Hayden Taylor, "Entry on: Ancient Greece by Richard Bonson, Stewart Ross ", peer-reviewed by Babette Pütz and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/903. Entry version as of November 06, 2026.

Richard Bonson , Stewart Ross

Ancient Greece

United States of America (2004)

TAGS: Agora Apollo Athena Athens Masks Olympic Games Oracles Peloponnesian War Pottery / Vases Sparta Theatre





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

General information	
Title of the work	Ancient Greece
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2004
First Edition Details	Ross Stewart, *Tales of the Dead: Ancient Greece*. DK Publishing 2004, 32 pp.
ISBN	0756605547
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Comics (Graphic works), Fiction, Illustrated works
Target Audience	Children (Children to Young Adults 7–14)
Author of the Entry	Hayden Taylor, Victoria University of Wellington, hayden.n.taylor11@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Babette Pütz, Victoria University of Wellington, Babette.Puetz@vuw.ac.nz Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Creators



Richard Bonson (Illustrator)

Richard Bonson is an illustrator for children's and young adults' books. Some of them are the international best sellers 'Disasters!', 'Great Wonders of the World', and 'Pompeii.' He lives with his wife in Suffolk, United Kingdom. He also has a passion for driving and restoring vintage cars.

Sources:

More information at Google Books (accessed: June 6, 2019).

Bio prepared by Hayden Taylor, Victoria University of Wellington, hayden.n.taylor11@gmail.com



Stewart Ross , b. 1947
(Author)

Stewart Ross was born in Aylesbury, United Kingdom on April 4th, 1947. He is a British author of fiction for children. Ross has also written adult novels, plays and a musical. He taught in Sri Lanka, the Middle East, the USA, and Britain before turning to writing full-time writer in 1989. He has been Chair of the Educational Writers Group of the Society of Authors and Chair of the Canterbury Branch of the Historical Association. Ross has earnt numerous literary achievements for his writing, all being from other books in his collections. The most famous being the 'Benjamin Franklin Prize for fact and faction, for the *Witches* in 1996,' and the 'Boston Globe Horn Honour, for *Into the Unknown* in 2011. Many of his works for children feature historical

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topics, including Greed, Seeds, and Slavery (Eden Children's Books, 2013), Big J: The Story of Julius Caesar (Wayland, 2001), Boudicca: Guilty or Innocent? (ReadZone Books, 2017), and Down with the Romans! (ReadZone Books, 2015).

Sources:

Official website (accessed: October 22, 2019).

Information at Google Books (accessed: June 12, 2019).

Profile at Scholastic (accessed: June 24, 2019).

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Additional information

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	S. Ross, *Tales of the Dead: Ancient Egypt*, London: Dorling Kindersley Ltd, 2003. S. Ross, *Tales of the Dead: Ancient Rome,* London: Dorling Kindersley Ltd, 2005. Both books follow the same narrative and didactic style as Ross' first book in the series.

Summary	The book's main story takes place in 416 BC Greece. It is the story of a young man competing in the Olympic Games, told in the form of a graphic novel. After a brief plot overview and the historical background, the story continues around the border of every page, whilst the centre of each page is filled with factual information. The plot of the story focuses on a young Athenian man named Kinesias and his journey to and attendance of the Olympic Games. Kinesias dreams of personal success and of claiming victory for his city Athens. The other Athenian characters in the story include his younger siblings Kalonike and Pylades. Kinesias' antagonists are Lykourgos, an athlete from Sparta, and Myrtilos, a money-crazed trickster. In order to win the Olympics and bring glory to Sparta, Lykourgos bribes Myrtilos to stop Kinesias from competing. Meanwhile, Kinesias and his brother Pylades are given a tablet which is allegedly from Athena. It instructs them to stay away from the Olympic Games. After a series of unusual incidents, such as a statue of Athena falling from a window and almost injuring Kinesias, the brothers start to believe them to be related to the mysterious tablet from Athena. They travel to Delphi to consult the oracle, but only receive confusing advice. On their return to Athens they investigate the incident involving the statue which fell on Kinesias earlier. They discover that the statue had been purposely pushed by an unknown assailant. Kinesias refuses to let the accident scare him and makes the journey to Olympia so he can compete in the games. The journey entails many complications, such as the destruction of their ship and a peaceful interaction with the Helots. Fortunately, Kinesias and his brother

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Pylades arrive in Olympia before the games begin. The arrival of Kinesias means that Myrtilos has failed in his attempts at stopping the Athenian from reaching the games. This leads to Lykourgos sending a second man named Ouletes to secretly attack Kinesias.

Ouletes goes to Kinesias' tent and attacks him with a wooden object. The attack leaves Kinesias unconscious and allows Ouletes to dress in Kinesias' armour so he can sabotage the race. Myrtilos fails to realise Lykourgos' new plan and decides to throw a spear at Kinesias during the race. The spear strikes the athlete forcing him to take off his helmet. Everyone is shocked when they realise the athlete is not Kinesias, but instead Ouletes. When the race restarts, Kinesias has awoken and participates. He wins the race and claims victory for Athens.

The book's narrative is displayed around the pages in a border of comics. The central sections of the pages are focused on specific sections of ancient life.

They include information on:

- Historical Rivalries, in particular Athens versus Sparta during the Pentekontaetia
- Ancient society and the everyday life
- Ancient Greek drama: theatre buildings, genres and performances
- Athenian government and politics
- Trade and seafaring, such as the import and export of goods by merchants
- Greek Helots and their relationship with Athenians and Spartans

The classical elements incorporated in *Tales of the Dead: Ancient Greece* are often basic and lack detail. However, this is because Ross is not attempting to provide an in-depth analysis of Ancient Greece. It is as an introduction for young readers (approx. 7–14 years old) into ancient culture.

Analysis

Stewart Ross' *Tales of the Dead: Ancient Greece* provides an introduction to classical history for a younger audience. It introduces them to elements of the classical world, such as historical rivalries between Athens and Sparta, and teaches them about daily life in

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Ancient Greece. The book contains violence, even though it is aimed at a younger audience. However, this makes the text realistic as the time period of the book focuses on a civil war in Ancient Greece. The Peloponnesian War remains to be an unpopular topic among authors of children's literature. This is most likely due to the troublesome nature of the events which took place, such as the plague and the bullying nature in which Athens treated its fellow members of the Delian League.

Ross employs the historical city states as examples to discuss human behaviours. Ross' Athenian characters display positive traits such as goodness, fairness, and peacefulness. The Spartans, in contrast, represent negative values: violence, trickery, and cheating.

Ross' factual sections seem to be influenced by Thucydides. The ancient historian goes into detail when discussing how Athens and Sparta were different. For example, Thucydides stated that Sparta was "neither built in a compact form nor adorned with magnificent temples and public edifices", as opposed to the cities of its Athenian rivals (Thucydides *History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.10.2). Ross captures the beauty of Athens with illustrations of its temples and Agora. Other pages are dedicated to its democratic system of government and functional harbour in Piraeus. The comparisons with Thucydides continue further throughout the book. Another example would be when Ross discusses the interaction between Kinesias and the Helots. In ancient Greece the Helots were forced to work for the Spartans as their slaves and farmers. Due to their dislike for each other the Helots accepted aid from the Athenians who helped settle them in the ancient outpost of Naupactus. Ross shows his Helots as repaying the Athenians kindness by aiding Kinesias and granting him safe travel to Olympia (Thucydides *History of the Peloponnesian War,* 1.14.2).

The illustrations in the book are realistic and provide a visual representation of ancient Greece. An example for this is a diagram of a small merchant ship entitled a "round ship." The illustration includes the ship's contents, which contain amphorae holding oil and wine, decorated pottery, and human cargo in the form of slaves. The characters are shown doing different activities, such as working or relaxing. An example of this is an illustration showing Helots hunting, farming, and fishing.

The illustrations make it easy to understand which characters are

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	‘good’ or ‘bad’, as the Spartans are usually depicted wearing red. In situations where there are no Spartans, the Athenians remain obvious due to Ross’ focalisation of the action through Pylades. Pylades continuously reminds the readers that Kinesias fights for his country, works the hardest and deservs to win at the Olympics, whereas Lykourgos and the Spartans are cheaters with no honour. As Pylades is a young character, he younger readers can identify with and relate to him. The year of publication of Ross’ book, 2004, was an important year for Greece, as it coincided with the Summer Olympic Games taking place in Greece. Thus, interest in the event was at a particularly high level. Ross’ book is followed by two more books from the same series, also with a historical focus, looking at Ancient Egyptian and Roman culture.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Agora Apollo Athena Athens Masks Olympic Games Oracles Peloponnesian War Pottery / Vases Sparta Theatre
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Conflict Family Heroism Knowledge Revenge Tricksters Values

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