Cath Senker

Ancient Greeks

United Kingdom (2015)

TAGS: Aphrodite Architecture Ares Athena Athens Comedy (Ancient) Dionysus / Dionysos Divination Graeco-Persian Wars Greek Art Greek History Greek Music Greek Theatre Hades Heracles Hercules Homer Minotaur Odysseus / Ulysses Olympic Games Oracles Poseidon Roman Empire Theatre Theseus Tragedy (Ancient) Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Twelve Labours of Heracles Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Ancient Greeks
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2015
First Edition Details	Cath Senker, *Ancient Greeks*, Ladybird Histories. London: Ladybird Books Ltd. (part of Penguin Books), 2015, 64 pp.
ISBN	9780723294436
Genre	Illustrated works, Instructional and educational works
Target Audience	Children (7+)
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



Courtesy of Cath Senker, portrait by photographer Fran Tegg.

Cath Senker (Author)

Cath Senker is a writer and editor based near Brighton in the UK. She has written around 150 children's books, mostly focused on history, religion, and global and social issues. Senker carries out creative writing workshops for undergraduates and frequent primary school visits.

Cath Senker's publications include titles in the *Talking About my Faith* series: *I am Buddhist*; *I am Christian*; *I am Hindu*; *I am Muslim*; *I am Sikh*; *I am Jewish* (Franklin Watts, 2005); contributions to the *My Family Celebrates* series: *Id ul-Fitr*; *Diwali*; *Hanukkah*; *Christmas*; *Easter, Vaisakhi* (Franklin Watts, 2009–10); *Uncovering History*: *The Ancient Greeks* (Smart Apple Media, 2003); *Rosalind Franklin* (new edition, Wayland, 2014); *Ancient Egypt in 30 Seconds* (Ivy Kids, 2015), and *Ancient Greece in 30 Seconds* (forthcoming, Ivy Kids, 2018).

Sources:

Official website (accessed: June 24, 2018).

Twitter profile (accessed: June 28, 2018).

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Additional information

Summary

Ancient Greeks is an educational, introduction to ancient Greek culture aimed at children aged 7+. This title is one of several titles in the *Ladybird Histories* series, including *Kings and Queens*, *Tudor and Stuarts*, *Ancient Egyptians*, *The Vikings*, *Romans*, and *Anglo-Saxons*. Each is written in a similarly serious tone. Through the combination of titles, the series presents the Ancient Greeks as an important non-British historical society. *Ancient Greeks* focuses on the Classical period, with the exception of two sections at the beginning on pre-Classical history and a section each at the end for Alexander the Great and the coming of the Romans.

Section Headings:

- *Who Were the Ancient Greeks?*
- *Greek Society*
- *New Lands , New Trade*
- *One Man, One Vote*
- *Spartan Life*
- *Farming the Land*
- *The Greeks at Home*
- *Food and Feasts*
- *Greek Fashion*
- *Children in Ancient Greece*
- *School and Learning*
- *Festivals*
- *Sport and the Olympic Games*
- *Going to the Theatre*
- *Myths and Poetry*
- *Writing and Messages*
- *Gods and Goddesses*
- *Temples and Public Buildings*
- *Arts and Crafts*
- *Doctors and Disease*
- *Soldiers in Battle*
- *The Greeks at War*
- *Alexander the Great*
- *The End of Empire*
- *What the Ancient Greeks did for Us*
- *Who's Who*

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Analysis

The section, *New Lands* explores colonisation, and includes the line: *They set up cities that became centres of the Greek language, lifestyle and religion* – which offers a positive interpretation of Greek activities emphasising peaceful cultural pursuits.

One Man, One Vote describes the classical Athenian political system, and includes the Parthenon in its own sub-section, including reference to the gold and ivory statue of Athena. This was an interesting choice for inclusion in this section as it discusses Greek religion within the context of politics without establishing an explicit link between the two. This perhaps reflects the author's interest in world religions; it also provides a clear link to the modern age by noting that the Parthenon can be still be visited.

The Greeks at Home situates religion as part of everyday life. There is reference to *the altar where the family prayed was in the courtyard, too*; the accompanying illustration depicts people standing or kneeling before a small shrine with a statue on it, offering it what appear to be vegetables. This section offers a valuable reminder of the importance of domestic life for people living in antiquity, steering away from the more familiar images related to public life and grand architecture. The offering of vegetables was perhaps intended to reinforce the impression of a relatively humble setting, in contrast to large-scale public sacrifices.

Festivals describes the Panathenaic Festival, referring to it a little misleadingly as taking place "every four years", when this festival is known to have been annual, with a four-yearly Great Panathenaic Festival. The festival is described as an event with music, dancing, poetry, sports. The festival of Dionysus is described as a spring festival with sacrifices, feasting, wine, and plays. Music is mentioned as an important part of festivals, accompanying *story-telling and poetry readings*. The purpose of festivals is described thus:

> "The Greeks had sports and harvest festivals, and religious festivals to honour the gods. They also celebrated weddings and birthdays. Religious festivals were the biggest events. The Greeks believed that if they held festivals to praise the gods, the gods would grant their wishes."

This framing of Greek religion aims at normalising it for the modern

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reader; the events sound fun and the description focuses on manifestations of religion which are similar to those carried out in the modern world, and with which children are likely to be familiar. This is especially clear in the inclusion of "birthdays" – not a very prominent element of ancient Greek celebrations, but very significant in the lives of modern children.

Sport and the Olympic Games have their own section. The Olympics is described as *held to praise the god Zeus*, offering a broader context to the pursuit of sporting excellence.

Going to the Theatre describes plays and play-writing competitions as a *vital part of religious festivals*. Comedies, satyr-plays, tragedies are all mentioned. The dramatisation of myths is not explicitly referred to, perhaps because myth will be addressed separately in the following section.

Myths and Poetry balances text on the importance of storytelling in ancient culture with a page of examples, summarising four myths. Homer and Sappho are both introduced; the former is described as having written a long poem about the war with Troy, while the latter is *one of the greatest poets*, although little survives.

A distinct box introduces the story of the Trojan horse, explained as part of the stories that people told to after Homer to extend the story of Troy.

The page introducing other myths features an image with a caption for each:

- *Odysseus killed a cyclops, a giant monster with just one eye.*
- *Hercules was so strong that he killed a lion with his bare hands.*
- *Half man and half bull, the Minotaur lived in the labyrinth.*
- *The brave hero Theseus managed to kill the Minotaur with his sword.*

All of the myths chosen express a very active form of heroism, focused on defeating an enemy.

Gods and Goddesses revisits ancient Greek religion. There are said to have been a "vast number" of deities. Zeus, Aphrodite, Ares, Poseidon, Hades are summarised briefly and depicted in illustrations (Zeus is white haired; Hades brown-haired; the other three blonde).

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Interaction with deities is outlined with an introduction to prayer, sacrifice, and divination. "Advice from the oracle" features a picture of a priest hiding in a tunnel under an altar pretending to speak as a god. Although this has archaeological support (see Mee and Spawforth, bibliog.), some readers may feel that this depiction of divination places undue emphasis on the idea of conscious deception.

Temples and Public Buildings continues the discussion of religion, contrasting the Greeks' simple homes with their "impressive temples."

Arts and Crafts refers to the fashioning of statues of gods, although not to depictions of myth (vases are said to have depicted "daily life").

Doctors and Disease, establishes a contrast between religious and scientific ideas of disease, noting that the earliest Greeks regard disease as "a terrible punishment from the gods", while prayer and priest-prescribed herbs gave way to doctors using science.

Towards the end of the work, a section opens up the question of *What the Ancient Greeks Did For Us*. This includes material on the influence of Greece on language, storytelling, art and architecture, the Olympic Games, science, medicine, and democracy.

A *Who's Who* features: Archimedes, Aristarchus, Aristotle, Alexander the Great, Draco, Herophilus, Hippocrates, Homer, Peisistratus, Philip II, Pythagoras, and Sappho. The choices reflect *What the Ancient Greeks Did For Us*' emphasis on the importance of the Greek scientific method.

Places to Visit recommends a selection of British museums and a number of sites in Greece and the wider Mediterranean.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Architecture Ares Athena Athens Comedy (Ancient) Dionysus / Dionysos Divination Graeco-Persian Wars Greek Art Greek History Greek Music Greek Theatre Hades Heracles Hercules Homer Minotaur Odysseus / Ulysses Olympic Games Oracles Poseidon Roman Empire Theatre Theseus Tragedy (Ancient) Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Twelve Labours of Heracles Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant	Heritage Historical figures History Knowledge Learning Relationships Religious beliefs Society

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Further Reading

Mee, Christopher B., Spawforth, Antony, *Greece: An Oxford Archaeological Guide* (Oxford Archaeological Guides), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Addenda

Illustrators:

Main: Emmanuel Cerisier.

Cartoons: Clive Goodyer.

Maps: Martin Sanders.

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