Kostas Poulos

Monsters of Greek Mythology

Illustrated by
Sofia Papadopoulou



ΜΕΤΑΙΧΜΙΟ

EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL

The Riddle of the Sphinx





PLAYING WITH THE MYTH

Educational material
by Maria Gonidaki

Translated
by Leo Kalovyrnas

LET'S LEARN ABOUT...

THE SPHINX

Ancient Greeks imagined the Sphinx as having the body of a winged lion and the head of a woman. That's how she was portrayed on vases and sculptures. In some statues she was also given a serpent's tail. That's what the marble Sphinx dedicated by the inhabitants of Naxos island to the temple of Apollo at Delphi looks like.

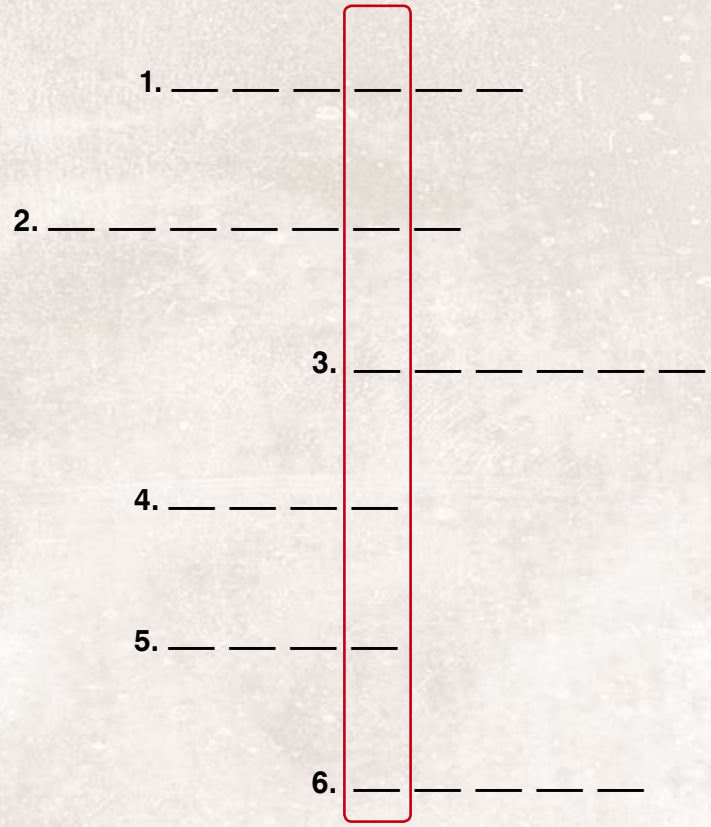
The most well-known myth about the Sphinx is the one about the Sphinx of Thebes, a city in ancient Greece. She was the daughter of Chimera (a monstrous fire-breathing creature consisting of many animals) and Orthrus (who was a two-headed dog guarding Geryon's cattle). According to other sources, she was the child of Echidna (a monster that was half-woman, half-serpent) and Typhon (a monstrous serpentine giant and the most deadly creature in Greek mythology). In this latter version, she was sister to Orthrus and other monsters, such as the Lernaean Hydra, a many-headed serpent, and Cerberus, a three-headed dog that guarded the gates to the world of the dead. The Sphinx of Thebes perched on a rock just outside the entrance of the city. She strangled and devoured every passer-by that couldn't find the solution to the riddle she posed. Her name in Greek means 'she who strangles'. Then one day, wise Oedipus came along and found the answer, causing the Sphinx to tumble from the rock and die. Then Oedipus became king of Thebes. According to one version, Sphinx was sent by the goddess Hera to torment Thebes because its citizens didn't pay her enough respect.

As it seems, the ancient Greeks believed that the Sphinx punished people on behalf of the gods. At the same time, however, she was a guardian and protector who warded off evil, like many other monstrous creatures. That's why a lot of Sphinxes were placed at the entrance of temples or tombs. Ancient Egyptians also thought of the Sphinx in a similar light. She was seen as a symbol of the power of the pharaohs, and was worshipped as a guardian deity. The most famous Egyptian Sphinx is the one at Giza, close to the great pyramids.

WORD GAME

Fill in the missing words and the answer to the riddle of the Sphinx will appear vertically.

1. According to one myth, the Sphinx was the daughter of Echidna and ...
2. The one who solved the riddle of the Sphinx of Thebes and became king of the city.
3. The Sphinx of Naxos is made of ...
4. The most famous Egyptian Sphinx is the Sphinx of...
5. The sphinx has the body of a...
6. Many statues show the Sphinx with the tail of a...



Try coming up with a riddle of your own.
Can your friends find the solution?



Answers: **1.** Typhon. **2.** Oedipus. **3.** Marble. **4.** Giza. **5.** Lion. **6.** Snake.

- Take a close look at the features of the Sphinx of Naxos statue and another portrayal of it on an ancient vase. What differences and similarities do you notice?

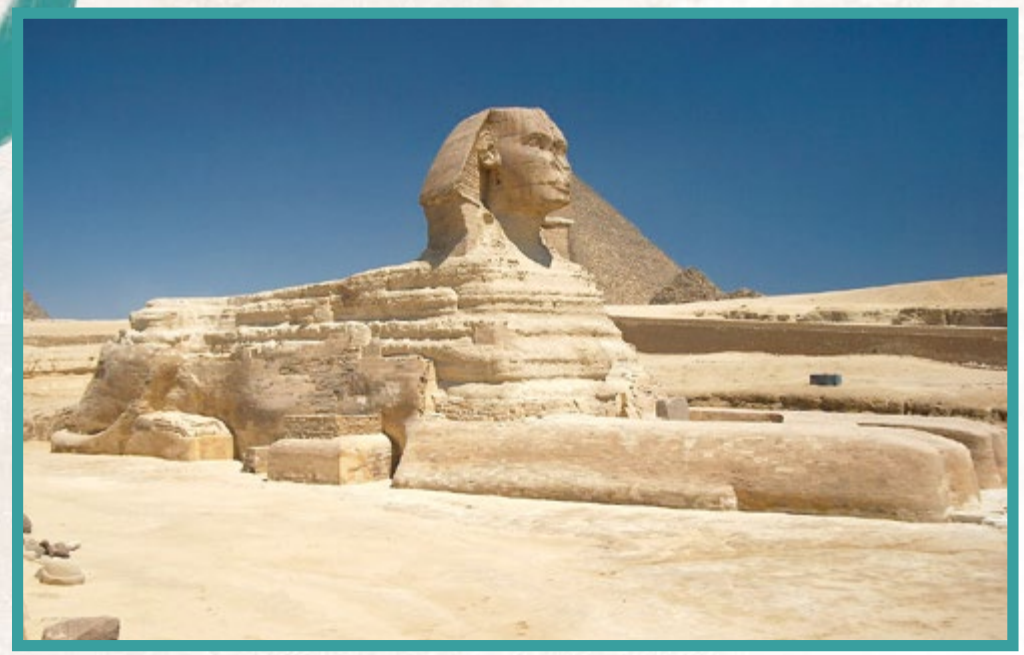


Delphi, Archaeological Museum



Rome, Vatican Museum

- Below you see the Great Sphinx of Giza. Does it look like the Greek ones?
- Why is it so big? (It is an impressive 73.5m long and 20.22m tall, the largest monolithic statue in the world, which means it's made entirely of a single rock). Could the huge size of pharaonic works of art in the Egyptian civilisation serve to emphasise the great power of the pharaohs?
- What conclusions can be drawn about how art relates to those who are in power in any given society?



- The Sphinx was a composite creature, meaning it had the body parts from several animals. Do you know of any similar hybrid creatures from other religions or any fictional characters that fit this description?

AN IMPOSSIBLY STRANGE MONSTER CONSISTING OF 3 DIFFERENT ANIMALS. ITS NAME HAS COME TO MEAN ANY HYBRID MONSTER.
A CREATURE THAT WAS HALF MAN HALF HORSE.
SEA-CREATURES THAT ARE HALF HUMAN AND HALF FISH.
A FAMOUS HINDU GOD THAT IS PART HUMAN AND PART ELEPHANT.

- The Chimera was a monstrous fire-breathing hybrid creature that had the body of a lion with the head of a goat arising from its back, and a tail that ended with a snake's head – meaning it had three heads!
- Centaurs were Greek mythological creatures with the upper body of a human and the lower body and legs of a horse.
- Mermaids are legendary aquatic creatures with the head and upper body of a female human and the tail of a fish. There are also legends about male mermaids, called mermen.
- Ganesha is one of the most worshipped gods of Hinduism. He has the head of an elephant, a human body and usually four arms. He is a benevolent god who is worshipped as a remover of obstacles.

- A lot of ancient works of art are unearthed every year thanks to the archaeological digs taking place all over Greece. Only recently, an important ancient tomb was discovered at Amphipolis. Two stunning statues of Sphinxes were found at its entrance.
- Would you like to search the web for more archaeological finds from around the world in recent years?
- What do you think being an archaeologist is like? Do you believe there should be digs? Is unearthing the artefacts of our ancestors of any benefit to us in the here and now?





The song of the Sirens





PLAYING WITH THE MYTH

Educational material by Maria Gonidaki
Translated by Leo Kalovyrnas



LET'S LEARN ABOUT...

THE SIRENS

In the imagination of the ancient Greeks, the Sirens were half women and half birds of prey. In the *Odyssey* and in the myth of the Argonauts, there were only two Sirens. But in other ancient texts, three Sirens are mentioned. The Sirens went by various names: Thelxiope or Thelxinoe, Molpe, and Aglaophonos; or again, Peisinoe, Aglaope, and Thelxiepeia. Their father was the River Achelous, or according to another source, the sea god Phorcys. Their mother was Melpomene the Muse or another Muse, Terpsichore. Another source gives Cthon, which is another name for Earth, as their mother.

The Sirens lived on the island of Anthemoessa, and their music mesmerised seamen to such a degree that they lost their senses and changed course towards the island. There they lived in a state of blissful daze, forgetting to even feed themselves, so at some point they just died. The only ones to ever get away were Jason and his Argonauts, and Odysseus with his shipmates.

Jason managed to escape by following the advice of the Centaur Cheiron, who had counselled him to take Orpheus along on the trip. When the Sirens began to sing, Orpheus started playing his lyre and sang so melodiously that the Argonauts listened to his singing instead and ignored the tempting song of the Sirens.

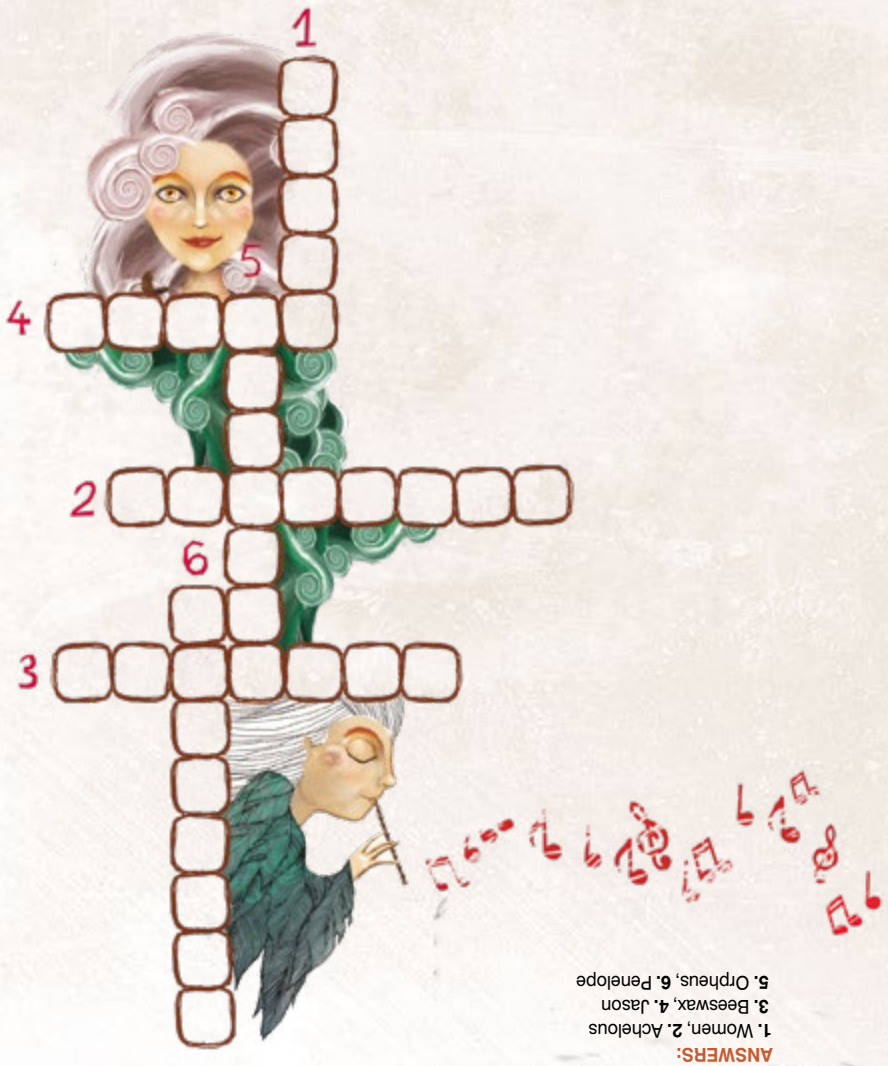
Odysseus followed a tip given to him by Circe the Sorceress, and so stuffed the ears of his shipmates with beeswax and ordered them to tie him up and not untie him no matter how much he begged and implored. And so their ship sailed by the Sirens' island and they continued their journey unscathed.

And perhaps it was just this incident that caused the death of the Sirens, because they simply couldn't bear the knowledge that they had been defeated and so they jumped to their deaths in the sea and were turned to rocks. According to another version of the myth, the Sirens jumped into the sea and died after losing to the Muses in a song contest.



CROSSWORD

1. The Sirens were half birds of prey and half...
2. The name of the Sirens' father.
3. What Odysseus used to save his shipmates.
4. The leader of the Argonauts.
5. His music saved the Argonauts.
6. Odysseus's wife.



ANSWERS:
1. Women, **2.** Achelous
3. Beeswax, **4.** Jason
5. Orpheus, **6.** Penelope

Do you know of any other mythical or fictional creatures that are either winged or can make dangerous sounds?

Here are some examples:

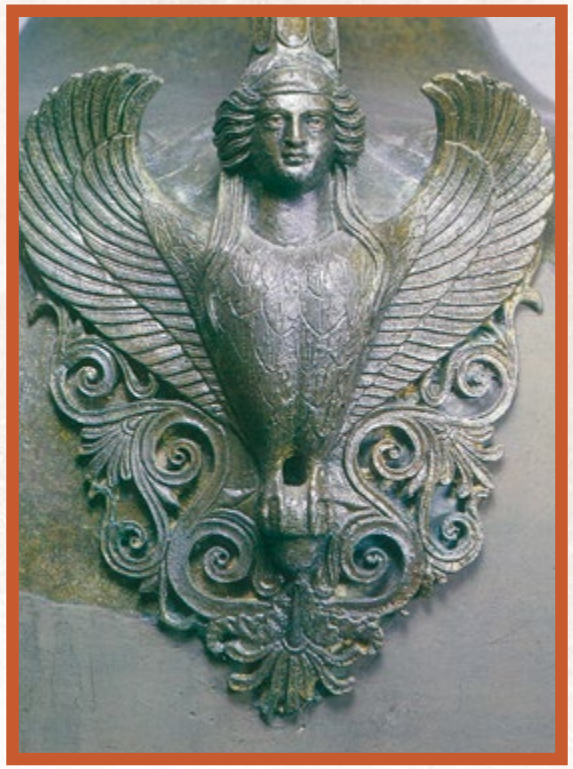
- Scary creatures in Irish mythology.
- An X-Man with a sonic scream in Marvel Comics.
- In the *Harry Potter* book series, creatures that are inhumanely beautiful and very destructive.

- In Irish mythology, **Banshees** were legendary female ghosts who were said to possess a powerful cry and herald death.
- In Marvel Comics, one of the X-Men is an Irish mutant called **Banshee**, who possesses a sonic scream that is capable of harming his enemies' ears.
- The **Veela** are the team mascots of the Bulgarian National Quidditch team and are portrayed as very attractive women. Like the Sirens, Veela music and dance has the power to cloud people's minds and make them want to do insane and self-destructive things. When the Veela get angry they transform into beings with heads like birds, with beaks and scaly wings.



- When sailors were away from home for long periods of time, their loved ones missed them terribly and so blamed the sea for taking them away. That's how people started making up stories about sea creatures like the Sirens, who always tried to beguile the sailors and keep them from returning to their families and homelands. Since the sailors' families were deeply hurt by what the Sirens did, they imagined them as monsters.

- Take a close look at how a Siren is portrayed on a hydria (an ancient liquid-carrying vessel with three handles).



Thessaloniki, Archaeological Museum

- Compare the Siren that is shown on the hydria with how the illustrator has imagined them to be in this book. What similarities or differences can you spot?



- Take a close look at the two images. On the left page there is an illustration from an ancient vase, while on the right page we see a painting by a modern Greek artist.
- Which version of the myth is shown in both images?
- How many Sirens are there?
- Write down the names of the Sirens and the man standing up.

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London, British Museum

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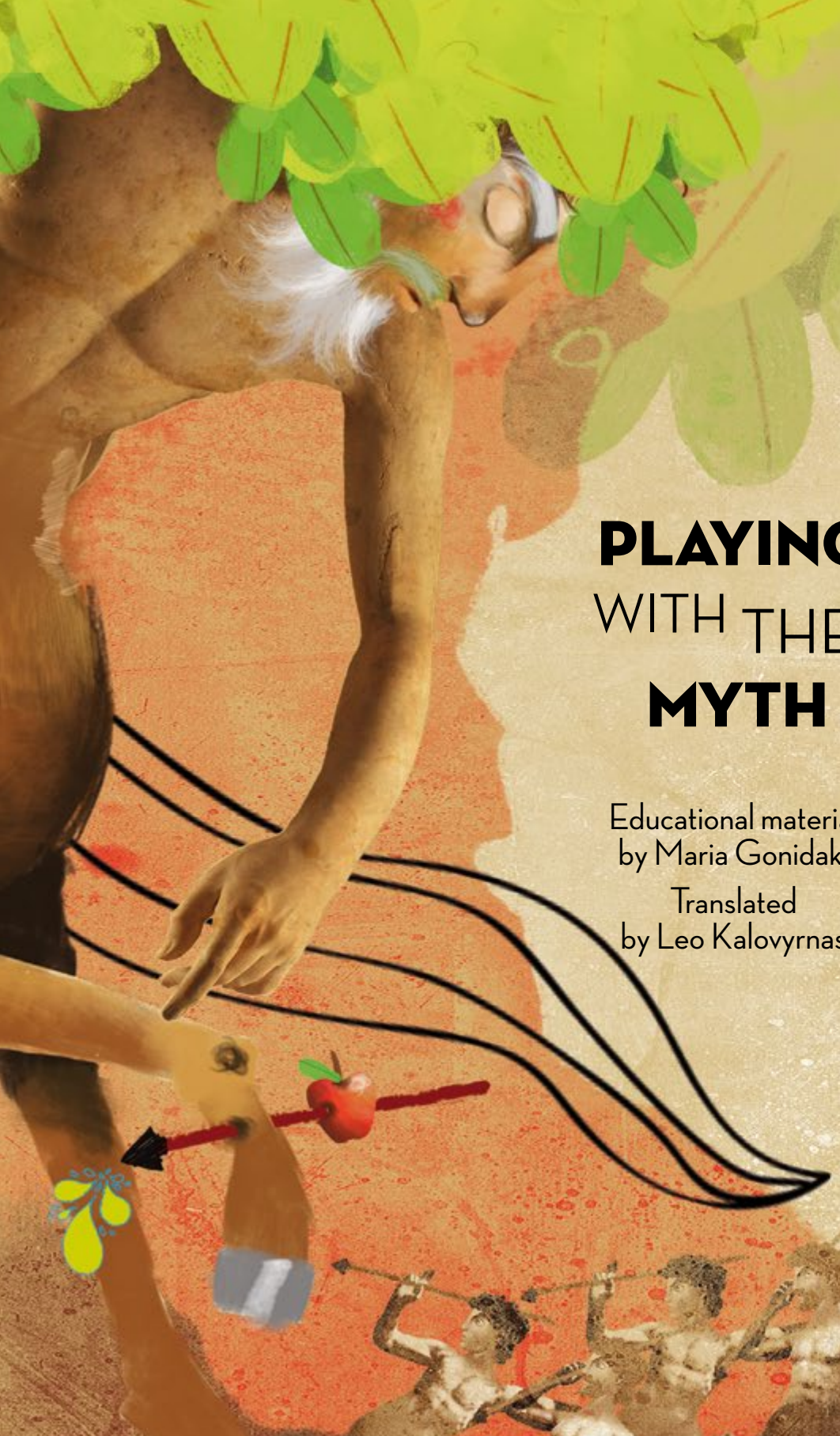
- The modern Greek artist has portrayed all figures looking exactly the same in order to stress that in our present day everyone dresses the same, eats the same food, or enjoys the same kind of things, which means that all variety in our ways and behaviours has been lost. Do you agree with that point of view?



Giannis Gaitis, Sirens-Odysseus, National Art Gallery (Athens)

Under the shadow of the Centaurs





PLAYING WITH THE MYTH

Educational material
by Maria Gonidaki

Translated
by Leo Kalovyrnas

LET'S LEARN ABOUT...

THE CENTAURS

Ancient Greeks imagined Centaurs as having the upper body of humans and the lower body and legs of a horse. They believed that the first Centaur was the son of Ixion, the cruel king of the Lapiths (a tribe of people that lived in Thessaly), and Nephele, a cloud that resembled Hera.

The Centaurs lived a life of freedom on the mountains, most of them on Mount Pelion. They were wild and belligerent, got drunk easily and got into fights.

Ixion had a son, Pirithus, who succeeded him on the throne of the Lapiths. Pirithus invited his half-brothers to his wedding, but the Centaurs got very drunk and tried to abduct the bride and the other Lapith women. A big battle ensued called Centauromachy, in which the Lapiths defeated the Centaurs and drove them away. In that way justice prevailed, and the civilised Lapiths defeated their wild and barbaric neighbours.

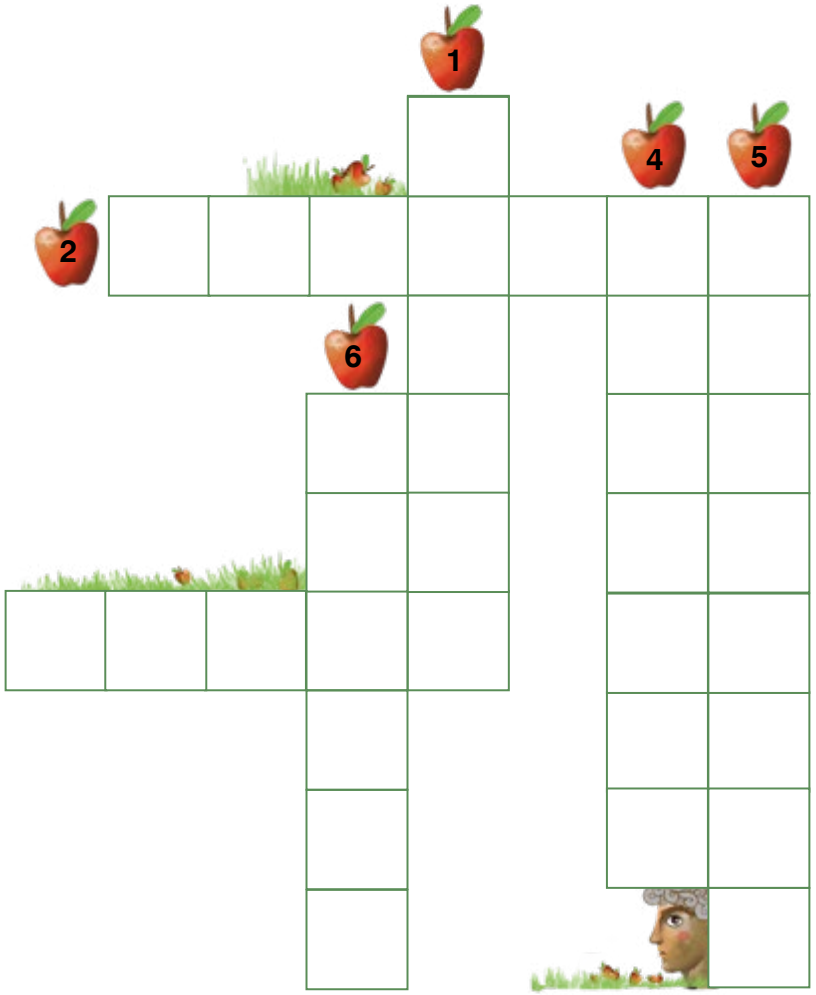
There were Centaurs in the Peloponnese too. One of them, the good-natured Centaur Pholus met Heracles, when the latter went there to hunt down the Erymanthian Boar. Pholus gave the hero a place to spend the night and stood by his side when the other Centaurs attacked him.

Pholus was not the only good Centaur; Chiron was also a just and wise Centaur. He was the son of Cronus (meaning he didn't draw his lineage from Ixion), lived on Mount Pelion, and was very helpful towards humans. He was the teacher of many great heroes, such as Achilles and Jason, as he was extremely knowledgeable and skilful: he was a huntsman, a great warrior, a musician, a seer, and very skilled in healing wounds with herbs. As a matter of fact, he was a proficient surgeon; when Thetis, Achilles' mother, accidentally burnt her son's ankle, Chiron replaced the bone with that of a giant!

CROSSWORD



1. He taught medicine to Asclepius.
2. Ixion's wife.
3. The father of the first Centaur.
4. The victors in the Centauromachy.
5. The name of the Centaur that started the Centauromachy.
6. Which Centaur lived in the Peloponnese?





ANSWERS
1. CHIRON. 2. NEPHELE. 3. IXION. 4. LAPITHS. 5. EYRYTION. 6. PHOLUS.

Take a look at the image on the ancient vase below.
Try to figure out who are depicted. The following clues will help you:

- What is the man to the right holding? What is hanging from his belt?
- Whom is he greeting and why?



British Museum, London

- The **Centauromachy** was a favourite subject matter in the art of ancient Greeks. Some of its best known depictions can be seen in the frieze of the Zeus temple at Olympia and in the Parthenon.

- Take a look at the drawing of a reconstruction of the pediment of the temple of Zeus. Notice the figures, and use different colours to colour the Centaurs and the Lapiths in so that you can tell them apart.

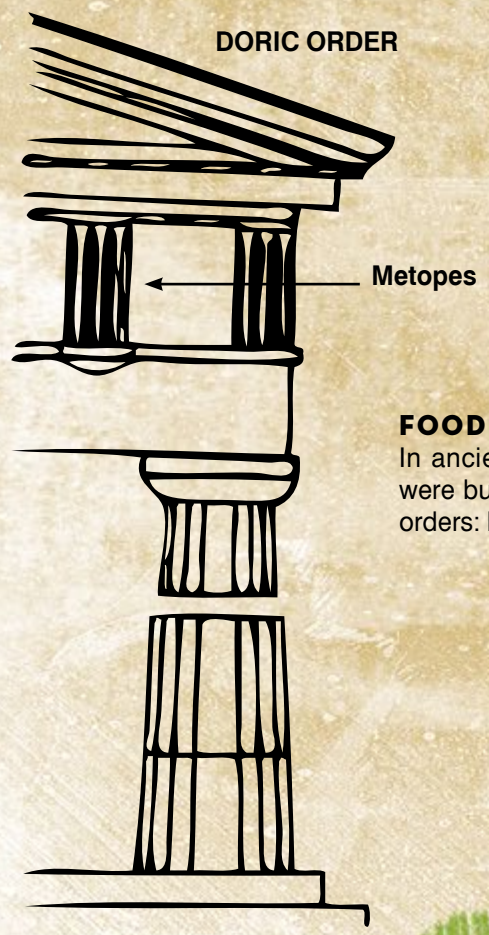




- The serene figure of a god can be seen in the middle of the image. Who may that be? What contrast does his presence serve?

The metopes (meaning the rectangular pieces of marble in the frieze below the roof) on the south side of the Parthenon depict scenes from the Centauromachy.

In the drawing below you can see how Doric temples were built (the Parthenon is a temple of the Doric order with some Ionic architectural features). Notice where the metopes are located.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT
In ancient Greek architecture temples were built in three different styles called orders: Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian.

Below you can see one of the metopes showing the Centauromachy. The original is housed in the British Museum along with fourteen others. One more is located in the Louvre Museum, and only one in the Acropolis Museum in Athens. These metopes were taken to the British Museum along with other sculptures from the Parthenon when the monument was looted by people working for Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin, between 1801 and 1804, when Greece was still part of the Ottoman Empire.
These works of art are better known as the Elgin or Parthenon Marbles. Look up on the internet information about how they were looted and how Greece has been petitioning the British Museum to return them to the place where they were created.



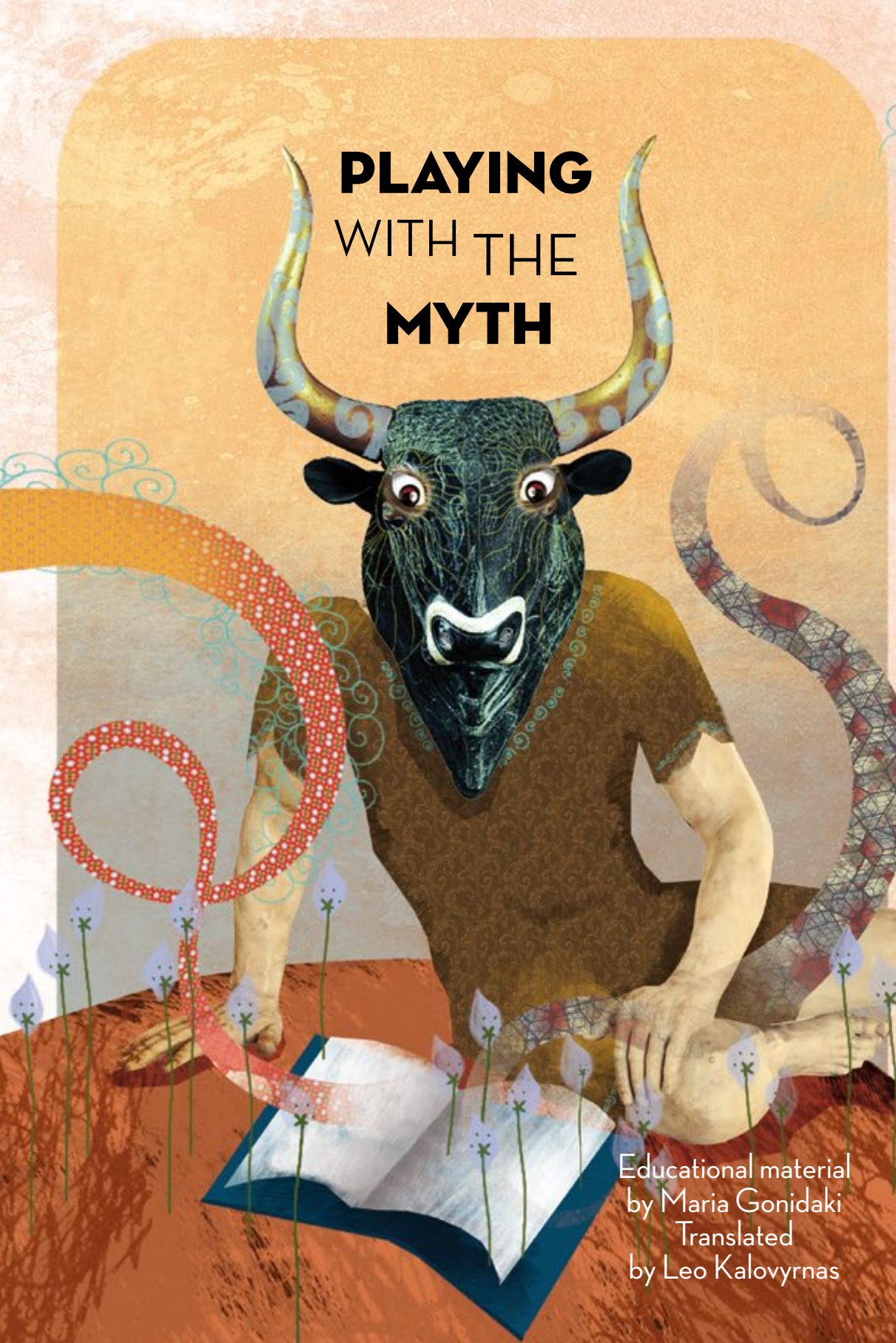


The Minotaur and the Labyrinth





PLAYING WITH THE MYTH



Educational material
by Maria Gonidaki
Translated
by Leo Kalovyrnas

LET'S LEARN ABOUT...

THE MINOTAUR AND THE LABYRINTH

Minos, son of the god Zeus and princess Europa, was a great legendary king of Crete. King Minos had asked the god of the sea Poseidon to give him a divine sign in order to convince his siblings that he was the fittest to take the throne after the death of their mortal father. Poseidon obliged, and a magnificent bull rose out of the waves. Minos, however, forgot to sacrifice the bull to the god, so Poseidon decided to punish the king by making the king's wife, Pasiphaë fall in love with the bull. They mated, and she gave birth to the Minotaur, a double-natured monster. (Remember other similar creatures such as the Centaurs, the Sirens, or the Sphinx.) The Minotaur had the body of a man and the head of a bull.

King Minos got rid of the Minotaur by locking him up in the Labyrinth. This was a complex maze full of small chambers and lots of passageways built below the Knossos Palace by the renowned Athenian architect, sculptor and inventor Daedalus. No one had ever managed to find the way out of the Labyrinth. That is no one except for Theseus.

King Minos wanted to take revenge on the Athenians because he considered them responsible for the death of his son. He attacked Athens with his ships and asked Zeus to send a plague on the city of Athens. To put an end to all the suffering the Athenians agreed to send fourteen young men and women to Crete every seven years, where they were imprisoned in the Labyrinth. It was on one of these journeys that Theseus, the prince of Athens, sailed to Crete. With the help of the king's daughter Ariadne, Theseus managed to not only kill the Minotaur but also to find his way out of the maze thanks to a ball of thread which he unravelled as he went in. Then he set sail for Athens together with Ariadne and the other young men and women.



THE MINOAN CIVILISATION

The celebrated Minoan civilisation took its name after King Minos. The Minoan civilisation flourished from around 3000 BC to 1200 BC. Archaeological digs at various places in Crete have brought to light glorious palaces with great larders, and a lot of workshops where pottery, jewellery, stamps, and fabric were crafted. The Minoans cultivated the land, raised cattle, and were also extremely capable seamen, travelling across the Aegean all the way to Egypt, Cyprus, and the Middle East where they traded their produce for copper, silver, gold, and ivory.

- Take a look at the map and notice where the great big palaces of Minoan Crete were located.
  - They are all near the coast. Why is that?



- Take a look at the layouts of the Cretan palaces. Do they look a bit like labyrinths?

KNOSSOS



PHAISTOS



MALIA



ZAKROS





WORD GAME

Fill in the missing words and the name of Minotaur's mother will appear vertically.

1. King Minos' mother.
2. Theseus's father.
3. The location of one of the magnificent palaces of Minoan Crete.
4. She helped Theseus defeat the Minotaur.
5. The Minoans built several of these across Crete.
6. What Theseus used to find his way out of the Labyrinth.
7. The architect of the Labyrinth.
8. The number of youths sent by Athens to Crete as slaves.

1. — — — — — —
2. — — — — — — —
3. — — — — — — — —
4. — — — — — — — —
5. — — — — — — — —
6. — — — — — — —
7. — — — — — — — —
8. — — — — — — — —

Take a look at the illustration on an ancient vase.

- Can you guess who the people shown there are?
- Write down their names in the blank spaces.
- Now take a closer look at their facial expressions. What kind of emotions did the ancient artist allow to show on the faces of the victor and the defeated?
- What's the role of the figure standing on the right?

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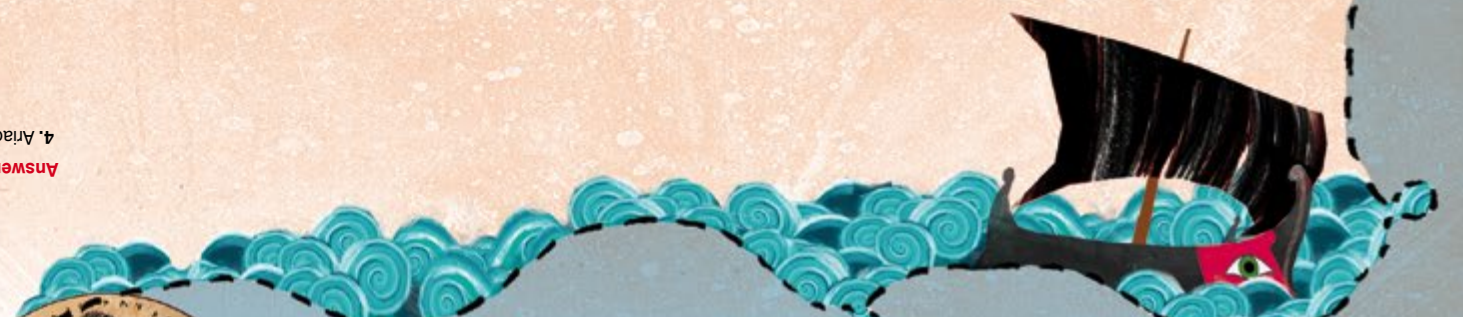
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Archaeological Museum, Ferrara, Italy

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Answers: **1.** Europa. **2.** Aegeus. **3.** Phaistos. **4.** Ariadne. **5.** Palaces. **6.** Thread. **7.** Daedalus. **8.** Fourteen.

The fresco below is from the Palace at Knossos and it pictures an ancient ritual sport called Bull-leaping. This was a kind of sport during the Minoan era, related to the worship of bulls. The athletes would perform jumps, leaps, and other acrobatics over the bull without causing the animal any harm. That way they tried to show off how fearless and agile they were.



Heraklion, Archaeological Museum

Take a look at the fresco and imagine what the entire scene of the ritual must have been like in the central courtyard of the palace.

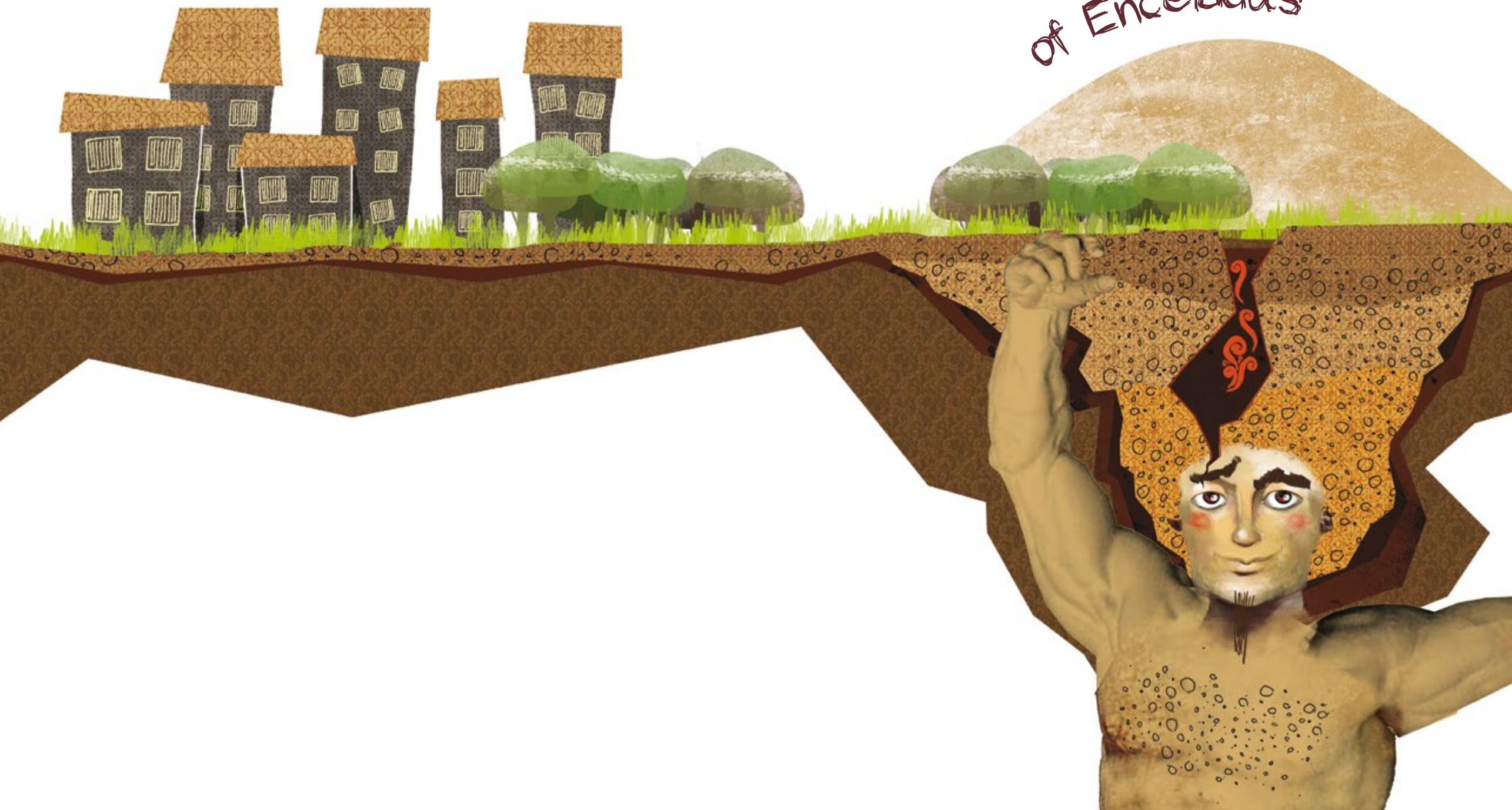
- Who would be watching the ritual and where would they be sitting (e.g. the royal family and the aristocrats of Minoan society, the priests of Minoan religion, the people)?
- How did the spectators show their admiration for the competing athletes?
- Based on what criteria did the best athletes stand out? What prize do you think they got?

THINK ABOUT THIS...

Have you ever seen or heard about bullfighting in Spain?
What are the differences and similarities between Spanish bullfights and Minoan bull-leaping?

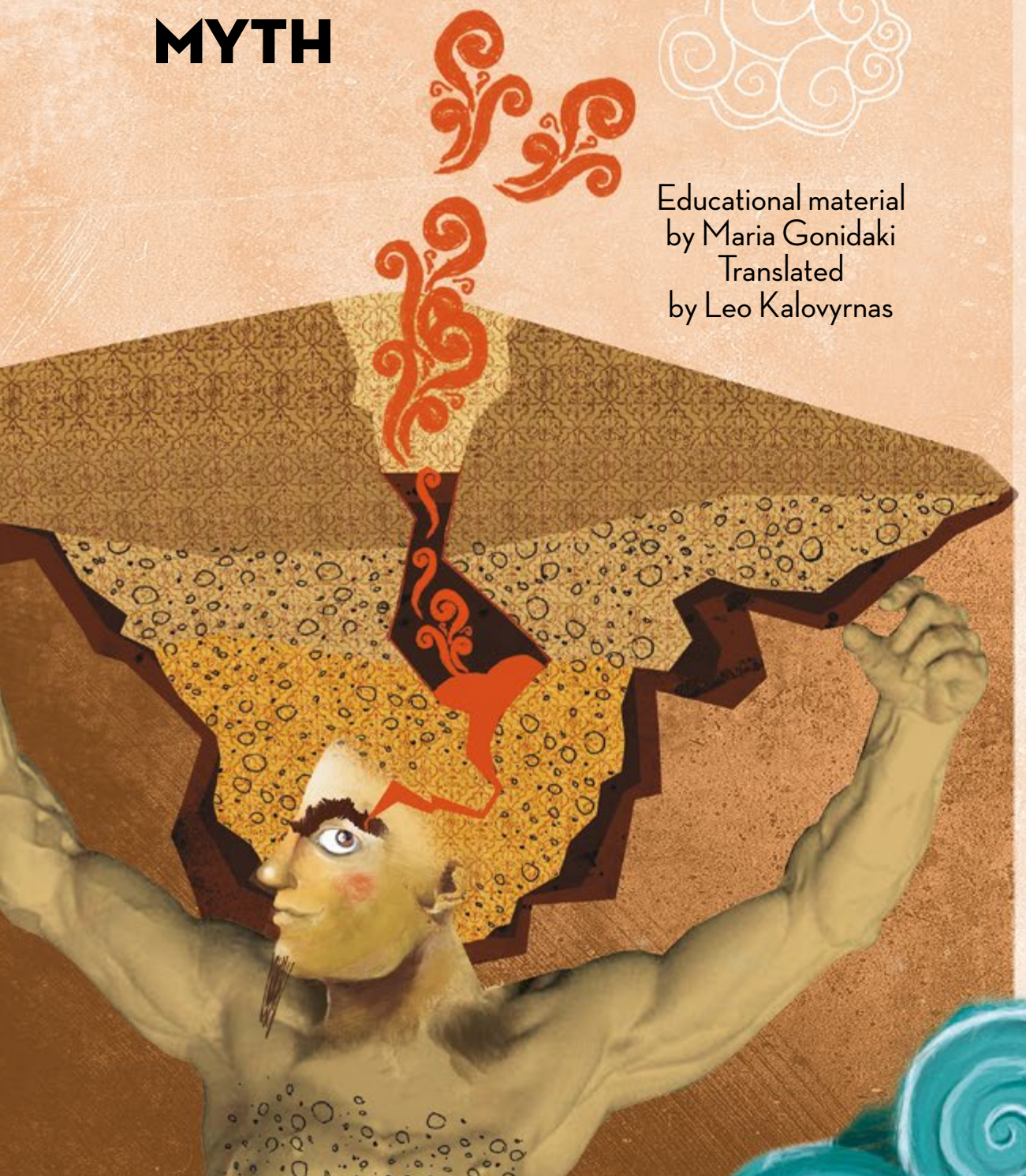


The Wrath of Enceladus



PLAYING WITH THE MYTH

Educational material
by Maria Gonidaki
Translated
by Leo Kalovyrnas



LET'S LEARN ABOUT...

ENCELADUS

Ancient Greeks imagined Enceladus as one of the Giants, son of Tartarus (or Uranus) and Gaia (Earth). Like all Giants, he looked like a regular mortal, only much, much bigger, with inexhaustible strength and formidable to behold.

Though not immortal, the Giants started a war against the Olympian Gods (Gigantomachy). The gods were attacked out of the blue: whole mountains and trees came raining down on them. Needless to say, they didn't take this onslaught lying down. Grabbing their weapons, they countered the offensive. Even though all the gods fought bravely with Zeus as their leader, the war could not be won, because the opponents were equally strong. Then a rumour went around that the gods would overpower the Giants only if a mortal helped them out. Zeus called upon his son Hercules to fight on the gods' side; Zeus also managed to find and destroy the plant that was meant to secure the Giants a victory before their mother got to it. With help from Hercules, the gods succeeded in defeating the Giants: some of them they killed, others they buried deep below the ground under entire mountains, as in the case of Polybotes and Enceladus.

Enceladus took on Athena, Zeus's daughter, who chased him across the Mediterranean Sea and eventually threw the island of Sicily on top of him, burying him under it. This is why every time the Giant tries to get up, the island quakes and trembles, spewing fire from Etna, a volcano in Sicily which remains active to this very day. There are other versions of this story, though this is the most well-known. According to other tales, Enceladus was killed by Silenus, a follower of the god Dionysus, or he was struck by a thunderbolt cast by Zeus, who then buried him under mountain Ossa or Othrys; or again, Athena killed him by driving over him in her four-horse chariot.

The ancient Greeks also believed that every time the god Poseidon came out of his underwater kingdom and walked on land, his steps shook the earth so much that Pluto, the god of the Underworld, feared that the earth might open in half and Tartarus might be revealed.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Earthquakes have always scared people around the world, so many cultures have come up with stories to explain why they happen. The myth about Enceladus (as well as the myths about Poseidon and Zeus) was how ancient Greeks attempted to explain the natural phenomenon of earthquakes.

WORD GAME

If you find the missing words, the name of the island that crushed Enceladus will appear.

1. The leader of the gods in Gigantomachy.
2. According to one version of the story, he killed Enceladus.
3. The mortal who helped the gods defeat the Giants.
4. Polybotes was crushed by which island?
5. One of the Giants, brother of Enceladus.
6. Etna is located in which country?

1. _ _ _ _
2. _ _ _ _ _ _ _
3. _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
4. _ _ _ _ _ _ _
5. _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
6. _ _ _ _ _



Answers: 1. Zeus. 2. Silenus. 3. Hercules. 4. Nisyros. 5. Polybotes. 6. Italy.

Can you tell the gods and giants apart? Separate them in the right column.

Zeus, Enceladus, Polybotes, Dionysus, Athena, Alcyoneus, Eurymedon, Poseidon, Pelor, Apollo.

GODS	GIANTS



Take a close look at the illustration on the ancient vase below and answer the questions:

- Can you tell who the two figures shown are? The objects they carry provide helpful hints.
- Which elements from the Enceladus myth as we know it are depicted in this work of art? Which elements seem to differ from the myth?



Louvre Museum, Paris

WHAT IS AN EARTHQUAKE?

- The Earth's crust is divided into huge pieces called tectonic plates, a bit like jigsaw pieces joined together. When the energy stored deep in the Earth's core gets too high, it is suddenly released as an earthquake. This usually occurs along the lines where the plates are joined (often called fault lines). Earthquakes can range in size from those that are so weak that they cannot be felt to those violent enough to toss people around and destroy entire cities. Seismology is the study of earthquakes.

- Greece rates as the first country in Europe and sixth in the world when it comes to seismic activity, meaning a lot of earthquakes happen in this country. Most of them don't cause any major problems, but some have had a tremendous impact on people and buildings. It is therefore important to be well prepared before an earthquake strikes, as well as know what we must do during an earthquake and right after.

FOOTBALLQUAKE

Curious about what a footballquake may be? Visit https://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/hazards/earthquakes/FootballQuake/home.html and find out how *you* can cause an earthquake!

Does the UK have any earthquakes?
Despite being nowhere near where tectonic plates meet, the UK experiences hundreds of small earthquakes each year.

Visit the webpage of the Greek **General Secretariat for Civil Protection** and read what to do during an earthquake depending if you are indoors or outdoors:
https://www.civilprotection.gr/en/earthquakes

Visit the webpage of the **British Geological Survey**, which has lots of fun facts about earthquakes. https://www.bgs.ac.uk/discoveringGeology/hazards/earthquakes/home.html

