of them claimed that it was *Paideia* who led them to Christianity. Through their biographies, where they faithfully display their conversion, that is, the search for the Christian *Paideia*, they provide the best evidence for exploring the place of Greek culture in the Roman Empire. We will review the mentioned biographies of conversion by focusing on three paradigmatic representatives of the Christian *Paideia*; Justin Martyr, *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*, and Gregory the Wonderworker. In addition, we will highlight the unique elements that the Christian *Paideia* brings in comparison with the classical one. Conversion is not the singular such innovation, but it conveys a suitable phenomenon through which we can glimpse into the range of the other elements – especially concerning the three noted pagan thinkers.

## 6. Justin Martyr (Ιουστίνος ὁ μάρτυρ)

In *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr describes his education through a critical look at ancient Greek philosophical schools; Stoics, Peripatetics, and Pythagoreans. For each of the mentioned academic orientations, he states the reasons why they failed to satisfy his appetite for knowledge. Even after a thorough acquaintance with everything that the Greek academy has to offer,

Justin remains lost. It was only by converting to Christianity that he managed to find the peace and knowledge he was looking for (Hofer 2003: 5–8). In the *Dialogue*, however, Justin nevertheless highlights the invaluable insights of Greek philosophy; the Pythagoreans, by emphasizing music, astronomy, and geometry, succeeded in directing Justin's soul from the visible to the invisible. If the Pythagoreans represent the first step towards the Christian *Paideia*, then Plato is the vestibule of knowledge itself.<sup>2</sup> The ultimate goal of Plato's philosophy, according to Justin, is God (Hofer 2003: 9). So it is clear that Justin sees an unbreakable link between *Paideia* and conversion. Justin heals his despair with Christianity and prayer, which suggests that the point of the *Dialogue* is not whether Christianity requires education, but whether Christianity is the only true philosophy. Justin's school was based on preaching the mysteries of God, creation, and Christ, as well as Christianity as the only reliable and true philosophy. For Justin, Christianity is a refined and advanced version of the Greek *Paideia* (De Vogel 1978: 371).

## 7. Saint Clement of Rome (Κλήμης Ῥώμης)

*Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* is a work that provides the sharpest critique of pagan education. The author of this work is Pope Clement I, Peter's successor as bishop of Rome. Greek *Homilies* or Latin *Recognitions* represent Christian adaptations of classical literature and the narrative of young Clement's quest for true knowledge (Bautch 2016). Before becoming a bishop and qualifying to teach the pagans the Gospel, Clement was educated according to the Greek *Paideia*. He acquired a thorough Greek education, which is clear from his writing on syllogisms (Bautch 2016: 133). In *Homilies*, a lost young man searches for answers to important questions, like Justin he feels the impossibility of acquiring the right knowledge until he meets Peter, the primordial imitator of Christ (Gemeinhardt 2012: 92). Clement concludes that education is essentially spiritual and not a matter of school syllabi. Like Justin, Clement's biography and epistle narrates the search for the Christian *Paideia*. Conversion to Christianity is an educational process and the goal of *Homilies* is to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over pagan teachings (Bautch 2016: 134–137).

## 8. Gregory of Neocaesarea (Γρηγόριος ὁ Θαυματουργός)

The story of Gregory the Wonderworker is also the story of Origen's school. In 231 AD, the Alexandrian theologian Origen established a school in Caesarea, Palestine, where he taught students dialectics, physics, and ethics (van den Broek 1995: 42). Gregory said that the "holy logos" inspired him to look for *Paideia* and brought him to Origen. Gregory thus acquired a thorough Greek education that allowed him to continue towards the Christian *Paideia*. Origen tried to convey the concept of *Paideia* as a common meeting point for pagan and Christian education (Stefaniw 2012: 119–122). For Gregory to become a Christian Gnostic, he had to become a philosopher, and he could not do that without a substantial acquaintance with Greek culture. Origen demanded that his students must not accept Christianity before they became acquainted with every other philosophy, as well as not to reject other philosophies until they were intellectually ready to accept Christianity. Through his works, Gregory

emphasised the feeling of essential belonging to Origen's school, which he considered the education of the spirit (Stefaniw 2012: 124–126).

## 9. The New in the Old

We have already noted that this chapter will not be solely about conversion but also concerning other novelty Christianity brings compared to the cults that already existed within the Roman Empire. The most suitable way to introduce these new elements, which are also integral to the conversion of Justin, Clement, and Gregory, is by revealing what their Christian education substantially entailed.

Christian education, which is very analogous to ancient Greek, pinpointed the upbringing and education of a person in its appropriate environment. The formation and shaping of a human in the classical Paideia were understood through the affinity between parents and children, that is, between teacher and student. In the new conception of Paideia, which emerged through Christianity, the role of parents is occupied by God, while the individual, as a creation of God, strives to grow and develop himself as a Christian. That does not mean that the role of a tutor is not valued in Christianity, which we will see in the example of Origen, about whom we will talk about in the next chapter. The tutor leads the individual to experience the reality of God. Unlike the ancient Greek mentor, the focus here is not on the art of conceptualization and moral lessons but on direct experience (Farley 1965: 339–342).

The project of moulding a human is now in the hands of God. The new concept of a human being is the transformation into Christ, where death is only the beginning and martyrdom is the birth and a reinvigorated becoming of a human being. For this reason, Ignatius of Antioch urged that the Romans not keep him alive but execute him so he could become a martyr and be reborn (Behr 2016: 21). The Christian religion is human's persistent pursuit of purpose and values as an inspiration and guides through the endless search for fulfilment and a contented life. In Christianity, the concept of truth changes. What was nature for the ancient Greeks now becomes God, the creative order of the universe. Unlike nature, as the supreme principle, Christians do not speak of God in causal terms. This change of emphasis enables humans to respond to the creations of God he fronts in his surroundings so that the encounter with God is immediate and not just mere instruction for acquiring naturalistic truth. Christian education aims to cultivate a Christian way of life in which the individual becomes receptive to the reality of God (Behr 2016: 22).

Speaking about Christian martyrs, it would be helpful to mention the definition of human by Irenaeus of Lyons, according to whom human represents the glory of God and only genuine human beings are martyrs (Behr 2016: 23). In the second century AD, Barnabas provided another definition of man; He states that human should not be defined by rational capacities but by experience through his existence on earth and suffering, which is in the hands of God. One becomes a human through learning (*pathein*) and suffering (*mathein*) (Behr 2016: 22). On the other hand, experience had a somewhat different meaning for the Greeks, primarily through philosophers who

offered various arguments about the immobile and unchanging universe. For Christians, the purpose and experience of suffering are reflected precisely in the fact that the earth is temporal and that everything we encounter is transitory and decaying. By converting to Christianity through the act of baptism, we become new-borns, formed into human beings through the virtue of sacrificial love. *Christian Paideia* is an exceptional type of knowledge that shapes us through the experience of mortality and demise. We learn to relish life only when we realise it is not in our hands. In the words of Jesus Christ – *my strength is made perfect in weakness*.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the experience of weakness acquaints us with the strength of God. The transformation into a human being requires a special kind of learning and more enriched viewpoints on suffering as a creative process. Like the ancient Greeks, the heavenly Christian virtues include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, and self-control. It should be kept in mind that the spiritual meaning of the above virtues varies, as well as the manner by which we achieve them through long-term Christian pedagogy and didactics (Behr 2016: 23–29).

From the three explained cases, we can see that the education and biography of pagan philosophers were intertwined in late antique Christianity. Educational ideals were implemented through the lives of prominent theologians, which further indicates the unbreakable link between education and conversion. A convert view of the significance of ancient education for the Christian life, as well as a Christian understanding of the relationship with pagan culture, values, and ethics, opens the way to new research.

Pagan thinkers educated in the culture of the Greek *Paideia* had to adapt to the new institutions of the Roman Empire. Our initial assumption is that the definition of *Paideia* cannot be static but must propose a broader contextual account of the dynamics of philosophical activities in Christianity. It is therefore necessary to examine how prominent pagan thinkers managed to adapt to the social ladders of the new empire. This brings us to rhetoric, as an inalienable aspect of Greek culture and a dynamic view of the practice of *Paideia*.

## 10. Performing *Paideia*: Greek Culture in the Panegyric for Christian Emperors

*Paideia*, a Greek culture that included language, literature, philosophy, and medicine, was an inalienable element of the social identity of the elite in the Roman Empire. Through performing praiseworthy orations, writing philosophy, and medical interventions, prominent *Paideia* thinkers were pushed even to the emperor himself (Van Hoof 2013: 387). This points to an interesting connection between culture and political power in late antiquity. The prevailing opinion of some historians that Greek culture suffered under Christian emperors like Constantius sheds a negative light on the place of *Paideia* in the 4th century AD (Gauville 2001: 53). Julian is generally considered to be the last Roman emperor to respect Greek culture, but one should not lose sight of the fact that Constantius had a rich cultural education, correspondence with leading cultural figures, and promoted the humanities (Lieu & Montserrat 1996).

“No person shall obtain a post of the first rank unless it shall be proved that he excels in long practice of liberal studies and that he is so polished in literary matters that words flow faultlessly from his pen.” (Van Hoof 2013: 388)



From the jointly issued edict of Constantius and Julian (Harries 2011), it can be seen that uneducated persons could not enjoy the perks of high positioning in the Roman Empire. This means that they had to acquire an education and familiarity with the tradition of Greek culture, *Paideia*. For these reasons, we will describe the social ascent of three pagan thinkers who managed to acquire high positions through the practice of *Paideia*. The main practice that is credited with promoting *Paideia* in early Christianity is panegyric. Through eulogies to emperors, panegyrics, early Christian philosophers had the opportunity to display the full splendour of their Greek education and culture pageantry and to guarantee their usefulness to emperors if they were chosen to perform some of the advisory court functions (Rees 2012).

## 11. Themistius Euphrades (Θεμιστίσιος)

The first example of a successful orator who flourished under Roman emperors is Themistius. In his panegyrics, Themistius praises Emperor Constantius, adding along the way that he does not provide flattering hymns for money, but cares about the values that Constantius and he share (Penella 2000: 194). Thus, traditional spiritual values such as self-control, courage, sanity, and philanthropy make the emperor god-like. Philanthropy is an ideal shared by pagans and Christians, and the particularity of imperial philanthropy is reflected in the pardon of execution (Feingold 1987: 157). Such a rule can be called “unstained” and reflects an amalgam of philosophy, religion, law, and political ideas inherited from antiquity. These characteristics distinguish a good ruler from a tyrant (Van Nuffelen 2004: 234). Themistius and other *Paideian* thinkers who longed for establishment in the Roman Empire exhaustively emphasised that only philosophers were reliable witnesses to virtue. Propagating the self-image of philosophers in the eyes of the emperor is a common rhetorical trick of the time (Kugler 1999). For a philosopher to get the opportunity to flatter the emperor at all, it was first necessary to establish philosophical authority. Such authority must be independent of the pursuit of interest and exclusively oriented towards the heritage of Greek values and culture.

Constantius in return writes a letter to the Senate, in which he speaks very praiseworthy of Themistius. Constantius is writing a letter of recommendation because he wants to nominate Themistius for senator. *Demagoria Constantii* is an exceptional testimony to Constantius classical education, because he does not write a mere letter praising Themistius, but embarks into a dialogue with him (Van Hoof 2013: 394). In *Demagoria*, Constantius first makes a cunning rhetorical trick, emphasizing that Themistius is not interested in money because he already has more than plenty. He then praises Themistius’ marriage, origins, and wealth, emphasizing the importance of the relationship between philosophy and society. Even if we put Themistius’ philosophical skills aside, he is still worthy of the senate because of the enumerated social values and reputation (Watts 2021: 11–14). Constantius argues in favor of a true philosophy that serves society and urges philosophers not to stand aside but to take political part to justify the duty of their vocation. Themistius possesses both Roman dignity and Hellenic wisdom, and as such will bring goodness

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For more on the three aforementioned definitions of human and the Christian understanding of the linkage between suffering and *Paideia*,

see in the chapter of John Behr’s *Patristic Humanism: The Beginning of Christian Paideia* (2016).

and virtue to the city of Constantinople (Watts 2021: 16). And Constantius, as a good emperor, cares about wisdom and education, and through this double gesture, he gives the place of a senator to Themistius and Themistius to the Senate. Constantius, through *Demagoria*, wants to show that a cultural ruler values philosophy, but also that a good ruler must unite philosophy and political influence with his personality. On the other hand, Themistius, Dio Chrysostom, and other *Paideia* thinkers have tried to establish a relation of need to the emperor, a good emperor is measured against the standards of philosophy (Kokkinia 2004: 498).

By focusing on Constantius as a paradigmatic Christian emperor, we can draw several conclusions about Greek culture in Constantinople. To build a solid center of political power, Constantius had to gather prominent cultural figures,<sup>4</sup> he was also very willing to promote figures who possessed a traditional type of cultural capital, Hellenic tradition, and pagan origin (Van Hoof 2013: 398). Therefore, he did not favor cultural Christians in regard to pagans, which was a smart political move because he thus attracted the elite and ensured the cultural transformation of Constantinople. The philosopher Constantius was the guardian of the Greek *Paideia*. Not only did he promote Greek cultural figures but he actively participated in Greek culture through discussions, readings, and analysis of classical works.

## 12. Nilus Dionysius

In addition to Constantius and Themistius, which is one of the examples of how thinkers of Greek culture stepped into Christian *Paideia*, there is another very illustrative indicator of the survival of the Greeks in the Roman Empire. Julian's letter to Nilus Dionysius shows another highly educated Roman emperor who used the benefits of the Greek *Paideia* (Elm 2016: 58). Julian was part of the Constantius dynasty and before the civil war, he offered an office to the Roman senator Nilus. Interest in philosophy influenced Julian's desire to gather cultural figures around him (Van Hoof 2013: 399), but Nilus rejected Julian's proposal. After Constantius' death, Julian becomes Roman emperor and Nilus decides to write to him and accept his invitation. Julian responds to him and very vehemently rejects Nilus's attempt to flatter him, during which he demonstrates an exceptional familiarity with Greek culture, classical works, and the philosophy of *Paideia* (Elm 2016: 58–62).

In the letter, Nilus refers to Dio Chrysost's arguments about the emperor who respects free-thinking philosophers (Moles 1983: 259–263) and states that Constantius also had hasty reactions to his sincerity and loyalty to justice. In this way, Nilus wants to let Julian know that his refusal to office has nothing to do with Julian personally as much as with Nilus's sincerity and consistency with the principles of a good philosopher. However, Julian recognises Nilus' rhetorical tricks very well and answers even more cunningly and wisely. Julian notices that Nilus is not a philosopher at all, and in Socrates' manner he cites two reasons that make Nilus a double ignoramus; ignorance of philosophy and ignorance of not knowing (Van Hoof 2013: 399). According to Julian, Nilus completely misuses the term *phronēsis* (Greek: *φρόνησις*). In addition, in a very witty way, Julian calls Nilus a prostitute and a chair warmer (Elm 2016: 63). With this letter, Julian underlines that philosophy and Greek *Paideia* are very welcome in his close circle, but not every philosophy! Julian

needs real connoisseurs and widely educated figures to make his rule good and wise.

### 13. Libanius (Λιβάνιος)

On the other hand, it is important to cite the example of Libanius, who passed the Julian cultural test (Ross 2020: 243). After several panegyrics of Libanius, Julian decided to allow him to advance and to fulfill his request for pardoning Aristophanes of Corinth (Pack 1951: 183). Libanius's *Oratorio 14* in a very charming and erudite way praises Julian's program of the cultural revival of the Roman Empire, which in turn gains Julian's personal affection (Van Hoof 2014: 16). The mentioned situations of Julian's correspondence with pagan thinkers indicate the vitality of traditional Greek culture in the 4th century AD in two ways; Greek culture was very much alive, not only in the classrooms, but through politics, orations, and lobbying; Greek culture is not a fossil but requires successful performance, education but not in a *l'art pour l'art* sense but the practice of *Paideia* in the right place and at the right time. We can also understand *Paideia* as a trade-off that exchanges culture for political capital in crisis circumstances.

### 14. Christian Elements in Panegyrics

Although our chapter on *Panegyric* seems quite unusual since it is not clear in what precise relation it stands to the preceding chapter on the conversion of pagan thinkers to Christianity, one should not think that this connection does not exist. Panegyric is primarily a practical implementation of the rhetorical aspects of the *Paideia*. Keeping this in mind, as well as the previously mentioned new elements of Christianity concerning classical *Paideia*, we can broaden the understanding of panegyric and relate it to the phenomenon of conversion and Christian martyrs through this new prism. To do this, we will first elucidate what role *words* play in Christianity. In contrast to the socio-political context, which did not allow Christians in the earlier centuries of the Roman Empire to write down their unique understanding of the world and human's place in it, the reigns of Constantius and Julian made panegyric possible. Of course, it is an open question whether this was due to the tolerance and diverse views of the new emperors or whether they were forced to be tolerant of Christianity in the same socio-political context. Whatever the case, the sacrifices made by the Christian martyrs laid the foundation for the ever-increasing presence of Christianity in the Roman Empire and thus for the praising orations – *the panegyric*.

For Christians, religion signifies a systematic and strategic course that makes the Christian's life meaningful, significant, and operative on an individual and collective level. For the Christian religion to achieve its goals, it had to use the right *words* correctly. The Word of God can be seen as a non-verbal instruction, and a disciplined pursuit of virtue (*Arete*) directed to achieve harmony of soul, body, and mind (Behr 2016: 26). In the face of radical evil, man's

helplessness finds consolation in the Holy Spirit and in the grace of God. When we speak about the consolation and support Christians find in God's written Word, we must first cite the *Book of Revelation*. *Revelation* meets human alienation, harsh conditions imposed by the circumstances, and contextually specific needs. The Scripture aims to reconcile human needs and actions with God's will through redemptive dialogue and the immediacy of religious experience. In addition, we can cite the *Book of Genesis* and the *Book of Jonah* as portrayals of God's project of creating a human in his image. Jonah learns and molds himself through suffering, almost identical to the suffering of the Christian martyrs.<sup>5</sup>

To deepen our understanding of panegyric and its bond with learning through suffering, we need to explain the philosophy of the ancient Greeks as a transitional phase towards theology and Christianity. To this end, we cite a lengthy quote from Gregory of Nazianzus (Behr 2016: 26–27):

"I take it as admitted by men of sense, that the first of our advantages is education [παιδείσις]; and not only this our more noble form of it, which disregards rhetorical ornaments and glory, and holds to salvation, and beauty in the objects of our contemplation; but even that external culture which many Christians ill judgingly abhor, as treacherous and dangerous, and keeping us afar from God. For we ought not to neglect the heavens, and earth, and air, and all such things, because some have wrongly seized upon them, and honour God's works instead of God; but instead [we ought] to reap what advantage we can from them for our life and enjoyment, while avoiding their dangers; not raising creation, as foolish men do, in revolt against the Creator, but from the works of nature apprehending the Worker, and, as the divine apostle says, bringing into captivity every thought to Christ; and again, as we know that neither fire, nor food, nor iron, nor any other of the elements, is of itself most useful, or most harmful, except according to the will of those who use it; and as we have mixed healthful drugs from certain of the reptiles, so from secular literature we have received principles of enquiry and contemplation [τὸ μὲν ἐξεταστικὸν τε καὶ θεωρητικὸν ἐδεξάμεθα], while we have rejected their idolatry, terror, and pit of destruction. Even these have aided us in our religion, by our perception of the contrast between what is worse and what is better, and by gaining strength for our doctrine from the weakness of theirs. We must not then dishonour education, because some men are pleased to do so, but rather suppose such men to be boorish and uneducated, desiring all men to be as they themselves are, in order to hide themselves in the general, and escape the detection of their want of culture." (Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 43.11)

As we can see, Gregory provides a detailed account of what religion designates as well as what Greek traditions and culture contributed to the conversion of numerous pagan thinkers to Christianity. Ancient Greek dexterities and knowledge such as geometry, rhetoric, astronomy, grammar, and music were preparation for philosophy. In comparison, philosophy as a servant of Christianity prepares us for theology as the queen of all sciences. Christian thinkers held that both Socrates and Plato were proto-Christians, but they often became entangled in contradictions because they needed an adequate archetext, the Scripture. Admittedly, the assertion that Plato was Moses speaking Greek is more of a hermeneutical and apologetic statement than a historical one (Behr 2016: 27).

St. Basil also wrote a similar treatise, *An Address to the Young on How They Might Derive Benefit from Reading Pagan Literature*, in which he sought to emphasise the importance of Greek culture and tradition for conversion. Interestingly, both Gregory and Saint Basil were pupils of Origen and corresponded with him, as may be evidenced by the following Origen's paragraph (Ibid., 27–28).

"I am very desirous that you should accept such parts even of Greek philosophy as may serve for the ordinary elementary instruction of our schools, and be a kind of preparation for Christianity:

also those portions of geometry and astronomy likely to be of use in the interpretation of the sacred Scriptures, so that, what the pupils of the philosophers say about geometry and music, grammar, rhetoric, and astronomy, that is, that they are the handmaidens of philosophy, we may say of philosophy itself in relation to Christianity.” (Origen, *Phil.* 13)

In his academy, Origen taught pupils to sharpen their criticism by reading original sources without limiting their learning and reflection. In this peculiar school, pagan converts went through spiritual and practical training, politics and ethics, and heavenly and human. These are merely a few examples of the synergy of Greek culture, tradition, and philosophy with Christianity, which builds on and persists in shaping human in the essential sense, that is, in the *Christian Paideia*.

Panegyric takes the best of both worlds, the natural and abstract elements of the *Paideia*. Education softens us like clay, which God then moulds. Even in Christianity, *Logos* is still what distinguishes us from animals. The importance of God’s Word is also reflected in oratory and the proper models of rhetoric that a disciplined mind uses to mould its personality and attain complete *Paideia*. Christians are looking for an adequate meaning under the Word of God, and here we uncover another linkage between panegyric and Christian martyrs like Justin, who considered dispersing the Word of God as the spreading of God’s seed – *Logos spermatikos* (Behr 2016: 31). Although the panegyrics were orations and rhetorical treatises addressed to emperors, their content portrayed questions about value, culture, knowledge, and a wide variety of views about the world and human’s place in it. Because of this unique content, the panegyrists could not help but integrate *Christian Paideia*. Whether about philosophy, socio-political order, or culture, Christian ideas were indispensably conveyed through panegyric. If we glance at the form and venter of panegyric, we will easily recognise elements of Greek culture and tradition. However, if we excavate more in-depth and examine them in the historical context to which they belong, we will find that these Greek fragments bore the form of *Christian Paideia*. All of this was made possible thanks to the footings laid by the sacrifices of the Christian martyrs. Pagan convertites like Justin, Clement, and Gregory made possible the performance of the *Paideia* in the form of the back-and-forth dialogue with the Roman emperors.

## 15. Concluding Remarks

The traditional elements of the Greek *Paideia* survived and were adapted to the circumstances in the early Christian Roman Empire. Constantine and Julian promoted philosophy, but not unconditionally! Self-presentation, flattering panegyrics, and orations were not enough, prominent cultural figures had to create new values in changeable political circumstances. This is how *Christian Paideia* was created, through adaptation and transformation. Unlike the static image of Greek culture in the period from Homer to the Peloponnesian War, in early Christian Rome, we have an insight into the

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In selecting the examples and sources we have utilised to establish the connection between the panegyric and the *Christian Paideia*, we have again followed John Behr’s text on *Patriotic Humanism* (2016). Here we encourage

readers to explore in full, in addition to Behr’s text, the other works in the outstanding edited volume *Re-Envisioning Christian Humanism: Education and the Restoration of Humanity*, published by Oxford University Press.

dynamics of late ancient culture and the role that *Paideia* played in the new society. *Christian Paideia* represents the continuity of Greek culture, but also innovative adaptability to the needs of new circumstances.

Applying this framework to comprehending the socio-political ascension in the Roman Empire, we can notice that the three aforementioned pagan thinkers remained in the old political order, even though one of the two emperors to whom the panegyric was addressed was a Christian. Thanks to the martyrs, that is, by the gratitude of their contemplative and virtuous life, the later thinkers were able to enter the political arena of the later Roman Empire. However, the way pagan converts rose to high positions does not mean they had any real influence. They merely and ostensibly emerged from the old order because the Roman emperors dictated politically favourable circumstances for themselves. Constantius was baptised, but it is an open query whether he was indeed a Christian or whether he did so because he recognised the advantages of such a political move. Nevertheless, these are open questions that we will answer in a forthcoming study. In this paper, we were interested in the survival of Greek tradition and culture in early Christian Rome, as well as the new elements that the *Christian Paideia* brought compared to the classical one.

In this paper, we have examined the resilience and vivacity of Greek culture between the 2nd and 4th century AD of the early Christian period. Nevertheless, it would be interesting and advantageous to explore the period between the 4th and 9th centuries within the emerging religious institutions in the Roman Empire. By this, we accentuate the influence of Greek culture on monasteries, educated monks, and monastic orders like the black monks of Benedictines. Roman culture was created based on prolific Greek tradition and can contemptuously boast of Lucius Annaeus Seneca and Marcus Tullius Cicero. However, educated Romans would not have developed a concept of *Paideia* without richly established Greek roots.

If we want to find out whether the relationship between educated philosophers and the political elite, regarding social roles has changed, then it is enough to ask ourselves what are the characteristic features of an educated wise persona of our time. The cultural protagonist of today can be an artist, a writer, or a political analyst, each of whom has his own panegyrics. The media allows suitable space for educated individuals to address a brand new Constantius and Julian, but the roles and stakes remain the same. If a ruler wants to be characterised as wise and candidly involved in the fate of his subjects, he must gather respected representatives of different cultural milieus around him. In this way, the political leader gains legitimacy and applause for his sensitivity toward cultural critique. In return, educated individuals enjoy all the benefits of the upper class, gaining decision-making power within their institutions such as theatres, universities, media outlets, and daily news. The criteria against which today's educated pagan is measured has remained the same, savvy knowledge of classical literature, pre-Socratic philosophy, Latin and ancient Greek reading and writing skills, ancient architecture, poetry, and witty phrases are always valued and esteemed. However, what an educated individual must not lose sight of is a deep understanding of Greek culture. Beneath the surface of beautifully written texts and sound dictations, there is a buoyant spirit of *Paideia*, which always commits and devotes to society with the searing fire of wisdom by improving the education and public thinking of his compatriots.

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### Petar Nurkić

## Kultura na društvenoj ljestvici od grčke tradicije do kršćanske Paideje

### Sažetak

U kulturi antičke Grčke pojam Paideia (grč. παιδεία) označavao je odgoj i obrazovanje idealnog člana polisa. Međutim, razdoblje od Homerove epske poezije (9. ili 8. st. pr. Kr.) do Peloponeskog rata (5. st. pr. Kr.) značajno se razlikuje u pogledu oblika helenističke kulture



nakon pojave kršćanstva (osobito od 2. do 9. st.). Zbog toga je potrebno razmotriti kakvo je značenje Paideia imala u različitim povijesnim razdobljima grčke kulture. Osim toga, rasprava o Paideji ne može postojati u apstraktnom obliku konceptualne analize bez uzimanja u obzir stvarnih povijesnih osoba koje su pridonijele opstanku grčke kulture u rimskom i ranokršćanskom razdoblju. Ovaj rad ima za cilj ispitati ulogu grčke kulture u društvenom životu ranokršćanskih Rimljana. Pokušat ćemo to postići detaljnom analizom panegirika (grč. πανήγυρις). Panegirici su hvalospjevi koji su obrazovani poganski mislioci upućivali rimskim carevima. Nakon panegirika, ispitat ćemo utjecaj grčke tradicije na raspodjelu društvenih uloga u višim klasama u Rimskom Carstvu. Istodobno, analizom panegirika, društveno-kulturnog konteksta ranog Rima i zahtjeva koje je društveni boljitak postavljao pred poganske mislioe, uvest ćemo nove elemente kršćanske Paideje u odnosu na njezinu klasičnu prethodnicu, pokazujući tako što je takva transformacija u biti podrazumijevala.

#### Ključne riječi

Paideia, rano kršćanstvo, kršćanska Paideia, panegirik, Konstancije I. Klor, Julian Apostat

Petar Nurkić

### Kultur auf der sozialen Leiter von der griechischen Tradition bis zur christlichen Paideia

#### Zusammenfassung

In der Kultur des antiken Griechenlands bezeichnete der Begriff Paideia (Griechisch: παιδεία) die Erziehung und Bildung eines idealen Mitglieds der Polis. Der Zeitraum von Homers epischer Dichtung (9. oder 8. Jahrhundert v. Chr.) bis zum Peloponnesischen Krieg (5. Jahrhundert v. Chr.) weist indessen erhebliche Unterschiede auf, was die Formen der hellenistischen Kultur nach dem Auftauchen des Christentums (speziell vom 2. bis 9. Jahrhundert n. Chr.) betrifft. Aus diesem Grund ist es geboten zu erwägen, welche Bedeutung der Paideia in verschiedenen historischen Perioden der griechischen Kultur zukam. Zudem kann die Diskussion um Paideia nicht in der abstrakten Form einer konzeptuellen Analyse existieren, ohne die realen historischen Persönlichkeiten zu berücksichtigen, die zum Fortbestand der griechischen Kultur in der römischen und frühchristlichen Epoche beigetragen haben. Dieser Aufsatz setzt sich zum Ziel, die Rolle der griechischen Kultur im gesellschaftlichen Leben der frühchristlichen Römer zu beleuchten. Wir werden versuchen, dies durch eine eingehende Analyse der Panegyriken (Griechisch: πανήγυρις) zu erreichen. Panegyriken sind Lobreden, die gebildete heidnische Denker an römische Kaiser richteten. Im Anschluss an die Lobreden untersuchen wir den Einfluss der griechischen Tradition auf die Verteilung der sozialen Rollen in den Oberschichten im Römischen Reich. Zugleich werden wir durch die Analyse der Panegyriken, des soziokulturellen Kontexts des frühen Roms wie auch der Anforderungen, die soziale Verbesserung an heidnische Denker stellte, neue Elemente der christlichen Paideia in Hinsicht auf ihre klassische Vorgängerin einführen und dadurch zeigen, was eine solche Transformation im Wesentlichen einbezog.

#### Schlüsselwörter

Paideia, frühes Christentum, christliche Paideia, Panegyrikus, Constantius I. Chlorus, Julian Apostata

Petar Nurkić

### La culture sur l'échelle sociale depuis la tradition grecque jusqu'à la Paideia chrétienne

#### Résumé

Dans la culture de la Grèce Antique le concept de Paideia (gr. : παιδεία) se rapportait à l'éducation et la formation du membre idéal de la polis. Toutefois, la période qui s'étend de la poésie épique de Homère (9ème ou 8ème s. av. J.-C.) à la guerre du Péloponnèse (5ème s. ap. J.-C.) se différencie significativement sur la question des formes de la culture hellénistique. Pour cette raison, il est nécessaire de considérer la signification que la Paideia avait à différentes

*périodes historiques de la culture grecque. Par ailleurs, le débat sur la Paideia ne peut pas exister de manière abstraite dans l'analyse conceptuelle si l'on ne prend pas en compte les personnalités historiques réelles ayant contribué à la survie de la culture grecque à l'époque romaine et du christianisme primitif. Le présent travail a pour objectif d'interroger le rôle de la culture grecque dans la vie sociale des Romains du christianisme primitif. Nous nous attachons à atteindre notre objectif à l'aide d'une analyse détaillée du panégyrique (gr. : πανήγυρις). Les panégyriques sont des éloges que les penseurs païens instruits adressaient aux empereurs romains. Après les panégyriques, nous examinerons l'influence de la tradition grecque sur la division des rôles sociaux dans les classes supérieures de l'Empire Romain. Dans le même temps, grâce à l'analyse du panégyrique, du contexte socio-culturel de la Rome antique et des contraintes amenées par le progrès social auxquelles les penseurs païens devaient faire face, nous introduirons de nouveaux éléments de la Paideia chrétienne par rapport à sa théorie classique antérieure, et montrerons ainsi ce qu'une transformation de la sorte a réellement entraîné.*

**Mots-clés**

*Paideia*, christianisme primitif, *Paideia* chrétienne, panégyrique, Constance Chlore, Julien l'Apostat