



Icarus & Daedalus

In the steps of the Myth



About this book

Agia Galini is the setting for one of the most enduring myths of Greece

- Icarus and Daedalus.

This book highlights the Daedalus trail, in modern times. The history surrounding the myth and the locations of the story.

Icarus & Daedalus

The Myth

Daedalus was an artisan based in Athens prior to the 15 century BC. He was known as an inventor and great architect, and was in the employ of the king. His apprentice, Talus, was equally talented and Daedalus became jealous of his craft, believing it would outshine him. One day he took Talus to the Acropolis and pushed him to his death.

Fearing retribution Daedalus fled Athens and found employment as the court architect with King Minos in Crete. Here he was responsible for the building of palaces and the great labyrinth.

Minos was the son of Zeus, and was well known to the Greek Gods. According to legend, after his son's death at the Athenian games, Minos agreed a deal with Poseidon and was granted a white bull as an offering. Minos liked the bull too much to sacrifice it, so he swapped it for another. Poseidon was angry and caused Minos' wife, Pasiphae, to fall in love with the bull. The result was a deformed child that was half man and half Bull. The Minotaur was condemned to live in the labyrinth, and to be fed 7 male and female sacrifices each year, a tribute from Athens who had killed Minos' son. One day Theseus challenged Minos that he could kill the Minotaur, and with the help of Minos' daughter, Ariadne, he went into the labyrinth. He had used a trick told to him by Daedalus of rolling out a string so he could find his way out again. Theseus killed the Minotaur and wed Ariadne, and returned to Athens. Minos however was displeased that Daedalus had helped Theseus, and cast him into the labyrinth as punishment with his son, Icarus.

Daedalus, to escape Minos, built wings from feathers and wax, and together with Icarus, flew from Soulia (now called Agia Galini) to the islands of Delos and Samos to the north. Icarus flew too high, and the sun melted the wings. He fell to the sea and drowned near the island now called Icthea.

Daedalus fled to Sicily, where he lived until his death.





Agia Galini - home to the story of Icarus and Daedalus



Statues of Icarus and Daedalus watch over the harbour area of the village







Agia Galini, ancient Soulia, was a port in Minoan times, but fell out of use until the late 19th century. Today it is vibrant fishing and tourist area in South Crete. South Crete has rugged terrain, spectacular scenery, and clean and sandy beaches.







In 2012 the Daedalus and Icarus Society of Agia Galini opened a new Greek amphitheater overlooking the harbour. Agia Galini is set to become a cultural capital of Crete.



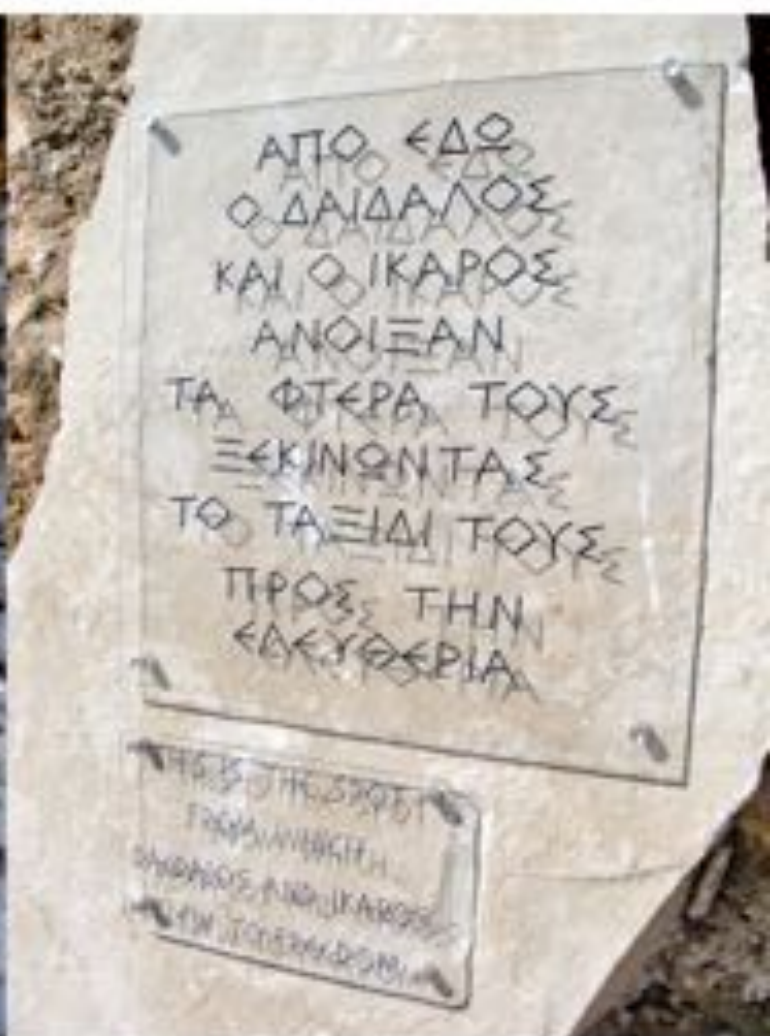
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Probable history

It is not known when Daedalus lived exactly, but was a renowned figure in ancient history. He was the 'Da Vinci' of his day, and is credited with the invention of the saw, the dividers for measuring, and many other tools and instruments. He was also a great architect, engineer, and shipbuilder, and was responsible for many artistic achievements. Born to the royal family, he worked for the King of Athens. At some time he left the court of Athens and went to Crete, to work for Minos (minos = ancient Cretan for 'King'). Why he left Athens is unclear but it seems to have been something to do with the death of his nephew, Talus, who it is said fell to his death from the Acropolis in Athens. Daedalus, in mythology, is blamed for this death, and it seems likely the death caused him to wish to leave Athens. It is unlikely a convict, as he is portrayed, would have been given sanctuary and then to work for Minos in such an important role. So it is more likely he left voluntarily, with an introduction to the court of Minos. There he met and married one of Minos' servants, and had at least one son, Icarus.

During the time Daedalus was at the Minos court, the queen Pasiphae gave birth to a deformed child. It was likely that the deformed child was rejected by the King, and maybe suffered from a condition similar to Proteus syndrome, where the head in particular continues growing and increasing in size, thus resembling a bull or elephant. As a result he was banished from the court, but continued to be fed and looked after. The child was after all, born of the Gods, and would not have been put to death. Such a child may become feral, and would attack humans, hence the stories of the sacrifices to the Minotaur, or literally "Bull of Minos".





Daedalus during this time was chief architect to Minos, and was responsible for palace building. It is rumored he was responsible for the building of Phaestos or Agia Triada in southern Crete, quarrying high quality stone from caves near to Gortys. These caves are 2.5km long and are made up from many passages and rooms, all interlinked, but with no natural light and deep underground. The existing caves still carry Minoan writing (known as Linear B) texts carved in the walls. They were a labyrinth, which in ancient Cretan actually referred to a place where animals were kept. Is it not possible that King Minos' deformed son was banished to such a place to live with the animals?

Hence the story that Daedalus built the labyrinth is probably correct, as this would have been to quarry stone for the palaces where he was architect. Such a place would have been used to keep animals and prisoners after its usefulness was spent. It may also be that these caves were modeled upon those in Egypt of the same era, where tombs for kings were constructed made of many rooms and passages. No one knows for sure.

Following the escape from the labyrinth by Theseus after killing the Minotaur, and Daedalus' help to Theseus and Aridane, it is likely Minos banished Daedalus and his family to the caverns as a punishment. Minos is reported to have given a command that Daedalus should never leave Crete, and so escape by ship was apparently out. It is reported he built wings and flew from Crete to avoid the ships of Minos. However aerodynamically this cannot be true. However Daedalus was also an inventor and a ship designer. It is reported in some ancient texts that he built ships that 'flew through the water'. It is therefore likely he escaped Crete with his family aboard a fast ship, or even windsurfer type craft, that could outrun the Minos fleet of slow war galleys. The prevailing winds would have taken him north east toward Delos, Samos and Lebynthos, before Icarus possibly falling to his death overboard in the stormy seas of that area. This is supported by his body being washed up on Icthea, and found by Heracles.

It is reported that Daedalus made his way to Sicily where he lived until Minos found him. By this time Daedalus was an elderly man, and Minos needed to recognize him. He contrived a test using a spiral shell and string to test Daedalus' genius at solving the riddle of how to put string through the spiral sea shell. King Cocalus, king of Sicily, tried to protect Daedalus, and caused Minos to be burnt to death whilst having a bath. Daedalus died at the age of 90. As for where he died, history is unclear. The most common reference is to Egypt, specifically to an islet in the Nile, where Daedalus was subsequently honoured as a god.

All of this took place around 3600 years ago!





Knossos - home of King Minos



Daedalus was the court architect for King Minos and was reputed to have built Knossos



Bull jumping was a known pastime in ancient Minoan Crete. The Cretan bull was a well known species, now extinct and fighting the bull was common.









On the south side of Crete, Phaistos - one of the Minoan palaces attributed to Daedalus



Built on a rock promontory overlooking the Messara plain, Phaistos commands a view of the surrounding countryside. It was built from stone quarried not far away at Gortys.







The resultant caves left by the quarrying, are over 2.5km long and are referred to as the 'Labyrinth caves' - see later in this book!



Nearby is the ancient port of Komos and the ancient site of Agia Triada, also both attributed to Daedalus in his role as chief architect to Minos.



Agia Triada is approx 3km from Phaestos



St. n.

Labyrinthes restués, pris dans les
monumens antiques de Grèce
de N°1 - N°6

Plan du Labyrinthe souterrain
pres de Tortigne dans l'ile
de Crot en Andipol
Prague 1857

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The Labyrinthine Caves

Arthur Evans, the excavator of the palace of Knossos, claimed the labyrinth of ancient times must have been at Knossos due to its large size and endless sequence of rooms. No one knows for sure. However, more realistically, the caves to the south of Crete on the Messara plain have been used as a quarry since ancient history, and given their location, size, shape and references in ancient texts, along with ancient Minoan texts being found in the caves, these would seem more likely. Daedalus was credited with building the caves/labyrinth and as he was chief architect to Minos, and is reputed to have built Phaestos and Agia Triada, then it is more likely he would have used these caves.

It is accepted by the Cretan people that the Labyrinth Cave - an ancient quarry-cave to the north of Gortys - is the labyrinth of the Minotaur, although the French archeologist, Paul Faure, claims the cave called Agia Paraskevi near Skotino - was the labyrinth.

The caves are over 2,5Km long, and over 9000 sqM in area, and are comprised of tunnels and interlocking rooms. Throughout the ages they have had a variety of uses, from the Romans who also used them as a Quarry, to the middle ages where they were used as a refuge from the Venetians, to the Germans in 1944 who used them for ammunition storage. It was this latter use that led to the caves being largely destroyed by a large explosion.

Access to the public is forbidden due to the danger.

1821 map of the Labyrinth Caves near Gortys



Inside the Labyrinthine Caves. These are closed to the public.
Are these the caves built by Daedalus and used to house the Minotaur?



Agia Galini, history and name - The ancient city of Soulia

The history of Agia Galini goes back millennia. Agia Galini was the historical harbour of Syvritos, a Minoan city that flourished in the Late Minoan period in the foothills of Mt Psiloritis, where the villages of Thronos and Agia Fotini stand today. It was later called Soulia. In antiquity, there was a great temple here dedicated to the goddess Artemis. A few finds from the ancient city were discovered during excavations for the foundations of new houses.

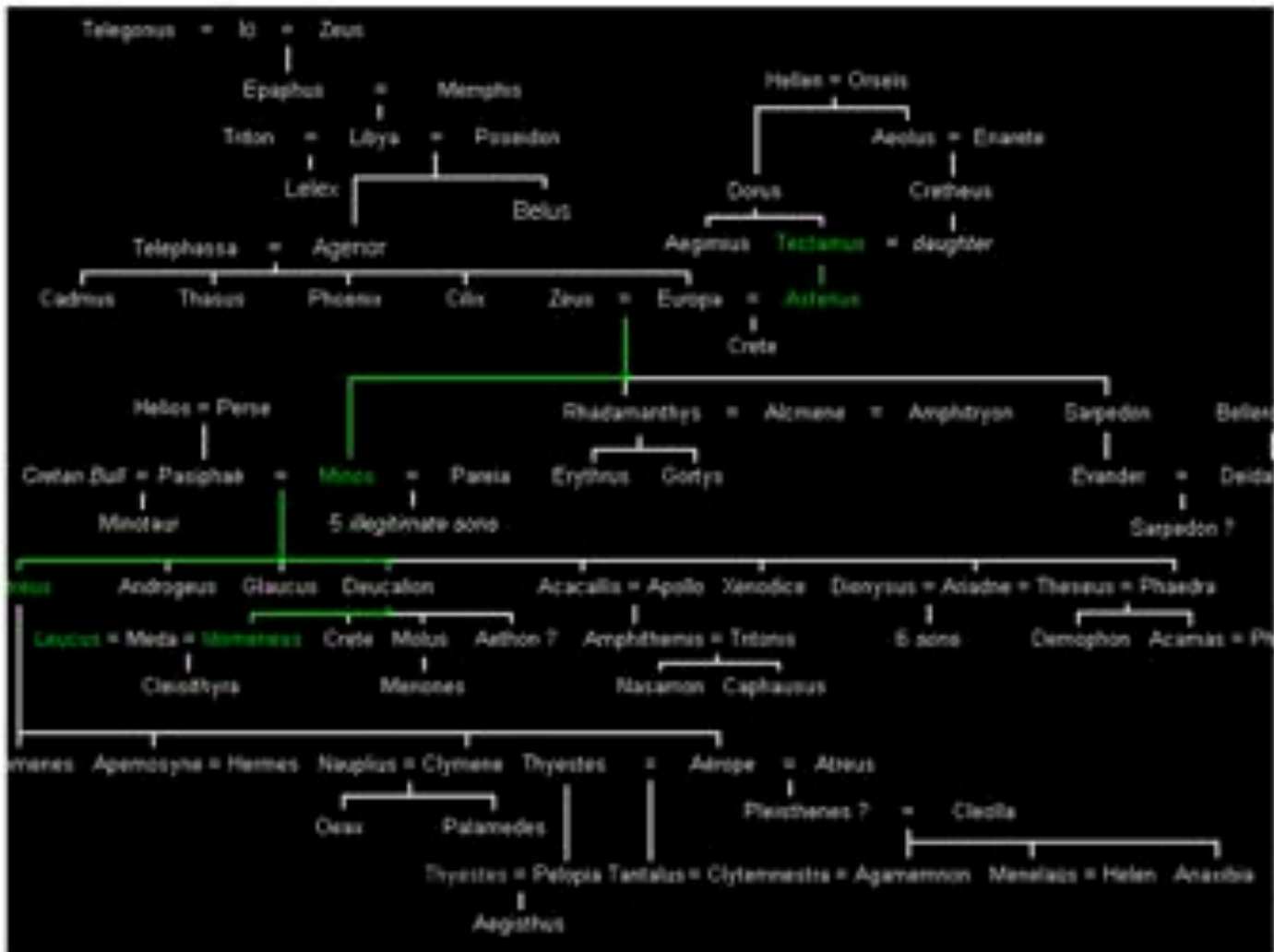
Soulia, as a coastal city, suffered from raids by Arab pirates, who destroyed it in 640 AD. It flourished for a second time in the Venetian period, and later its harbour was used several times for resupplying during the risings against the Turks, and also for exporting olive oil and other products from south Crete. However, there was no permanent settlement at Agia Galini until 1884, when villagers from nearby Melambes and Sachtouria moved here and built the new village. Tourist development began in the 1970s, and today Agia Galini is considered one of the largest tourist resorts in south Crete.

In the Orthodox Church, **St Galini** (*Agia Galini* in Greek) is said to have lived and been martyred in Corinth in the 3rd c. AD and her feast-day is celebrated on 16 April. However, the name Galini is very rarely used in Greece.

So how did this Cretan village come to have such an unusual name? There are various theories, all based on legend and guesswork. They may not give us a clear answer, but they add a note of mystery to the charm of unique Agia Galini.

According to legend, the name Agia Galini is due to the Byzantine Empress Eudocia, who was caught in a great storm as she travelled to the Holy Land by ship. The huge waves threatened to sink the ship with all hands, when Eudocia prayed to the Virgin for aid, promising to build a church in her honour if they were saved. The ship safely reached a sheltered beach in south Crete, so the Empress commanded that the church of Panagia Galini (the Virgin of Serenity) be built, now next to the village cemetery. However, it may also be when Christianity was established the Monastery of Galinios Christos (the Serene Christ) was built over the Temple of Artemis, and the village was named after it.





Minoan family tree
 (c) www.timelessmyths.com





The Icarus & Daedalus Trail

Photographs (c) Martin Fagan