Katerina Volioti, "Entry on: The Twelve Gods of Olympus [Οι 12 θεοί του Ολύμπου (Oi 12 theoí tou Olýmpou)] by Natalia Kapatsoulia, Filippos Mandilaras ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/166. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Natalia Kapatsoulia , Filippos Mandilaras

The Twelve Gods of Olympus [Οι 12 θεοί του Ολύμπου (Oi 12 theoí tou Olýmpou)]

Greece (2008)

TAGS: Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Cronus / Kronos Cyclops / Cyclopes Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Gaia / Gaea Giants Hades Hecatoncheires / Hundred-Handed Hephaestus Hera Heracles Hermes Hestia Nymphs Ouranos / Uranus Poseidon Rhea Titans Zeus



Courtesy of the Publisher.



General information	
Title of the work	The Twelve Gods of Olympus [Οι 12 θεοί του Ολύμπου (Oi 12 theoí tou Olýmpou)]
Country of the First Edition	Greece
Country/countries of popularity	Greece, UK, USA, Australia, Germany, France, Russia, Spain
Original Language	Greek
First Edition Date	2008
First Edition Details	Filippos Mandilaras, *Οι 12 θεοί του Ολύμπου* [Oi 12 theoí tou Olýmpou], ill. Natalia Kapatsoulia, My First Mythology [Η Πρώτη μου Μυθολογία (Ī prṓtī mou Mythología)] (Series). Athens: Papadopoulos Publishing, 2008, 36 pp.
ISBN	9789604840014
Available Onllne	Demo of 9 pages available at epbooks.gr (accessed: October 12, 2021).
Genre	Humor, Instructional and educational works, Myths
Target Audience	Children (age 4+)

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.

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Creators



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.

Sources:

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

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stories to children. Mandilaras is interested in the anthropology of extraordinary creatures and his forthcoming work is about Modern Greek Mythologies.

Sources:

In Greek:

Profile on EP Books' website (accessed: June 27, 2018).

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

Public Blog, published 15 September 2015 (accessed: June 27, 2018).

Press Publica, published 28 January 2017 (accessed: June 27, 2018).

Linkedin.com, published published 6 May 2016 (accessed: February 6, 2019).

In English:

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

On Mandoulides' website, published 7 March 2017 (accessed: June 27, 2018).

In German:

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

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Additional information

Adaptations	Filippos Mandilaras, Greek Mythology [Ελληνική Μυθολογία (Ellīnikī Mythología)] (series): The Twelve Gods of Olympus [Οι 12 θεοί του Ολύμπου (Oi 12 theoí tou Olýmpou)], Athens: Papadopoulos Publishing, 2012, 16 pp.
Translation	The English version used for the entry 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. German: *Die zwölf Götter des Olymp*, trans. Georgios Kotelidis, Athens: Papadopoulos Publishing, 2016, 40 pp. French: *Les douze dieux de l' Olympe*, trans. Irini Pirpassou, Athens: Editions Papadopoulos, 2016, 40 pp. English: *The Twelve Gods of Olympus*, trans. Alison Falkonakis, Athens: Papadopoulos Publishing, 2016, 24 pp.; Pharos Books, 2019, 36 pp. Russian: *12 богов Олимпа* [12 bogov Olimpa], trans. Lora Averbach, Athens: Papadopoulos Publishing, 2016, 40 pp. Spanish: *Los doce dioses del Olimpo*, trans. Verónica Bruzón Cid, Athens: Papadopoulos Ediciones, 2017, 24 pp. All demos available on the website of the publisher (accessed: October 12, 2021).
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Other books in the series *My First Mythology.*

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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 targets foreign visitors to Greece, presumably tourists' children or Greek children who wish to practice their foreign language skills. Learning about The Twelve Gods also entails language learning. Indeed, the English is accurate and easy to follow, and there are a few difficult words, such as "dungeons" and "bowels" on the opening page. Of the book's 24 pages, seven 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 on 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. Instead, 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. With key phrases such as "In the beginning there was nothing" and "all life was created", the text 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

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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 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 bald, with relatively unhappy faces. The text does not explain the presence of a woman holding up a green saucepan with a spout. In all likelihood, she is the goddess Hestia who was shown carrying a saucepan on 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 minimal. Once again, there is something utterly comical in the illustrations.

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An introduction to the twelve gods follows, which is a lot for any child 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. For instance, Ares, the god of war and hatred, is shown with a plastic fly swat, with which he can 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 singing and contexts of performing and learning Hesiodic poetry. However, such allusions 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 the warfare between the gods and the Giants. The latter are shown as "teratomorphic" creatures, combining elements from reptiles (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 restoring 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. After a mythical journey about origins, fighting, and extraordinary beings, the reader returns to reality, objectivity and science.

In reading this book, children learn about the gods' deeds and 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

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art. All illustrated figures resemble cartoon characters and, given their wide eyes, young children's toys. Thus, the book uses modern popular culture to promote knowledge about Greek mythology, at least as it is known in the western world. Popular culture helps the author to reach out to an international audience. The Latin forms of Greek names, e.g., Hercules and not Herakles, make the book accessible to a broader 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.

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

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

*** See Louden, Bruce, "Iapetus and Japheth: Hesiod's *Theogony*, *Iliad* 15.187–93, and *Genesis* 9–10", *Illinois Classical Studies* 38 (2013): 1–22, DOI: 10.5406/illiclasstud.38.0001.

**** See Canevaro, Lilah Grace, *Hesiod's works and days: How to teach self-sufficiency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 217.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Cronus / Kronos Cyclops / Cyclopes Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Gaia / Gaea Giants Hades Hecatoncheires / Hundred-Handed Hephaestus Hera Heracles Hermes Hestia Nymphs Ouranos / Uranus Poseidon Rhea Titans Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures,	Child, children Coming of age Death Gaining understanding Parents (and children)

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and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Further Reading

Information about the book at epbooks.gr, published 16 May 2016 (accessed: July 31, 2018).

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).

The entry is based on the English edition: Filippos Mandilaras, *The Twelve Gods of Olympus,* trans. by Alison Falkonakis, ill. by Natalia Kapatsoulia, Athens: Papadopoulos Publishing, 2016, 24 pp.

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