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The Athenian Amnesty and Reconstructing the Law

Edwin Carawan

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The Athenian Amnesty and Reconstructing the Law Edwin Carawan
This volume explores the amnesty which ended the civil war at Athens in 403 BC. Drawing upon ancient historians and speechwriters, together with the surviving inscriptions, it presents a new interpretation of the Athenian Amnesty in its original setting and in view of the subsequent reconstruction of laws and democratic institutions in Athens.

Beginning with the evidence on the original agreement and the events that shaped it, the volume also discusses the major trials that challenged and reinterpreted key elements of the amnesty agreement, including the trial of Socrates. These studies reveal the Athenian Amnesty as a contractual settlement between the warring parties, a bargain for peace and reconciliation. The oath that came to symbolize the Amnesty was the closing to that contract, a pledge not to go back on the covenants that spelled out remedies and restrictions- not a promise to forgive and forget. The same contractual principle inspired major reforms of the restored democracy, barring litigation on settled claims and ensuring that new legislation did not conflict with the constitution.

While this book deals largely with the ancient agreement, Carawan also draws perspectives from parallels in modern history, such as the post-apartheid settlement in South Africa, illustrating how the Athenian Amnesty is generally regarded as the model for political "forgiveness" or "pardon and oblivion" embraced in later conflict resolution.

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