

expressed here, many are likely to benefit from consulting this book. It is an original and important contribution to the study of Greek religion.

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Deborah Levine Gera, *Ancient Greek Ideas on Speech, Language and Civilization*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003. xii + 252 pp. ISBN 0 19 925616 0.

This is a book that requires its rather bald title. It is not a work of linguistics, or a history of the Greek language, still less a discussion of the origin of language itself (a topic notoriously banned by the Linguistic Society of Paris): rather an exposition of Greek ideas of language. It is, nonetheless, enormously wide-ranging (as wide ranging as Greek ideas themselves), not only in terms of chronological scope (from Homer's Polyphemus through to Late Antiquity), but more importantly in terms of the themes covered: the nature of the language of a golden age, or the discovery of language or writing by Palamedes, Theuth, or Prometheus; the affinity between primitive language and savage diet (so Thucydides' Eurytians, raw-meat-eaters with 'the most incomprehensible language'); the characterisation of language as a mere 'dollop of names' (in the fine phrase of Denyer); the phenomenon of namelessness (from Alcinous' assertion in the *Odyssey* that 'there is nobody, good or bad ..., without a name' to Herodotus' discovery of the Atarantes, a people with no names); speaking animals, deaf and feral children, sign language — and much more.

Though many of the discrete topics tackled within this vast canvas (most famously the story of Psammetichus' language test) have already been widely discussed, what Gera achieves by her synthesis of so much material is little less than to carve out a new area of study. Most impressively, she is careful never to impose a false uniformity on the material she surveys. For example, she traces a tension between two different models of development, which often intertwine: one of decay from a golden age, the other of progress from savagery. Though the construction of language as merely a collection of names for things is dominant (so, for example, the story of Aesop's waking to discover that he is no longer deaf and naming all the objects around him in turn), there are hints, as she shows, of an understanding of language as a more complex phenomenon: in the Eleatic Stranger's claim in the *Sophist*, for example, that words need to be woven together.

The book's scope, significantly, also extends to include the theories of other periods, particularly modern and early modern. This is occasionally problematic. What does it mean to interpret Psammetichus' children's first word ('bekos', the Phrygian for bread) in the light of modern ideas of children's development? or to compare the objects of Psammetichus' language test with historically attested 'feral children'? When, in the context of that language test, the reader is told that the 'world's first language came out of Africa, not Phrygia', we seem to make a move from describing the merits of ancient ideas to testing them. But the juxtaposition of ancient and modern material — ancient ideas of the golden age with early modern theories of a universal language, for example — is often enlightening for our understanding of the ancient material, allowing us to 'read backwards' in Gera's words. It also has the effect of heightening our appreciation for ancient attempts at understanding language. After exposure to some of the more eccentric of modern theses — the sixteenth-century Jan van Gorp's suggestion that the first language was in fact Flemish (because of the similarity of bekos and the Flemish word for baker), or the recent theory of Eric Gans that 'speech developed from the cries which accompanied the collective ritual sacrifice of a marginal member of society' — it is hard not to return to the ancient world with a more sympathetic understanding. What emerges above all, indeed, from Gera's treatment is the extraordinarily rich inventiveness of Greek writers. This includes writers whose 'interest' in language is little more than playful: though one may be hard pressed to squeeze much significance from the speaking animals

of Crates' *Theria* (including the fish who announce that they have not been properly fried), the parrot of Ctesias' *Indica*, who can be taught either Indian or Greek, embodies much the same insight as the displaced children of the sophistic *Dissoi Logoi* (a Greek child speaks Persian when transplanted to Persia, and vice versa). Perhaps the most poignant example of this experimentation with language is the figure of Cratylus, the straight man of one of the most aporetic of Platonic dialogues. Plato's Cratylus famously argues the case for the natural appropriateness of names; the Aristotelian Cratylus, by contrast, has given up speech altogether (Gera suggests through disenchantment in later life) and chosen to communicate solely through moving a single finger.

What I occasionally missed in this enormously rich discussion was a keener focus on power. The wife of Ischomachus in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* has been trained before her marriage — in keeping with the famous words of the Periclean funeral oration — to speak as little as possible; only after she has been tamed by her husband can she carry on a conversation. Though it would require a broader treatment which integrated ideas of language with the *representation* of women's speech, the 'gendering' of language is surely a topic that could be further explored. So also is the association of (the Greek) language with distinctly *Greek* virtues, for example freedom or self-control (qualities which the incontinently chattering barbarian slaves of the Attic stage notably lack). Gera concludes with an optimistic parable of how the 'boundaries of language and culture can be respected — and yet superseded' — a moral for our times certainly — but it is a story of 'two companions of different species' rather than ethnicities: Androcles and the lion.

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Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford, Eng.: Princeton University Press, 2004. xiv + 563 pp. ISBN 0 691 11691 1.

In this book Benjamin Isaac has a double aim, which he states on the first page: to show that 'early forms of racism, to be called proto-racism, were common in the Graeco-Roman world', and that 'these early forms served as prototype for modern racism, which developed in the eighteenth century'.

The book also is twofold, in that it has two just about equal parts. In a long introduction (1-51) Isaac defines what he means by racism, as opposed to related concepts like ethnic prejudice and ethnic stereotyping. The rest of this part (55-251) concerns the various phenomena that led to ancient racism, such as imperialism and the anxieties engendered by contact between self-supposedly superior peoples and inferior ones. The second part (255-500) reviews these concepts in practice both from the angle of the 'superior' or conquering people, whether Greek or Roman, and then from that of the 'inferior', Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Syrians, Egyptians, Parthians, Greeks as seen by Romans, Gauls, Germans and finally Jews. Isaac summarizes his view in a final chapter, 'Ethnic Prejudice, Proto-Racism, and Imperialism in Antiquity'. There are ten plates, ample footnotes, and indexes of sources and of topics discussed.

Even a short summary indicates the richness of this book. Isaac uses scrupulous care and enormous erudition to define his terms, set out his aims, and examine his cases. His discussion is also very personal: he explains his own involvement in the subject as that of one 'who grew up as a Jew in Amsterdam after World War II' and who has 'witnessed forms of ethnic and social tension relevant to many of the topics considered in this study' (51). At the same time, Isaac treats his ticklish topic not with bitterness but with even a wry humor, especially in the footnotes. Thus 'It is hard to achieve clarity by asserting that an author says one thing, but really means another' (61 n. 23); 'Is this Herodotus's opinion according to Flory or Flory himself?' (273 n. 71).

This book will undoubtedly become, as it deserves, the starting-point for future studies of racism in classical antiquity. Anyone who wants to find the essential passages of classical authors