Tikva Schein, "Entry on: Hercules by John Bankston", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/539. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

John Bankston

Hercules

United States (2016)

TAGS: Admete Admetus Alcmene Amazons Amphitryon Apollo Apollodorus Apotheosis Arcadia Athens Atlas Augeas Cacus Cerberus Chiron / Cheiron Cithaeron (Mount) Constantine Constellations Deianeira Diana Diodorus Siculus Diomedes (of Thrace) Electryon Erginus Erymanthus Eurystheus Eurytos Greece Hera Heracles Hercules Hesperides Hippolyta Hydra Iolaus Juno Jupiter Lerna Linus Macedonia Minerva Minos Minyans Nessus Olympians Olympic Games Olympus Oracles Pholus Plato Pluto / Plouton Prometheus Ptolemy Pythia Rome Sparta Thanatos Thebes Titans Virgil Zeus



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General information	
Title of the work	Hercules
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2016
First Edition Details	John Bankston, *Hercules*, A Kid's Guide to Mythology. Hockessin: Mitchell Lane Publishers, 2016, 48 pp.
ISBN	9781612289960 | 9781612289977 (e-book)
Official Website	mitchelllane.com (accessed: October 10, 2018)
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Didactic fiction, Instructional and educational works, Myths
Target Audience	Children (age 8–11, grades 3–6 in the United States)
Author of the Entry	Tikva Schein, Bar-Ilan University, tikva.blaukopf@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.

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Creators



John Bankston , b. 1974
(Author)

John Bankston is a prolific writer of biographies for young adults, having penned over sixty biographies so far and over a hundred nonfiction books in total for children and young adults. He has written biographies of Eminem, Daniel Radcliffe and Shirley Temple, as well as of Alexander the Great, Stephen Hawking and Albert Einstein.

He was born in Boston, Massachusetts, grew up in Vermont and lives in Newport Beach, California. His writing for adults can also be seen in his prolific work as a columnist in national newspaper publications. He has over two hundred published articles in media outlets such as *The Tallahassee Democrat*, *The Orlando Sentinel* and *The Tallahassean*.

In 2013 he published his first work of fiction for adults, *Vampires of Orange County*, which has since been followed by several more. He has been writing since he was a teenager.

A list of Bankston's books with summaries of each (accessed: October 10, 2018).

Source:

Bankston's bio at smashwords.com (accessed: October 10, 2018).

Bio prepared by Tikva Schein, Bar-Ilan University,
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Additional information

Summary

This book is part of a series of eight on different Greek deities. It tells the story of Hercules, half-man, half-god who with his god-given strength was able to overcome great obstacles. However, he was not able to overcome the greatest internal obstacle of his own anger. Starting with the episode of Hercules' cattle being stolen, Bankston launches into a discussion of myth and the place of the myth of Hercules in the ancient world. Each chapter contains selections of the myths with other information for reflection on the reception of the myth or historical details of the ancient world.

Divided into five chapters following Hercules from birth to death, the work is appended by chapter notes, consulted works, a list of further reading from books and online, a glossary and an index.

Chapter 1, *Epic Battle*, relates Hercules' defeat of Cacus, a "dangerous thief" who "breathed fire and ate people", includes a discussion of the nature of myth, its connection to history and a description of the ancient city of Rome.

Chapter 2, *A Hero is Born*, describes the birth of Hercules and his mortal mother Alcmene's own story. The chapter also includes a description of Hercules' childhood, education and expertise as a warrior and the hatred Juno had for him. His hunter skills are explored in the story of Hercules killing the lion eating King Thespius' livestock and his sense of justice is remarked upon in his fighting the Minyans.

Chapter 3, *Labors of a Hero*, has Hercules killing the Nemean lion and the Hydra, capturing a deer special to the goddess Diana and a boar which had been killing townspeople. It also relates Hercules' fifth labour of cleaning the Augean stables.

Chapter 4, *Final Labors*, has Hercules dispersing the birds of Lake Stymphalia, capturing a bull in Crete, bringing back King Diomedes' horses, going down to Thanatos and taking a special belt of gold from the queen of the Amazons. It also relates the final two labour of bringing King Eurystheus golden apples and of bringing back Cerberus from the underworld.

Chapter 5, *Death of a Hero*, represents the aftermath of Hercules' labours and how he was celebrated in later years.

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Hercules in the 21st Century gives a sense of the myth of Hercules as it has been received in the present world.

With quotations from Classical authors, maps, pictures of related artwork and sidebars on connected facts (e.g. on Rome, mosaic patterns, Olympics and astronomy), Bankston's book provides a wealth of information about all thing Hercules-related.

Analysis

The book, part of a series of eight on the myths of Greek gods, Nordic gods and other notable characters begins with a recognition that many versions of the Hercules myth prevail and this story presents just one. The very acknowledgement that myths are widespread and are used to explain mysteries of the past sets up the context of the Hercules myth itself. The story is no longer merely about overcoming demons but is set in a wider context of how we relate to our past and the ancient world.

By starting with a discussion of myth and its evolution, Bankston frames the story of Hercules in its socio-cultural and historical place, as one which emerges from myth and all that entails. Bankston presents Hercules as a product of Greek national expansion and contact with Romans, "Greeks traveled to Rome and shared their stories" (p. 8). This book tells the story of Hercules from the Roman perspective. By providing historical information as to the city-state structure of Greece and the geographical relevance of many places connected to Hercules' story, the reader can garner a wealth of knowledge. The book is brimming over with information and it lends itself to be read as a chapter book or as a guide for students learning about different aspects of the Classical world. However, this does not preclude the reading of this book solely for pleasure: it is well illustrated, laid out aesthetically pleasantly and does not demand the reader to know anything other than to follow the densely-packed sentences.

The story of Hercules is written in a simple and somewhat informal manner, e.g. "There was trouble in the kingdom of Mycenae" (p. 11). Information not directly relevant to the peregrinations of Hercules are interpolated into the narrative, e.g. "Amphitryon and Alcmene traveled to Thebes, a city-state in Greece" (p. 11). The transliteration of names, e.g. "Iphicles (IF-i-kleez)" (p. 12) makes the text accessible to the reader unfamiliar with Greek names. The sentences are on the

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whole short, with variation, which both keeps the pace fast and also makes the text easy to read, e.g. "The lion was sneaky. It was hard to find. After searching for almost two months, Hercules finally found it" (p. 15). Nevertheless, the book is at no times patronising, everything is laid out in an edifying manner.

The inclusion of pictures of artwork from or referring to the Classical world widen the range of the mythological world which Bankston is presenting. For example, on page 14, the caption reads "this krater illustrates Chiron (right), the centaur who taught Hercules hunting, law, and medicine. Chiron is shown alongside a woodland creature called a satyr (left)". This attention to detail in elucidating details of the Hercules story and enhancing the readers' appreciation via different media, is a credit to the book's breadth. It also demonstrates – as is seen further on in the book – the nature of reception and how the same message can be viewed differently on different planes.

Bankston, despite making this book highly informative, does not skimp on descriptive power. E.g. "King Eurystheus was frustrated…The king had run out of ideas" (p. 30).

Juno is presented as "the most dangerous woman in his life" (p. 31) and, though the little emphasis is put on Juno as opposed to any other figure, we do recognise the threat Hercules faces from her, e.g. "The tree they [the golden apples] grew on was guarded by a dragon. Worse, the tree belonged to Juno!" (p. 31). Her femininity is only slightly emphasized as opposed to any other part of her and she is not mentioned more than four times in the whole book.

The glossary and index turn this book into a reference book as well as a simple, easy and well-illustrated read.

The discussion of what myth can mean for us together with historical detail about the ancient world gives Hercules contextual meaning for the study of the ancient world as well as for the modern. Hercules is seen through reception in art, science and modern media. This book is a good introduction for people learning about the Classical world, including maps, transliterations of names, pictures of artwork on Hercules and written in a conversational tone. Bankston has managed to write an informative book on Hercules without requiring background knowledge or talking down to the reader.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Admete Admetus Alcmene Amazons Amphitryon Apollo Apollodorus Apotheosis Arcadia Athens Atlas Augeas Cacus Cerberus Chiron / Cheiron Cithaeron (Mount) Constantine Constellations Deianeira Diana Diodorus Siculus Diomedes (of Thrace) Electryon Erginus Erymanthus Eurystheus Eurytos Greece Hera Heracles Hercules Hesperides Hippolyta Hydra Iolaus Juno Jupiter Lerna Linus Macedonia Minerva Minos Minyans Nessus Olympians Olympic Games Olympus Oracles Pholus Plato Pluto / Plouton Prometheus Ptolemy Pythia Rome Sparta Thanatos Thebes Titans Virgil Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Adversity Authority Character traits Childhood Conflict Gender Heroism Humanity Individuality Intellect Knowledge Learning Love Maturity Modernity Past Philosophy Relationships Religious beliefs Science Self Society Students Subjectivity Teachers Tricksters Values
Further Reading	Allan, Tony, *Exploring the Life, Myth, and Art of Ancient Rome*, New York: Rosen Pub., 2012. Jennings, Ken, *Greek Mythology*, New York: Little Simon, 2014. McCaughrean, Geraldine, *Hercules*, Chicago: Cricket Books, 2005. Van Lente, Fred, *Hercules*, Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2013.

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