Stewart Ross

Athens is Saved!

United Kingdom (1997)

TAGS: Ancient Slavery Athens Divination Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History





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General information	
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Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
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First Edition Date	1997
First Edition Details	Stewart Ross, *Athens is Saved! The First Marathon*, ill. Sue Shields, Coming Alive Series. Evans Brothers Ltd., 1997, 62 pp.
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Genre	Historical fiction
Target Audience	Children (8+)
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Creators



Stewart Ross , b. 1947
(Author)

Stewart Ross was born in Aylesbury, United Kingdom on April 4th, 1947. He is a British author of fiction for children. Ross has also written adult novels, plays and a musical. He taught in Sri Lanka, the Middle East, the USA, and Britain before turning to writing full-time writer in 1989. He has been Chair of the Educational Writers Group of the Society of Authors and Chair of the Canterbury Branch of the Historical Association. Ross has earnt numerous literary achievements for his writing, all being from other books in his collections. The most famous being the 'Benjamin Franklin Prize for fact and faction, for the *Witches* in 1996,' and the 'Boston Globe Horn Honour, for *Into the Unknown* in 2011. Many of his works for children feature historical topics, including Greed, Seeds, and Slavery (Eden Children's Books, 2013), Big J: The Story of Julius Caesar (Wayland, 2001), Boudicca: Guilty or Innocent? (ReadZone Books, 2017), and Down with the Romans! (ReadZone Books, 2015).

Sources:

Official website (accessed: October 22, 2019).

Information at Google Books (accessed: June 12, 2019).

Profile at Scholastic (accessed: June 24, 2019).

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Additional information

Summary

Athens is Saved! opens with a note *To the Reader* from the author. The note explains that the story is based on a real event, with some invented parts added to make the story more fun. The author adds his wish that the story will encourage the reader to find out more about ancient Greece and perhaps to run their first marathon.

Notes on *The Story So Far* are divided into three sections: *Ancient Greece, The Persians*, and *Athens*. *Ancient Greece* explains that "Before the time of Jesus Christ" (p. 8), Greece was one of the most rich and interesting places in the world. It was divided into city-states, there was a shared language and shared gods. Most Greeks were farmers but slaves did most of the hard work. Some Greeks were merchants. All fit men had to be ready to fight in war. *The Persians* explains that Persia is the 'old name for Iran'. It had a huge empire from India to Europe and Darius I wished to make it even bigger. *Athens* describes the acropolis and the city's walls. Being near the sea made it a base for merchants. It was a city of wealth and ideas, full of poets, thinkers, and writers, with an unusual system of letting all citizens have a say in the running of the city. The citizens are training for war now that they have heard of the threat of Persian invasion.

A timeline follows. One page has "BC (Before the birth of Jesus Christ)", the facing page has "AD (After the birth of Jesus Christ)". The timeline goes from 800BCE–1900CE. The first section features events such as the first Olympics, first written laws in Athens, foundation of Persian Empire, alliance of Athens and Plataea, Athens helping the Ionians, 1st and 2nd Persian invasions. The CE section features the abolition of the Olympic Games in 393 and the first modern Olympics in 1896.

A *Portrait Gallery* features pencil drawings of the busts of the six main characters: Cimon a young athlete; Naxi, Cimon's slave; Paros the bully; Callimachus the commander-in-chief; General Miltiades; and General Nicias. Miltiades is shown with a Corinthian helmet pushed up onto his forehead.

The story begins in the training ground of Athens. Young men there are preparing to run a race overseen by Callimachus. Cimon is a gifted runner, but he is being bullied by the others, particularly,

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Paros, and they mock him for his stammer. He is tripped by Paros during the race and Callimachus scorns him as a clumsy fool. Cimon shows his dedication by returning to the training ground the following morning for weapons training. It is explained that the Greeks are spear-wielding foot-soldiers who must fight close together to see off Persian cavalry – the best in the world. News arrives that the Persians have landed. Paros continues to taunt him, but Cimon attends the Assembly and hears Miltiades arguing that the Athenians will be able to withstand the Persian cavalry and that they are likely to be backed up by the Plataeans and Spartans. Miltiades wins the argument. The army will be mustered. Philippides the runner will go to Sparta for help. Cimon returns home to prepare for battle but wishes he were going in place of Philippides – we later learn that he dreams of being a messenger.

The Athenian army sets out for Marathon. Many of the men are soon tired by the pace set over the challenging terrain. Miltiades notes that Cimon is still in excellent condition and makes a note of his name. Paros taunts Cimon once again, but when Cimon goes to retaliate another soldier holds him back and notes that Paros is only doing it because he is struggling and envious. When the army stops at a rest point, Cimon goes forward to view the Persian army. He meets Miltiades there. Miltiades asks him if they can win and when Cimon insists that they can, Miltiades approves.

The Athenians halt at Marathon in a grove sacred to Hercules. The generals meet. Miltiades wishes to establish a plan so that they can fight as soon as possible. General Nicias accuses him of rashness and insists that they will be cut down if they rush out to fight. Miltiades outlines a plan. The generals are split and Miltiades speaks privately to Callimachus who has the deciding vote. He urges him that if they go ahead, Athens will win its freedom and become the greatest city in Greece. Callimachus agrees, and five of the generals give their command days up to Miltiades. Cimon and Paros are told that their unit will fight in the centre of the battle line. News arrives; the Plataeans are on their way but the Spartans are held up by a religious festival. The Greeks are outnumbered 25,000:10,000.

As they prepare for battle, Paros approaches Cimon and apologises sincerely for bullying him. He explains that he has been envious of Cimon's greater athletic ability. They agree to put the past behind them to concentrate on the real enemy – the Persians. Callimachus is annoyed to see Cimon in the centre and raises an objection with

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Miltiades citing Cimon's clumsiness. Paros intercedes and confesses to having tripped Cimon. Cimon then protects Paros from Callimachus' disapproval by laughing it off. Later, the two young men stand guard and hear people approaching the Greek camp. After a tense few moments it is revealed that Ionian Greeks compelled to fight in the Persian army have come to give the Greeks a warning. They explain that the Persians are removing their cavalry, creating the perfect opportunity to attack. Paros and General Nicias are suspicious, but Cimon and General Miltiades trust the Ionians. Callimachus consults a priest about whether or not it is a good day to fight. The priest says that it is, although Callimachus decides to sacrifice anyway to "be on the safe side" (p. 32).

The day of battle arrives. The Greeks push forward behind a barricade, drop the barricade, and then rush forward. The Ionians are proved to have been true to their word and no cavalry appears. The fighting in the centre is very fierce. Cimon realises that they are losing, but he and Paros hold firm, fighting side by side and persisting despite their wounds. Cimon realises that they must regroup and bids Paros use his clear voice to call the men to him. The centre holds. After a desperate struggle Cimon realises that the Persians are retreating and those approaching their band of survivors are Greeks. Many Persians have been killed and far fewer Greeks, although that did include Callimachus. Miltiades explains to Cimon that he deliberately left the centre light on men, with the best men there, to give the wings a better chance of winning and then encircling to relieve the centre. Miltiades roars that Athens owes everything to Cimon and Paros. He asks them what they would like as a reward. Although wounded, Cimon begs for the honour of returning to Athens with the message of their victory. Miltiades grants his wish. Cimon struggles in a heroic run to Athens, delivers his message, and dies as people declare "Athens is saved!" (p. 38).

The History File. This section follows the main narrative and provides further historical context. *After the Battle* describes the second invasion and its defeat and the Spartans' victory in a follow-up war between Sparta and Athens. *The Olympic Games* outlines the importance of sport in ancient Greece and the competitions held at the games. It goes on to say that Pierre de Coubertin established the modern Olympic Games so that people could compete in sport rather than on the battlefield. Some of the adoptions from the ancient Olympics are outlined. *The Modern Marathon* explains that the modern Olympic Committee wanted a long distance race and decided

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to base it on the story of the runner who sped from Marathon to Athens. The idea caught on and there are now many marathon races. *How Do We Know?* is an introduction to ancient Greek source material. Herodotus and Plutarch are both discussed. The tangled traditions of the first marathon are unteased. It is explained that Herodotus mentioned Philippides (or Pheidippides) running to Sparta, but did not refer to a run to Athens. Plutarch did mention the run to Athens, but wrote much later and may therefore be less reliable. English poet Robert Browning "muddled things up even more" (p. 43) by writing about Philippides running to Sparta, to Marathon, and back to Athens where he died of exhaustion. It is concluded that we may never know for sure what happened. The author then explains that he chose the Plutarchan story because that run is the origin of the modern Marathon. He reiterates that elements of the story are made up, but that Miltiades' plan, the Ionians, and the battle are all real historical events. He adds that while Herodotus is difficult to read, children may enjoy reading more books about ancient Greece that they will find in libraries. A glossary of new terms concludes the work.

Analysis

Athens is Saved! combines the provision of information about the Battle of Marathon with a tense narrative that immerses the reader in the events. *To the Reader* orientates the reader before they have begun, guiding them on how to perceive what they are being presented with. The follow-up information after the story provides a readable yet unusually complex account of how the events of the campaign are known, the complexity of tradition, and the importance of making choices in the creation of a modern narrative. The timeline is not successful, but is unlikely to have been created by the author himself.

The Story So Far is not perfect but it does help to establish the context of the campaign. There are multiple references to Greece's great wealth, although Greece as not particularly wealthy in this period and Persia was far wealthier, as summarised in the ancient quip that the Persians had come to rob the Greeks "of our poverty" (Herodotus, 9.82). The information on Ancient Greece focuses on social information about Greek culture while that on the Persians is about empire and its relation to Greece, there is no equivalent information on Persian religion, language, occupations or cultural activities and in that sense the information is overly Eurocentric,

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doing a disservice to Persian culture. The Ionian Revolt is incorrectly described as a revolt of the Ionian Islands (rather than the Ionian Greek cities of Asia Minor). When it is mentioned that Athens sent help leading to Darius sending an army to punish them there is nothing about the Athenians making and breaking their pact with Persia. If this had come from an Athenian character this would have been a realistic selective account, but coming as it does in the 'real history' section it is ideologically loaded to Persia's detriment.

The choice of names used is interesting. 'Cimon' was not a common Greek name, but was the name of Miltiades' father and son, so the use of it for the protagonist extends the connection with the wider historical circumstances even if young readers may not be aware of that. Similarly, 'Paros' was not a human's name but rather the name of a Greek island – the island Miltiades attacked after Marathon, leading to his fatal injury and ruinous prosecution. A fictional "General Nicias" features, apparently named for the Nicias known from the Peloponnesian War. "Platea" is used rather than the more usual "Plataea" (e.g., p. 19) and the arguably more familiar Roman 'Hercules' rather than 'Heracles'. In the sketches of the main characters, Miltiades is shown with a Corinthian helmet pushed up onto his forehead. This is a visual clue that he is the serious military figure and the image appears to be modelled on the famous bust of Athenian general, Pericles (versions of which may be seen in the British Museum in London, the Alten Nationalgalerie in Berlin, and the Museo Barracco di Scultura Antica and Vatican Museum in Rome).

The decision to have the young protagonist participate in the battle means that the reader is encouraged to imagine their own participation in this climactic event. The opening establishes something more familiar and relatable, with sports training akin to that in school and rivalry between young men who are being watched by their elders. There is extensive use of the Herodotean tradition to underpin a narrative which gives a good overall sense of the battle. There is reference to the debates held about the response to invasion and to the army structure including ten generals (p. 19). The army is mustered from amongst the citizens. The challenge of facing Persian cavalry is explained, as is the basic sense of using massed groups of troops arranged in a broad line. There is a sense of Miltiades having a more forceful personality than Callimachus, which reflects the Herodotean tradition of him somewhat dominating the lead general. The words of Ross' Miltiades to Callimachus paraphrase the Herodotean Miltiades' speech to Callimachus before the other

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generals (p.25; Herodotus, 6.109). The exciting story of the Ionians' night visit is included, and this adds a sense of complexity to the ethnic make-up of the conflict as well as a character-revealing choice about trust. It is clear that the Greeks are outnumbered. The Plataeans' contribution is included as well as the disappointment of the Spartans' delay. The account of the battle includes the Persian's archers and the Greeks' attempt to run and avoid them (p. 33; Herodotus, 6.112). Pheidippides' run to Sparta features without being the focus of the story, and this is combined with the Plutarchan tradition of the run to Athens leading to the death of the protagonist. Overall the account of the battle gives a sense of the intense nature of hand-to-hand combat and the terrible danger involved. It is made clear that the Greek victory was both surprising and significant.

This ancient Greece is a tough world in which one may appeal to the gods for help but where the people are ultra-competitive and rarely kind. Physical excellence is highly prized and public scrutiny is pervasive. There are no female characters in the story and no references to any women or girls; one might well receive the impression that ancient Greece was an all-male community. Despite the pro-Greek bias of the introduction, the moral of the story does not focus on East versus West, and the Persians are not demonised so much as a faceless threat. The moral message of the story focuses far more on the growing cooperation between the two young men, Cimon and Paros. There is also the encouraging message that while Cimon is not magically cured of his speech impediment he achieves great things anyway, although that greatness is crowned ultimately by an act that causes his death. In its emphasis on cooperation with one's peers and the value of self-sacrifice, *Athens is Saved!* is more akin to the young adult graphic novel, *Marathon* (see elsewhere in this database) than the gentler children's novel *Mission to Marathon* (elsewhere in this database).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Ancient Slavery Athens Divination Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History

Adventure Adversity Child's view Coming of age Conflict Death

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Emotions Freedom Heroism Historical figures History Nation Parents (and children) Teenagers Violence War

Further Reading

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