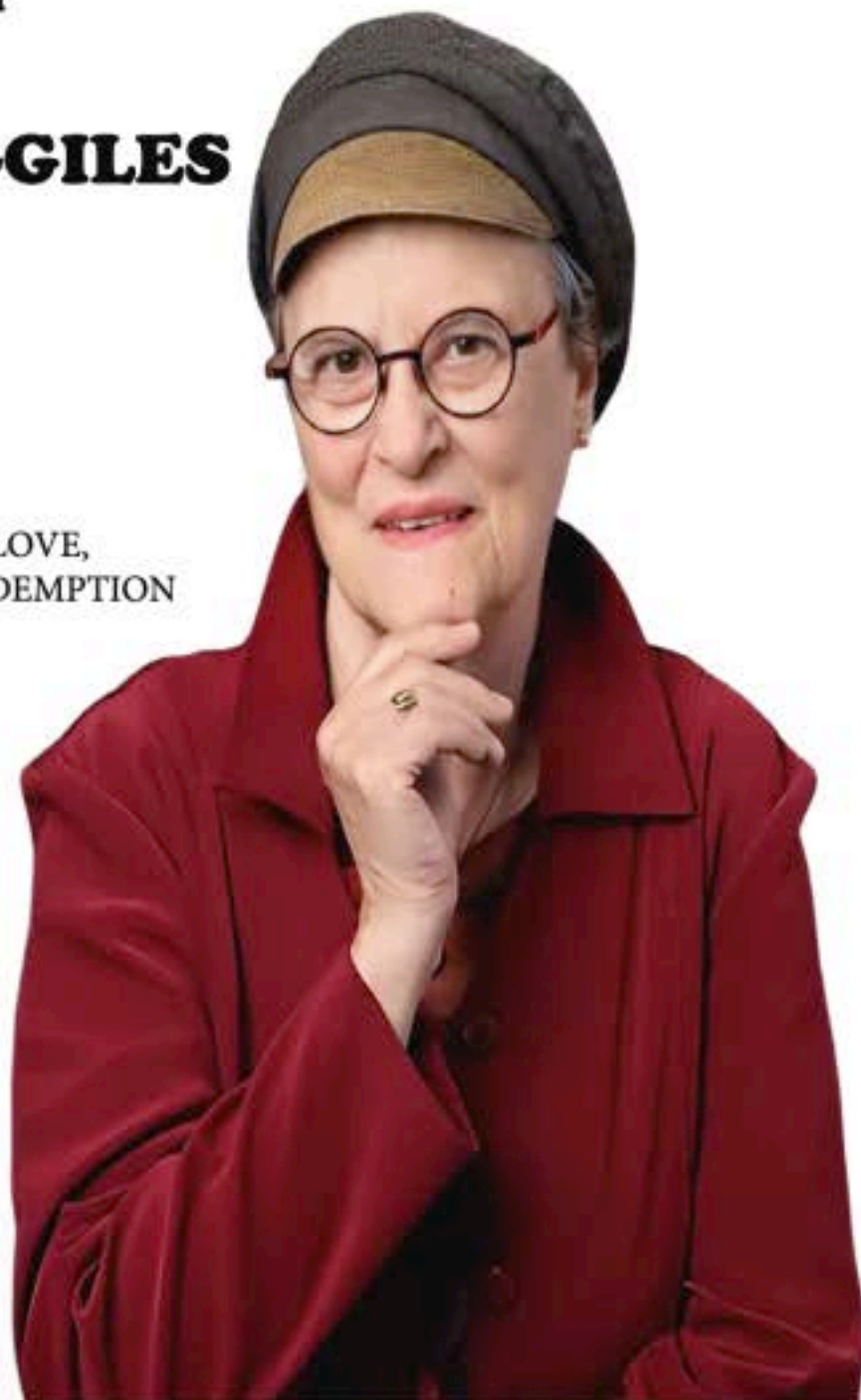


**AN UNEXPECTED ALLY**  
**BY**  
**SOPHIA**  
**KOUIDOU-GILES**

A GREEK TALE OF LOVE,  
 REVENGE AND REDEMPTION



Sophia Kouidou-Giles was born in Thessaloniki, Greece, and university educated in the USA. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and masters in social work. In her over-30-year child welfare career, she served as a practitioner, educator, researcher, and administrator and published articles in Greek and English professional journals. In recent years, her focus has shifted to writing nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and translation. She has published in Voices, Persimmon Tree, Assay, The Raven's Perch, The Time Collection, and The Blue Nib. Her poetry chapbook is Transitions and Passages. Her work has appeared in anthologies, including The Time Collection, Visual Verse, and Art in the Time of Unbearable Crisis.

Her memoir, Επιστροφή Στη Θεσσαλονίκη/Return to Thessaloniki, was published in Greek by Tyfri Press. The book in English: Sophia's Return: Uncovering My Mother's Past, was published by She Writes Press. Sophia lives in Seattle, Washington, near her son, her daughter-in-law, and two grandsons. Find out more about her at her website. Perse is a sequel to An Unexpected Ally. Look for it in November 2025.

Follow Sophia Kouidou-Giles on social media:

Facebook: @Kouidou | Twitter: @Kouidou | Instagram: @sophiakg1

## Interview questions for Sophia Kouidou-Giles

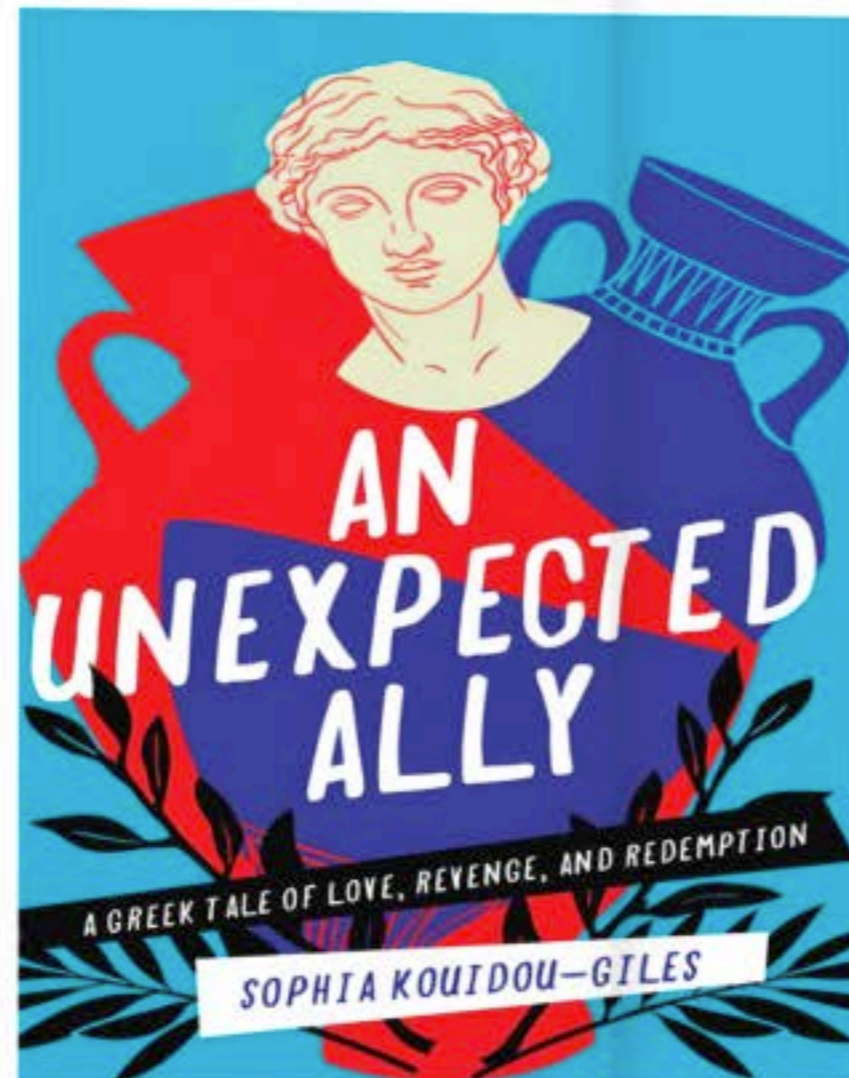
### 1. You are Greek and from the beautiful city of Thessaloniki. How did you decide to leave the capital and move out permanently to America?

I left Greece right after high school to come to the United States and attend college. The high school I had been attending in Thessaloniki, Anatolia College, is a truly excellent educational institution that introduced me to the English language and thoughts of study abroad. A recipient of a Fullbright scholarship I came to the US and studied psychology in the Pacific Northwest, fully intending to return to Greece. However, during the years I sought a master's degree, I met married and had my son here. I have settled in Seattle, WA but I do return to Thessaloniki, my heart home, as often as I can.

### 2. When did you start writing and what was the stimulus that motivated you to start?

I started writing *An Unexpected Ally: A Greek Tale of Love, Revenge, and Redemption*, in 2020 and finished it in March 2022. It took me about two years to complete.

The idea for the book originated from reading a series of historical fiction books, (Madeline Miller, Ellen Barker, Natalie Haynes), based on Greek myths. Right away, I loved the richness and creativity of these manuscripts, and realized the potential in mythology; besides, this was an opportunity to bridge one culture (where I was born) to another (where I reside). That is when I began delving into Greek myths and reading original sources, such as Homer, Greek tragedies, Herodotus, Xenophon, Apollonius and Ovid to learn more.



*An Unexpected Ally* is where I cast my characters in a new light. Working with women protagonists, like Circe and Skylla, afforded me the opportunity to create a new balance in the story, reimagining a plot with powerful female heroines, who in the past had been presented as secondary in tales about mighty men delivering heroic deeds and war victories. It was my opportunity to give agency to women.

### 3. Lets start by decoding the title of the book "AN UNEXPECTED ALLY". Did you know from the beginning that this would be the title of the book or did it come up along the way?

My goal was to come up with a title that provides a hint about the content of the book concisely and is engaging. The title of the novel and the book cover are meant to suggest that the story relates to ancient Greek myths while the subtitle hints at challenges the characters will face.

The title sprang out easily as I was writing the final chapters of the book. However, identifying the subtitle took a lot of back and forth, as I debated with friends and family what powerful emotions to highlight.

*An Unexpected Ally* hints at a twist that would surprise readers: the fortuitous friendship between Circe and Skylla. The subtitle, *A Greek Tale* identifies the basic ingredients of the novel, ancient Greek myths and discloses the principal challenges the characters will face: *love, revenge and redemption*.

### 4. By reading the book, it is easy for someone to see that a thorough research was done before writing it. What kind of research did you do? Did you gather information from the internet, historical sources, libraries or from all of them? Approximately how much time did you dedicate before completing the writing of this book?

There was research taking place all through the writing journey, with stops and starts as I needed to sort out plot details, settings, daily life. It started with my own copy of Homer's *Odyssey*, but I obtained a lot more sources from libraries, used bookstores, and google searches, seeking both texts and images. I came to enjoy surrounding myself with the print copies. I estimate half my endeavor was immersed in research, alongside these companions, while the remainder was taken up with manuscript crafting, refining, and reimagining.

**5. By using the “Odyssey” as a canvas for the development of the unrequited love of the truly wonderful fiction, why did you choose from Homer’s entire work to present Circe, Glaucus and Scylla?**

That is part of the mystery of creative writing. These three certainly charmed me! Of all the stories, plots and characters in Greek mythology, when I was rereading Homer’s description of Odysseus’ arrival to Aeaea, Circe’s island I knew she would be my protagonist! The stories of Glaucus and Scylla fell into place as I was working out the plot, the story arc, and the message I hoped to deliver with this novel. Perhaps they selected me! They became real, alive in my mind. I found expanding and extrapolating their characters in the retelling a wonderful opportunity to create relatable mortals and immortals, with flaws and virtues to resonate with contemporary readers.

**6. Why did you decide to present the Greek witch Circe through a personal restorative perspective as a deeply human, emotional being of unparalleled beauty and tenderness?**

My goal was to undo the image of a sorceress that is evil, mostly known for transforming men into pigs, and one that uses her powers for evil. It is not unusual in mythology to encounter two dimensional characters, personas that are all good, or all bad. But there is more complexity to people, to women, and this was an opportunity to build Circe as a fully-fledged being that was central to the plot, not just a secondary character in a supportive role. My aim was to give her strengths and weaknesses, along with some impressive magic that lets her steer her own destiny.

**7. The characters in your book are unexpectedly fascinating. With the dynamism of your delightful pen, the settings come alive, the thoughts of the heroes echo in the ears of the reader who is surprised, identifies, and sympathizes in the process. Do you ultimately believe that love is ecstasy or torture?**

This is a though provoking question that addresses the complexities, the Ying and Yang of life! Isn’t it fascinating that love contains both moments of sheer bliss and moments of heartache? And there are so many colors of love: agape, eros, familial love and filial love, to name a few.

The beginnings of these journeys are generally full of hope and promise, and they unfold with twists and turns where no one really knows where they lead. Yet, in life’s unpredictable odyssey, isn’t it undeniable that love is a journey worth taking,

for what is a life without love?

**8. What is your favourite activity that calms you down and relaxes you?**

I am naturally drawn to being out in nature, whether it’s taking long walks alone or with friends, especially by water. There is something soothing about the open-air magic, sounds and the beauty of the surroundings. Add the fascination I have for flowers and foliage. Whether they’re in a park, a forest, in the house, or gracing yards, there’s something incredibly captivating about them. I also take pleasure in arranging bouquets in vases and capturing them in photographs.

Music is also very important to me. Depending on the mood, it has the power to either relax me or energize me. I can lose myself in melodies, finding solace or motivation in different rhythms and sounds. I especially love Greek music of my youth and the poetry of its words.

And of course, there is nothing like reading a good book while snuggling up with my kitty. It’s a quiet, comforting escape where the outside fades away and I can fully immerse myself in a different world.

**9. Your next writing project is a sequel to the book “AN UNEXPECTED ALLY” titled “PERSE”. Can you tell us a few words about it or do you believe it’s a bit too early for that?**

Absolutely, I’d be happy to share a sneak peek into *PERSE*, the sequel to *AN UNEXPECTED ALLY*. This continuation delves into the adventures of Circe’s mother, Perse when she returns to her husband, Helios, the sun-god. Often, a child’s perspective differs from that of their parent.

As for the release, you can look forward to diving into “PERSE” in the spring of 2025. Stay tuned for more exciting details!

And thank you for your hospitality.