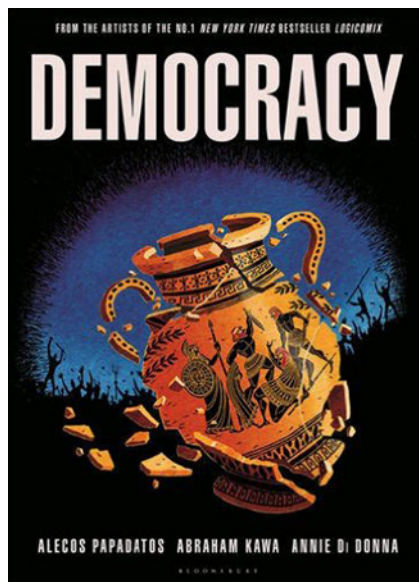


BOOK REVIEWS

Papadatos A, Kawa A and di Donna A **Democracy**

pp. 236. Bloomsbury Publishing,
2015 Paperback, £18.99 ISBN
978-1-4088-2017-9



This is a comic book or graphic novel, produced by the team responsible for *Logicomix: an Epic Search for Truth*, a very successful examination of mathematics and philosophy and a brave attempt to bring abstruse material to a younger readership. Somewhat in the same vein, the team have produced, not a history of democracy, but an account of its beginnings.

The story starts, in true epic style, on the eve of the battle of Marathon and finishes with the battle itself; in between, our soldier protagonist, Leander, tells the story of his youth, which coincides with the stirring events of 510-08 BC. This is an excellent device and the tale is fleshed out with a son's longing for a murdered father, a love-story denied, various intrigues and a digression to the Delphic oracle.

As regards accuracy, all the main historical features are here, convincingly interwoven with Leander's own story. Leander's father is a successful merchant and sends his son on an unlikely business trip to the Chersonese, where he bumps into his own hero. The latter is, unfortunately, destined to be a Delphic priestess, but this does not stop a brief, shy tryst and a reunion later in the story. Athena is, *Odyssey*-like, ever-present in a number of ways and this brings me to one of the strengths of the story; the cultural and historical background is foregrounded and the romantic *Bildungsroman* is not allowed to take over.

All-important, of course, are the graphics and they are gorgeous. The palette edges towards the brown/

orange/red part of the spectrum, allowing the artists to suggest vases, the dry Athenian earth, the gold of Delphi and the goddess, Athena; blues and greens are reserved for night scenes and all the more striking for their comparative rarity. The drawing is sharp and angular, the cells distinct and the page layout just varied enough to be entertaining without being off-putting. A central scene, involving Cleisthenes and our hero in Delphi, has pages whose borders contain repeated motifs, rather in the manner of a Greek vase. My favourite scene is that where Leander explains the detail of the Cleisthenic *trittyes* to Athenians who are no wiser than the 14-year-olds I try to teach.

There are some sly references to literature, including a clever nod to Aristophanes' *Acharnians* on p. 133. I have no real quibbles, beyond the slightly jarring modernisms here and there, but the script is admirably intelligible. All in all, this is an entertaining and effective way of presenting the dawn of democracy and the difficulties attendant on its birth. A copy in the school library will be very popular.

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