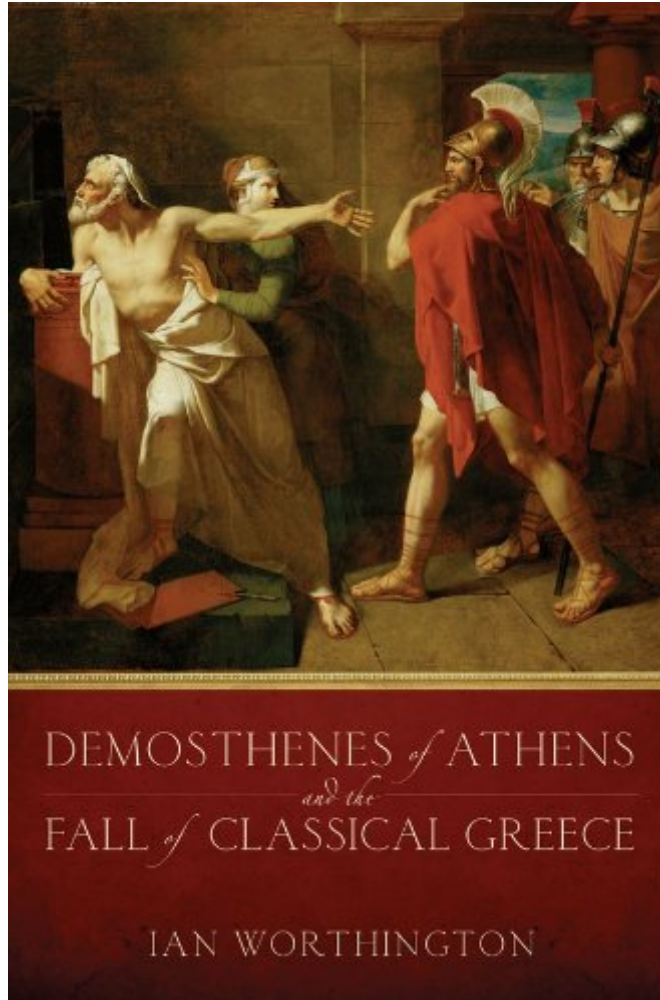


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Demosthenes Of Athens And The Fall Of Classical Greece



Synopsis

Regarded as ancient Greece's greatest orator, Demosthenes lived through and helped shape one of the most eventful epochs in antiquity. His political career spanned three decades, during which time Greece fell victim to Macedonian control, first under Philip II and then Alexander the Great. Demosthenes' resolute and courageous defiance of Philip earned for him a reputation as one of history's outstanding patriots. He also enjoyed a brilliant and lucrative career as a speechwriter, and his rhetorical skills are still emulated today by students and politicians alike. Yet he was a sickly child with an embarrassing speech impediment, who was swindled out of much of his family's estate by unscrupulous guardians after the death of his father. His story is one of triumph over adversity. Modern studies of his life and career take one of two different approaches: he is either lauded as Greece's greatest patriot or condemned as an opportunist who misjudged situations and contributed directly to the end of Greek freedom. This biography, the first ever written in English for a popular audience, aims to determine which of these two people he was: self-serving cynic or patriot - or even a combination of both. Its chronological arrangement brings Demosthenes vividly to life, discussing his troubled childhood and youth, the obstacles he faced in his public career, his fierce rivalries with other Athenian politicians, his successes and failures, and even his posthumous influence as a politician and orator. It offers new insights into Demosthenes' motives and how he shaped his policy to achieve political power, all set against the rich backdrop of late Classical Greece and Macedonia.

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Customer Reviews

After a couple of centuries of warfare, the world-historical city state of Athens is spiritually staggering. Still, a generation after the great defeat by Sparta, risen like Germany, she once more is the most influential of the cities. Sadly, in a two year attempt to tighten control over her latest empire, by about 350 she has spent nearly a billion dollars on war! (Think of this as a prosperous American city and county of about 500,00 like Lancaster Pa, where I live blowing that amount in 2 years). Also she has privatized the state silver mines and they now produce much less revenue for the citizens. Citizen attempts to regain state control are futile. The rich are increasingly exempt from taxes and, again, attempts to eliminate exemptions are futile. Political quarrels abound. Meantime, up the road, the Macedonians are buying off their neighbors and investing heavily in new (weapons) technology and rethinking how an army might be organized. When Athens finally wakes up, she's flattened by King Phillip, almost as an afterthought. In fact, I don't really believe in history repeating itself like this. When I was young it was all about Spengler and the flabbiness of the West, a thesis now forgotten. Nonetheless, I found this book interesting reading, indeed. History doesn't repeat, said Twain, but it DOES rhyme. Many classical geeks besides me, I'll bet can't much fill in the historical details between the death of Socrates and Alexander except in broad outline. Alexander and his exploits are well covered and so's the defeat of Athens in the war with Sparta, but the intervening period where the mainland and the Peloponnese goes down to Phillip is much less known. This fills a lacuna in my knowledge, at least.

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