Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Alexander the Great Dane by Chris Capstick , Monika Filipina", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/702. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Chris Capstick , Monika Filipina

Alexander the Great Dane

United Kingdom (2017)

TAGS: Alexander the Great Ancient Slavery Architecture Bible Egypt





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

General information	
Title of the work	Alexander the Great Dane
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Chris Capstick, *Alexander the Great Dane*. Bromborough: Fourth Wall Publishing, 2017, 31 pp.
ISBN	9781910851463
Genre	Picture books
Target Audience	Children (c. 3–8)
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 Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Creators



Chris Capstick (Author)

Chris Capstick is a UK-based children's author and illustrator. He studied art, design, and photography at Leeds and Manchester. His works as an author include *Claude the Magnificent* (Fourth Wall, 2016) and *Dr James McGee: And the Time Machine* (Fourth Wall, 2017). His work as an illustrator includes *The Boy Who Unplugged the Sea* (Fourth Wall, 2016, au. Paul Smith).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk



Monika Filipina (Illustrator)

Monika Filipina is a freelance children's illustrator now based in Cambridge in the UK. She took a BA in Illustration from the University of Wolverhampton and, in 2014, completed a MA in Children's Book Illustration at the Cambridge School of Arts.

Source:

Official website (accessed: March 13, 2019)

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk

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Additional information

Summary

This light-hearted story is set in an ancient Egypt ruled by giant cats. The giant cats unfairly favour the normal-sized cats, leaving dogs to do all the work. This injustice has persisted for generations, until "a young pup called Alexander" left his care-free youth behind him to enter a world of toil and decided to lead the dogs in throwing off the shackles of their oppressors. True to the genre of books for young children, Alexander asks dogs of various occupations for their views on how a revolution might be carried out, with each answering with suggestions linked to their modes of employment. Alexander attempts to implement their various ideas, but each fails. When the soldier dog suggests firing catapults at the giant cats, the giant cats simply start wearing giant hats. Not to be put-off, Alexander hits on a plan that draws on the skills of *all* the dogs. The dogs dig giant holes beneath the city. Alexander then invites the cats to a party. When the party turns to dancing, the giant cats fall through the floor into the giant holes beneath. "The dogs were free at last. 'Hurray for Alexander the Great Dane!' they all cheered." The giant cats remained underground, dancing, and their giant hats became the pyramids we all know and love today.

Analysis

This is a fun book made more fun by the inventive use of illustration to evoke a cat-run ancient Egypt. On the cover, Alexander's name is written as if on an ancient papyrus scroll which, in combination with the book's title, immediately communicates antiquity. The cover's interior is covered in playful imitation hieroglyphs with a cat and dog theme. Similar cartoon hieroglyphs appear throughout the work on walls, scrolls, and vases in the backgrounds of the main illustrations. The giant cats wear head-dresses akin to those of pharaohs, adding to the ancient milieu. There is also a delightful image of dogs playing ancient-style musical instruments at the party. All of these sorts of details will help to familiarise very young readers with some of the iconographic indicators of ancient Egypt.

Young readers may also be introduced in this work to the concepts of slavery, exploitation and labour disputes, albeit through the distant environment of the ancient past. The occupations referred to suit an ancient environment – cooking, tailoring, soldiering, labouring, and (perhaps somewhat euphemistically) massaging. While labour itself is

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not denigrated, the story emphasises the desirability of fairness in the division of labour and the importance of choice. The notion that one group could compel another group to service them is presented as unjust, undesirable, and unsustainable. These challengingly adult ideas are softened by their presentation in a bygone (ancient) and fantasy (animal-led) context. What is quite clear, however, is that the plot is based on the biblical story of Moses. The title, *Alexander the Great Dane*, appears to be born entirely from the beauty of the punning riff on the name of Alexander the Great and the dog breed, Great Dane. The title may encourage some to buy the book as it is both funny and communicates the ancient setting, but readers may be surprised if they expect to find anything even vaguely evoking the Macedonian conqueror beyond that title. In that sense, there is a sort of inter-changeability to ancient culture here, in which Alexander can both sell a book and be absent from it.

The violent horrors of revolution are minimised by insistence that the giant cats were happy enough dancing underground, without reference to them suffocating or suffering other ill-effects. That they are "still dancing" today both reinforces the idea that the giant cats have not been harmed by being shut underground and also captures something of the theology of ancient Egypt, in which the entombed have gone beyond mortal life without truly dying. The connection to the present day will help young readers to anchor Egypt through time, as both ancient and contemporary space, while the reinterpretation of what the pyramids are is more charmingly silly than really misleading. This continues the book's element of double-coding, in which adult and child readers will interpret material on different levels. Children may miss the Great/Great Dane pun, may not recognise the plot as a reflection on Moses or more recent slave-rebellions and labour disputes, and may not see the pyramid hats as a joke. The book can still be enjoyed without them recognising these more sophisticated elements, and they create an opportunity for adults to enjoy the book more than they might otherwise, and for adults to help children to a deeper understanding through explanation and discussion.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Alexander the Great Ancient Slavery Architecture Bible Egypt

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Adolescence Adversity Animals Authority Character traits Conflict Disobedience Freedom Good vs evil Heroism Hierarchy Judaism Morality Oppression Political changes Society Talking animals

Further Reading

Moore, Kenneth, Royce, ed., *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Alexander the Great*, Leiden: Brill, 2018.

Beal, Jane, ed., *Illuminating Moses: A History of Reception from Exodus to the Renaissance*, Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Urbainczyk, Theresa, S*lave Revolts in Antiquity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

Wright, Melanie, Jane, *Moses in America. The Cultural Uses of Biblical Narrative*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

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