

Pseudo-Xénophon. *Constitution des Athéniens*

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Abstract

The *Constitution of the Athenians* is a satirical tract on Athenian democracy, which was written near the end of the fifth century BC, during the period when Pericles, for his part, praised Athenian democracy. Although it has long been attributed to Xenophon, it was in fact authored by an anonymous upper class Athenian supporter of the opposing oligarchic system of government. The author condemns democracy as an unfair system, whose victims are the rich, well-born citizens, whom he calls “the valuable” and sees as the best qualified to rule. In contrast, “the worthless”, the poor majority, take advantage of a system which aims at their sole interest. The opuscle explains the peculiarities of the democratic system and its consequences for different categories of people. It represents the Athenian democracy as an immoral, but very coherent system. Considered a major work by modern historians of the ancient world, the *Constitution of the Athenians* is a mine of information on Athenian democracy, its workings, and the opposition which it had to face.

This critical edition leans on a new examination of both the Greek manuscripts and also of modern philological studies. It tries to understand the text as it has been transmitted without improving its style with pointless corrections. The translation faithfully and coherently renders the original style and reasoning. The detailed commentary accounts for the philological choices of this particular edition, and provides linguistic, literary, and historical insights on the anonymous author’s ideas and their place in the history of political thought, as well as on the events and social customs mentioned. A glossary includes a large selection of words in Greek and in transcription; the selected terms are also translated and their meaningful occurrences are indexed. The volume concludes with a complete *index uerborum*. All this is preceded by a 160-page introduction which deals not only with the textual and critical traditions that preceded this edition, but also with whatever aspects of the historical context of the opuscle affect its interpretation: its date, its author, the genre to which it belongs, its structure, its biased representation of Athenians and others, its targets, its polemical processes, its informative value, the political ideal behind it, and its place among ancient debates on democracy.