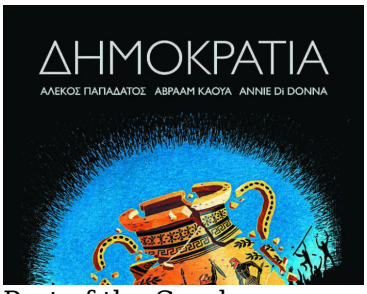
Nanci Santos, "Entry on: Democracy by Annie Di Donna, Abraham Kawa, Alecos Papadatos ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/704. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Annie Di Donna , Abraham Kawa , Alecos Papadatos

Democracy

United States (2015)

TAGS: Agamemnon Apollo Athena Athens Curetes Delphi Democracy Echo Eurydice Gorgon(s) Graeco-Persian Wars Hero(es) Hubris Leander Medusa Narcissus Oligarchy Oracles Orestes Orpheus Spartans Troy Tyranny Zeus



Part of the Greek edition's cover (Athens: Ίκαρος [Ikaros], 2015). Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 (accessed: December 28, 2021).

General information	
Title of the work	Democracy
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2015
First Edition Details	Alecos Papadatos; Abraham Kawa; Annie Di Donna, *Democracy.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2015, 240 pp.
ISBN	US: 9781608197194; UK: 9781408820179; Ebook: 9781632863171
Genre	Comics (Graphic works)
Target Audience	Children (12–15 year old children (according to the Portuguese edition))
Author of the Entry	Nanci Santos, OMC Contributor, nancisantos@hotmail.co.uk
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators

Annie Di Donna (Illustrator)

Annie Di Donna, born in Philippeville, Algeria, studied graphic arts at the École Superieure des Arts Decoratifs, Grenoble, and painting at the École des Beaux Arts, Annecy, before working as a graphic designer, artistic director, and training as an animator. Between 1987 and 1991, she worked as an animator for various French companies and worked on various animations, including *Babar* and *Tintin*. Since 1991, she has been working in Athens as an animator, alongside her husband Alecos Papadatos, where they have created a new studio. Between 2004 and 2008, she worked on the comic book *Logicomix*, alongside Papadatos.

Sources:

logicomix.com (accessed: March on 07, 2019)

Bio prepared by Nanci Santos, OMC Contributor, nancisantos@hotmail.co.uk

Abraham Kawa (Author)

Abraham Kawa teaches Cultural Studies at the University of the Aegean. He is also a researcher of graphic novels and genre fiction, and a novel writer. His books include *What song the sirens sang?* (2004) and *Screaming Silver* (2009).

Bio prepared by Nanci Santos, OMC Contributor,

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Alecos Papadatos by Denise1gr. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 (accessed: December 28, 2021).

Alecos Papadatos , b. 1959
(Author)

Alecos Papadatos was born in 1959 in Greece. Between 1978 and 1986, he studied Economics at the Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, followed by a postgraduate degree in Marketing at the University of Sorbonne I, in Paris. In 1986, Papadatos began studying animation and cartoon design, after which he started working as an animator for French TV commercials. Since then, Papadatos has produced, directed, and contributed towards various animated, prize-winning films and animated series, some of which have aired in TV channels, such as the series *Babar*, which originally aired in Canal Plus, but has since become popular in other countries, such as Portugal. In 1991, he moved to Athens to teach animation and animated film production, where he has since worked alongside his wife, Annie Di Donna, in various television series, TV cartoon commercials, and the comic book *Democracy*.

Papadatos is also the artist of the graphic novel *Logocomix* which was the No. 1 New York Times Best Seller Graphic Book in 2009.

Sources:

web.archive.org (accessed: March 07, 2019)

logicomix.com (accessed: March 07, 2019)

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Additional information

Translation

Dutch: *Democratie*, trans. Mat Schifferstein, Tom Mes Emtw, 2016.

French: *Démocratie*, trans. Pierre-Emmanuel Dauzat, 2015.

German: *Demokratie. Eine Geschichte vom Mut, die Welt zu verändern*, trans. Ebi Naumann, 2015.

Greek, Modern: *Δημοκρατία* [Dīmokratía], 2015.

Italian: *Democracy*, trans. G. Fontana, 2016.

Portuguese: *Democracia*, trans. Joana Neves, 2016. (recommended age group: 12–15)

Spanish: *Democracia*, trans. Maria Isabel Soto, 2016.

Summary

Democracy is set in 490 BCE, just before the Battle of Marathon. One of the men fighting for the Athenians, Thersippus, fears that Athena would abandon them and this would cause Athens to fall. A second soldier, named Leander, approaches Thersippus and tells him that they will win as Athena would help them; he proceeds to tell a story of how he once saw Athena and how she helped him.

Leander begins by explaining that when he was 16, he was living with his father, councilman Promachus, when Hippias, one of the tyrants, was killed by a rebel group during the Panathenaia. Due to his father's connections to politics, he too was killed by a Scythian soldier, in front of Leander, during the commotion. Leander, being only a young man at the time, had to flee so that he would not be killed too, swearing one day to return and avenge his father's death. He travelled to Delphi, where he met with the family friend, Antenor, and began working there, looking after the Treasury of Delphi. Leander hoped that, much like Orestes, one day he would see the oracle of Delphi and be guided to his destiny. However, the day never came and instead he saw Athena in his dreams. She told him that he must sacrifice something of his to the gods, and so began painting and practicing his craft until his products were good enough to be given as an offering.

As the months passed after his dream about Athena, Leander began

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noticing strange conversations between the oracular priestesses, who kept warning other states that their issues would not be solved until they help the Athenians. He took note of it but did nothing, until one day he met Cleisthenes, an Alcmaeonid from Athens. He overheard the oracle's prophecy being changed between what the oracle stated and what was actually transmitted to Cleisthenes, in that Cleisthenes was told that the Athenians needed to seek the help of the Spartans to defeat the tyrant Hipparchus. This played on Leander's mind and he decided to investigate the offerings in the treasury where he found that the oracle had lied many times. There, Leander also discovered how the oracles influenced the world, and arrived at the conclusion that his father's death was in vain. So, he decided to return to Athens, which had been freed from Hipparchus' tyranny by this point. To celebrate the death of the tyrant Hipparchus, Leander created a vase painting and offered it to Athena. The story thereafter, proceeds to explain how Cleisthenes' 30 tribes in Athens were introduced, how politics in Athens changed, and how another civil war began due to politics, with the Athenian citizens having to fight Isagoras, the winner of the elections, who was backed by the Spartans. The story then explains how, after the Athenians drove out the Spartans out of Athens, the Athenians asked the oracle how they should prepare for what was coming, including the Persian Wars. The story then returns to modern day and the soldiers prepare to fight, feeling braver and more at ease that Athena will help them.

Analysis

One of the most distinctive aspects of Classical Greece was the ability to tell and write stories. *Democracy* replicates this in various clever ways. Throughout various points in the story, characters tell stories, or draw stories into pottery, or walls: these are illustrated in the book. These "stories", or better, *mythoi*, give the reader a glimpse into the importance of storytelling in Classical Greece. Perhaps the most clever of all is how the main character, Leander, in telling his story to the soldiers -which later influences the soldiers' actions and attitudes – becomes an oral storyteller himself.

It is possible to find both real and mythological stories within Leander's story. Focusing on the mythological ones, the first story the reader comes across is that of Agamemnon, Iphigenia, Clytemnestra and Orestes. It appears in the opening scenes of Leander's story, who, when he is merely a boy, decides to paint a wall of his father's house.

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He chooses the scene where Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia. This is a reference to the sacrifice Agamemnon made to Artemis during the Trojan War, so that the army may have been able to leave Aulis, and head to Troy, enabling the war to take place. This sacrifice, however, had then created a domino effect. When Agamemnon's wife, Clytemnestra, discovered the truth about Agamemnon's sacrifice, she murdered him upon his return from Troy. This, in turn, caused Orestes, their son, to murder Clytemnestra, in revenge for his father's death, as depicted in *The Oresteia* trilogy by Aeschylus.

This connection is also present as such in the comic book as young Leander is told he is allowed to paint something in a wall, however, he ended up painting on all three scenes in various walls in the house, followed by Orestes' trial as "(...) that's where the whole thing comes together", according to young Leander, emphasizing the importance of the three scenes. This passage also illustrates the importance of Bronze Age heroes and stories for young Athenian children and its links to the worship of heroes, or hero-cults. This theme is found throughout the comic book, both with this scene with Agamemnon as well as later in the book with the commissioning of the famous sculpture "The Tyrant Slayers".

Also linked to the Agamemnon storyline, throughout the book there are the various references to Orestes and his hubris. Various characters compare Leander to Orestes and warn him not to commit hubris. This hubris is in reference to the earlier mentioned slaying of his mother, which angered the Furies and this leads to the aforementioned scene of the trial of Orestes, as in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy. This parallels what happened to Leander as his father was killed and he too sought retribution, thus, much like with Orestes, he flees to Delphi where he speaks to Athena. However, unlike with Orestes, Athena guides Leander, rather than Apollo. Nonetheless, this is a direct reference to the *Oresteia*. As with Orestes, he meets Athena, but as a judge rather than someone who helps. Throughout the comic book, the various references to the *Oresteia* are not by accident, as this trilogy is essential for the depiction of democracy, and how it created a new system of judgement by trial rather than vengeful killings.

Another mythical story found within the comic book is that of Hero and Leander. The oldest extant literary reference to the story is in Ovid's *Epistulae Heroidum*, a series of poems that compile Greek and

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Roman love myths. In the comic, Leander meets a woman named Hero when visiting a family friend, and Hero's father comments the fact their names could replicate the famous tale of Hero and Leander, except he hopes their fate is not as tragic as the one in the myth. Other love stories referenced within the comic book, shortly after mentioning the Hero and Leander myth, are those of Narcissus and Echo, and Orpheus and Eurydice. The three stories themselves are very different from one another. The Leander and Hero myth consists of a young man who fell in love with a priestess of Aphrodite and would swim to her every night to spend time with her, until one day, during a stormy night, there were mixed signals and Leander seemed to have disappeared, according to one version. The one regarding Narcissus and Echo discusses a nymph who fell in love with a young man; however, Narcissus, in turn, fell in love with his reflection in the lake. The Orpheus and Eurydice myth, meanwhile, is of a man who went to the underworld to retrieve his lover, Eurydice, on the condition that he would not look back; however, was not able to do so because he lost faith in the gods and looked back. All three stories have very similar tragic endings, which is what the family friend is alluding to when he hopes the fates of young Leander and his daughter Hero, are not the same. Also by alluding to these stories, the family friend is also perhaps foreshadowing the fates of Hero and Leander, as their love has proven that it can also never be, as Hero becomes a pythian priestess.

Another aspect of Greek mythology found throughout *Democracy* is Athena and her association with the Gorgons and Medusa. The Gorgon's head in particular is referenced throughout as it is associated with Athena's shield. According to Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.4.3, Perseus offered the head of the slain Gorgon, Medusa, to Athena and she placed Medusa's head on her shield. Papadatos discusses in the notes section that the Gorgon's eyes had the power to "(…) even in death [….] to petrify those who looked into its eyes." He further discusses how this fits into the story as whenever Leander is petrified of Athena, he sees the Gorgon's head, rather than that of the goddess. It is worth noting how the writers decided not to include Medusa as a mythical creature but instead she was included based on her negative portrayal and the things that she stands for, such as "petrifying" anyone who sees her, rather than turning them into stone, or the fear often associated with creatures such as the gorgons.

There are also references to Athens' origin story. The comic book

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discusses the origins of the polis and its first king, Erichthonius, who was half-human, half-serpent. It refers to the story as the king being the child of Hephaestus when he attempted to force himself on Athena. This story is used in the comic book to highlight how Athenians, in spite of having a horrible origins story, still pride themselves in it and do not hide their origins.

Further to this, it is also worth noting that Leander briefly compares the clashing of spears and shields by the Spartans, after they take over Athens, to be similar to that of infant Zeus. This is a reference to myth of Zeus and how, according to one of the versions, the Curetes clashed shields and spears to hide the noise the infant was making, so that he would not be found by his father Cronus.

Last but not least, another mythical story which is found within the book is that of how the pythian priestesses came to be and how Apollo and Dionysus share Delphi. During the time in which the main character, Leander, is living and working in Delphi, he learns how Delphi and the oracular priestesses operate, as well as witnessing first hand, the corruption found within the oracle. This corruption echoes the thoughts of ancient sources of the likes of Herodotus, who themselves did not trust what the pythian oracle said. This also serves as a warning to the modern reader towards taking primary sources by their face-value, and the problems with interpretation of events. Leander also learns that the oracles originated because Apollo slain the Python (a snake-like creature), leaving it to rot under the sun, and then proceeded to build a temple there – in the future site of the oracle.

Democracy has been a very interesting book to cover for this database, from the way it handles the historical aspect of the story, making it friendly and accessible to young readers, to the way the illustrations depict various different periods within the classical world. I was struck by the amount of detail that went into the making of the book, especially with the notes section at the end, which enables anyone who is interested in the subject to find out more on particular topics and understand some of the thought processes that went behind some of the choices.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs,

Agamemnon Apollo Athena Athens Curetes Delphi Democracy Echo Eurydice Gorgon(s) Graeco-Persian Wars Hero(es) Hubris Leander Medusa Narcissus Oligarchy Oracles Orestes Orpheus Spartans Troy

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Characters, and Concepts	Tyranny Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Historical figures History

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