

BOOK REVIEW

Enmity and Feuding in Classical Athens. By ANDREW T. ALWINE. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015. Pp. xvi + 264. Hardcover, \$55.00. ISBN 978-1-4773-0248-4. E-book, \$55.00. ISBN 978-1-4773-0803-5.

I enjoyed this book. It offers a thoughtful, accessible treatment of the understudied phenomenon of *ekhthra* (interpersonal “enmity”) in Athenian rhetoric and lived experience. Alwine establishes beyond any question that such enmities were “socially acceptable” in Athens, so long as they were pursued within the limits of prevailing laws and customs. He is thus able to show how it was quite often rhetorically effective for litigants to acknowledge a pre-existing *ekhthra* towards their opponents in court cases. And by complicating our knowledge of enmity in this way, Alwine’s book encourages us to reconsider the ways we objectify Athenian sociality in general, casting further doubt on our two most influential “models,” namely David Cohen’s vision of a relatively violent, honor-driven “feuding society” and Gabriel Herman’s counter-vision of a more rational-legal, peaceful, altruistic form of order.¹

After an Introduction (1–22) which lays out the study’s parameters, stakes, and primary sources, Chapter One (23–54) presents an overview of the nature and dynamics of interpersonal enmities in the Athenian environment. Fundamental here is Alwine’s recognition that *ekhthra*, like *philia*, refers not to an emotion but to a reciprocal, communally recognized relationship. Born in a range of different circumstances, from assembly rivalries to conflicts over material resources, *ekhthrai* were shared by one’s family, one’s friends, and sometimes one’s descendants. And they expressed themselves through various media, including prosecutions, personal attacks during procedures like *dokimasiai*, and messages on curse tablets. Indeed, they were of sufficient societal consequence that ending them involved a ceremonial process of reconciliation, with oaths sworn before witnesses

¹ David Cohen, *Law, Violence, and Community in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Gabriel Herman, *Morality and Behaviour in Democratic Athens: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

human and divine (31–33). Athens is thus best seen as a highly competitive “enmity culture,” if not quite a full-fledged “feuding society”. Accordingly, *ekhthrai* were a “widespread problem” (27) in the democratic polis.

Alwine turns to the “rhetoric of enmity” in the next two chapters, which form the heart of the study. Chapters Two (55–93) and Three (94–116) together show how references to any pre-existing *ekhthra* between litigants in forensic speeches were largely determined by the particular exigencies of each speaker’s case. Essentially, a litigant would include such references if he felt that they would somehow enhance the overall “probability” (*eikos*) of his version of events. Thus, for example, Polyaenus in *Lysias* 9 expressly invokes the enmity between himself and his accusers to bolster his claim that he is being maliciously prosecuted. By contrast, Euphiletus in *Lysias* 1 adamantly denies that there was any prior *ekhthra* between himself and Eratosthenes, since such a relationship might have given him probable cause to entrap and murder the latter, just as his accusers were claiming. Moreover, there was a certain “flexibility” in the use of the “rhetoric of enmity.” When helpful, it could be employed in almost any kind of legal proceeding, whether *dike*, *graphe*, or otherwise, by defendants and prosecutors alike. When so employed, the *ekhthra* in question might be foregrounded (as in *Lysias* 9) or somewhat downplayed as the needs of a case demanded. And affirmations or denials of enmity could be effectively combined with various other forms of rhetorical strategy (107–115).

Finally, in Chapter Four (117–52), Alwine surveys the sundry mechanisms Athenians used to control the “problem” of *ekhthra*, thereby minimizing the potential harm that, say, quests for vengeance might inflict upon the democratic polis. Thus, polis officials were deterred from using their positions to pursue feuds with *ekhthrois* by their oaths of office, the collegiate nature of their duties, and accountability procedures like *euthunai*. A prevailing “democratic ideology” of “equality and freedom” (136) discouraged the use of the courts for personal vendettas, defaming opponents, and so forth. And this same ideology, along with a communal aversion to non-military arms-bearing, helped to minimize instances of excessive violence in everyday life. In sum, democratic thought and practices “prevented society from devolving into a violent free-for-all” (150).

As a specialist study of *ekhthra* in classical Athens, this book makes a very useful contribution to the field. In so doing, one hopes it might also stir us finally to dispense with the unhelpfully reductive models of Cohen and Herman in our larger efforts to make sense of Athenian modes of sociality. That said, and despite his own claims to the contrary (5–10), Alwine does not really offer a compelling alternative model of his own.

Alwine dismisses previous alternatives, such as those of Christ and Allen, because they strain too hard to frame a kind of compromise position between Cohen's and Herman's antithetical extremes (6).² Yet it seems that his own account is a similarly strained compromise, whereby *ekhthra* is simultaneously both "socially acceptable" and a "widespread problem". Whence this apparent contradiction? Ample evidence adduced by Alwine suggests that interpersonal enmities were entirely normal in Athenian experience. On the other hand, the claim that they were also somehow problematic in themselves seems to be more of an assumption, since *ekhthrai* clearly do not align well with our consensus vision of a "democratic" Athens. If so, I suggest, a less strained alternative to the Cohen/Herman binary might instead begin by interrogating this consensus account. Why do we insist on equating *demokratia* with our own modern, liberal, egalitarian political regimes? Why do we disregard all the evidence which indicates that the Athenians saw their *politeia* as a much more comprehensive "way of life," one that knew no modern-style state-society divide, one that could accordingly accommodate all manner of non-modern phenomena, like curses, oaths, divine witnesses, and even socially acceptable interpersonal enmities?

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² Matthew Christ, *The Litigious Athenian* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Danielle Allen, *The World of Prometheus: The Politics of Punishing in Democratic Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).