Marta Pszczolińska, "Entry on: Zodiac. The Ancient Menagerie [Zodiak. Starożytny zwierzyniec] by Krystyna Kreyser", peer-reviewed by Katarzyna Marciniak and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2026). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1575. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Krystyna Kreyser

Zodiac. The Ancient Menagerie [Zodiak. Starożytny zwierzyniec]

Poland (1987)

TAGS: Amalthea Argonauts Artemis Athamas Castor Cronus / Kronos Dioscuri Europa Ganymede Hebe Helle Hephaestus Hera Heracles Hydra Ino Iolaus Jason Leda Nephele Orion Pan Phrixus Pollux Polydeuces Rhea Troy Zeus Zodiac





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General information	
Title of the work	Zodiac. The Ancient Menagerie [Zodiak. Starożytny zwierzyniec]
Country of the First Edition	Poland
Country/countries of popularity	Poland
Original Language	Polish
First Edition Date	1987
First Edition Details	Krystyna Kreyser, "Zodiak. Starożytny zwierzyniec", *Płomyk* 1–23 (1987).
ISBN	ISSN: 0137-8503
Genre	Anthology of myths*, Article in a periodical*
Target Audience	Children (12–16 years)
Author of the Entry	Marta Pszczolińska, University of Warsaw, m.pszczolinska@al.uw.edu.pl
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Creators



Photograph courtesy of Piotr Kreyser, the Author's Son.

Krystyna Kreyser , 1924 - 2009
(Author)

Classical philologist (PhD), president of the Section of Popularization of the Knowledge about Antiquity, Polish Philological Association (PTF). Initiator of high school Olympics rewarding knowledge of Antiquity, under the patronage of the PTF; member of the Polish Veterinary Society; Latin teacher; author and co-author of many books and of over 150 articles about the influence of Antiquity on European culture and on teaching Latin. Awarded the Rector's 1st prize for didactic achievements at the Warsaw University of Life Sciences (SGGW). Main works: *Śladami mitów starożytnej Grecji i Rzymu* [Following the Myths of Ancient Greece and Rome], 1992; *Cztery pory roku w mitach Greków i Rzymian* [Four Seasons in the Myths of the Greeks and Romans], 1993; *Zwierzęta gospodarskie w traktatach agrarnych pisarzy rzymskich I wieku cesarstwa* [Farm Animals in Agrarian Treatises of Roman Writers of the 1st Century of the Empire], 1996; *Tabella. Łacina bez trudu* [Tabella. Latin Without Effort], 2006. Co-author with Halina Cieszkowska of: *Gaudium in litteris, czyli radość z odczytywania napisów. Przechadzki po Warszawie* [Gaudium in litteris, or the Joy of Reading Inscriptions. Walks through Warsaw], 1993; *Wizytówki Warszawy* [Vignettes of Warsaw], 2000.

Source:

Bio based on the material kindly provided by the Author's Son.

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Additional information

Summary

Zodiak. Starożytny zwierzyniec is a cycle of twelve narrative texts, published once a month, which describe ancient roots of the zodiac and present the myths associated with particular signs. The cycle was correlated with seasons so that the readers could become familiar with the mythical tale corresponding to the sign of the current month. The texts were released as follows:

1. "Zodiak. Starożytny zwierzyniec" and
2. "Koziorożec" [Capricorn] – *Płomyk* 1 (1987), 19;
3. "Wodnik" [Aquarius] – *Płomyk* 3 (1987), 19;
4. "Ryby" [Pisces] – *Płomyk* 5 (1987), 19;
5. "Baran" [Aries] – *Płomyk* 7 (1987), 20;
6. "Byk" [Taurus] – *Płomyk* 9 (1987), 18;
7. "Bliźnięta" [Gemini] – *Płomyk* 11 (1987), 19;
8. "Rak" [Cancer] – *Płomyk* 13 (1987), 19;
9. "Lew" [Leo] – *Płomyk* 15 (1987), 18;
10. "Panna" [Virgo] – *Płomyk* 17 (1987), 18;
11. "Waga´[Libra] – *Płomyk* 19 (1987) 18;
12. "Skorpion" [Scorpio] – *Płomyk* 21 (1987), 20;
13. "Strzelec" [Sagittarius] – *Płomyk* 23 (1987), 23.

Analysis

In 1987, Krystyna Kreyser, already known to readers of *Płomyk* [The Little Flame] for her texts on ancient themes,* decided to write a highly informative column on star related myths. In the preface, she explained that, rather than taking an astronomical approach, she wanted to introduce readers to the myths that ancient people imagined when looking up at the stars. Kreyser introduces readers to the fact that ancient names of constellations are still in use, and evokes the Homeric description of Achilles' shield which features several star scenes imagined on its edge.

The myths are not recounted in a didactic style, but presented in a lively narrative, as though an aunt were telling stories to children. The language and vocabulary are not contemporary everyday speech, some words are outdated and rarely used in the 1980s, others are deliberate archaisms, creating an atmosphere of a mythical tale set in the distant past. At the same time, amusing, light illustrations by Jerzy Flisak accompany the text, building an atmosphere of fun while

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familiarising the reader with the star myths.

The cycle begins with “Capricorn”, featuring the story of baby Zeus being endangered by his own father, and his infancy nurse, the goat Amalthea, who was posthumously celebrated by having her image placed among the stars. The second instalment, “Aquarius”, is much more elaborate. The author offers two detailed versions of the myth of Ganymede, enriched by the quotation from the *Iliad* in Ignacy Wieniewski’s (1896–1986) rhythmical translation. The author adapts for the intended audience the reason for Ganymede’s abduction to become cupbearer to the gods of Olympus, following Homer’s description, pointing out the boy’s beautiful appearance (cf. *Il*. 20.232–235), and glossing over later sources that mention the homosexual relationship between Zeus and his young favourite. Consequently, by the end of the story, Hera does not consider Ganymede to be her rival for Zeus’ attention, but rather for the divine duties of her daughter Hebe, resulting in Zeus placing Ganymede in the sky as the constellation Aquarius. In the third instalment on Pisces, the author is unable to include a myth, as there was no mythological explanation of their origin. Instead, she tells the tale of Polycrates of Samos and his ring, as recounted by Herodotus. For Aries, the mythical ram as an animal helper, the author returns to the fairy-tale convention, outlining the opposition between the child protagonists, Phrixus and Helle, and the evil queen Ino, who is plotting to get rid of her stepchildren.

An interesting modification was made to the myth of Taurus, which in the sky reflects the bull that abducted Europa. Two paragraphs describe the serene atmosphere of a flourishing meadow where Europa and her friends were spending time, and her encounter with the bull. The final paragraph informs the reader that Europa arrived on the bull’s back in Crete, where she married king Asterios, and that the bull was placed in the sky. Zeus is notably absent from this interpretation of the myth, along with his deception to seduce Europa in the form of a bull, which resulted in the birth of their children, the future royals of Crete, Minos and Rhadamanthys (according to Homer), and Sarpedon (according to Apollodorus). Another shift from the main version of the myth is placing Phoenicia on the shores of today’s Libya, and not in Lebanon. The omission of the abduction of a girl and inter-species extramarital love affair from this adaptation may have been due to editorial concerns about morality, leaving Europa and the bull at the core of the story, and ending it in a way reflecting the fairy-tale idea that the destiny of a female protagonist is marrying

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a prince and living happily ever after.

"Gemini" describes several mythical plots where the Dioscuri were involved. They are presented as the natural sons of Zeus and Leda and the brothers of Helen, with no mention of their sister Clytemnestra, the swan, the egg, or the other extraordinary circumstances of their conception. These were probably considered similarly inappropriate for children as the relationship between a bull and a human. The author describes the skills and training of Castor and Pollux, mentions their participation in the Argonaut expedition, and focuses on their fraternal love, which lasts beyond death.

The mythical narrative returns in the "Cancer" story. Kreyser vividly depicts Heracles fighting the Hydra of Lerna and the crab sent by Hera to stop him. However, when it comes to the Leo constellation, the author does not choose to retell the most popular myth associated with Leo: Heracles' fight with the Nemean lion, as if Heracles' plot has already been exhausted. Instead, she retells the episode of the Doliones which took place during the Argonaut expedition, a story largely unknown to children. The accidental death of the king of the Doliones, Cyzicus, in a tragic battle between friendly soldiers who, under the cover of the night, thought they were fighting an enemy, was in fact the revenge of the goddess Rhea for the death of her sacred lion. After the Argonauts made sacrifices to Rhea, they were able to resume their voyage, and the goddess placed the image of her lion among the stars.

From instalment nine onwards, the column becomes much shorter. A single paragraph explains that Virgo personifies justice, i.e., Dike / Astrea, and mentions the myth of the Golden Age as associated with her. Similarly, the symbolism of Libra is described in just one sentence, with two added quotations: one from Virgil, and one from Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855), the Polish national bard. The "Scorpio" instalment is shorter than the initial instalments, but it adequately summarises the mythical tale of Orion and Artemis. Orion is presented as astounded by the goddess' beauty and agility, and in consequence, passionate and openly expressing his feelings. It is said that his downfall was caused by his importunity, which angered Artemis so much that she sent a scorpion to punish her impudent suitor. In this context, Scorpio serves as a warning that forcing your unsolicited feelings on someone may end badly. The final instalment follows Eratosthenes' tradition identifying the Archer with the stellar image of Krotos, the son of Pan and Eupheme, who was placed among

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	the stars at the request of the Muses. Kreyser focuses on Pan's character and explains the origin of the term 'panic' to the young reader.
	* All these articles dealt with the themes of everyday life in ancient times, especially issues close to children's hearts, such as school, games or animals, e.g., "Na czym pisano starożytne księgi?", *Płomyk* 9 (1974), "Wierny jak pies", *Płomyk* 9 (1976), "W starożytnej szkole", *Płomyk* 15–16 (1976), "Skąd się wzięła piłka?", *Płomyk* 9 (1986).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Amalthea Argonauts Artemis Athamas Castor Cronus / Kronos Dioscuri Europa Ganymede Hebe Helle Hephaestus Hera Heracles Hydra Ino Iolaus Jason Leda Nephele Orion Pan Phrixus Pollux Polydeuces Rhea Troy Zeus Zodiac
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Appearances Child, children Death Heroism Love Punishment Siblings
Further Reading	Kreyser, Krystyna, *Tabella. Łacina bez trudu*, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 2006.
Addenda	The entry presents the result of research conducted within the project "Classical Antiquity in Periodicals for Children and Young Adults in Polish People's Republic (PRL) – Classical Education, Promotion of Political Ideology, or Expression of Resistance? Changes in the Reception of Classics in the PRL from 1945 to 1989," funded by the National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki) Preludium grant no. 2022/45/N/HS2/00549, and led by Marta Pszczolińska at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales" at the University of Warsaw.

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