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Stuart Hill , Sandra Lawrence

The Atlas of Heroes. A World of Heroes from Myth and Legend

United Kingdom (2018)

TAGS: Achilles Aeneas Aeneid Aesop Agamemnon Argo Argonauts Ariadne Athena Athens Atlas Bellerophon Bible Cassandra Cleopatra VII Crete Egypt Gilgamesh Golden Fleece Hector Hecuba Helen Heracles Hercules Homer Iliad Jason Labyrinth Mark Antony Medea Menelaus Minos Minotaur Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Pegasus Penelope Priam Roman History Theseus Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Twelve Labours of Heracles Virgil



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



General information	
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Target Audience	Crossover (Children 7+; Teens)
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Creators



Stuart Hill (Illustrator)

Stuart Hill is a freelance illustrator based in Lincolnshire, UK. He specialises in maps and often works in a hand-drawn style. He has published work with houses including Penguin, Bonnier Quarto and Templar Publishing. Hill was the illustrator for the 2017 *Atlas of Monsters* (Big Picture Press, 2017).

Source:

Official website (accessed: June 15, 2020)

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



Sandra Lawrence (Author)

Sandra Lawrence is a British journalist and writer. She began as a singer, moved into featured journalism and now combines journalism with writing books, particularly non-fiction children's books. Sandra Lawrence developed the *Grisly History* series (Weldon Owen Books 2016; published by Little Bee Books as *Hideous History* in the USA). She has written *Festivals and Celebrations* and *Myths and Legends* for 360 Degrees (360 Degrees, 2017). She published *Atlas of Monsters* (Big Picture Press, 2017) and 2018 will see the publication of the *Anthology of Amazing Women: Trailblazers Who Dared to Be Different* (forthcoming 2018).

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Source:

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Additional information

Summary

This atlas is large in scale (at 28x34 cm) and sumptuously illustrated with hand-drawn maps decorated with numerous heroes associated with each location. The figures on the maps are numbered, and these correspond to a companion page which features summaries of each hero. The maps are double-framed within an introductory story communicated via text and illustration; a young girl discovers the atlas as part of a stash of items in an attic, and the atlas features notes added by her as she uncovers more about the person whose items were discovered. Use of Greek names in the introductory texts indicate that at least one of the framing stories takes place in Greece, and this is later confirmed. Many, many heroes and their stories feature in the atlas – mythical and historical figures from all over the world.

The *Atlas* opens with a diary entry by "Alicea", introducing her intention to delve into a box of mementos belonging to her adventurous Great Great Aunt Helena. Alicea must give a school presentation but has no ideas and is considering running away. Helena's box distracts her. The first item is the opening journal entry of nineteen-year old Helena as she begins her travels. She is running away from home having determined not to marry the young man that she is intended for. Her grandmother (her "Yiayia") has told her stories of the heroes of Greece, but Yiayia poured scorn on the idea of Helena being a hero, telling her that only men could be heroic. Now Helena intends to travel and have adventures; she wants to hear about heroes wherever she goes and hopes that at least some of them will be women (despite what her grandmother said). An old woman at the dock hands Helena a note in a mysterious script. Will she ever interpret it?

The Contents page then reveals a list of the places that Helena has visited - journal sections – and her plan to include details of the heroes that she hears about on the way:

- Greece (p. 12).
- The Middle East (p. 14).
- Africa (p. 18).
- South and Southeast Asia (p. 22).
- China and Korea (p. 26).
- Japan (p. 30).

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- The Pacific (p. 32).
- Australia and New Zealand (p. 34).
- South America (p. 38).
- North America (p. 40).
- Northern Europe (p. 44).
- Great Britain and Ireland (p. 48).
- Southern Europe (p. 50).
- Russia and Central Asia (p. 54).

The heroes included in the Greece (pp.12–13) section are: Odysseus (pictured with the Sirens flying about his boat), Penelope, Heracles, Hippolyta, Bellerophon, Theseus, Jason, Heroes of the Trojan War. Odysseus is described as battling many challenges to make it home from the Trojan War. Homer's *Odyssey* is name-checked. Penelope features in relation to her tapestry trick, keeping the suitors at bay until Odysseus returned. Heracles' story is told featuring his strangling of serpents in his infancy, killing of his family in a fit of madness, and 12 labours against monsters to earn his freedom. He is depicted heroically nude wrestling the Nemean lion. Hippolyta is described as queen of "a fierce race of women"; there is reference to her being kidnapped by Theseus and to her giving Heracles her belt before Hera turns the incident into "another battle." Bellerophon defeats the Chimera with help from Athene who lent him Pegasus. The myth of Theseus and the Minotaur is told including Minos' demand of tribute, a summary description of the Minotaur, Theseus volunteering to kill it, and Ariadne giving him the ball of string so that he can find his way out of the maze. Jason is described setting off with the Argonauts and being aided by "the enchantress Medea".. The *Heroes of the Trojan War* section (p. 13) explains the basic premise of the Trojan War and mentions Homer's *Iliad*. The heroes are then listed in a sub-section: Greek Heroes: Agamemnon, Menelaus, Achilles, Patroclus, Ajax, Diomedes, Odysseus, Nestor; Trojan Heroes: Priam, Paris, Hector, Aeneas, Hecuba, Cassandra. Alicea uses her phone to look up some of the things Helena mentions, such as "epic poem."

Zenobia of Palmyra's battle with Rome features in *The Middle East* (pp.14–17) Other figures include Gilgamesh, the Queen of Sheba, and characters from Arabian Nights (which also has its own sub-section): Scheherazade, Ahmed, and Sinbad the Sailor. King Solomon of Israel is the only Jewish hero featured; he is mentioned in passing as someone who matched the Queen of Sheba in intelligence. Zenobia – a historical ruler – is referred to in relation to her opposition to being "under the thumb of the Roman Empire", although she is also

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described as "The legendary Zenobia…", and Alicea adds a note to say that Zenobia "seems to be a historical figure who became a legend… maybe all legends start with something real."

Cleopatra (pictured on Libya) features in the *Africa* section described as "a great queen who ruled Egypt 51–30 BC. Exaggerated stories about her life started while she was still alive!" Cleopatra also features in an inset box and a note from Alicea. The inset box is captioned "Truth vs Legend" and notes that, "As with so many 'real' heroes, we can never know the true story of Cleopatra VII"; some stories are true, others were "exaggerated or even invented to suit the readers of the day". Alicea's note adds that a Hollywood film about Cleopatra that Alicea saw went on for hours; Cleopatra fell in love with a Roman general called Mark Antony but they both died. The Africa section features a combination of mythical and historical figures. The mythical ones include the trickster tortoise (see elsewhere in database) popular in West African storytelling, especially amongst the Yoruba, Ibo and Edo peoples.

Northern Europe includes one Greco-Roman myth, that of Brabo, a Roman soldier who refused to pay a giant a toll to enter Antwerp before fighting and defeating the giant. His Roman-ness is expressed in illustration through his short red tunic, cloak, and muscular body armour. Classical figures in *Southern Europe* are limited to Androcles and Aeneas. Aeneas is depicted on a ship south of Sicily. His text relates that he was forced to wander after the Trojan War and that his wanderings are related in the *Aeneid*; "His descendants were said to be the founders of Rome". Androcles is depicted in central Italy picking the fabled thorn from a lion's paw.

Great Britain and Ireland features the historical figure, Boudicca: "Queen of the Iceni tribe, who rose up against the oppressive Roman invaders in around AD 60… Her name remains a legend to this day." She is depicted in action wielding a spear and shield aboard a two-horse chariot. Arthur and Merlin also feature in this section, but not with reference to Roman Britain. Arthur "is a legendary king" who early writers claimed to be real while others suggest he had "more legendary origins."

The maps are followed by a return to the format used in the introduction, with several entries from Helena's journal then a note from Alicea. There is a journal entry for 1934, Helena has returned home to her family.

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1937: Helena has been working on some illustrations for a guidebook of Athens.

1939: War has broken out. The atmosphere in Athens is anxious. Helena and the young man who wished to marry her visit the temple of Poseidon at Sounion to escape; he proposes, she accepts.

June 1941: The Nazis have occupied Athens. There is little food and any opposition to the Nazis is met with death.

Aug 1941: Helena and her husband set up a wireless station as part of the resistance. A note is delivered to them in a strange script.

A note from a family friend to Helena's brother reveals that Helena and her husband have been discovered by the enemy; it is implied but not stated that they have been killed. The friend is "devastated", Alicea feels as "shocked" as she imagines her Great Great Uncle Markos did when he first received the note.

Alicea's journal entry: She will now give her presentation on the topic of Great Great Aunt Helena. Helena and her husband, George, were as brave as any of the heroes from myths and Alicea will be brave and tell Helena and George's story.

Analysis

The scale and scope of this book is truly impressive. It contains the stories of approximately 200 heroes from all over the world, from many different cultural traditions. The large attractive maps and clear structure make it easy to pore over and explore. The stories are varied; they come from a mixture of time periods and combine mythical and historical traditions. Colonised continents include a mixture of indigenous and settler-culture stories. As an introduction to mythology, geography, and the story-telling traditions of the world, this book offers young people a wealth of accessible material to engage with. The illustrations are fun and attractive; they are rendered in the same cartoon style throughout the work, but costume details and other cultural markers change throughout to help indicate regional specificity. In the Greek section (pp. 12–13), crested helmets, short kilts, two images of the Trojan Horse filled with soldiers, and a Greek key around the map provide visual markers of "Greekness". The bold colours, lively illustrations, and varied lay-out make the Atlas visually attractive and interesting in a manner that is likely to be

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engaging for young readers.

The world-wide scope of the book is one of its satisfying features of this work; this aspect demonstrates that story-telling is an important part of all cultures, and shows inclusive respect for traditions which are typically less well-known in Northern Europe. Nonetheless, Greece is privileged within this world of myth. It is presented as the home of Helena and her family, and perhaps of Alicea. Greek myths are the only ones that we know Alicea has been told – learned from her grandmother. And Greece gets its own section, separate from the Southern Europe section which treats the rest of Southern Europe together. Greece and Japan are the only countries to receive a section of their own. The hero Atlas features on the cover of the book, holding up the title as if it was the world; the connection between the word "atlas" and the mythical figure "Atlas" goes unexplained however, leaving this connection as something that an adult may or may not be able to explain to the young reader. Atlas' appearance on the cover nonetheless places ancient Greece centre stage from the outset; "Ancient Greece" is identifiable in him through his tunic and crested helm. Through these various features, young readers indirectly receive the message that Greek mythology is a particularly important part of mythology. While several figures connected with ancient Rome feature in the atlas, Roman mythology is not prominent. Aeneas and the lesser-known Brabo are the only solid Roman mythological figures to appear (with *The Aeneid*, but not Virgil, mentioned); Androcles is from an Aesop's Fable (although he is presented as a historical character here, with his depiction wearing only a pair of trousers and sandals indicating his low social status), while the others connected with Rome are historical Romans or enemies of Rome. Perhaps still more surprising is the absence of any Biblical heroes. The map of the Middle East carefully demarcates Gaza, Israel, and the West Bank, but the only reference to the Biblical tradition is that King Solomon of Israel was a match in intelligence for the Queen of Sheba. While it is good to see other Near Eastern traditions included, the exclusion of Jewish heroes seems something of a disservice to a tradition that has shaped and continues to shape many cultures around the world and to young readers who might expect a more even-handed treatment of world mythology.

Greek mythology helps the Helena character to reflect on her personal crisis. The male heroes' actions are "mighty", but only Hippolyta is a heroine; Penelope "was brave but stayed at home. I couldn't." This reflection prompts Helena to realise that she would have left home

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regardless of George's proposal, and that really he is rather "sweet". This introduces the idea of different sorts of heroism, while simultaneously expressing a preference for heroism of the active variety which takes place in the public sphere; at the same time it prepares the reader for Helena's return home after her odyssey and her reunion with patient, Penelope-like George.

The Trojan War takes a prominent role in this representation of Greek mythology and Homer is mentioned on more than one occasion offering young people a sense of where some mythic traditions come from and where they could find out more. Athena and Hera are the only Greek deities mentioned, the former as Bellerophon's helper, the latter as causing trouble for Heracles. Although Colchis is named, Jason is depicted in Caria, presumably because Colchis does not feature on the map of Greece.

The approach to story-telling itself in the Atlas is curious. The terms "legends" and "myths" are used interchangeably to mean "story", while there is an apparent preference for the term "legend". The basis on which historical rather than mythical figures are included is not entirely clear; so, for example, it is not clear why Cleopatra VII of Egypt is included but figures from Egyptian mythology such as Isis are not, while Wenamun, a literary creation of Middle Kingdom Egypt, is treated in a manner that makes it unclear if he is historical or mythic. A historicising approach is taken to mythology as a whole, while actual historical figures are sometimes discussed in terms that cast doubt on their historical reality. So, the historical Queen Zenobia of Palmyra is described as "The legendary Zenobia...", Zenobia "seems to be a historical figure who became a legend... maybe all legends start with something real." While we can "never know" about Cleopatra's life. While it is constructive to introduce young readers to the concept that historical traditions are cultural creations that are not all equally literally true, it is an overstatement to assert that no one can know about the life of a famous ancient queen and it is misleading to suggest that Zenobia "seems to be a historical figure" when it is well-evidenced that she certainly was. This presentation of myth and history may well give the impression that mythology's value lies in preserving hidden history of some sort while simultaneously casting doubt on historians' ability to know anything about historical figures; neither of these positions is fair and both may give young readers a false sense of the field. There is some more positive treatment of myth in the tentative introductions to comparative mythology via Alicea's notes: there are many flood stories ("The story of Gilgamesh reminds

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me of 'Noah's Ark' in the Bible and the Greek Myth (sic) of the god Zeus flooding Phthia. Similar legends seem to appear in lots of different places"; many heroes are "remembered for defeating monsters", and many cultures have trickster animals. It is helpful for the book to prompt readers to note these trends and similarities, although there is no suggestion of what they should do with these observations or how they might be made meaningful.

The framing of the maps, on the other hand, gives an innovative and effective means for young readers to consider the relevance of mythology to their own lives. At a fundamental level, Alicea and Helena provide examples of young people who enjoy mythology and gain great intellectual stimulation and fun from learning about heroes and the cultures and places from which they come. In that sense they model and normalise young people's engagement with mythology and cultural studies and in doing so encourage young people themselves to feel comfortable taking an interest. More specifically, Helena's frame presents defying expectations to find yourself as a kind of heroism, and then fighting Nazis as an active yet modern heroism. Heroism is not only something from long ago, in its active form it is something that still exists in the modern world and heroes may be found within our own family traditions if we care to look; similarly the moral courage of standing up to something is also explored as a form of heroism and something that is similarly still current. Alicea, arguably a more relatable figure than Helena, also models a form of heroism by embarking on this intellectual journey and by learning from the heroes to be more confident she demonstrates how mythology can inspire personal growth and a heroism of little things.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Aeneas Aeneid Aesop Agamemnon Argo Argonauts Ariadne Athena Athens Atlas Bellerophon Bible Cassandra Cleopatra VII Crete Egypt Gilgamesh Golden Fleece Hector Hecuba Helen Heracles Hercules Homer Iliad Jason Labyrinth Mark Antony Medea Menelaus Minos Minotaur Odysseus / Ulysses Odyssey Pegasus Penelope Priam Roman History Theseus Trojan Horse Trojan War Troy Twelve Labours of Heracles Virgil
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth	Adolescence Adventure Adversity Child, children Conflict Emotions Environment Expectations Fairy tale references Family Gaining understanding Gender Heritage Heroism Historical figures History Journeys Judaism Knowledge Learning Maturity Memory Nation Past

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Culture

Political changes Socialisation Travel War

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