

whereas Aristotelian dialectic is more communal. This criticism of Vlastos' account of the elenchus has been made in different forms by many commentators. The revised version of his paper on the elenchus published in the *Socratic Studies* reveals that he had already made minor concessions to his critics. It is a pity that he did not live long enough to give further consideration to these questions.

Despite these criticisms it should be admitted that Vlastos' two books are major achievements in their field. They contain brilliant pieces of scholarship the lasting value of which is quite independent of the controversial general framework. The discussions on irony, piety, the rejection of retaliation, and the role of virtue and happiness in Socratic-Platonic philosophy are particularly enlightening. *Socrates* and *Socratic Studies* will remain necessary equipment for all scholars of ancient philosophy for a very long time.

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RICHARD BUXTON: *Imaginary Greece: The Contexts of Mythology*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994. XVI, 250 p. ISBN 0-521-32978-7. GBP 35.00 (hb). ISBN 0-521-33865-4. GBP 12.95 (pb).

Ever-growing interest in Greek religion and mythology has recently given rise to high-quality contributions addressed not only to specialists but to a wider audience as well. In addition to the book under review we may mention Ken Dowden's *The Uses of Greek Mythology* (1992) and the brand-new English translation of Fritz Graf's *Griechische Mythologie* (originally 1985). Common to all these treatments is that they contribute to the liberation of Greek myth from the realm of just entertaining stories, deformed history or literary fiction, and recognize its value as a mode of thought by which the Greeks constantly described, organized and motivated the realities of their everyday life.

The present study especially stresses the principle that myths are to be interpreted within their determined historical and cultural context. This is a principle more than familiar to those who (like the present reviewer) have followed the work of Italian historians of religions such as Brelich, Bianchi and Sabbatucci. The Italians, however, do not receive any special acknowledgement in Buxton's book which appears more inspired by other eminent contemporary mythologists (Vernant, Detienne, Vidal-Naquet, Calame, Graf, Burkert, Bremmer).

The author approaches the contexts of mythology from various angles. Particularly rewarding is the section where the myth-telling situations (the narrative contexts) are discussed. In fact, this is a surprisingly little studied territory, despite its fundamental importance. One obvious reason for this is that myths have been predominantly read in the form of written texts and treated in terms of philological-historical *Quellenforschung* or literary criticism. However, recent discussions of the im-

pact of oral-aural communication in ancient Greece necessitate a new assessment of questions like 'where', 'when', 'how' and 'by whom' was the mythical patrimony transmitted and retold. Buxton deals with the argument rather sketchily (for obvious reasons of space) but manages to provide many valuable insights and starting points for further research. He examines the performance of myths from the point of view of the situation (private/public) and the age-groups and sexes: children were told myths at home mostly by women (nurses, mothers), school exercises might have involved mythological poetry, at various festivals myths were represented to the whole community by choruses of youths (both boys and girls). In spite of the common festivals, adults recounted and listened to tales at banquets, during rhapsodic and dramatic contests, etc. In this chapter a slight motivation for criticism may be aroused by the fact that Buxton somewhat neglects the important aspect that narrative contexts (not only public ones but also the *symposia*) are almost regularly ritual. These ritual settings reveal the link that after all could exist between myth-telling and cultic activity. Fortunately, however, Buxton does not see the distinction between domestic (private) and public myth-telling as clear-cut since he ascribes to the former the vital role "of preparing children for entry into the symbolic world of the adult community" (p. 21). I would see private and public myth-telling as complementary. In both cases it is ultimately a question of cultural self-identification and integration into the basic values of the community.

The second part of the book is dedicated to the relationship between the ordinary everyday life and the mythical world. Buxton takes as his point of departure aspects of the 'real world' (natural environment, family, religion), and examines how they are reflected in myths. Similarities between everyday life and myths lead to the conclusion that mythology is in many ways based on the perceptions of everyday life. Although I personally side with those who stress the temporal and qualitative *difference* of the mythical world in respect to the actual reality, I found many good analyses and a lot of sound argumentation. This is especially true in the pages where Greek attitudes to uninhabited wild landscapes are investigated. The last part provides a survey on ancient and modern opinions on the functions of mythological narratives. Here the author proves free from dogmatism and artificial classifications paying due attention to the polyvalence of myths and, at the same time, to the importance of the historical contexts in which they were created and narrated.

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