

Demosthenes, Against Timocrates (lawsuit accusing Timocrates of proposing an illegal decree)

(139) Βούλομαι δ’ ὑμῖν, ὦ ἄνδρες δικασταί, ἐν Λοκροῖς
ὡς νομοθετοῦσι διηγήσασθαι· … ἐκεῖ γὰρ οὕτως οἴονται δεῖν τοῖς πάλαι κειμένοις
χρῆσθαι νόμοις καὶ τὰ πάτρια περιστέλλειν καὶ μὴ πρὸς   (5)
τὰς βουλήσεις μηδὲ πρὸς τὰς διαδύσεις τῶν ἀδικημάτων
νομοθετεῖσθαι, ὥστ’ ἄν τις βούληται νόμον καινὸν τιθέναι,
ἐν βρόχῳ τὸν τράχηλον ἔχων νομοθετεῖ, καὶ ἐὰν μὲν δόξῃ
καλὸς καὶ χρήσιμος εἶναι ὁ νόμος, ζῇ ὁ τιθεὶς καὶ ἀπέρχεται,
εἰ δὲ μή, τέθνηκεν ἐπισπασθέντος τοῦ βρόχου. (140) καὶ γάρ   (1)
τοι καινοὺς μὲν οὐ τολμῶσι τίθεσθαι νόμους, τοῖς δὲ πάλαι
κειμένοις ἀκριβῶς χρῶνται.

I want, gentlemen of the jury, to describe to you how they pass legislation among the Locrians. … For there the people so believe that it is right to observe old-established laws, to preserve the institutions of their forefathers, and never to legislate for the gratification of whims, or for a compromise with transgression, that if a man wishes to propose a new law, he legislates with a noose round his neck. If the law is deemed good and beneficial, the proposer departs with his life, but, if not, the noose is drawn tight, and he is a dead man. And so they do not dare to propose new laws, but they use strictly the ones set up long ago.