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Susan Lape, *Race and Citizen Identity in the Classical Athenian Democracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xii & 341. £55.00. ISBN-13:978-0-521-19104-3 (Hbk).

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The subject of this book is not, as might be supposed from its title, Athenian attitudes toward other races (however they might be defined) and how these affected Athenian conceptions of their own identity. It is focused rather on the Athenian idea that they themselves were a race apart, unique in that they were born from the earth itself, and how this was used to justify their political systems and policies. This naturally calls forth questions over terminology – is it accurate to speak of this as a ‘racial’ conception? What is the definition which is being used? – which Lape answers in her preface, stressing that ‘nothing in this project hangs on the use of the term “racial” per se. One might read this entire study substituting “ethnic” or some other less controversial term for “racial” ’ (p.ix) but preferring her terminology because of its specificity and historical parallels between the development of Athenian citizen identity and modern racial ideologies (pp.ix-x).

These parallels essentially come down to the idea that for the Athenians ‘racial citizenship’ was used to justify their privileged position; it was ‘a rationale for preexisting practices and norms’ (p.4) similar to the development of modern concepts of racial difference in France and the USA, which were ways of justifying the exclusion of non-whites from the equality which was supposed to encompass all men (p.40). The difference was that in the case of Athens there was no overarching ideology of the equality of all human beings. Instead of having to justify the exclusion of certain groups from political equality, the Athenians had to explain why equality should be extended exactly as far as it was (p.41). It was thus in defence of democracy that their

racial ideology was developed. It also, by extending *eugeneia* to all citizens, offset the divisive impact of social and political inequalities (p.43).

In the main, Lape's argument is compelling. Drawing mainly on Athenian drama, law and oratory, she presents her case and the theoretical underpinnings of her work clearly. She is particularly effective at communicating theories from the fields of social psychology and anthropology to a non-specialist reader. The comprehensive notes and bibliography provide an excellent starting point for those interested in investigating this aspect more deeply. Her study not only shows the Athenians constructing and utilising their racial identity, but also deals with those who rejected or denied it, for example Herodotus and Thucydides (pp.57-58, 149ff.). Some of the minor points of Lape's argument, however, are less than convincing, and occasionally she fails to deal with problematic issues satisfactorily.

The most prominent example is how Lape deals with the Athenian practice of naturalisation. One might expect that this would be seen as a problem for their professed belief in their own autochthony and racial unity, since it clearly showed foreigners entering the citizen body. Lape accepts that this might seem to be a contradiction, perceptively (and entirely fairly) noting that 'human beings have a high threshold for contradiction... especially when holding discrepant viewpoints or identity narratives serves to buttress self-interest or esteem needs' (p.244). She goes on, however, to argue that the contradiction was not a problem, since naturalised citizens were viewed in the same way as Athenians saw adopted children – i.e. as inferior to their natural counterparts (p.244-245). Lape then claims that naturalisation actually supported the racial citizenship myth, on the tenuous and rather odd grounds that 'only those candidates whose actions demonstrated their worthiness to "be Athenian" could be selected' (p.248). Even the mass enfranchisements of the Samians and Plataeans proved unproblematic, since through their actions as allies of Athens they 'could be construed as "acting Athenian" or displaying *andragathia* toward the Athenian demos... [the enfranchisements] may not

have put undue pressure on racial fictions, since they worked to support the ends of Athenian nationalism in the international arena' (p.262).

None of these arguments addresses the central difficulty, which is that naturalisation showed that the racial myth was not reflected in reality. Indeed, the fact that the enfranchised foreigners had proven as groups to be 'worthy' of Athenian citizenship would surely have served to undermine the notion of Athenian exceptionalism having any racial basis. This does not, of course, disprove or significantly weaken Lape's central argument. It would be better to accept it as one of the contradictions inherent in any concept of identity, however, than to attempt to explain it away.

While Lape generally handles the evidence well, she does not adequately confront the difficulties of one source in particular. Plato's *Menexenus* is referred to on a number of occasions (pp.19, 100, 143, 271 n.95) but there is no lengthy or involved discussion of its nature as a parody or the multiple layers of irony which it contains. Lape prefers simply to claim that 'the speaker is under the spell of the very ideology he presumes to parody' (p.143). Perhaps so, but it is disappointing that Lape does not justify this assertion, or aim at a deeper understanding of the text.

Similarly, the presence of foreigners in Athens is glossed over. The metics, we are told, 'supplied an important out-group or Other against whom Athenian citizens could be defined', but unfortunately Lape does not go into further detail. She is convincing when she claims that the Athenian racial identity was based more on ideas about themselves than about others (e.g. p.45), but it is not clear that studying one aspect without the other is the most effective approach.

There are also a couple of minor points which readers may question. Lape claims that Herodotus was not writing during the Peloponnesian War (p.139), when in fact there are references in his work to events of the 420s. In her discussion of the consequences which the Periclean citizenship law had on

ideas of birth and gender (pp.110-112), Lape does not give due attention to the possibility that the view that only fathers had any input into the genetic makeup of their children (attributed to Anaxagoras and put across by Apollo in the *Eumenides*) was not the popular orthodoxy.

These objections aside, however, the book is well and thoroughly argued. It is a useful and timely contribution to our understanding of democratic Athenian identity. For the purposes of teaching, it is likely to be most useful as part of a third-year undergraduate or postgraduate module. Additionally, it will serve scholars and students of Greek history and the Classics well as an introduction to theories of social identity from outside the discipline.