



# Social Memory in Athenian Public Discourse: Uses and Meanings of the Past

*Bernd Steinbock*

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Prompted by the abundant historical allusions in Athenian political and diplomatic discourse, Bernd Steinbock analyzes the uses and meanings of the past in fourth-century Athens, using Thebes' role in Athenian memory as a case study. This examination is based upon the premise that Athenian social memory, that is, the shared and often idealized and distorted image of the past, should not be viewed as an unreliable counterpart of history but as an invaluable key to the Athenians' mentality. Against the tendency to view the orators' references to the past as empty rhetorical phrases or propagandistic cover-ups for *Realpolitik*, it argues that the past constituted important political capital in its own right. Drawing upon theories of social memory, it contextualizes the orators' historical allusions within the complex net of remembrances and beliefs held by the audience and thus tries to gauge their ideological and emotive power.

Integrating literary, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence with recent scholarship on memory, identity, rhetoric, and international relations, *Social Memory in Athenian Public Discourse: Uses and Meanings of the Past* enhances our understanding of both the function of memory in Athenian public discourse and the history of Athenian-Theban relations. It should be of interest not only to students of Greek history and oratory but to everybody interested in memory studies, Athenian democracy, and political decision making.

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