

Introduction

This website will look at Byzantine education, specifically between 400 and 600AD. At the beginning of this period Christian and Pagan teachings were taught side by side in educational institutions. However, by 600AD Pagan teachings were eliminated from schools due to Emperor Justinian's legislation against the practice. The website will explore what was taught in educational facilities at the beginning of this period, Justinian's legislation that banned pagan education, and the effect this legislation had on Byzantine education. This research will help explore whether or not government intervention is necessarily beneficial to educational facilities and their students. The website will also compare Justinian's legislation to recent attempts at educational reforms in New Brunswick, specifically within the realms of post-secondary education and French Immersion.

Sources/Limitations of Study

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The Byzantine people inherited a lot of their respect of knowledge and learning from the classical Greek world. Although there was much to be documented and copied from manuscripts because the Byzantines were well achieved in preserving the past, there was still much to be documented that they were unable to preserve. Most of their information from the past can be found in the monastery libraries and have influenced the European world in many ways (Rice, *Everyday Life in Byzantium*, p. 191). It is unfortunate that when paganism was demolished by the Christian rule, there was much information about education as well as objects related to secular life destroyed as well. What was left is largely focused on the religious aspects of Byzantine history as opposed to scholarly pursuits.

Furthermore, we often looked at sources that were critical of Justinian’s rule as Emperor. There are several sources that laud Justinian’s rule as Emperor, such as John W. Barker’s book “Justinian & The Later Roman Empire and P.N. Ure’s “Justinian And His Age”. These books are a good starting point for those who interested in an opposing viewpoint to what is presented here.

Argument/Discussion/Evidence

Education before Emperor Justinian's Rule

Education prior to Justinian's rule was set up in three stages – “primary, secondary, and higher (Mango, 125)”. Very few students made it past primary school, where they learned the basics of reading, writing, and counting. Those who made it to secondary school were immersed in literary studies, learning poetry, criticism, correction (making sure texts were written correctly), and recitation. Math and sciences also played a role in secondary education, with students studying mathematics, geometry and astronomy (Mango, 125-127).

Higher education was usually limited to the upper classes, but artisans, soldiers, and simple folk often learned side by side with men well educated in the late antique culture. They studied the philosophy of the Hellenistic times, which dates back to ‘the institutions of the age of Christ’ (Haussig, *A History of Byzantine Civilization*. pp. 80). Universities were supervised by the state, and each university had a teaching staff consisting of ten Latin and five Greek grammarians, three Latin and five Greek sophists, two jurists, and one philosopher.

During this time, Christianity began to rise as a dominant force in Byzantine Empire, which posed problems for educators. Many of the subjects studied came from pagan sources and were taught by practicing pagans, creating tension in an increasingly Christian empire. Many Christians refused to learn anything other than Christian teachings, preferring to set up their own schools over learning from heathens.

If you wish to read histories, you have the book of Kings; if rhetorical and poetic writings, you have the Prophets, you have Job, you have the Proverbs, wherein you will find a sagacity that is greater than that of all poetry and sophistry since those are the words of our Lord who alone is wise (Mango, 131)

As Christian values were embraced by the public, tensions between Christians and pagans rose in the schools, leading to violent outbursts and the disruptions of studies. University education became tarnished as a result, sinking “to the level of an institution for professional training” (Haussig, pp. 81).

Justinian Rule and Education



Justinian was a well-known ruler of the Byzantine Empire from 527-565, succeeding his uncle, Justin I. Upon taking over the throne, Justinian considered it his duty to repair the deteriorating Roman Empire. He felt that the best way to do this would be to establish an empire where everyone followed and believed in the same things. His formula for this was “one state, one law, and one church” (Vasiliev, pp. 148). Obviously, in order to achieve this, Justinian would have to make some adjustments to the practices of the people in his empire.

Justinian was very well educated, religiously, and enjoyed being a part of religious discussions, as well as writing church hymns. He believed that religious conflicts were dangerous, as they threatened the unity of his empire (Vasiliev, 49). Although his desire to create a harmonious empire seemed like a positive one, it had detrimental effects on education, as well as people’s personal beliefs. In order for Justinian to be successful in creating a society where the population shared one religious belief (in this case, Christianity), he first had to eliminate paganism, which was being practiced and taught around the empire.

Unfortunately for scholars throughout, this meant removing pagan practices and teachings from

the school system as well. Justinian shut down the well-known philosophic school in Athens in 529, and prohibited pagans, Jews, and heretics from teaching, dismissing many of them from their posts (Treadgold, p. 180). Many pagan teachers fled to Persia, where they were told the King was interested in philosophy. True to the rumours, they were welcome with open arms. Unfortunately for them, life in a foreign country was found to be quite difficult, and therefore they returned to their homeland, where they formed a treaty with Justinian: he would not persecute them, nor force them to take on Christian faith. Justinian was true to his word, and unbeknownst to him, paganism continued to exist discreetly in remote areas (Vasiliev, p. 150).

The Effect of Justinian Rule on Education



Justinian's goal to unify the Byzantine Empire under the Christian flag had disastrous effects on education. The elimination of secular teachings from the schools led to the banning and burning of books, which undermined educational efforts across the empire. Countless classic works were lost thanks to Justinian's legislation, but the loss of books was not as great as 'the limitations imposed on intellectual freedom by the Christian state (Haussig, pp. 81).

By the end of sixth century, only three cities – Constantinople, Alexandria, Berytus - offered higher education to its citizens, and the University of Constantinople appears to have all but disappeared by the early seventh century. In fact, secondary and university education vanished from many areas of the empire, leaving the majority of citizens with primary school educations. Educational pursuits declined for decades following Justinian's reign, and did not recover until the late eighth century (Mango 131-136).

Ultimately, Justinian's attempt to unify the Byzantium under one law and religion failed. The empire, like the education system, fell to pieces completely following his death 565, as his expansions left Byzantium open for attacks on several fronts. Furthermore, the economic costs of the expanding the empire resulted in financial instabilities that crippled future rulers (Ostrogorsky, 72). This led to one of the darkest periods in Byzantine history (between 565 and 610), with anarchy, plagues, and poverty raging through the empire (Vasiliev, p. 169).

Relation to contemporary education

Government led changes to education are taking place to this very day. In New Brunswick, the Shawn Graham-led Liberal government has attempted to make sweeping changes to both elementary and post-secondary institutions, with varying degrees of success. While those who commissioned the reports stated the changes would give New Brunswickers an 'educational advantage,' (Miner) others argued they would have disastrous results to the New Brunswick education system. We will briefly look at each proposed change, public reaction to the proposals, and the outcome of each proposal.

Commission on Post Secondary Education in New Brunswick

The Suggestion

In 2007, a government commissioned report on Post Secondary Education in New Brunswick suggested making massive changes to several institutions in the province. Key to the report was a proposal to merge University and Community Colleges in Saint John, Northwestern, and Northeastern New Brunswick. Dubbed as polytechnic institutes, these new institutions were sold to the public as means to teach employable skills while simultaneously meeting the needs of the local labour market. As report commissioner Rick Miner stated in *Advantage New Brunswick: A Province Reaches To Fulfill Its Destiny*, "Their educational mission, for the most part, would be tailored to the needs of their region, and they would have the flexibility to adjust their teaching programs in ways that respond effectively to these needs" (Miner, 26).

The Reaction



While Miner suggested in the report that public opinion supported the idea of changes to New Brunswick's post-secondary institutions, public reaction indicated otherwise. Thousands of people attended rallies to oppose the proposed changes, and news stories and opinion pieces deriding the idea filled local news reports for weeks following the announcement. The government was accused of selling out student interests to private industry. "When the energy hub they're building is fully staffed we're not going to need a polytechnic anymore in this city," said Professor Miriam Jones. "The people of Saint John are going to have a big white elephant on their hands, a giant, expensive boondoggle that was put up for short-term gain" (Davis, p. C4).

The Outcome

With public opinion clearly against the proposed changes to post-secondary changes in New Brunswick, the Premier decided against moving forward with the reports suggestions. At a state of the province address five months after the commission release, Graham announced that "UNBSJ will retain programs like liberal arts, while expanding with new offerings to meet emerging economic opportunities" (Klinkenberg, p. A1).

The French Second Language Report

The Suggestion

The French Second Language report was released to the public February 28, 2008. The report suggested eighteen changes to French language education in New Brunswick, including the elimination of early immersion. Instead, all students would enter an intensive French program in grade five, with an option of entering a late immersion program in grade six. The report, written by Jim Croll and Patricia Lee and commissioned by the province, justified the changes by arguing that an intensive French program would increase chances of English students entering an immersion program, thus increasing the percentage of bilingual people in the province. Croll and Lee proposed that schools use the time freed up by the elimination of French from the grade 1-4 curriculum to enhance music, art, and physical education programs in the province (Backgrounder, gnb.ca).

The Reaction



Protests sprang up around the Province against the proposed changes. Hundreds of people gathered at rallies throughout New Brunswick to voice their disapproval. In Saint John, candidates for the city mayoral race joined protesters in a show of solidarity. "The early French immersion program does work and I think it should continue as is," said candidate Ivan Court, who would eventually win the race. "I think that's the clear message that has to go back to the province of New Brunswick (Davis, p. C4). The protests were especially heated in Francophone communities, as people who opposed the decision feared it would have disastrous effects on the province, including stirring up prejudices between the French and English communities.

"However, there were also a number of people who publically supported the decision. A group called Parents for Fairness came out in favour of the report, citing concerns that students in early immersion often struggled with English Language comprehension, and ended up leaving the program frustrated due their lack of progress (O'Toole, P. A1).

The Outcome

In the end, court challenges and protests forced Lamrock to compromise the findings in the original report. Early Immersion was eliminated, but a foundational French program was established for students from kindergarten to grade two. Students could enter the immersion program in grade three, two years earlier than the report suggested. Intensive French, however, was introduced to the grade five classroom at the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year. Protests against the changes have died down, but the effectiveness of the changes is still being debated. Grade five math scores decrease nearly six percent in the province between 2008 and 2009 (Assessment Results, gnb.ca), and some teachers suggested that the drop in scores was a direct result of the intensive French Program (Chuck Teed, conversations with teachers).

Conclusion

While New Brunswick in 2010 does not have a lot in common with Byzantine during Justinian's rule, one can see what that government intervention affects educational practices to this very day. When governments make decisions about education, those in power often do so for reasons that are in the best interest of the government, and not necessarily the students they serve. However, unlike Justinian, who could impose his will on the people of Byzantium without recourse, New Brunswick politicians must face the wrath of the public if they attempt to tamper with the educational status quo. That being said, it does not stop governments from attempting to exert control over the general populace through education reform. Educators, students, and parents must remain informed and diligent when it comes to proposed education reforms in their communities.