Susan Deacy, "Entry on: Greek Heroes and Monsters by Charles Front , James Mason ", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/881. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Charles Front , James Mason

Greek Heroes and Monsters

United Kingdom (1991)

TAGS: Aegeus Ariadne Crete Cyclops / Cyclopes Medusa Minoan Civilization Minos Minotaur Odysseus / Ulysses Penelope Perseus Sirens Theseus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Greek Heroes and Monsters
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1991
First Edition Details	James Mason, *Greek Heroes and Monsters*, "A Sense of History" series. Harlow: Longman, 1991, 24 pp.
ISBN	0582068177
Genre	Adaptations, Myths
Target Audience	Children (Children aged circa 7–11)
Author of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk
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Creators



Charles Front (Illustrator)

Charles Front, best-known as the illustrator for the Beatles's *Rubber Soul* album, is the illustrator of a number of books for children including *A Child's Bible, The Little Dressmaker, and Carbonel and Calidor.* Among his other works for children are the illustrations for 15 episodes of the Children's BBC series *Jackanory* in the late 1960.

Sources:

en.wikipedia.org (accessed: August 19, 2019).

rodmckie.blogspot.com (accessed: August 19, 2019).

Bio prepared by Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk



James Mason (Author)

James Mason is the author or co-author of books for children, mostly on historical topics, for children of various ages, including primary-aged children and those following the GCSE syllabus in the UK. His publications span a range of topics including ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, the Anglo Saxons, the Vikings and Oliver Cromwell.

Sources:

amazon.co.uk (accessed: August 19, 2019).

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Additional information

Summary

The book starts off with an introduction to 'the Greeks' which explains why people now visit Greece, namely because they are drawn to its holiday places. This leads into a discussion of a key aspect of life in ancient Greece: storytelling. Among the illustrations in this section is an ancient Greek vase-painting showing a storyteller saying words that translate as "once upon a time..." (p. 3). These words become the opening of the first of two stories narrated in the book, that of 'Theseus and the Minotaur'. This retelling starts with Theseus's inclusion in the tribute of children sent every ninth year to Crete and continues with Theseus' killing of the Minotaur thanks to the help of Ariadne who falls in love with him. Next, Ariadne is left behind on Naxos after Theseus and the other Athenians forget about her. Once they have sailed off, Ariadne encounters Dionysos, who is out hunting with his friends. Ariadne and Dionysos fall in love and 'live happily together on the island' (p. 8). Theseus forgets a promise he had made to his father Aegeus, should he be successful in killing the Minotaur, to change the ship's sail from black to white. In his grief, Aegeus commits suicide and Theseus is crowned king.

The second story, of 'Odysseus and Penelope', starts with Odysseus's departure to fight "a war" (p. 10) and continues with the courtship of his wife, Penelope, and Penelope's stratagem of unweaving a section of cloth each evening. Next comes Odysseus and his friends' encounter with a "one-eyed giant" (p. 11) who traps them in his cave until Odysseus blinds the giant before Odysseus and his men escape by hiding under the giants' sheep. Odysseus has told the giants that his name is 'Nobody,' so when the giant tells his own friends that 'Nobody is attacking me' they disperse. Back at sea, the men encounter the Sirens, to whose song Odysseus alone listens. Finally, after "many more adventures" (p. 15) Odysseus returns home just in time to save Penelope from the suitors, who have discovered that she has been tricking them.

Next come several pages explaining how the artist came to illustrate the stories in the way he did: whereas the ancient Greeks depicted myths in contemporary dress, the artist knows better thanks to archaeological discoveries on Crete.

The book includes text boxes explaining key terms, e.g. 'god' and 'archaeologist.' There is also a timeline giving key dates. For example,

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the ‘story of Troy’ is dated to 1500 BC and the story of Odysseus to 1100 BC.

Analysis

Like other works in the *Sense of History* series, this book seeks to convey representative aspects of its topic for primary school-aged readers. This is done above all via stories told by the ancient Greeks which, the author writes, "are not true" but "provide us with clues about the sort of place Greece was in ancient times" (p. 3).

The author omits, or plays down, aspects which might be thought inappropriate for the target readers. The origins of the Minotaur – in a sexual encounter between a woman and a bull – are omitted, for instance, and Theseus abandons Ariadne because he has somehow forgotten that she left Crete with him. This takes me to another feature of the mythological retellings, namely the lack of a role played by deities. Although one of the textboxes defines ‘god’ as ‘a superhuman being worshipped as having special powers’ (p.8), deities – unlike (non-worshipped?) monsters – are mostly omitted from the retellings. For example, whereas in ancient versions it is on Athena’s instructions that Theseus leaves Ariadne behind on Naxos, here "nobody knew what made Theseus forget her" (p. 7). In the one exception, "a god called Dionysos" (p. 8), who comes upon the abandoned Ariadne, is depicted as a local inhabitant of the island, out hunting with friends. As the author assumes no prior knowledge of the stories he narrates, his target readers might learn later on, with surprise, the prevalence of deities in Greek myths.

Unusually for an illustrated book, the author explains why the artist has depicted the stories in the way he has. He has not "just invented it all" (p. 16) but, we are told, has taken inspiration from the paintings discovered by archaeologists. One of the illustrations in this section, a Minoan painting showing dancing women (p. 17), could be the inspiration for Front’s drawing of two bare-breasted women in long dresses who are shown dancing on the beach at Naxos (p. 7). The illustrations are presented as more authentic than those produced by ancient Greek artists, who "had no idea what life was like hundreds of years before" (p. 20). All the same, the final pages present a set of illustrations of ancient Greek vases, along with notes setting out features of each image.

One of the images in this section, a vase painting of Odysseus and the

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	Sirens, includes questions for the readers: "Do you like the picture…? How would you draw them?" (p. 22). This is perhaps intended to get the readers to contrast the ancient Greek vase-painter's Sirens, who have human heads and the bodies of birds, with Front's who are partially-clothed young women (p. 14). This time, Front's inspiration does not seem to be anything Minoan.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aegeus Ariadne Crete Cyclops / Cyclopes Medusa Minoan Civilization Minos Minotaur Odysseus / Ulysses Penelope Perseus Sirens Theseus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Heroism Tale vs reality
Addenda	Also available as part of the set *Ancient Greece Evaluation Pack* ISBN 0582 08775 9 along with *Ancient Greece Resource Book, Teacher's Book, 6 Posters, 12 Timelines, Audio Cassettes*. Like the current book, each item was also published separately.

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