Joe Infurnari , Boaz Yakin

Marathon

United States (2012)

TAGS: Ancient Slavery Architecture Athena Athens Gods Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History Olympic Games Pan Sparta





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Marathon
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States; United Kingdom; Canada
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2012
First Edition Details	Boaz Yakin, *Marathon*. New York: First Second, 2012, 192 pp.
ISBN	9781596436800
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Awards	Kirkus Best Teen Books of the Year; South Carolina Children's Book Award; Tri-State Reviews Committee Books of Note.
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Graphic novels, Historical fiction
Target Audience	Young adults (+ teenagers)
Author of the Entry	Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk
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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



Joe Infurnari (Illustrator)

Joe Infurnari is a Canadian cartoonist based in Toronto. He has worked on publications for Marvel Entertainment, Vertigo/DC, Image Comics, Oni Press, and First Second Books. Infurnari is co-creator and artist on Skybound Entertainment's new series, *Evolution*.

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk



Boaz Yakin , b. 1966 (Author)

Boaz Yakin is an American screenwriter and film director based in New York City. Yakin studied filmmaking at New York City College and New York University. He has written and/or directed many films, including: *The Punisher* (1989), *Fresh* (1994), *Remember The Titans* (2000), *Death in Love* (2008), and *Max* (2015). He wrote the screenplay for the game-based period film, *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (2010). With directors Eli Roth and Scott Spiegel, Boaz Yakin formed a film production company Raw Nerve, which primarily produces horror films. In addition to Marathon, the subject of this entry, Yakin has written a number of further graphic novels, including *The Remarkable Worlds of Phineas B Fuddle*, illustrated by Erez Yakin (Paradox Press, 2000), and Jerusalem illustrated by Nick Bertozzi (First Second, 2013).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk

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Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Marathon by Joe Infurnari , Boaz Yakin ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/335. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

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Additional information

Summary

Marathon tells the story of the Battle of Marathon, which was fought in Greece in 490 BCE. The book's focus is placed on the traditions around extraordinary running feats relating to the battle, with the runner, Eucles, acting as protagonist.

The book opens in the years before the Battle of Marathon, when Athens was ruled by the tyrant, Hippias, son of Peisistratus. Eucles, at this time, is a child slave. After Eucles being noticed for his speed, Hippias takes him on as his messenger, but warns him that he will execute his family if he is ever late with a message. The resentful sons of Hippias and their friends interrupt Eucles' delivery of a message, and Hippias follows through on his threat, killing Eucles' family. This engenders in Eucles a life-long hatred of Hippias and tyranny. When the Spartans arrive a short time later to expel the Peisistratids, Eucles, though still a child, urges Spartan King Cleomenes to kill Hippias to prevent him from ever returning to Greece. The king is amused by the boy's intensity, but does not heed his warning.

The novel skips forward to 490, when Hippias is returning to Greece accompanying a Persian invasion fleet and intending to be reinstated by force as tyrant in Athens. Eucles, now freed from slavery, wishes to fight, but as the fastest Athenian he is nominated to run to Sparta to request aid against the invasion. Before Eucles leaves, his wife, Nia, promises that she will take offerings to Pan. The novel switches between Nia making her offering very publically, and Eucles, now exhausted, feeling strange and thinking that he sees Pan, who seems to lead him through a short-cut to Marathon. Against the advice of other soldiers, Eucles joins in and fights in the battle. After a remarkable victory, the Athenian troops are concerned that the Persians will sail round and capture an undefended Athens. Eucles volunteers to run to Athens to warn them to prepare for the Persian fleet's arrival. Several men volunteer to accompany him, including one of his erstwhile childhood tormentors. Eucles' companions are killed one-by-one as Persians pursue them, with each Athenian taking a self-sacrificing stand to slow the pursuers. As they make the hazardous journey, the childhood enemies learn a new regard for each other and determine to put their differences behind them.

Eucles reaches Athens in time to persuade the non-combatants there to dress up in every piece of armour that they can find in order to

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trick the Persians into thinking that the city is defended. Against the advice of his wife and friends, Eucles struggles down to Athens' harbour, the Piraeus. The Athenians successfully see off the Persians, and Hippias is enraged to be brought away after getting so close. Eucles collapses and dies once victory is assured. The Marathon sports event is founded in honour of his achievement.

Analysis

Marathon is an action-packed depiction of a key moment in ancient Greek history, told as a story to inspire greatness in young people today. 'Twenty-five centuries later, it still inspires men to greatness. It set the foundation for one of the greatest global peace efforts of the twentieth century – the modern Olympic games', reads the promotional blurb. While this is arguably somewhat overstated, this is nonetheless a thoughtful depiction of the Marathon campaign that places considerable emphasis on moral and social values.

In terms of the look of the work, the story is told in black and white images. They are rendered in a realistic style, achieved in part by the use of shading. The dividing boxes come in a variety of shapes and lay outs, which adds dynamism to the flow of the narrative. Details of clothing, architecture, and weaponry place the events in classical antiquity. Greek and Persian military equipment is shown in an essentially accurate way, distinct from one another; while this extends inaccurately to the omission of any Greeks or heavy-armoured Carians on the Persian side, this helps to establish the existence of different military traditions and overall cultural difference between Greece and Persia.

The ancient world in *Marathon* is an exciting but violent place. The essentially arbitrary killing of the young Eucles' family sets a tone of violence and fear. This episode is important in establishing why tyranny is problematic, and why Eucles hates Hippias, but it also establishes the city as a violent environment. The fact that violence amongst children triggers the killing of the family adds to the sense of an ingrained aggression within this environment. The Spartans' arrival to remove the tyrant and his family by force furthers the closeness of conflict. When Eucles makes his run to Sparta he kills robbers who are waiting for him on the road. One of them is killed while begging for mercy; Eucles declines, observing that he must run back this way later. Eucles' actions are characterised as necessary violence, but the necessity itself expresses a lack of physical safety.

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The battle follows, involving a lot of spectacular inter-personal violence. This is followed by the group run to Athens, in which the Athenians are hounded and die one-by-one at the hands of pursuing enemies.

Masculinity in *Marathon* is predominantly expressed through bravery, endurance, violence, and self-sacrifice. Eucles' and his childhood enemies achieve resolution through their appreciation of each other's bravery and self-sacrifice. The group as a whole applaud the actions of those who die fighting against the odds, as indeed the whole Athenian army did earlier in the day. One of the group dies transfixed by multiple weapons, in illustrations that appear to be influenced by the Second Sophistic traditions about the death of Callimachus (See Polemon the Elder, texts most easily accessed in E.B Harrison (1972); Aelius Aristides, *On the Four;* Pseudo-Plutarch, *Greek and Roman Parallel Stories*, 2). Eucles' apparently inspirational achievement is not only his running feat, but his unwillingness to stop until his has seen the Persians retreat. Against all advice he continues his mission, and dies at Piraeus when he could have stopped after delivering his message in Athens itself (Phalerum is the site that the Persians actually waited at – see Hdt. 6.116 – Piraeus was perhaps chosen in *Marathon* as the site more likely to be familiar to a modern audience). It was a significant decision from the author that although he would appear to be familiar with the 5th century BCE account of the battle by Herodotus, in which the runner Pheidippides ran to Sparta and the whole Greek force made its way back to Athens as quickly as possible after the battle (Herodotus, *Histories*, 6.105–106; 6.116), he preferred the later traditions (e.g. Plutarch, *Were the Athenians More Famous in War or Wisdom?* 349 C) in which the runner Eucles runs to Athens after the battle and gasps out his message with his last breath. The focus on the self-sacrificing nature of his achievement is extended by the inaccurate claim in the last panel of the book that the ancient Greeks established the Marathon race at the Olympic Games in Eucles' honour, suggesting a panhellenic celebration of his deeds and obscuring the fact that the Marathon event was initiated at the 1896 CE Athens Olympics. Despite this endorsement of the virtue of self-sacrifice, the book's emphasis on running over fighting orientates the focus away from inter-personal conflict and towards fitness and endurance, even as violence remains prominent.

Positive ancient masculinity is also characterised without misogyny. Eucles is shown to be very loving towards his wife and he regards her esteem for him and her actions as valuable. Nia, Eucles' wife, has a

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sub-plot which reinforces Eucles'. In what appears to be the end of an un-shown sex scene, the reader learns that the couple hope to have a child together; Nia has not been able to conceive and is worried that Eucles will leave her to have children with someone else. Eucles reassures her that he will not. Nia explains that she has been praying to Pan for help, and she describes how Pan helped her to hold off a pack of wolves when she shepherded her father's flock during her childhood. Eucles leaves his young slave-boy a wreath to give to Nia for her to dedicate to 'her god', Pan. When the citizens begin to waver once the army has departed, it is Nia's public run through the streets to take the wreath to the temple of Pan on Mt. Anschemus which inspires them to continue waiting for the army to return; they initially mistake her for an epiphany of Artemis. Although Nia does not wish Eucles to continue on to Piraeus, she supports him physically when he asks for her help to make it there and she stands beside him at the water's edge.

Nia's childhood encounter with the wolf-pack is a metaphor which anticipates the Persian invasion. The same metaphor and some of the same visual cues were used in Frank Miller's *300* (Dark Horse Books, 1998, ill. Lynn Varley), in which Leonidas, as a boy, defeats a wolf by luring it into a narrow pass akin to Thermopylae in miniature. In this instance, Nia's childhood experience demonstrates how standing firm and trusting Pan can be enough to see off a frightening, numerically superior enemy. Both metaphors also associate the Persians with animalistic savagery. Nia's childhood actions are then played out at large by the Athenian army. Her run through the city echoes her husband's run, and it is implied that her actions help him and therefore the Athenians (and Greeks as a whole). Nia's storyline represents a laudable effort to include a female perspective on what would otherwise be an exclusively male story. Arguably this result is undermined somewhat by making Nia's story so clearly an echo of Eucles more prestigious one. That Nia achieves her contribution largely through religious action is at least consistent with one of women's most influential sphere in classical antiquity – religion and association with the natural world. The detail about her concerns about her own fertility also point her storyline towards her physiology and reproductive value, and while that would have been a genuine concern for people in antiquity, this does seem somewhat reductionist; it is perhaps intended to act as a metaphor for the future that Eucles gives up when he chooses self-sacrifice. One other depiction of women relies on ahistorical detail; women are shown participating in political

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debate in the 'Athenian democratic assembly,' at a time when no Athenian women could do so. Lastly, women are depicted donning helmets and weapons to stand alongside older men to trick the Persian fleet. Although there is no tradition of this for Athens, this does reflect a story relating to the women of Argos (Pausanias, 2.27.7-8, with 2.20.8). So while this detail is also ahistorical for the Persian Wars, it gives the women of ancient Athens a positive presence in the book as active agents in the resistance against the invaders.

Marathon's treatment of slavery is very distinctive. The prominent place of slavery in the opening of the novel helps to establish the sense of ancient Greece as a violent and unpredictable place to live. As part of establishing the underdog theme, Eucles is initially a slave within a family of slaves, yet he goes on to serve within the Athenian military like any other soldier. Although freed and enslaved people were involved in Greek armies, even fighting, it is ahistorical to suggest that as a freedman Eucles could serve as an equal and a hoplite alongside free-born citizens. Nonetheless, this aspect of the storyline is extremely important to the representation of antiquity. The crucial contrast established in the work is between those who recognise the rights of others and those who do not. Unlike many representations of the marathon campaign, this aspect is more important than ethnicity in how characters are presented. Tyrannous 'baddies' of either ethnicity tyrannise others, while the 'goodies' do not. That being said, it is curious to find that the adult Eucles apparently owns a slave-boy called Alexis. Although he is never explicitly referred to as a slave, Alexis calls Eucles 'Master' and 'Lord', and acts as his servant. Eucles is shown to always treat Alexis with kindness, and the boy is represented as concerned for Eucles' well-being. In this way, slavery becomes a deeply entrenched part of antiquity, with the moral choice falling between those who treat their slaves well and those who do not, rather than between those who accept or reject slavery as an institution. This backdrop creates the impression that Eucles has risen to his comfortable position and ultimately honoured place through his own hard work and good character, when in reality that would never have been possible for a slave in ancient Athens, who would have remained deeply stigmatised and marginalised throughout their life no matter what they did. So while the depiction of 'bad' slavery (as indicated by the casual killing of Eucles' parents) suggests the violence of ancient culture, the more persistent representation of 'good' slavery (kind treatment by owner;

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possibility of social progress) creates a falsely benevolent impression of ancient Greek slavery.

Religion is presented as a pervasive aspect of ancient culture. Early on in the novel a statue of Athena is included that looks much like Pheidas' Athena which would be added to the newly built Parthenon in the mid-fifth-century BCE. The sacrifice of a sheep is shown; the knife at the sheep's throat, worshippers kneeling, and the spurt of blood issuing from the knife of an ecstatic-looking sacrifice. Passing this reminds Eucles of his wife's story of Pan, as discussed above, and of the wreath that he left for her to give to Pan – publically, *so [the Athenians] might be reminded of the courage and beauty of Greece*.

The Persians are not depicted as engaging in religious rituals, but there is at least one indication that they share a similar religious culture to the Greeks. Following the Herodotean story (Herodotus, *Histories*, 6.107), Hippias loses a tooth when he lands on Greek soil. The Persian with him, Datis, remarks that this is a bad omen for Hippias, who angrily replies that he does not believe in omens. Hippias' response represents a change from the Herodotean tradition, in which Hippias groans in realisation that he will never capture Athens. The alteration creates a less self-aware Hippias, in-keeping with *Marathon*'s depiction of him as unmitigatedly arrogant. Also following the Herodotean tradition, the Spartans' refusal to march immediately to Marathon is explained by the desire to stay for the Carneia festival – regarded by King Cleomenes as *the will of the gods* (see Herodotus, *Histories*, 6.106). But while *Marathon* depicts this as a raging mad Cleomenes inflicting this upon the other Spartans, who are keen to go, Herodotus had presented it in a much more neutral manner, unconnected to Cleomenes personally, and certainly unconnected to the king's alleged mental health problems (for which see Herodotus, *Histories*, 6.75–84); in fact there is a good chance that Cleomenes was dead by the time of the Battle of Marathon, succeeded by his brother (not, as in *Marathon*, son), Leonidas. This emphasis on Cleomenes' madness as the cause of the decision gives the impression that inconvenient dedication to religious edicts is undesirable, an idea perhaps more modern than ancient. Perhaps more importantly thematically, it reinforces the book's emphasis on the problematic nature of sole rulers and their arbitrary power, a theme brought explicitly to the reader's attention by the king's derision of democracy and Eucles' staunch defence of it. When it comes to the Pan epiphany, the book is equivocal. It is clear that by that stage Eucles is exhausted. He sees several goats. Images of him running and

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scrambling are interspersed with one of a Pan statue and others of Nia worshipping Pan. Eucles emerges from a cleft in the mountains and declares that Pan showed him a short-cut. The readers are left to decide for themselves whether a real epiphany occurred or Eucles was deranged by tiredness (see Herodotus, *Histories*, 6. 105–106, on the tradition). The story's penultimate panel refers the Athenians' dedication at Delphi, including, 'a special place [there] for the god to whom they most attributed their victory' – with a picture of a garlanded, pipe-playing Pan. While this is not entirely accurate historically, it does roll significant religious responses to the battle neatly and perpetuates the idea of the Athenians' perception of divine influence on the battle. (A stoa was erected at Delphi, but Pan was honoured with a new shrine under the Athenian acropolis, Herodotus, Histories, 6.105; this would have sat awkwardly with the book's ahistorical depiction of an existing Pan shrine at Athens).

The ancient Greeks are depicted as a divided people with very conflicting priorities. This appears through the class divisions at Athens and, more so, through the Spartans refusal to help promptly, and non-Athenian villagers choosing to help the invaders rather than their rival neighbours. This accurately depicts the divisions within Greek culture; it extends it further by omitting the participation of the Plataeans in the campaign, perhaps as a means of emphasising the Athenians' extraordinary actions. Even while the bond between Athens and Plataea remained firm, the Athenians themselves were given to omitting the role of the Plataeans when they recounted the battle narrative, particularly if they were claiming the Athenians' rights over others (see e.g. Andokides (1.107), Lysias (2.20), and Demosthenes (60.10–1 I) Isocrates (4.86, and 7.75), with speaker in Herodotus (9.27.5), and Plato (*Leges* 698B–699D).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ancient Slavery Architecture Athena Athens Gods Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History Olympic Games Pan Sparta
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant	Adversity Authority Child, children Conflict Death Family Friendship Gaining understanding Gender expectations/construction Heroism History Identity Justice Memory Morality Nation Orphans Parents

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for Children and Youth Culture	(and children) Past Relationships Social class Society Violence

Further Reading

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Addenda	Webpage for the book (accessed: July 26, 2018) includes summary, reviews, author and illustrator details, and a downloadable "Discussion Guide" sheet.

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