

millenia Mediterranean whites and African blacks came into contact with each other in commerce and in war. Known most commonly as Kushites, Ethiopians or Nubians, the blacks of antiquity were respected as formidable warriors and equals. Early Christianity reinforced the favorable view of the black: «The Christian vision of a world in which «there is no question of Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman,» owes not a little to earlier views of man in which color played no significant role» (p. 108).

The best summary of *Befor Color Prejudice*, a book that should be required reading in all university courses in classics and ancient history, are Snowden's own well chosen words:

...in the ancient world there were prolonged black-white contacts, from an early date; first encounters with blacks frequently involved soldiers or mercenaries, not slaves or so-called savages; initial favorable impressions of blacks were explained and amplified, generation after generation, by poets, historian, and philosophers; the central societies developed a positive image of peripheral Nubia as an independent state of considerable military, political, and cultural importance; both blacks and whites were slaves, but blacks and slaves were never synonymous; black emigrés were not excluded from opportunities available to others of alien extraction, nor were they handicapped in social relations — they were physically and culturally assimilated; in science, philosophy, and religion, color was not the basis of a widely accepted theory concerning the inferiority of blacks (*ibid.*).

Certainly, Frank Snowden's latest book deserves to be in every classicist's library and his findings included in the teaching of every survey of the history of the ancient Mediterranean World.

JOHN E. REXINE
Colgate University

***Aspects of the Epic.* Edited by Tom Winnifrith, Penelope Murray and K. W. Gransden. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. Pp. xi + 121. Cloth. \$22.50.**

The lectures reproduced in this slight volume were originally delivered as part of a series organized by the School of Classical Civilization at the University of Warwick in the autumn of 1980 and generously sponsored by the Greek Embassy in London. The contributors, only three of whom have academic appointments in Classics (J. Gould, G. S. Kirk, and P. Murray), were asked to consider various aspects of the European epic tradition. All contributors have an interest in the Greek epic, and if there is any unity at all to the volume, it is the poet Homer who provides it.

The first paper by Penelope Murray of the University of Warwick is entitled «Homer and the Bard» (pp. 1-15) and considers the portrayal of the bard in Homeric epic, stressing particularly the relation of Homer's own biography to the fictional bards depicted in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* but also indicating that there is a basic ambiguity.

The poet «wants us to believe that he is just one of a traditional group of *aidoi*, singers of lays; he sets himself in a tradition which goes back to the Bronze Age. But he knows perfectly well that he is no such thing. Homer has deliberately obscured his biography: it was Homer himself who invented the Homeric question» (p. 15). In his contribution the distinguished Homeric scholar from the University of Cambridge, G.S. Kirk, concerns himself with «The *Iliad*: The Style of Books 5 and 6» (pp. 16-31) and shows that it is possible to make out the mind of Homer midst the mass of inherited material and that Books 5 and 6 of the *Iliad* are products of Homer's special genius. Homer was part of a great tradition but, Kirk insists, he was in part a great poet because he was able to go beyond that tradition. In «Homeric Epic and the Tragic Moment» (pp. 32-45), John Gould of the University of Bristol investigates the seminal influence of Homer on the Greek tragedians and demonstrates that Greek tragedy emerges from a totally different world from that of the Homeric epics yet at the same time «for the playwrights of the fifth century, there was everything to learn from the poetry of Homer. He was «the poet», as perhaps only Shakespeare is for us, or as Dante was for Eliot, who had produced images of human experience that were true and right and timeless, in a variety of modes, and with a mastery and sophistication that were, for Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, their education» (p. 45).

The other four essays shift their focus chronologically to Homeric influences in later literature. K. W. Gransden of the University of Warwick in his paper on «Virgil's *Iliad*» (pp. 46-63) gives us an excellent analysis of the second half of the *Aeneid*, focusing on those particularly Virgilian features that set these books apart from their Homeric prototypes. Though Virgil may incorporate Homer, he completely transforms him and goes beyond him. John Bayley of the University of Oxford gives us a much more farranging view in his survey «The Epic Theme of Love» (pp. 64-79) that takes the reader from ancient to modern times, with special attention to Homer, Milton, Tolstoy, and Chaucer, while Tom Winniffrith of the University of Warwick in his presentation «Homer in Byzantine Dress» (pp. 80-91) calls our attention to the Byzantine epic of *Digenis Akritas*, its merits but also its limitations. Most sweeping of all is Paul Merchant's contribution «Children of Homer: the Epic Strain in Modern Greek Literature» (pp. 92-108). Also of the University of Warwick, Merchant surveys such writers as Nikos Kazantzakis, George Seferis, Kostis Palamas, Constantine Cavafy, Odysseus Elytis, Takis Sinopoulos and Yannis Ritsos with ample quotations in translation to show their relation to the ancient epic. It is a monumental task that can only be suggested for.

In Greece... with its almost unbroken tradition of the long poem, contemporary writers have frequently responded to the complexity of their times with epic, and most often with poetic epic, to produce a body of work expressive of the national, as well as personal, turmoils of this country. In some important respects the literature of Greece may be said to stand in as crucial a strategic position, in relation to continental writing, as the country has always been placed in politics by its geography. The Eastern Mediterranean has in the past been important as a crucible of ideas, and Greece continues to respond fully in its literature to the vagaries of its history (p. 93).

There is a long postscript (pp. 109-118) by Tom Winnifrith that attempts to deal with the question of the definition of epic that is worth reading also.

Aspects of the Epic is a collection that will be of more than passing interest to students of classics, of comparative literature, and of modern Greek literature. It suggests a number of useful ways in which scholars from related but different disciplines can come together to discuss important topics of common interest.

JOHN E. REXINE
Colgate University

Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*. London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983. Pp. xvi + 382. Cloth. \$ 29.95.

The French have in recent years contributed enormously provocative analyses of Greek myth and thought, and such contributors, though challenged by ancient Greek culture, have not necessarily been classicists. In fact, it has not been uncommon for anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists to bring forth studies that have approached Greek studies from an untraditional and surprisingly fruitful point of view. Jean-Pierre Vernant, Professor at the College de France, author of *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* (Harvester Press, 1978); *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* (Harvester Press, 1980; Methuen, 1982); *The Origins of Greek Thought* (Cornell University Press, 1982); and co-author of *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece* (Harvester Press, 1981), originally published the present collection in French in 1965 under the title *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*. Its translation into English will assure it an even wider audience. Dedicated to I. Myerson, whose methods in historical psychology, anthropologist Vernant has for over a decade tried to apply to the field of Greek studies, the volume *Myth and Thought among the Greeks* ranges over Greek religion with its myths, rituals, and illustrated representations; philosophy; science; art; social institutions; and technical and economic material. Though the essays can be read and used separately, they «seek to understand the individual, in Ancient Greece, a being inseparable from the social and cultural environment of which he is at once the creator and the product» (p. ix). Because we find a certain cultural kinship in the ancient Greeks and they live on in our cultural tradition, we can study them as a whole and we can apply to them today's psychological categories with a certain degree of precision. We can trace in the ancient Greek the course of Western man from the *homo religiosus* to the *homo politicus*. Especially appealing to scholars of the last half century have been the gradual development of the idea of the individual. They form the bulk of the interest of Vernant's very provocative collection of fifteen studies. Such topics as memory and time, space, work and technological activity, imagery and the concept of the double are discussed in detail. Particularly full are the discussions on work and space.

The book is organized in seven major parts: (1) «Myth Structures,» which includes