

Studying Abroad in Antiquity: Student Movement and Educational Policy

Studying abroad is widely recognized as a means to promote international understanding and student employability. Nonetheless, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) July 6, 2020 directive, which threatened to deport international students during the COVID-19 pandemic if they did not enroll in in-person classes, shows how easily students abroad can become targets of negative nationalist sentiment. In Greece and Rome, too, studying abroad was could carry negative connotations and prompt oppositions. Students from abroad fueled the *topos* that foreign imports threaten national unity and moral values (e.g., Cic. *leg.* 2.7, 2.28; Plut. *Lyk.* 9.3, 27.3). This paper analyzes how reservations in philosophical treatises about studying abroad traveled from Greece to Rome and became manifest in the legal policies of the Roman Empire. First, it outlines the stakeholders involved in granting student-entry permits and the status of foreign students as "non-resident aliens" (cf. *Dig.* 47.10.5.5 = Ulp. *56 ad edictum*). Next, the paper shows how national policies and philosophical thought complemented each other in inhibiting student mobility. Finally, it shows that, despite reservations against studying abroad, ancient philosophers held a more nuanced view of higher education and of the international exchange of scholars than contemporary legislators did.

While the movement of orators and professors of higher education is a recognized phenomenon in ancient literature (cf. Philostratus and Eunapius *vit.*; Plin. *ep.* 2.18, 3.3, 4.11, 4.13) and modern scholarship (e.g., Montiglio 2005), student movement is not. Moatti (2006) takes a first step in analyzing how ancient Roman authors and state legislature express the need to control the influx of foreigners. Specifically, beginning with the imperial stipulation of 370 AD (cf. *Cod. Theod.* xiv 9.1; cf. Pharr 1939: 265-268), the influx of students into the higher education centers of Rome and Constantinople was legally regulated. In these cities,

Valentinianus I enforced strict supervision of non-resident students. The entry provisions required students to provide a dossier with recommendation letters, a birth certificate, and a permit issued by local judges. To date, Classical scholars such as Criore (2003) have discussed recommendation letters and dossiers in the context of private education and intellectual networks. However, these imperial provisions indicate that recommendation letters also influenced official permissions to study abroad. The writers of these letters consequently worked in concert with city authorities and played a key role in educational policy and student mobility. On the administrative level, the provisions show that – contrary to modern expectations – student permits were the purview of local authorities rather than of the authorities of foreign residence.

Next the paper shows that the reservations about students abroad can be traced back from Roman legislation to the Greek orators and philosophers. Aeschines (cf. *Tim.* 47), for instance, gives an example of a foreigner who illegally sought work opportunities while pretending to be a student, and Plato (cf. *leg.* xii 950d) fears moral degradation due to the influx of students from abroad. Greek orators and philosophers shared a common agenda of inhibiting student mobility. This agenda persisted to the Roman imperial time when Cicero adopted the Greek sentiment about cultural deterioration from admitting foreigners and when lawyers translated it into legal policies.

Finally, the paper examines to what extent the visionaries of the ideal state differed from Greek indictments and Roman legislation that inhibited academic mobility. Although Plato (cf. *leg.* xii 950) and Cicero (cf. *rep.* 1.29, 5.6) have been quoted as being highly skeptical of studying abroad (cf. Moatti 2006: 122), this paper shows that they held a more nuanced view about educational movement. While subscribing to a traditional patriarchal education and a local

"breeding" of morals, they valued academic exchange, accommodated some educational mobility in their ideal state, and acknowledged the challenges arising from it. Plato (cf. *leg.* xii 953c-d), for instance, believes that traveling scholars serve as ambassadors of their home city abroad, that they learn from good and bad city models and can assist in improving local institutions. Ancient philosophers consequently reflect the common sociocultural concerns about studying abroad, but also add a more nuanced perspective on the benefits and dangers of studying abroad in antiquity.

Bibliography

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