Margaret Bromley, "Entry on: Once Upon a Vase by Sandra Jobson", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/578. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Sandra Jobson

Once Upon a Vase

Australia (1970)

TAGS: Acrisius / Akrisios Agamemnon Ancient Fashion Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Centaur(s) Children's Game (Ancient) Doris Eris Eurytion Fates Graeae / Graiai Helen Hephaestus Hera Hermes Hippodameia Leto Maia Menelaus Nereid(s) Nereus Oceanus / Okeanos Oenomaus / Oinomaos of Pisa Paris (Trojan Prince) Peleus Poseidon Pottery / Vases Priam Pygmies Wedding Traditions (Greek and Roman)





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

General information	
Title of the work	Once Upon a Vase
Country of the First Edition	Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1970
First Edition Details	Sandra Jobson, *Once Upon a Vase*. Melbourne, Sydney: The Macmillan Company of Australia. Pty, Ltd. 1970, 45 pp.
Available Onllne	cyberkidzone.com.au provides an abridged version of Jobson's *Once Upon A Vase* (accessed: November 5, 2018).
Genre	Adaptations, Historical fiction, Illustrated works, Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (Children, young adults)
Author of the Entry	Margaret Bromley, University of New England, brom_ken@bigpond.net.au
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Creators



Sandra Jobson , b. 1942
(Author, Illustrator)

Author and Illustrator, Sandra Jobson, was born in 1942 and was brought up on the Sydney waterfront. Her anaesthetist father introduced her to the rock pools of Long Reef and taught her to look under rocks “to find the most amazing things” (Alomes, 1999, p. 201). Jobson attended the Julian Ashton Art School, Sydney, and subsequently studied history at the University of Sydney. After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts, Jobson became a journalist. In an era when female journalists were beginning to be recognised and released from their traditional roles of reporting on the prescriptive “women’s pages” in newspapers in Australia, Jobson was the first woman to work on general news at the *Sydney Morning Herald*, moving to the UK in the 1960s, to work in their London office.

Returning to Sydney in the late 1960s, with her husband Robert Darroch, in the 1970s and 1980s Sandra Jobson Darroch contributed to numerous Australian magazines and newspapers, including articles for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the Australian Consolidated Press, and later, *The Australian*, published in Melbourne. Jobson writes in the genres of Australian Studies, biography, journalism and literary criticism.

Jobson has published nine books, mostly on local history. As a writer she is best known as Sandra Jobson Darroch for her recently revised and republished biography of Lady Ottoline Morrell. *Once Upon a Vase* is her only book for children.

Sources:

Alomes, Stephen, *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, 201–206.

Darroch, Sandra Jobson, *Garsington Revisited, The Legend of Lady Ottoline Morrell, brought up to date,* 2017, Indiana University Press,

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Indiana.

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- The Third Story. The Revenge of Hephaistos
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- The Fifth Story. Perseus and the Gorgons
- The Sixth Story. The Battle of the Pygmies and the Cranes

The colophon states that “Ergotimus made my vase and Kleitas painted me. Sandra Jobson has retold my story and redrawn my illustrations in my book”: “Ergotimus m’epoisen Kleitas m’egrappen” (Jobson, 1970, p. 9).

Jobson’s **Introduction** tells of how, in 1845, the French archaeologist, Allesandro François, was digging near Chiusi in central northern Italy when he came across the shards of a large pot, an intricately decorated Greek vase which came to be known as the François Vase. An exquisite an example of black figure vase painting, The François Vase depicts significant stories from Ancient Greek Mythology, incorporating the lives of the Greek gods and goddesses, their quarrels and wars through six friezes around the Vase. Unusually, the foot of the vase and the handles are also decorated.

Jobson discusses how the Etruscans were “a mysterious race of people who had lived in that part of Italy before the Romans came”. The François Vase was found in the tomb of what was probably that of a rich Etruscan merchant (Jobson, 1970, p. 9). The Etruscans prepared well for the life hereafter, as one of a long celebration of feasting and happiness enhanced by precious possessions. The François Vase, a volute krater for mixing wine, is an outstanding example of Etruscan vase manufactured for its graphic coverage.

In Ancient Greece the use of pots for storage was a significant cultural practice. Ancient Greek vase painters and potters were important community members. Wall paintings did not often survive the ravages of climate and environment but “ancient Greek pottery was glazed and almost indestructible” (Jobson, 1970, p. 10). The information depicted

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in vase decoration presented complex and nuanced storytelling.

Jobson explains how cross checking the decoration and shape of Greek vases with other vases and details on statues can assist with dating of the vases. The inscription on the François Vase and the decoration dates it to c. 570 B.C. The method of making the vase, the colours used (black, orange, purple and white) and the graphic styles help in the dating of this vase as an example of black figure vase painting. After c. 530 B.C. the common style was red figure painting.

Before the black-figure style, Greek vases were decorated in two basic styles, those of Geometric and Orientalising. Geometric decorated vases were covered in bands of patterns, zig-zags and criss-crosses. At a later date, painters inserted stick figure people and horses with spindly legs pulling chariots.

Orientalising was a softer style than Geometric, concentrating on birds, animals and flowers, with few human figures. By the time Kleitas painted the François Vase, these styles were old-fashioned, but traces of the tall thin elegant horses and the stylised fighting animals are to be seen on the Vase.

The stories on the Vase are taken from Homer (750–700 B.C.), his stories of the Trojans, and the Mycenean Greeks who had lived 450 years earlier. Kleitas's scenes from the Iliad and the Odyssey would have been familiar to his contemporaries.

One side of the Vase depict events at Peleus's wedding leading to the Trojan War. The Vase shows Peleus's fight with the ferocious Kalydonian boar. Theseus also took part in this boar hunt. The same side of the vase depicts the story of the comic craftsman god, Hephaistos, joining the rest of the procession to Peleus's wedding. The foot of the Vase depicts the humorous battle between the Pygmies and the Cranes. The handles are embellished with two hideous Gorgons.

The priceless François Vase is housed in the Archeological Museum in Florence. Jobson tells of how "In 1900 a madman rushed into the Museum brandishing an axe and smashed the Vase into 638 smithereens" (Jobson, 1970, p. 12). Jobson's illustrations have filled in the missing parts of the Vase, enabling a continuous visual narrative for the reader, reading the figures from left to right, whilst the text interprets the friezes and explains the context of the missing shards.

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The First Story, The Story of Peleus and Thetis, introduces readers to the customs and clothing surrounding the wedding procession of two important people, depicted on a double page spread of all the characters mentioned.

As the gods gather for the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, the God of fire, Hephaistos, is seen riding on a donkey, accompanied by Triton, the Sea Monster. Okeanos, the Ocean Stream, is accompanied by his wife Thetys. The Nerieds, sisters of the bride, are wearing embroidered dresses with straight skirts and folded top, known as a "peploi". Hermes is accompanied by his mother Maia, waited on by the Fates, who decide the course of people's lives. The text points out the confusion of the Kleitas painting of four Fates instead of three: "More likely Kleitas intended them to be the four seasons and carelessly wrote the wrong names beside them" (Jobson, 1970, p. 16).

Athena and Artemis, the goddess of hunting, are being greeted by the bride's mother and father, Doris and Old Nereus. Apollo, the god of light and the sun, the brother of Artemis, his mother Leto are followed by Ares, the god of war, and Aphrodite the goddess of love. Poseidon, the sea god, and his wife Amphritnite are riding with their horses. Zeus, the king of the gods, wearing a chiton, a white tunic, is accompanied by his wife Hera. Dionysos, the god of wine joins the procession, followed by Cheiron, the Centaur. Iris, the female messenger of the gods, is wearing a short tunic, whilst Thetis is seen, seated, "modest, hiding her face in her shawl" (Jobson, 1970, p. 17).

The wedding of Peleus and Thetis has catastrophic consequences, through a series of events fated to lead to the Trojan War. Jobson recounts that according to Homer in *The Iliad*, not all the guests are happy about this union. Zeus and Poseidon both "wanted to marry the gentle Thetis" but they had heard the prophecy that Thetis would have a son who would grow up to be stronger than his father (Jobson, 1970, p. 17). Hence it was arranged that she should marry Perseus, a mortal.

An uninvited attendee, Eris, the goddess of discord, throws a golden apple into the group of goddesses, Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, challenging them to a beauty contest. Zeus asks Paris, the son of King Priam of Troy to be the judge. Despite the individual efforts of Hera and Athena, Paris succumbs to Aphrodite's promise of the love of the most beautiful woman in the world. Years later, Aphrodite assists Paris to abduct the beautiful Helen of Troy, by then already married to

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Menelaos, brother of the vengeful Agamemnon. The two powerful brothers amass a great army of warriors and chariots to challenge Helen's abduction.

The Second Story. The Trojan War. On the François Vase, Kleitas depicts several scenes from the Trojan War. In particular the ambush of Troilus by Achilles, the son of Peleus and Thetis, who fulfills a prophecy that Thetis's son would be greater than his father. Knowing that this was fated to happen, Athena and Hermes watch passively while Achilles slays Troilus on Apollo's sacred altar. Apollo is appalled at this desecration and vows to side with the Trojans against Achilles and the Greeks.

Menelaos and his brother King Agamemnon amass a fleet of fifty black ships in preparation for war. While the fleet is gathering, an important omen occurs; a serpent climbs a tree and devours eight young birds and their mother. In revenge, Zeus turns the serpent into stone, prophesising that in the tenth year of war, Troy would kill the Greeks.

Jobson reminds readers that the story of the Trojan War is told in the Iliad, that the trickery and intervention of Apollo is retribution for the slaying of Troilus. The Trojan Horse as stratagem for invading the city of Troy is depicted, enabling the Greeks to ransack the city of Troy and win the Trojan war. Menelaos reclaims Helen; his troops return to Greece in their black ships.

The Third Story. The Revenge of Hephaistos. This comic story presents the god of fire and volcanoes, Hephaistos, who is big and strong, but also ugly and lame. The son of Zeus and Hera, Hephaistos was rescued as a baby by two sea nymphs after his mother, disgusted at his appearance, threw him to the bottom of the sea. As the divine blacksmith, Hephaistos made jewellery, shields, spears and horseshoes. He forged a throne of gold from which his mother could not escape. Then he bargained with his mother to marry Aphrodite, who was similarly repulsed by his ugliness and deformity. Aphrodite wanted to marry Ares; when both were caught inflagrante with a net, the gods witnessed their pain and guilt. For a change Hephaistos was laughing with the gods, not against them.

The Fourth Story. Theseus and the Minotaur. Jobson sees this story as a point of intersection of legend and actual historical events, stating that archaeologists and classicists now think that much of this story is based on fact.

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Theseus subverts the usual practice of the lottery of names pulled out of the vase to be sacrificed to the Minotaur of Crete by volunteering to go as one of the enslaved. Poseidon, the sea god, and Theseus's godfather, had ordered him to go to Crete to defeat the Minotaur. In Crete, Ariadne falls in love with Theseus, and supplies him with the means of escape, a ball of string to unwind whilst in the maze: a "clew" to a difficult puzzle (Jobson, 1970, p. 31).

Excited and thoughtless, Theseus makes two serious mistakes. Firstly Ariadne is left ("mistakenly?" Jobson asks) on the island of Naxos (Jobson, 2007, p. 31). In his haste, Theseus forgets to heed his father's request to lower the black sails on his ship and raise the white sails to indicate his triumph over the Minotaur. In despair, King Aegeus flings himself off the top of a cliff into the sea below.

Also included in this story is a depiction of Theseus as a brave participant in The Hunt of the Kalydonian Boar. Theseus subsequently courageously assists in The Battle of the Lapiths and the Centaurs. Jobson suggests that "Centaurs were, by legend, half-man, half-horse, but were probably a race of human who had rough manners and chased their herds on horseback" (Jobson, 1970, p. 37). The Lapith King Perith was about to marry Hippodameia, daughter of Oinomanus, the King of Pisa. Invited to the celebratory feast, Eurytion the Centaur tries to steal the bride. Eurytion amasses a troop of Centaurs, armed with trunks of pine trees and slabs of stone. But, with Theseus's help, the Lapiths win the battle.

The Fifth Story. Perseus and the Gorgons. On the François Vase, the three Gorgons, Medusa and her two sisters, are depicted on the handles, conspicuous in their ugliness.

The story goes that the princess Danae and her son Perseus were exiled by her father, King Akrisios, who had heard a prophecy that he will be killed, most probably by his grandson. Akrisios can't bring himself to kill Danae and Perseus, so he casts them adrift in a wooden chest, so the prophecy would not come true. But, Danae and her son Perseus are saved by the fisherman, Diktys, and "Perseus grew up to be a strong and clever boy who could throw a spear faster than the wind" (Jobson, 1970, p. 39). Polydektes, the ruler of the island, demands Danae as his wife but is thwarted by Diktys. The vengeful Polydektes demands the head of the Gorgon, Medusa.

"The fearful Gorgons dwelt on the farthest side of the ocean in the

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neighbourhood of the Night and the Hespirides". The three Gorgon sisters were Staeno "the mighty", Eurydale, "the wide-wandering" and Medusa, "the Queen", who still had vestiges of her former beauty. "But her sisters were like ferocious beasts with golden wings and brazen claws and huge tongues lolling out between cruel lips" (Jobson, 1970, p. 40).

Perseus's challenge amounts to trickery, involving a treacherous, long journey and an impossible feat with the Gorgons. Even to glance at their terrible faces would be fatal, turning the viewer to stone. However, Athena brings Perseus a shield, instructing him to polish it to a mirror-like finish. Hermes gives Perseus a sword with winged sandals, enabling him to fly over land and sea to Libya, to find three old hags with only one eye and one tooth between them, the Graiai. His journey involves confrontation with the Graiai, who are tricked into telling Perseus the route, and the nymphs who go down into the Underworld to retrieve the Cap of Darkness which bestows invisibility. Perseus's borrowed weapons, the sword, the polished shield, the winged shoes all enable him to behead Medusa and rescue Andromeda from the sea monster. Perseus subsequently marries Medusa and destroys Polydektes by using the Gorgon's head to turn him and his nobles to stone.

The sixth story. The Battle of the Pygmies and Cranes. At the foot of his vase, Kleitas painted the fierce battle of the Pygmies and the Cranes which took place every year. Jobson suggests that as this story is about crop growing it is probably very ancient, "possibly dating back to the time when man first began tilling the soil instead of purely hunting for food" (Jobson, 1970, p. 42). Farmers eked out a meagre living from the rocky soil. Unless they were rich enough to own an olive grove, farmers were very poor. The marauding cranes arrived annually to steal the ripening corn.

The Pygmy farmers were an easy target for the cranes, being only twenty seven inches tall. The only way they could defeat the cranes was to go down to the sea shore, mounted on the backs of goats and rams, and fight the cranes with slings loaded with stones. For three months every year, the Pygmies risked being torn to pieces by the cranes. Hurling stones at the giant birds and grappling them with crooked sticks, the Pygmies eventually defeated the cranes and feasted off their eggs and chicks.

The battle continues today through a Greek children's game of the

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Pygmies and the Cranes, chasing each other with long crooked sticks.

Analysis

Jobson was probably inspired to write and illustrate *Once Upon a Vase* for older readers after sighting the François Vase herself, as the textual and visual detail suggests a close engagement with the subject. Her introduction reflects an appreciation of the density of information contained in the decoration of Ancient Greek vases, as a vehicle for the sophisticated storytelling of the Ancient Greeks. Jobson draws the images on the Vase as they would have been originally, before the breakages. The stories in *Once Upon A Vase* follow the scenarios depicted in the friezes.

The François Vase, considered an indispensable graphic source for the study of Greek mythology depicts 270 figures, 121 of which have accompanying inscriptions. The Vase represents a milestone in the development of Ancient Greek pottery, due to Kleitas's unique drawing style and the related stories, which was quite new in Athenian painting.He depicts crucial dramatic moments in the stories and notable celebrations, or moments when the dramatic tension is past.

Jobson promotes the intersection of legend and ancient history and archaeology. The introduction explains the use of black, orange purple and white in the illustrations, whilst the stories integrate descriptions and labelling of costume, social hierarchy and customs.

The landscape format of the book enables a sense of continuity of action and story as well as fluidity of movement of the characters depicted in the friezes, all moving from left to right through a series of dramatic tableaux. Characters are depicted through side profiles, with large gestures and mouths wide open in alarm.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Acrisius / Akrisios Agamemnon Ancient Fashion Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Athena Centaur(s) Children's Game (Ancient) Doris Eris Eurytion Fates Graeae / Graiai Helen Hephaestus Hera Hermes Hippodameia Leto Maia Menelaus Nereid(s) Nereus Oceanus / Okeanos Oenomaus / Oinomaos of Pisa Paris (Trojan Prince) Peleus Poseidon Pottery / Vases Priam Pygmies Wedding Traditions (Greek and Roman)

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Authority Conflict Emotions Family Fashion Freedom Heritage History Individuality Love Parents (and children) Prediction/prophecy Respect Revenge Society
Further Reading	The François Vase, online at florenceinferno.com (accessed: November 5, 2018).
Addenda	Illustrated information book on the François Vase and its makers, the potter Ergotimus and the painter Kleitas. The discovery of the Vase by Allesandro François. The use and significance of Ancient Greek vases. Jobson's illustrations and text depict the Classical Greek myths of the six friezes on the François Vase. Australian National Library Registry no. 70–161.

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