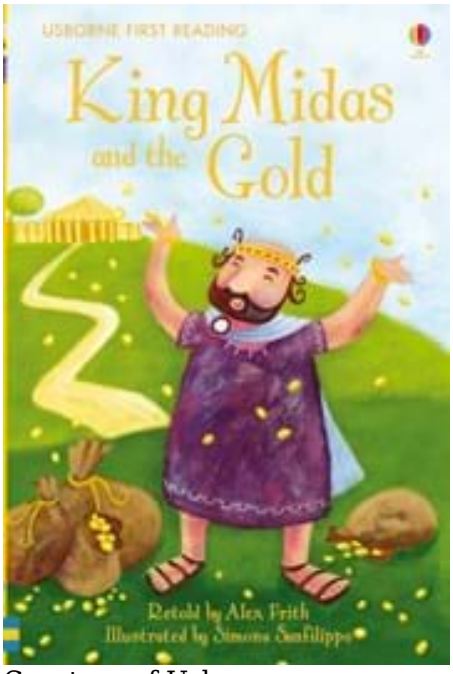
Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: King Midas and the Gold by Alex Frith , Simona Sanfilippo ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/334. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Alex Frith , Simona Sanfilippo

King Midas and the Gold

United Kingdom (2008)

TAGS: Apollo Architecture Dionysus / Dionysos Gods Laurel Wreath Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Midas Ovid



Courtesy of Usborne Publishing Ltd., publisher.

General information	
Title of the work	King Midas and the Gold
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2008
First Edition Details	Alex Frith, *King Midas and the Gold* (Usborne First Reading Series, Level 1). London: Usborne Publishing Ltd., 2008, 30 pp.
Genre	Instructional and educational works, Myths, Picture books, Puzzles and games
Target Audience	Children (c. 3–6)
Author of the Entry	Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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



Alex Frith (Author)

Alex Frith is a British children's author and editor. Alex has been writing children books for years on various subjects. Among his books: submarines, big book of dinosaurs, human body picture book and more. He has worked for Usborne publishing since 2005, contributing to the Young Reading series with myth-based titles including *Hercules: The world's strongest man* (Usborne Young Reading, Series 2, 2011) and *Stories of Thor* (Usborne Young Reading, Series 2, 2016). Alex Frith has authored other myth-based titles, such as *Illustrated Norse Myths* (Usborne, 2013), and many non-fiction (particularly science) titles, amongst which are: *What's Happening to Me?* (Usborne, 2007), *See Inside Science* (Usborne, 2007), and *Big Book of Big Dinosaurs* (Usborne, 2010).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk and Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@gmail.com



Simona Sanfilippo , b. 1976 (Illustrator)

Simona Sanfilippo (1976-) is an Italian freelance illustrator who works on adult and children's titles. She works in a range of techniques, including acrylic, watercolour, oil, coloured pencil. Her children's publications include series of Bible stories for QED books (2013/14) and Ciranda publishing (2016); *The Grumpy Queen* (Evans Brothers Ltd., 2008); and a series of remixed fairy-tales (*Fairytale Jumbles*, Wayland, 2009-2013).

Source:

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Interview with Simona Sanfilippo (accessed: January 20, 2018).

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Additional information

Summary

King Midas and the Gold is a children's storybook written with deliberately simple language for those learning to read. It is part of a series that contains many examples of traditional myths and simplified versions of classical literature.

The Midas myth is told in an extremely simplified form as the paramount focus is telling a story with very basic vocabulary. There is more emphasis on Midas' kindness than his foolishness or greed. The text states 'he was kind', accompanying a picture of him scattering gold coins. His kindness to the elderly father of 'a god' leads to his golden touch. Midas wishes to give up his gift once his dinner has been turned to gold. The story ends with the gift being washed off. A series of seven related puzzles follow. The book closes with an *About the Story section*.

Analysis

King Midas and the Gold is a very sweet-natured retelling of the myth of Midas (for which see Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 11.90–193). The characters all act from positive motives, and they are illustrated mostly smiling, in simple soft-toned colours. Midas' kindness to the old man and his swift reward convey a moral message encouraging altruism. The king's generosity to his people establishes the point that his kindness is a pattern of good behaviour, reinforcing the suggestion that his fault is thoughtlessness rather than anything more sinister. The unnamed god (unnamed because of the level of the target audience's reading), is also presented as benevolent. He greets his father warmly, shows concern for Midas' plight, and displays no hesitation in helping Midas once the king realises his mistake. The god is depicted as a young man with very blonde hair bound by leaves, carrying an elaborate staff. The god's power is reinforced through the illustrations. When his godhood is being revealed, he glows magically; he is shown turning grapes into wine with a magic staff, and there is no doubt that the god is responsible for Midas' new ability. This is an ancient Greece in which magical things can happen and gods are benevolent.

Many retellings of this myth have Midas turn his daughter to gold, following the nineteenth-century Nathanial Hawthorne tradition. This is not introduced into the narrative, but there is a hint of it in the

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	illustrations, in which a servant is transformed. The simplicity of the text does not allow for elaboration on this subject, but its presence in the illustration enables further exploration. Other potential extensions of the ancient myth, such as the competition between Apollo and Pan and Midas' receipt of ass' ears have been avoided, perhaps partly for reasons of space as well as for their more potentially disturbing nature. Overall this retelling communicates the myth's traditional moral message about greed and adds encouragement to be kind. It supports learners in their progression as readers, while also familiarising them with a major myth and with the origin of a phrase still used in the modern world, namely 'golden touch'. The book's illustrations place the story in antiquity. The characters wear gowns and sandals, and there are depictions of classical style architecture throughout. The puzzles are followed by an 'About the story' section. It states that 'King Midas was a real king. He lived in Ancient Greece around 3,000 years ago', while the river, the river Pactolus, is in modern day Turkey. It is quite likely that Midas was based on a historical figure, although tradition places him in Phrygia, north-west Turkey, rather than in Greece (see e.g. Herodotus, 1.14; 1.35; 8.138; Strabo, 1.3.21). While the error is somewhat unfortunate, the inclusion of this section suggests a desire to equip adults supporting the child reader with extra information and conveys the idea that the story's antiquity is part of its value and appeal.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Apollo Architecture Dionysus / Dionysos Gods Laurel Wreath Metamorphoses (Ovid's) Midas Ovid
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Family Gaining understanding Knowledge Learning Morality Parents (and children)
Further Reading	Griffiths, Alan H., "Midas", *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford

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Prag, A.J.N.W., "Reconstructing King Midas: A First Report", *Anatolian Studies* 39 (1989): 159–165.

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Addenda

Practitioner's Notes

The current reviewer has found this an enjoyable book to read with groups of four-year olds. It has been well received by the children whether the book is being read to them, or they are beginning to read for themselves with support. The repetition of simple words such as 'gold' 'god' and even 'Midas' helps growing readers to recognise letter patterns. The illustrations are full page and very engaging; children enjoy picking out details. As the book's primary emphasis is on readability, there is less explicit discussion of motives, moral issues, and other factors than can sometimes be found in retellings of the story. This makes adult supervision particularly useful as an extension of reading practice – the children can read to the adult, and the adult can ask leading questions in a second go through the book. Constructive questions include:

- *Why does Midas help the old man?*
- *Why doesn't Midas want the gift anymore? Can people eat gold food?*
- *What else could Midas have asked for? What would you ask for?*
- *Is Midas a good king?*

Many of the children thought that the god was a woman, confused by his tunic and long, blonde hair.

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