

Review Article: *Alexandros to Hellenikon Paidion*

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ABSTRACT

Alexandros is a derivative of Rouse's *A Greek Boy at Home* (1909). This review sets the Ancient Greek pedagogical context in which this book arrives, describes its contents in detail, and considers whether this text might be used for a text-based, communicative approach Ancient Greek course.

KEYWORDS

Ancient Greek, pedagogy, communicative, text-based, Rouse, Direct method.

DÍAZ ÁVILA, M., & ROUSE, W. H. *Alexandros to Hellenikon paidion: e libro "A Greek Boy at Home" a W.H.D. Rouse anno 1909 conscripto*. Guadix, Granada: Cultura Clásica. 2014. 17x24 cm. 232 p. ISBN 978-84-935798-7-6. Text and Audio CD. 16 €. Sample pages [here](#).



Alexandros Book Cover (Rubio & Lopez)

In 1909, W.H.D. Rouse wrote a first-year reader containing eighty-four stories in Ancient Greek, called *A Greek Boy at Home*. The stories describe the life and surroundings of an imaginary Greek boy named Thrasymachus. *Alexandros* is a 2014 digest derived from *A Greek Boy at Home*. The main character's name is changed from Thrasymachus to Alexandros. The stories are reduced from eighty-four in *A Greek Boy at Home* to twenty-four in *Alexandros*. Illustrations are added on nearly every page and exercises following each story are included.

Alexandros is meant to be a reading based beginner textbook for the first year or two of instruction in Ancient Greek. Would it be a good choice for use in your classroom? The answer will be influenced by the individual instructor's philosophy of teaching Ancient Greek. My review of *Alexandros* is influenced by my conviction that employing communicative methods in the study of Ancient Greek is the most effective way for most learners to reach an acceptable level of reading comprehension.

In the review, you will find a description of *Alexandros* and comparisons with *A Greek Boy at Home*. An evaluation follows, together with some notes on the book's significance. Finally, I've considered the possibilities of using this book with communicative methods. As an introduction to the review, I felt it was necessary to provide the following overview of the pedagogical context into which this book arrives.

PEDAGOGICAL CONTEXT

The study of Ancient Greek was greatly promoted by the publishing of the first complete Greek New Testament by Erasmus in 1516 and renewed interest in reading it. During the 1500's and 1600's there was an emphasis in Ancient Greek pedagogy on using Ancient Greek. We hear Erasmus himself advocating the same, as quoted in Wheeler's history of language teaching, "Nor have I ever agreed with the common run of teachers who, in inculcating these authors [i.e., of grammar books], hold boys back for several years. For a true ability to speak correctly is best fostered both by conversing and consorting with those who speak correctly and by the habitual reading of the best stylists" (46). As an interesting aside, evidence of this pedagogical approach is found in Isaac Newton's notebook, written during the years of 1661-1665, and rediscovered in 2011. In the book we see notes on classes in mathematics, physics, and metaphysics, all freely composed in Ancient Greek ("[Newton Papers](#)").

By the 1800's teaching methods had shifted. Nearly all Ancient Greek instruction employed what is today known as the Grammar Translation method. This method follows a deductive pattern, as described by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson: "Grammar rules are presented with examples. Exceptions to each rule are also noted. Once students understand a rule, they are asked to apply it to some different examples" (21). The Grammar Translation method is what most today would call the traditional way of teaching Ancient Greek. The method continues to be used in most academic institutions for Latin and Ancient Greek instruction.

There were a few early voices that fought against the Grammar Translation method, advocating inductive methods. One dissenter, and the language learning method he promoted, gives us the context we need to better understand the book here under review. The man was W. H. D. Rouse, headmaster of the Perse School in Cambridge from 1902-1928 and author of *A Greek Boy at Home*. He advocated the Direct Method for teaching Latin and Greek. The method, described more below, encouraged the use of oral instruction in Ancient Greek, reading, and composition. The Direct Method is viewed today as a historical method of language teaching, now surpassed by communicative methods. The Bateman and Lago video series on language teaching methods puts the Direct Method into historical context. "The Grammar-Translation Method was criticized by advocates of more 'direct' methods, who claimed that languages ought to be learned by actually speaking and listening to them rather than merely studying about them." Bateman and Lago go on to quote from *Latin on the Direct Method*, written by Rouse himself. "The current [Grammar Translation] method is not older than the nineteenth century. It is the offspring of German scholarship, which seeks to learn everything about something rather than the thing itself; the traditional English method... was to use the Latin language in speech" (*Latin on the Direct Method 2*).

In the first half of the 20th century, the Direct Method seems to have been the sole contender to the Grammar Translation method. It ultimately lost the battle and by the time Rouse died in 1950, only a few remained who remembered and approved of the Direct Method of teaching Ancient Greek. There was no other viable contender to the Grammar Translation method of teaching Latin or Ancient Greek for the next fifty years.

However, in the last ten years there has been a renewed discussion about the pedagogy of Ancient Greek. Within this discussion, the Direct Method and Rouse's ideas have been newly discussed and praised. In the past four years, Ancient Greek

forums have featured long discussion threads about Rouse and his book (“[Textkit Greek and Latin Learning Tools](#)”). Ancient Greek learners have produced freely downloadable audio recordings of his stories (Eidsath, 2014). In 2010, a reprinted version of Rouse’s *A Greek Boy at Home* was produced by a USA based Ancient Greek university professor under the title *Rouse’s Greek Boy: A Reader*. The most recent and enthusiastic supporter of Rouse’s Direct Method comes out of Spain, author of *Alexandros*, Mario Díaz Ávila. He is joined by the many other enthusiastic Ancient Greek teachers who produce supplementary material for *Alexandros* on a Spanish language website for Latin and Greek teachers, dubbed “*El primer portal del mundo grecolatino en español*” [The premier portal of the Greco-Roman world in Spanish] (“[Cultura Clásica](#)”).

DESCRIPTION

As a book produced by Spaniard classicists, the introduction is appropriately given in both Spanish and Latin. The entirety of the remainder of the book is in Ancient Greek. In the introduction, author Díaz Ávila advises the reader to follow the active methodology of Rouse “*Esta edición está basada en el libro *The Greek Boy at Home* de W.H.D. Rouse, publicada en el año 1909, que sigue una metodología activa* [This edition is based on the book *The Greek Boy at Home* by W.H.D. Rouse, published in 1909, which follows an active methodology].”

Díaz Ávila briefly describes the Direct Method in the book’s introduction and further in an online Spanish language document (“[Estructura](#)”). For this review, we will rely on the introduction to Rouse’s 1909 *Greek Boy at Home* to provide a description of the Direct Method. Rouse tells us, “One or two dialogues are given early in the book... These are meant to show how the matter of any exercise may be driven home by word of mouth” (iii). Rouse felt the two essential instructional methods should be reading and reproduction. By reading, he meant that the teacher should perform a vocal reading of the stories and explain their meaning in Ancient Greek. “This book is meant to be read aloud and explained in class... All questions should be asked and answered in Greek, and English used only if all else fails” (v). By reproduction, Rouse encouraged teachers to ask questions about the stories in Greek and require students to retell, paraphrase, and reproduce the stories both in written and oral form. Even class notes were to be taken in Ancient Greek. “Whenever the master gives an explanation, the class should write it [in Ancient Greek] in their notebooks... by ear” (v). It seems that oral and aural learning was of the

highest priority to Rouse. “I may caution the teacher that it is not enough for him to speak. His pupils must also speak, and the more they speak the better” (vi).

Both Rouse’s *A Greek Boy at Home* and *Alexandros* are first-year graded readers, that is, books intended to teach beginners through stories which increase in difficulty. The stories are not authentic Ancient Greek, but composed by the author. Though Rouse’s intended audience were students in boys’ prep schools, the content is not immature. In *Alexandros*, Díaz Ávila retains the basic progression as found in *A Greek Boy at Home*. The book begins with a story about a young Greek boy and his family. Through successive topic based stories we learn both vocabulary and culture about ancient Achaia, living in the country, farming, festivals, and the sights of the city of Athens. Within other narratives, we hear some dialogues; learn about body parts, sports, and historical battles.

As the stories progress, grammatical structures become more advanced. Early stories stay with Present Indicative verbs. About three quarters of the way through the book, we find the Aorist Indicative. Later we encounter the Subjunctive and Participles. The use of case functions shows less of a progression. From the first story, many of the forms and most of the functions of Ancient Greek cases are used. Vocabulary is added at a rate ranging from 20 to 50 new words with each story. A full list of the progression of grammar throughout the stories is found in a supplementary online Spanish language document (“[Contenidos](#)”).

Díaz Ávila’s stories are shorter than Rouse’s. *A Greek Boy at Home* contains eighty-four stories and about 30,000 words. *Alexandros* contains twenty-four stories composed of about 5000 words. The longest story in *Alexandros* is about 500 words. The longest story in *A Greek Boy at Home* runs over 3000 words.

Each story in *Alexandros* is accompanied by margin notes in Ancient Greek and illustrations defining some of the new words in each story. Unlike Rouse’s book with a sum total of about a dozen illustrations, in Díaz Ávila’s book, it is not unusual to find up to a dozen illustrations on one page.

A Greek Boy at Home was meant to be read together with a grammar book, [A First Greek Course](#) (Rouse). In the Díaz Ávila edition, sparse grammatical notes are found within each lesson and a short compendium of grammar and paradigms are found in an appendix. A unique feature of *Alexandros* is that all grammar, and indeed the entire book excepting the Introduction, is written in Ancient Greek. Thus, we do not find either English or Spanish forms of words such as *Nominative*, *Singular*, or *Subjunctive*; rather we read the Ancient Greek terms “ὁ ὀνομαστικῆ πτώσις,

ἐνικὸς ἀριθμὸς, καὶ ὑποτακτικὴ ἔγκλισις.” Directions for the exercises are entirely in Ancient Greek. Even the labeling of the exercises is done with Greek numbers: Α', Β', Γ', Δ', ΣΤ', Ζ', κτλ. instead of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, etc. *A Greek Boy at Home* includes an appended dictionary with glosses given in Ancient Greek. *Alexandros* lacks any dictionary.

Following each story are 5-6 exercises. These typically include (a) several comprehension questions on the story; (b) a section showing Greek words that have cognates in Romance languages; (c) cloze exercises; (d) matching or true/false questions; (e) some substitution drills such as, Ἀλλαξὸν τοὺς λόγους εἰς τὴν ἐνεργητικὴν διάθεσιν [Change the words into the active voice]. All exercises include a sample showing students how they are expected to answer. An audio CD accompanying the book gives an audio recording of many exercises with answers. A transcript of all audio recordings is provided in an appendix in the printed book.

The [Cultura Clásica](#) Spanish language website offers many useful supplementary materials. A blog page is available for discussing teaching with the book (“[Ἀλέξανδρος](#)”). A *Wikispace* classroom page contains supplementary material such as pictures illustrating vocabulary, audio files, online exercises, and information on Greek culture (“[Recursos](#)”). A second *Wikispace* page is devoted to planning lessons (“[Programación](#)”) and gives more supplementary material, much of which is very high quality. One sample is referenced here containing high quality pictures and vocabulary regarding physical life (“[O bios](#)”). An online document, apparently written by Díaz Ávila, explains how to go about planning a course based on *Alexandros* (“[Estructura](#)”).

EVALUATION

This simplification of Rouse’s larger work was carried out with care. The reduction makes *Alexandros* far more accessible than the imposing *A Greek Boy at Home*. The illustrations are beautiful and effective. The text type used is very readable and double spaced, a relief from the printing of *A Greek Boy at Home* or *Rouse’s Greek Boy*. I noticed few errors in accents or spelling (see [Corrigenda](#)). The book has a sturdy sewn binding with a glossy cardstock cover.

The stories, though not compelling, should prove to be interesting to students of Ancient Greek. They give a glimpse into the life of a Greek boy living outside of Athens. We learn about some feasts with servants at hand, sports of wrestling, box-

ing, and more, wars and battles with Persians, and even simple daily life of gathering eggs and climbing trees.

One clear benefit in this book is that through its use of stories, the vocabulary will be learned in context, connected with meaning. Vocabulary lists are given at the end of each lesson, but no glossed definitions are given. This would not be a serious problem for those with access to free online Ancient Greek dictionaries. A teacher could as well easily create a handout with glossed definitions in the students' native language. Though Rouse would have discouraged teachers to use any language other than Ancient Greek, research has shown that a glossed definition in the learner's native language does have a role in acquisition (Nation & Chung).

The stories, from the very beginning of the book, are not easy. Do not imagine a graded reader the likes of *Fun with Dick and Jane* (Grey & Arbuthnot). As with all Greek readers I have seen, the stories start off demanding a fair knowledge of Greek structures and vocabulary. Though the Greek is simple, a typical beginner would have much to learn before he or she could read the first stories with any degree of comprehension. A sample passage from the second story in *Alexandros* will demonstrate the point:

Ἐν δὲ τῇ οἰκίᾳ καὶ οἰκεῖ ἡ τροφὸς ἡμῶν. Ἄρ' ἐρωτᾷς
 τί ἐστὶ τροφός; Λέγω δὴ· ἡ τροφὸς τρέφει τὰ μικρὰ
 τέκνα. Ἡ οὖν τροφὸς ἡ ἡμετέρα οἰκεῖ μεθ' ἡμῶν ἐν
 τῇ οἰκίᾳ καὶ ὀνομάζουσι τὴν τροφὸν ἡμῶν Χαράν
*[In this house our nurse also lives. So, you ask, what
 is a nurse? I will certainly tell you. The nurse takes
 care of small children. Therefore, our nurse lives with
 us in the house and they call our nurse Charan] (33).*

The thirty audio recordings on the accompanying CD are of very high quality. Multiple voices and sound effects are used to dramatize the exercises. A pleasant Spanish lilted *Erasmian* pronunciation is used. The exercises accompanying each lesson will be useful for out of class homework. The advice of Rouse and Díaz Ávila is to require students to carry out a further exercise of reproducing the stories through paraphrasing and other methods. Specific directions to that effect at the end of each lesson would be a useful addition. The high quality supplementary materials found online ("[Cultura Clásica](#)") will be especially helpful to teachers who use *Alexandros*.

The use of Ancient Greek for all instructions and grammatical terms is interesting. It is certainly a choice based on the principles of the Direct Method that “the student’s native language should not be used in the classroom” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson 30). Though it is generally accepted in second language acquisition theory that the sole use of the target language is not necessary, this feature may have an unintended benefit. Since only Ancient Greek is used in the book, it should theoretically make it universally accessible to any Ancient Greek teacher world-wide. On the other hand, the use of Ancient Greek metalanguage is exceedingly rare. For most teachers, this would result in some extra work in deciphering the Ancient Greek grammatical terms (see [Grammar Terms wiki](#)).

SIGNIFICANCE

The publication of this book is a good sign for the reform of the pedagogy of Ancient Greek. Grammar is taught inductively. Students read narratives and descriptions in Ancient Greek as opposed to translating short and disconnected sample sentences, as is typical in most Ancient Greek primers. The use of illustrations to make the text more comprehensible is a rare and a welcome feature.

The lively community of Spanish Ancient Greek teachers using this book is very encouraging. Though the web pages are in Spanish, those who do not know Spanish can understand most of the content with Google’s translation tool. An interesting possibility to imagine is the prospect of teachers from around the world sharing teaching notes using Ancient Greek as the medium of communication.

The aim of these simplified versions of Rouse’s stories is to provide level appropriate material for the implementation of the Direct Method. Though this method has its limitations and has been superseded by methods better supported by Second Language Acquisition research, the move away from the Grammar Translation method is encouraging.

NOTES ON THE USE OF THIS BOOK WITH COMMUNICATIVE METHODS

Díaz Ávila encourages teaching this book via Rouse’s Direct Method. I have great admiration for Rouse and find many good things about the method he advocated. However, as noted above, the Direct Method has been superseded by language teaching methods generally lumped under the label the Communicative Approach (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson 219). Communicative methods are focused on creating communicative competence via acts of communication. Although my ultimate

goal in Ancient Greek instruction is to teach reading competence, I believe it is acts of communication, comprehensible input and output, that will get learners to that goal (see Patrick). I think *Alexandros* could be used as a text-based course that employs communicative methods.

Some would disqualify the book out of hand because it is not an authentic text. The matter of authentic texts is a debate both in the reform minded Ancient Greek teaching community and among second language acquisition theorists. On the one hand, we do not want to present students with inaccurate and unidiomatic language. On the other hand, all extant authentic Ancient Greek is at a level that is beyond beginners. I would have no qualms about using *Alexandros*. It is composed in good idiomatic Attic Greek, its simplicity makes it more accessible than authentic texts, and it could be used to create communicative tasks. I agree with Tomlinson's opinion on the debate about authentic texts: "For me, an authentic text is one which is produced in order to communicate rather than to teach" (Tomlinson 162).

A second consideration in choosing this as a text book would be the level of difficulty. Tomlinson, a prolific writer on the development of language learning materials, notes that opinion is divided on the exact level of difficulty a text should be for learners (Tomlinson 171), but it seems a matter of common sense that we cannot throw too many new words and structures at learners all at once. Starting out at a far too difficult level is the fatal flaw in all the Ancient Greek first-year readers I have looked at: Morice (1883); Moss (1900); Peckett (1965); Rouse (1909); and others. Setting aside the poorly written low-level readers I have seen, Díaz Ávila's *Alexandros* is the simplest of the lot. Still, the heavy cognitive load in beginning stories of *Alexandros* remains a concern.

In order to use *Alexandros* with beginners, teachers would need to build up their students' ability to comprehend the stories. This could be accomplished by designing a series of communicative lessons. The goal would be to get the learners to a level where they could understand a majority of the vocabulary and language structures encountered in the next story in *Alexandros*. Vocabulary and structures found in a particular story could be broken into smaller portions and taught through communicative methods such as Total Physical Response (Asher), TPR Storytelling (Ray), and the [Where Are Your Keys](#) language game (Gardner).

The job would be difficult and time consuming in the beginning. Before confronting the very first story in *Alexandros*, learners would need to have some communicative exposure to many features of Ancient Greek: (a) Gender; (b) Case

usage and the forms of the 1st and 2nd Declension; (c) Present, Active, Indicative forms of the Omega uncontracted and Epsilon contract verbs; (d) Several forms of the copulative, εἰμί; (e) Adverbial subordinate clauses; (f) Causal clauses; (g) Possessive pronouns ([Contentidos](#), pg. 10). One could imagine it taking 20 lessons or more to prepare students to read the very first story in *Alexandros*. However, once beginners were brought up to the level of being able to read the first story couple stories, preparatory lessons for subsequent stories could be considerably fewer.

A concurrent strategy to offering lessons to prepare the students to read *Alexandros* stories could be to rewrite them as embedded stories (“[What is Embedded Reading?](#)”). To create embedded stories the teacher takes a text and composes simplified versions. In my experience, embedded stories can lead a learner to nearly full comprehension of the unaltered text entirely without leaving the Greek. Taking the example previously quoted, a teacher might create the following leveled versions. By building up comprehension through TPRS and the use of realia, the text from *Alexandros* would be far more comprehensible.

Level 1: ἡ τροφὸς ἐστὶν ἐν οἰκίᾳ μου. τί ἐστὶν τροφός; τροφός ἐστὶν γυνή. τροφός δίδωσι τέκνοις βρώματα. τροφός τρέφει τέκνα. [*The nurse is in my house. What is a nurse? A nurse is a woman. A nurse gives children food. A nurse takes care of children.*]

Level 2: ἡ τροφὸς οἰκεῖ ἐν οἰκίᾳ μου. ὄνομα αὐτῆς ἐστὶν Χαράν. Χαράν ἐστὶν τροφός. ἐρωτᾷς τί ἐστὶν τροφός; τροφός ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος. τροφός τρέφει μικρὰ τέκνα. Χαράν τρέφει με. Χαράν τρέφει ἀδελφὸν μου. Χαράν τρέφει ἡμᾶς. ἡ ἡμετέρα τροφὸς ἐστὶν Χαράν. [*The nurse lives in my house. Her name is Charan. Charan is a nurse. So, you ask, what is a nurse? A nurse is a person. A nurse takes care of small children. Charan takes care of me. Charan takes care of my brother. Charan takes care of us. Our nurse is Charan.*]

Level 3: τίς οὖν ἐστὶν ἡ ἡμετέρα τροφός; Λέγω δὴ· ἡ Χαράν ἐστὶν ἡ ἡμετέρα τροφός. πάλιν τί δὲ

ἐστὶν ὄνομα αὐτῆς; ὀνομάζουσι δὴ αὐτὴν Χαράν.
Χαράν οἰκεῖ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἡμῶν. αὕτη οἰκεῖ μετὰ με
καὶ μετὰ ἀδελφὸν μου. [*Therefore, who is our nurse?
Indeed, I say, Charan is our nurse. Again, what is her
name? We indeed call her Charan. Charan lives in
our house. She lives with me and with my brother.*]

Original: Ἐν δὲ τῇ οἰκίᾳ καὶ οἰκεῖ ἡ τροφὸς ἡμῶν.
Ἄρ' ἐρωτᾷς τί ἐστὶ τροφός; Λέγω δὴ· ἡ τροφὸς
τρέφει τὰ μικρὰ τέκνα. Ἡ οὖν τροφὸς ἡ ἡμετέρα
οἰκεῖ μεθ' ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ καὶ ὀνομάζουσι τὴν
τροφὸν ἡμῶν Χαράν [*In this house our nurse also
lives. So, you ask, what is a nurse? I will certainly tell
you. The nurse takes care of small children. There-
fore, our nurse lives with us in the house and they call
our nurse Charan*] (33).

Using *Alexandros* for a text-based course would require effort in creating supplementary lessons and materials. The reader might wonder why the same could not be done in building up to the reading of an authentic text such as Plutarch or the epistles of Paul. One advantage to using this text has been mentioned: the Greek is far simpler than any authentic text. Another advantage is its subject matter. The subject matter of authentic texts is either abstract concepts or difficult narratives. In contrast, *Alexandros* teaches us about writing on tablets, rooms and items in a typical house, sights in the city, and more. Possibly in no other single book do we find such a wealth of physical and easily manipulated Ancient Greek vocabulary and constructions. This may make *Alexandros* a good choice for those who employ communicative methods in the teaching of Ancient Greek.

In conclusion, *Alexandros* is a fine publication that could be used in a text based implementation of communicative methods, though the difficulty of creating a multitude of customized supplementary lessons would be a challenge. *Alexandros* should at least be read by any Ancient Greek teacher because of its wealth of concrete vocabulary and phrases.

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