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BOOK REVIEW

Athens, Thrace, and the Shaping of Athenian Leadership. By MATTHEW A. SEARS. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xvi + 328. Hardcover, $95.00. ISBN 978-1-107-03053-4.

In this book Sears examines Athenian "Thrace-haunters" or "Disciples of Thrace" (the term, θρᾳκοφοῖται, comes from the *Gerytades*, a lost play of Aristophanes) (1). According to Sears, there were in Athens in the late archaic and Classical period a group of men, often related or otherwise associated, who looked to Thrace both for advancement of their political ambitions and fulfillment of their desires for a flamboyant, heroic lifestyle.

Sears treats such men as Pisistratus, Miltiades, Alcibiades, Hagnon, Dieitrephes, Iphicrates—virtually any Athenian who ever served in Thrace or commanded a contingent of Thracian peltasts—and concludes that they found Thrace and its resources attractive because there they could easily obtain money and mercenary forces. They could use these resources to further their careers back home in Athens, but their activities in Thrace were also important to the Thrace-haunters, according to Sears, because in Thrace they had a scope to act outside the constraints of the limiting, democratic politics and egalitarian ideals of Athens. Furthermore, according to Sears, the hard-drinking, horse-loving, flamboyant culture of Thrace was deeply appealing to these aristocrats because it allowed them "to live a pseudoheroic lifestyle reminiscent of that enjoyed by Homer's chieftains, the *basileis*" (4).

The main advantage of this book is that Sears collects seemingly all references to Thrace and Athenians working in Thrace and so demonstrates to a reader perhaps unfamiliar with them just how numerous they are. The chief difficulty is that in his eagerness to find connections and make conclusions, Sears perhaps treats too many topics and individuals too rapidly. This means that often he does not have the time to craft the careful argumentation necessary to make his conclusions secure. For example, often points that required several pages of careful argumentation are instead based upon an appeal to others' work which Sears calls convincing and simply asks his reader to accept without much discussion.

In addition, Sears can also be prone to accept too long a chain of possibilities when reaching his conclusions. For example, Sears discusses the gold burial masks discovered at Sindos and elsewhere dating from the mid-sixth to fifth century and remarks on some of the masks' similarity to Mycenaean burial masks (185). Pointing to later cult activity in Mycenaean tombs, Sears argues that Iron Age and later Greeks were familiar with Mycenaean funerary objects, "including gold masks" (187). Because the gold masks in Thrace appear in a specific time period that corresponds to increased contacts between Greeks and Thracians, Sears says that "it is plausible that Greeks establishing new contacts in the north had a role in the adoption on the part of Balkan warrior elites of funerary masks made deliberately to evoke Bronze Age Mycenaean objects" (186).

Sears admits that Greeks after the Mycenaeans did not themselves use gold funerary masks but speculates that "sociopolitical factors might have played the largest role in preventing the Greeks from engaging in such conspicuous consumption" (189), and so suggests that they would have if they could have. When he remarks that "Pisistratus inaugurated a period of intense interaction between Greeks and Thracians at Sindos" and that "the masks at Sindos and Chalkidiki begin to appear immediately following Pisistratus' visit" (187), the implication (though not actually stated at this point) is that Pisistratus himself encouraged the Thracians to develop gold masks in order to fulfill his own flamboyant aristocratic desires.

There is, of course, no actual evidence for this speculation. Yet Sears speaks as if this chain of possibility is certain, remarking "it is fairly easy to imagine why Thracian nobles adopted a new status symbol imported from Greece" and "that the gold masks and many other objects buried in these elite tombs were Greek imports, or at least inspired by contact with Greeks, only added to their value as prestige goods" (190). Only at the end of the section does Sears acknowledge that what he offers is only "a plausible explanation to account for a rather neat coincidence" (191).

There are many other examples where Sears builds up complicated chains of possibilities without offering enough evidence to make them convincing. At the same time, Sears often makes assertions about his subjects that are impossible to support. For example, at one point he says that "the younger Miltiades … relished the chance to fight on horseback along with the native inhabitants of his territory" (243). In sum, Sears brings a wealth of interesting characters, events, and sources to his readers' attention and for this he should be commended. He might have done better, however, to have focused on fewer topics in order to better substantiate his conclusions.

Finally, a useful element of the book is the section "Defining Thrace" in which Sears briefly describes the territory of Thrace and its main inhabitants, topics likely to be largely unfamiliar to many of his readers. Unfortunately, however, the book's two maps are simply stock maps from the Cambridge Ancient History that do not include most of the sites Sears discusses.

MARTHA C. TAYLOR
Loyola University Maryland, MTaylor@loyola.edu