

ALBERT RIJKSBARON, (ed. and comm.), *Plato. Ion. Or: On the Iliad*. Amsterdam Studies in Classical Philology, 14, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2007, xii + 285 pp., ISBN 978-90-04-16321-8.

This book originated in a first year course which the author taught at the University of Amsterdam. He had intended to produce a commentary to aid students in their reading of the *Ion*, but it soon became apparent that further work on the text was required. The standard editions of Burnet (OCT) and Méridier (Budé) were unsatisfactory in that, although both scholars had used the same MSS, their choice of readings varied, often without explanation, a problem not, of course, confined to the *Ion*. Furthermore, Burnet's apparatus was known to be not fully reliable. Rijksbaron cites R.S. Bluck's apposite observation (*Plato's Meno, ed. with introduction and commentary*, Cambridge 1961, 139) that '...on a number of occasions one has to choose between readings, one of which is attested by F and one by B T W, either of which, it would seem, might have been written by Plato', and comments, 'Indeed one has – but how?'. Accordingly R. set out to establish a fresh text, with revised apparatus, on the basis of his own collation *in situ* of the four primary MSS, T W S and F. In addition he has also taken into account the indirect tradition (there is a useful summary of quotations from the *Ion* in later authors on pp. 49–52), including the testimony of Proclus, which has apparently been overlooked by previous editors. But he concludes that this tradition provides no new or otherwise valuable readings. Where there are no obvious palaeographical reasons for adopting one reading rather than another R. has relied on detailed linguistic analysis to determine his choices, and his commentary, as he says, has a strong linguistic orientation.

So what does this edition and commentary contribute to our knowledge of the dialogue? There are detailed discussions of e.g. the spelling of the 2nd person singular middle-passive thematic

indicative, of the variation found between $\nu\upsilon\delta\eta$ and $\nu\upsilon\nu$ $\delta\eta$ in the editions of Plato, of accent and punctuation. But the text ‘in spite of a certain number of divergences, is basically the same...as that of e.g. Méridier, Burnet, Bekker, Stephanus and the Aldina’ (p.28). Some interesting issues emerge from R.’s painstaking investigation of the MSS. For example, R. notes that our main witnesses all begin with a double title, $\text{I}\Omega\text{N}$ ἢ περὶ Ἰλιάδος yet modern editors are careless in their reporting of the details. R. concedes that such double titles may be Alexandrian or post-Alexandrian inventions, but argues that they do in fact go back to the earliest written texts of Plato’s dialogues. In the case of the *Ion*, the alternative title περὶ Ἰλιάδος is significant in that it underlines the main theme of the dialogue, that poetry, of which the *Iliad* is the prime exemplar, is not an art and cannot be analysed as such. Again, modern editors are equally unreliable in their treatment of speakers’ names, which, despite modern editorial practice, are never presented by the MSS either at the beginning of the dialogue or in the text. This suggests that for medieval readers and their ancient counterparts the identity of speakers would have been established by other means such as the use of the vocative, ὦ Σώκρατες, at *Ion* 530a3. The dialogue begins, of course, with Ion’s name, so we are assured of his identity from the start, but the phrase τὸν Ἴωνα χαίρειν conveys more than that. R. shows by detailed investigation of Plato’s use of the definite article with proper names that such usage can imply the importance of the individual, as in the following exchange: ‘Yesterday I’ve met Tony Blair.’ – ‘*The* Tony Blair?’ – ‘Yes, *the* Tony Blair.’, i.e. ‘the one we are all familiar with’, ‘the well-known Tony Blair’. The formal address to this vain and stupid rhapsode sets the tone for the dialogue as a whole.

In general the value of this commentary lies in its rigorous examination of Plato’s linguistic usage rather than in its overall interpretation of the dialogue. For example, if one wants to understand the precise connotations of τὰ $\nu\upsilon\nu$ in the opening line, this is the place to look: in the 150 or so cases of adverbial τὰ $\nu\upsilon\nu$ in Plato (as opposed to the much more frequent $\nu\upsilon\nu$, some 1500 instances) the majority serve to ‘specify, and often limitate [*sic*], the duration of (part of) the verbal action it modifies’. So Socrates’ question can be translated: ‘From where have you

temporarily moved over to Athens?' Or take Ἐχε δὴ at 535b1: R. considers all instances of this phrase in Plato and concludes that a) it is never followed by a connective particle, and b) it always indicates that a question will follow. But the imperative used by Socrates immediately afterwards (εἰπέ) is unparalleled, a sign in fact that his behaviour towards Ion is 'very rude', particularly in combination with the 'even ruder prohibition' μὴ ἀποκρύψης. In sum, the way in which Socrates addresses Ion here suggests that he does not regard him as a serious interlocutor. Again, commentators tend to treat τέχνῃ and ἐπιστήμῃ at 532c5 as synonyms (indeed I sloppily referred to the terms as 'virtually synonymous', for which I am justly taken to task), but R. shows that ἐπιστήμῃ here means knowledge of the skill and its subject matter, and an ability to give an account of what one knows. It will emerge that the τέχνῃ of which Ion claims to have knowledge is non-existent, and that he is unable to give an account of what it is that he professes to know.

The cumulative effect of such analyses is to produce a more nuanced understanding of Plato's Greek than is achieved by other commentators, and for that one should be grateful. It is also reassuring for readers to know that the text we have been accustomed to using is not substantially affected by R.'s investigation of the manuscripts. But despite its impeccable scholarship I am not sure that this commentary leaves me much the wiser concerning the broader significance of the dialogue within Plato's *oeuvre*. R. argues, along with a minority of scholars, for a middle period date, partly on the basis of lexical correspondences with *Meno*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, partly on the *Ion*'s stance towards poetry and poets. On the question of dating I am agnostic, but, as R. himself points out, the linguistic evidence is inconclusive. And how far one can speak of development in relation to Plato's views of poetry it is difficult to say. Few could dispute that his attitude is overwhelmingly hostile, and I would be the first to agree that a primary purpose of the *Ion* is to deny poets τέχνῃ, a theme which is constant throughout Plato's work. But the *tone* in which that theme is articulated varies: whereas the *Republic* is straightforwardly negative, the *Ion* (like the *Phaedrus*) is more subtle in its criticisms. Indeed Plato's brilliance lies precisely in the ambiguity of his attack,

which is couched in the language of extravagant praise. Plato himself may have equated inspiration with lack of knowledge, but the central speech (533d) is constructed in such a way that readers who believe in the possibility of divine inspiration are free to interpret it in a different way. Hence the richness and variety of responses which this short dialogue has provoked. R.'s insistence on the simplicity of its message is somewhat reductive, and his neglect of the theme of inspiration fails to explain why the *Ion* has attracted attention out of all proportion to its length. Nevertheless, serious students of the text will want to consult this commentary for information concerning the manuscripts on which it is based and for elucidation on linguistic matters.

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