

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Andrew Wolpert, K. A. Kapparis, eds.** *Legal Speeches of Democratic Athens: Sources for Athenian History*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2011. 332 pp. \$16.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-87220-927-5; \$48.00 (library), ISBN 978-0-87220-928-2.

**Reviewed by** John Nicols (University of Oregon)

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**Commissioned by** Christopher R. Waldrep (San Francisco State University)

## Sources for Athenian History

The publication of this volume marks a welcome addition to the study of Athenian law and society. Most importantly it will find an important place in seminars and in advanced undergraduate courses. The editors have assembled a representative collection of fourteen of the most important speeches that survive. More importantly, they also provide a splendid commentary not only on the issues being litigated but also on the broader context of Athenian society. Even if one knows the speeches well, the commentary is always useful and frequently enlightening even when dealing with well-known texts, e.g., Demosthenes 59 (Nearea).

The seventeen-page introduction lays the basics for understanding the history of the collection and the role of oratory in legal proceedings and the connection of the speeches to Athenian society and politics. Section 3, on the technical procedures followed by Athenian courts and orators, should be required reading for all interested in the subject. The last sections of the introduction deal with the Attic orators as a group and their technique and style. It should be noted, as the authors emphasize, that the speeches survive not necessarily because they reveal important information about culture and society, but rather because they were thought of as models for the study of forensic oratory.

The chapters that follow provide translations of each of the fourteen speeches (one from Antiphon, five from Lysias, one from Isaeus, six from the Demosthenic cor-

pus, and one from Aeschines). Each speech is preceded by an introduction to the nature of the case, the problems facing the orator, and concludes with a Key Information (the cast of characters, date of the speech, the charge, the court, and penalty). Thereafter follows a translation of the Greek. It should be noted that the focus is on the speech itself, so testimonials of witnesses are referenced, but not included.

The speeches included do not deliver a coherent and systematic view of Athenian culture and society. There are many details that do in fact illuminate such perspectives, but they do so indirectly and often require interpretation. For example, Demosthenes 41, *Against Spudias*, provides a wealth of details about wills, the transfer of property to descendants, loans and dowries, and the role of women, but however intriguing these items are, they do not in themselves constitute a systematic perspective on any one of these subjects. Nonetheless the authors attempt to remedy the situation with considerable success.

On the whole this is an excellent book, and one that will be of great value to students of Athenian history and of ancient legal practices. What is missing, and perhaps the authors will address these concerns in another context, is the question of whether the insights gained apply to Greek and Roman society in general or to Athens only. As I read the speeches and commentary I was frequently reminded of similarities in the speeches of Cicero, similarities in procedures (hearing the testimony of wit-

nesses, for example) and of content. As these speeches were surely studied by Roman orators, one would like to know if and how such devices influenced Roman legal oratory. In making that statement I am not referring to the obvious use of the title *Philippics* to characterize a set of Cicero's speeches, but rather to the way witnesses were heard, ownership defined, and responsibilities clarified.

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