HIST 312 | The Concept of Democracy: A diachronic perspective
Summer 2025, June 23-July 5, Athens, Greece

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Course Description

The course will take the NHS students to key locations in Attika and Athens, such as the Agora of Athens, the Pnyx, the Stavros Niarchos Cultural Foundation, and the Hellenic Parliament, where, through personal autopsy, they will experience these sites as places of public gathering and exchange of ideas. Students will connect, compare and contrast ancient and contemporary perceptions of Democracy in Europe and the United States.

Democracy is one of the most widely celebrated concepts of the modern world, despite drawing its origin from Antiquity. Modern states have endorsed almost unanimously the ideal of democracy and have modelled their respective polities accordingly. While representative democracy is the most common form of government in the contemporary world, it is direct democracy which was the first form to emerge in history. Located at the birthplace of democracy, in central Athens, this course aims to explore the genesis, transformations and challenges posed to democracy from antiquity to present times. Having as a starting point the Pnyx Hill, the place where the Athenians used to gather to talk on political issues and to make decisions on the future of their town, the course will take students on a conceptual journey across sites, which are significant for understanding the values, principles, challenges, and historical evolution of democracy both as an idea and as an institution.

Democratic deficit has been identified by the European Commission as one of the main problems that the EU has been facing in recent years. The term describes what many European citizens perceive as a lack of democratic accessibility, representation, and accountability in the EU. This is reflected in the reduced participation in European and national parliamentary elections, as well as a general feeling of disengagement experienced by E.U. citizens, as regards policy and politics at E.U. level. How can we address citizen engagement at a time of political transformation? What is the role of citizen fora, technology and participatory democracy?

Learning Course Approach

Through this course, participants will explore aspects of Democracy, inequality, diachronic values, and modern concerns. They will also visit areas of interest, such as the Parliament, and engage in discussions on military and economic matters, as well as on the politics of the past and present and, why not, the future.

Tracing the formation of Democracy during the times of classical antiquity, we will visit the Acropolis and adjacent museum, as the most recognizable symbols of the origin of democracy and the values it represented. Exploring the unique relationship between theatre and democracy, the importance of dialogue, and the necessity of justice, we will visit the Dionysus theatre at the slope of the Acropolis. In addition, a visit to the Panathenaic Stadium will enable students to experience a significant aspect of Greek culture, that is, the Olympic Games and other Panhellenic games, resonating across the known world at the time. This way, they will get a better understanding of the pivotal role said games played in the emergence of the ideal of democracy.

A discussion about the Battle of Marathon (490 BCE) will also act as a springboard to investigate the variety of polity regimes in the ancient world, including the differences between democratic and oligarchic or monarchic regimes. We will delve more in such differences during our visit to the site of Delphi, where we will discuss pre-democratic forms of governance, along with the ways democratic Athens sought legitimation. A visit at the Greek Parliament will allow us to reflect on the challenges presented to representative democracy today. The graffiti walk in central Athens will prompt us to raise questions around the appropriation of public space, as a quintessential aspect of democracy, and the relationship between democracy and collective memory. Last but not least, students will explore the contemporary uses of terms associated with democracy, such as the concept of "Agora," an everyday space of meeting, exchange and co-existence, by visiting the Niarchos Cultural Centre.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, the participants will have
- acquired a deeper knowledge of the roots and evolution of Democracy,
- experienced aspects of Greek everyday life and the role of politics,
- compared and contrasted ancient and modern politics,
- discussed the challenges of the future of Democracy for Greece, Europe and the U.S.

Assignments and grading

Course participants are expected to attend all seminars and on-site visits, as well as the two-day trip to Delphi.

- Class attendance and contribution to the discussions and any short group assignments or projects.
  Grading: 30% of the Final grade.
- Written reflection: At the end of the second week, students should deliver a 1500-word manuscript, enriched with their own photographs, drawings or other illustrations, focusing on the diachronic aspects of Democracy based on the course readings, live discussions, walks and personal experience. This manuscript should be delivered in a word doc format, 1.5 space, 12 Times New Roman fonts and with a selected bibliography at the end.
  Delivery date: Friday July 4, 20.00.
  Grading: 70% of the Final grade.

Class Schedule

Class Day	Day/Date/Place (if applicable)	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due
1	Mon June 23 Check-in	Students' arrival
2	Tue June 24 CYA	Orientation and neighborhood walk PM: *The concept of democracy: Ancient and Modern* Introduction to the Course. Students are introduced to the ideas and practices of Democracy and focus on the similarities and differences between now and then. Welcome dinner
3	Wed June 25 CYA & Pnyx	AM: *Seminar: The birth of Democracy* A historical journey to the origins of Democracy in Athens and beyond. AM: *Who wishes to speak in the assembly?* Students discuss the power of Greek oratory in relation to democracy. They will also explore the ways in which the power of democracy changed over time (e.g. different historical phases and assembly sizes)-and reflect on how civic participation at the assembly was determined by gender or socio-economic criteria. Finally, students will engage in an experiential discussion on the power of the assembly in matters of life and death.
4	Thu June 26 Hellenic Parliament & CYA	AM: *Visiting the Hellenic Parliament* The Hellenic Parliament at the Syntagma Square will be the focal point of this visit to the heart of the modern Greek state and of the Hellenic Republic. *PM: Democracy: Europe under threat* Key concepts/issues and the EU context.
5	Fri June 27 Trip to Delphi	*Democracy and Theocracy* Students will visit the magnificent sanctuaries of Athena and Apollo of the Olympic Pantheon, at the spectacular slopes of Mount Parnassus. The role of religion in decision-making will be explored.
6	Sat June 28 Return to Athens	Students visit the Archaeological Museum of Delphi. Propaganda, art, religion, offerings, politics, competition and public space will be the topics of the day.
7	Sun June 29	FREE DAY
	Mon June 30 Ancient Agora & Agora Museum	AM: *Protecting Democracy at the heart of Athens* Students will delve into the realities and challenges of the Athenian Democracy. How was it structured? What happened when an individual or a group challenged its power and authority? What kinds of public buildings and functions associated with the constitution of democracy have been archaeologically identified?
8	Tue July 1 Panathenaic stadium & Zappeion Gardens	AM: *Sports, spectacles and Democracy.* By visiting the Panathenaic stadium, a magnificent marble stadium dating to the Roman period (2nd C. CE), students will examine how sports came to become an integral part of societies, democratic or not.
9	Wed July 2 Trip to SNCF	*AM: Public space and Democracy* Students will visit the recently built Stavros Niarchos Cultural Foundation (SNCF), a modern "Agora," and discuss contemporary public space. This is a public space, where everyone has free access and can participate in a multitude of cultural, educational, athletic,

		environmental and recreational activities and events. It includes the Greek National Opera, the National Library of Greece, and the Stavros Niarchos Park, which is one of the largest green spaces in Athens, covering 21 hectares.
10	Thu July 3 Psyrri (central Athens)	*AM: Graffiti walk* A walk at Psyrri will follow to explore the neighborhood's street art. Psyrri has been associated with nightlife since the 19th century. Recent historical shifts have transformed this Athens area into more than just an entertainment hotspot; it has become a hub of creativity and alternative artistic expression, as the proliferation of graffiti in the area testifies.
11	Fri July 4 Acropolis of Athens & Acropolis Museum	PM: *Democracy and propaganda.* The Athenian Empire through its monuments. Students will take a tour around the slopes of the Acropolis of Athens and the Acropolis itself, in order to experience the visual propaganda through architecture and discuss the idea of the relationships between Classical Athens and the other City-States in Greece.
12	Sat July 5	Check out rooms

Total contact hours: 22

N.B.: The course schedule, in terms of subjects and readings, may be subject to change to benefit student learning and to keep up to date with current research.

Selected Course Bibliography

- Bernard C. (2002) *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: OUP Oxford
- Carey, C. (2017) *Democracy in Classical Athens*, Bloomsbury.
- Dunn, J. (ed.) 1992) *Democracy: the unfinished journey, 508 BC to AD 1993*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (available at CYa library)
- Hansen, (1991) *Athenian democracy in the age of Demosthenes: structure, principles and ideology,* Blackwell.
- Makres, A. and Scott, A. (2020) *Power and the People: The Enduring Legacy of Athenian Democracy,* Pegasus Books. (available at CYa library)
- Osborne, R. (2010) *Athens and Athenian Democracy*, Cambridge.

Course instructor

Katia Rassia is an ancient historian & Classical archaeologist working on the social and cultural history of Greece from the Classical to the Roman Imperial periods. She received her BA in Greek Archaeology & History of Art from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Afterwards, she moved to London, where she conducted graduate studies in Classical Art & Archaeology at the University of London and in Ancient History at King's College London. She has held postdoctoral fellowships at the University of Erfurt (Germany) and Genève. She is currently an Early Career Fellow at the Center for Hellenic Studies (Harvard University).

Guest lectures (CYA faculty).

Angeliki Dimitriadi holds a PhD from Democritus University of Thrace on transit migration from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. She has an MA in War studies from King's College London and a BSc in International Relations & History from the London School of Economics. She is a political scientist with an interest in irregular migration and asylum, as well as the interplay between migratory movement and policies of deterrence and protection. Her research focuses on migration management policies at external borders, migration governance in the EU and European foreign policy on migration.

Rosa Vasilaki holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of Bristol (UK) and a PhD in History from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (France). She has taught history and sociology on undergraduate and postgraduate level and conducted research in a number of universities in Greece, Israel and the UK. Rosa is the founder and co-coordinator of DISSENSUS-social research group which is composed by early-career and experienced social scientists. She is also the co-convener of the Politics of Liberation seminar series, a global bi-monthly seminar which hopes to make Athens a center for political debates and critical thinking in challenging times.