

Natalia Kapatsoulia , Filippos Mandilaras

Solon. The Wise Statesman [Σόλωνας, ο σοφός νομοθέτης (Sólōnas, o sofós nomothētīs)]

Greece (2011)

TAGS: [Agora](#) [Areopagus / Areios Pagos](#) [Athens](#) [Croesus](#) [Cyprus](#) [Egypt](#) [Heliaia](#) [Lydia](#) [Megara \(Polis\)](#) [Salamis](#) [Solon](#)



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| General information | |
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| <i>Title of the work</i> | Solon. The Wise Statesman [Σόλωνας, ο σοφός νομοθέτης (Sólōnas, o sofós nomothētīs)] |
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| <i>Country/countries of popularity</i> | Greece |
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| <i>Genre</i> | Illustrated works |
| <i>Target Audience</i> | Children (5+) |
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Creators



Natalia Kapatsoulia (Illustrator)

Natalia Kapatsoulia studied French Literature in Athens, and she worked as a language tutor before embarking on a career as a full-time illustrator of children's books. Kapatsoulia has authored one picture book *Η Μαμά πετάει* [Mom Wants to Fly], which has been translated into Spanish *Mamá quiere volar*. Kapatsoulia, who now lives on the island of Kefalonia, Greece, has collaborated with Filippos Mandilaras on multiple book projects.

Sources:

Official [website](#) (accessed: July 2, 2018).

[Profile](#) at the [epbooks.gr](#) (accessed: July 2, 2018).

Bio prepared by Katerina Volioti, University of Roehampton,
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Filippos Mandilaras , b. 1965 (Author)

Filippos Mandilaras is a prolific and well-known writer of children's illustrated books and of young adults' novels. Mandilaras studied French Literature in Sorbonne, Paris. His latest novel, which was published in May 2016, is entitled *Υπέροχος Κόσμος* [Wonderful World], and it recounts the story of teenage life in a deprived Athenian district. With his illustrated books, Mandilaras aims to encourage parents and teachers to improvise by adding words when reading stories to children. Mandilaras is interested in the anthropology of extraordinary

creatures and his forthcoming work is about Modern Greek Mythologies.

Sources:

In Greek:

[Profile](#) on EP Books' website (accessed: June 27, 2018).

i-read.i-teen.gr (accessed: June 27, 2018).

[Public Blog](#), published 15 September 2015 (accessed: June 27, 2018).

[Press Publica](#), published 28 January 2017 (accessed: June 27, 2018).

[Linkedin.com](#), published published 6 May 2016 (accessed: February 6, 2019).

In English:

[Amazon.com](#) (accessed: June 27, 2018).

On Mandoulides' [website](#), published 7 March 2017 (accessed: June 27, 2018).

In German:

literaturfestival.com (accessed: June 27, 2018).

Bio prepared by Katerina Volioti, University of Roehampton,
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Additional information

Summary

Solon is presented, right from the book's opening page, as a wise and well-travelled individual who set the foundations of Athenian democracy. The city-states of Solon's time were governed by tyrants. Solon travelled around the world, studying the laws of different places. When he returned to Athens, the book continues, people were distressed that the Megarians had taken over Salamis. After Solon's motivational speech in the Agora, the Athenians followed his crafty plan to fight the Megarians. Athenian soldiers dressed up as women and went to the seaside. The Megarians were deceived, believing the Athenians were women and not soldiers. A battle is implied, but is neither described nor illustrated. We read that Salamis returned to the Athenians.

We are then told that, in the aftermath of this military success, the Athenians elected Solon as archon and asked him to change the laws. With Solon's first law, enslaved farmers who were in debt regained their freedom. Solon gave power to the people by instituting a court, the Heliaea, and the council of the Four Hundred. Moreover, Solon asked for his laws to be inscribed and displayed in the Agora for everyone to read. Solon left Athens for ten years, travelling first to Egypt and then to Cyprus and to the palace of Croesus in Lydia. He died peacefully back in Athens.

The book closes by offering additional information about Solon and two creative exercises for children. An illustration shows Athenian soldiers in women's clothes and a Megarian soldier approaching. Children have to imagine the soldiers' conversations and fill in the speech bubbles. On the last page, children are asked to draw tyranny and democracy.

Analysis

With this book, young children learn ancient history by focusing on a great man who made a difference in society. In view of the Athenian context, there are subtle similarities with the book about Pericles in the same series.* Both men were highly educated, influential speakers, and committed to serving their city. Solon, like Pericles, was of aristocratic descent but sided with the masses giving them access to judicial and political processes. Certainly, democracy is the key theme in both books. Yet, democracy appears to be more than a political system. Social justice is also important. Solon's laws benefited all



Athenians, including poor citizens who had been sold as slaves because of their debts. The story of the wise lawmaker might have anti-capitalist undertones, pointing to class systems and struggles in modern Western societies. Solon's care for the weak in society might also resonate with present-day human rights activism. Modern sensitivities for social equality seem to be rooted in the ancient past, and this, by itself, could serve as an incentive to study ancient history. The Greek past, therefore, may be of interest to an international audience of learners, and not only to people who live in Greece and want to know the history of the Greek lands.

Solon devises a cunning plan to trick the Megarians. A parallel could be drawn with Hermes' propensity to mislead others in the book about the god.** Solon's actions, nonetheless, contrast with those of mythic actors whose extraordinary deeds fall, in most cases, in the wilderness and far away from a civic domain. Baby Hermes steals and guides overnight a herd of cattle across vast expanses of Greek landscapes. While stealing is tolerated for a divine character, it would have been inappropriate for a man of integrity like Solon. A moralistic message may emerge as follows. Political personas must behave with outmost responsibility, serving the common good and operating within a strict legal framework.

The Athenian civic context, however, was not the only source of inspiration for Solon. Mandilaras showcases Solon as a curious and open-minded individual who loved travelling. The illustration on the first page features Solon seated in a chariot that is labelled 'globetrotter' (in English). On the horse's body there are stickers for Lydia, Cyprus, and Egypt (in Greek), reminiscent to the ones that modern tourists collect on their journeys and attach to their suitcases and cars. Also on the first page, we read that Solon set the foundations for democracy with the knowledge he acquired in his travels. Solon may not have been a wise social reformer if he could not think beyond the remits of his birthplace. Later on, having finished with his legal reforms, Solon went away from Athens so as not to interfere with the process of applying the laws. Solon, perhaps not unlike Herodotus, tends to have an anthropological interest in other cultures, visiting the Egyptian pyramids and remarking on King Croesus' wealth. For all its uniqueness because of its democratic system that was beginning to take shape in Solon's days, Athens is not the only place of historical significance. Readers are encouraged to think about a broader geographical context, and how distant lands compared with Athens and the Greek city-states more generally.



Mandilaras' language includes numerous elevated and composite words that derive from ancient Greek, which help with young children's language acquisition. We read, for example, that Solon's father, Exekestides, was a eupatrid (ευπατρίδης). In Modern Greek, the word 'eupatrid' describes a nobleman and is used widely, also in journalistic writing, to denote a person who contributed to the common good.*** Hence, there is no need for children to learn that the word means 'offspring of a good father' in ancient Greek (εὖ + πατήρ + -ίδης). Neither is a reference necessary to the clan of the Eupatridae, one of the ancient autochthonous populations of rural Attica who, according to Greek myth, relocated to central Athens after Theseus' union of Attica.**** The contemporary use of the term suffices for appreciating Solon's distinguished family background.

* [Pericles and the Golden Century \[Ο Περικλής και ο Χρυσός Αιώνας \(Ο Periklís kai o Chrysós Aiónas\)\]](#).

** [Hermes. The god for all chores \[Ερμής, ο θεός για όλες τις δουλειές \(Ermís, o theós gia óles tis douleíés\)\]](#).

*** [See](#), for example (accessed January 29, 2019).

**** [See](#) (accessed January 29, 2019).

Classical, Mythological,
Traditional Motifs,
Characters, and
Concepts

[Agora](#) [Areopagus / Areios Pagos](#) [Athens](#) [Croesus](#) [Cyprus](#) [Egypt](#) [Heliaina](#)
[Lydia](#) [Megara \(Polis\)](#) [Salamis](#) [Solon](#)

Other Motifs, Figures,
and Concepts Relevant
for Children and Youth
Culture

[Authority](#) [Communication](#) [Historical figures](#) [Humanism](#) [Integrity](#)
[Journeys](#) [Justice](#) [Learning](#) [Morality](#) [Past](#) [Respect](#) [Society](#) [Values](#)

Further Reading

Information about the book:



Katerina Volioti, "Entry on: Solon. The Wise Statesman [Σόλωνας, ο σοφός νομοθέτης (Sólōnas, o sofós nomothētīs)] by Natalia Kapatsoulia, Filippos Mandilaras ", 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/657>. Entry version as of February 10, 2025.

epbooks.gr/product/100547/solon,-the-wise-statesman (accessed February 12, 2019)



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