Natalia Kapatsoulia, Filippos Mandilaras

The Twelve Gods of Olympus

_Greece_ (2016)

**TAGS:** Aphrodite, Apollo, Ares, Artemis, Athena/Athene, Cyclops/Cyclopes, Demeter, Dionysus, Gaia/Gaea, Giants, Hades, Hephaestus, Hera, Heracles/Herakles, Herm, Hestia, Hundred-handers, Kronos/Cronus/Cronos, Nymphs, Ouranos, Poseidon, Rhea, Titans, Zeus

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### General information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title of the work</strong></th>
<th>The Twelve Gods of Olympus</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Country of the First Edition</strong></td>
<td>Greece</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Original Language</strong></td>
<td>Greek</td>
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<td><strong>First Edition Date</strong></td>
<td>2016</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Genre</strong></td>
<td>Humor, Instructional and educational work, Myths</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Target Audience</strong></td>
<td>Children (age 4+)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Author of the Entry</strong></td>
<td>Katerina Volioti, University of Roehampton, <a href="mailto:Katerina.Volioti@roehampton.ac.uk">Katerina.Volioti@roehampton.ac.uk</a></td>
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<td>Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, <a href="mailto:s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk">s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk</a> Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, <a href="mailto:elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com">elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com</a></td>
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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.

Official website (accessed: July 2, 2018).

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

Bio prepared by Katerina Volioti, University of Roehampton, Katerina.Volioti@roehampton.ac.uk

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.
More information:

In Greek:


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


In English:

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


In German:


Bio prepared by Katerina Volioti, University of Roehampton, Katerina.Volioti@roehampton.ac.uk

Additional information

Translation
The English version here was published in May 2016, together with versions in French, German, and Russian. A translation into Spanish appeared in March 2017 (see here, accessed: July 31, 2018), testifying to the book’s popularity.

Summary
The text and illustrations in the book offer a humorous overview of how the Olympian gods came to establish themselves. The book’s opening page presents snow-laden and surprisingly barren-from-trees Mount Olympus, with a bird, perhaps a blackbird but painted red-brown here, and a goat in hiking boots looking at the text, and directing readers’ attention to it. The text summarises the book, telling us where the gods lived and how they became conquerors of the world by combating beasts and monsters.

Analysis
The book appears to target foreign visitors to Greece, presumably tourists’ children, or Greek children who wish to practice their foreign language skills. Evidently, learning about The Twelve Gods also entails language learning. Indeed, the English is accurate and easy to follow and there are few difficult words, such as “dungeons” and “bowels” in the opening page. Of the book’s 24 pages, 7 pages (25 percent of the total) including the front and back cover, are available online for free in pdf format,* making the book even more accessible to a wide audience.

Hesiod’s Theogony may have inspired the depiction of Mount Olympus in the opening page. Mount Helicon in Boeotia, another famous Greek mountain, sets the scene in lines 1 to 4 of the Theogony: “From the Heliconian Muses let us begin to sing, who hold the great and holy mount of Helicon, and dance on soft feet about the deep-blue spring and the altar of the almighty son of Cronos.”** (Hes. Th. 1-4)

However, there is none of the warfare, fighting, and violence that characterises the Theogony. The author has done a superb job to adapt a story of aggression and negative sentiments, including a father’s (Uranus) hatred for his offspring, for children of a young age.
Following the opening page, Gaia makes her entrance, featured first as a genderless baby and then as a beautiful and happy mermaid-like young woman. The text, with key phrases such as “In the beginning there was nothing” and “all life was created”, reflects humanity’s search for origins. The deep blue chosen by the illustrator may recall the Mesopotamian Deluge.*** If so, the origins of The Twelve Gods are intimated as not exclusively Greek. A mention of “trees,” “plants,” “the sun,” and “the stars,” which the illustrator places on Gaia’s dress, may connote to modern environmental concerns and hence to additional things in this world that all humans have in common, now and in the past.

By contrast, in subsequent pages, we read about beings that “were not human like you and me,” namely, Titans, Cyclops, Giants, and the Hundred-handers. The illustrator ensures that there is nothing monstrous about these “first children,” who are depicted as wide-eyed and smiley babies that Uranus, like a good modern father, caries away to “the depths of the earth” by pushing a pram. Cronus’ overthrowing of his father, Uranus, moreover, is depicted as comical and not brutal. Cronus and Uranus are shown like generic ancient Greeks, wearing sandals and white chitons. Cronus seems to have hit Uranus on the head, and Uranus is suspended in mid-air with stars around his head indicating the head impact. Gaia and Rhea, both young and beautiful, observe the action with delight.

Then, we move on swiftly to Cronus’ swallowing of his children, and Cronus is shown with a large belly as if he were pregnant. A happy-faced Rhea hides Zeus in a cave giving Cronus a rock to swallow in Zeus’ place. Again, we have the presence of beautiful young females, this time in the form of nymphs caring for Zeus.

The rest of the book is about Zeus taking action as a strong, young, and decisive god. Zeus frees his brothers and sisters from his father’s stomach, and the male and female divine siblings emerge as young children. Hestia and Demeter are shown with happy faces, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon less so. Hera, in particular, is shown in tears and carrying a teddy bear, perhaps alluding to whinging children before bedtime. The illustrator’s task here appears to be to draw children’s attention to pictures that they can see themselves in, rather than to unfamiliar gods from the distant past.

Zeus frees the Cyclops and the Hundred-handers, who are depicted as grown-ups and not babies so that they fight the Titans on the following
pages. The combat between the gods and the Titans shows, rather, aged individuals, some of them being bald, with relatively unhappy faces. The presence of a woman holding up a green saucepan with a spout is not explained in the text. In all likelihood, she is the goddess Hestia who was shown carrying a saucepan in a previous page and is shown again with a saucepan towards the end of the book. The level of violence in the fighting scenes is very low. Once again, there is something utterly comical in the illustrations.

What follows is an introduction to the twelve gods, who are quite a few for any children to learn at once. Thus, first, we read that the gods divided the world into three tiers, the underworld, the seas, and the heavens, and we meet Hades (with a torch), Poseidon, and Zeus respectively. The gods appear to have been consensual in having Zeus as their ruler. The term “leader” used by the author here may point to modern-style leadership, teamwork, and consensus-building.

Finally, we see all twelve gods, who are labelled “beautiful” in the text. Indeed, all gods are shown with young, attractive, and healthy bodies, carrying both ancient and modern paraphernalia (ranging from a helmet to a lyre and from nail varnish to a steel saucepan) and creating a festive atmosphere for children to immerse themselves in. Ares, the god of war and hatred, for instance, is shown with a plastic fly swat, with which he can, in actual fact, inflict very little harm. Rather, the twelve gods are playful and funny, just like children are. The music coming out of Apollo’s lyre and Hermes’ twisting body may allude to Archaic performances of dance and signing, and contexts of performing and learning Hesiodic poetry. Such allusions, nonetheless, remain remote possibilities and only come to mind to those with a good knowledge of Classics. The book’s purpose seems to be to entertain its readers, and not to instil specific knowledge about Archaic Greece and literature.

Then the book takes a turn back to warfare between the gods and the Giants. The latter are shown as “teratomorphic” creatures, combining elements from serpents (perhaps crocodiles) and big cats (perhaps cheetahs) that may recall folklore stories beyond Greek mythology. The book closes with a mention of Dionysos and Herakles helping the gods against the Giants, and the restoration of peace at last. On the last page, we return to Olympus, where the gods lived peacefully, and we see a temple and statue on its top. The closing sentence, namely, that the ancient Greeks worshipped the twelve gods and built them statues and temples, is factual and informative. The reader returns to
reality, to objectivity and science, after a mythical journey about origins, fighting, and extraordinary beings. In reading this book, children learn about deeds of the gods and of other divine entities (Titans, Cyclops, nymphs). There are many names to learn and remember. The genealogy of Greek gods would suggest linear time. The modalities of viewing here are different from looking at Classical art. All illustrated figures resemble cartoon characters and, given their wide eyes, young children’s toys also. Thus, the book uses modern popular culture, at least as known in the western world, to promote knowledge about Greek mythology. Popular culture helps the author to reach out to an international audience. The Latin forms of Greek names, e.g., Hercules and not Herakles, makes the book accessible to a wider English-speaking audience. Hesiod’s writings, with their didactic purpose, transferred knowledge in two main ways. Firstly, the epic poem was performed and listeners learned in the same way that pupils pay attention to their teachers. Secondly, Hesiod allowed his audience to use excerpts of his works in new contexts. For our picture book, the blending of modern and ancient elements, and the international flair of its pages, facilitate a creative fragmentation and re-contextualisation of the book’s words and images by children, parents, educators, and others, shaping an ever-evolving understanding of the mythology of Greece and other lands.

* See epbooks.gr (accessed: July 31, 2018).

** See perseus.tufts.edu (accessed: July 31, 2018).


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena/ Athene Cyclops / Cyclopes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demeter Dionysus Gaia / Gaea Giants Hades Hephaestus Hera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heracles / Herakles Hermes Hestia Hundred-handers Kronos / Cronus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kronos / Cronus Nymphs Ouranos Poseidon Rhea Titans Zeus</td>
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<tr>
<th>Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture</th>
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<tr>
<td>Child, Children Coming of age Death Gaining Understanding Parents (and children)</td>
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**Further Reading**


**Addenda**

The book was first published in Greek in 2008 (see here, accessed: July 31, 2018), as part of a series of books entitled *My first mythology*. Other series by the same author are: *My first history; My first Bible; and Aristophanes’ Comedies* (see blog.public.gr, accessed: July 31, 2018).