

The Rise and Fall of Icarus: Myth and Metaphor

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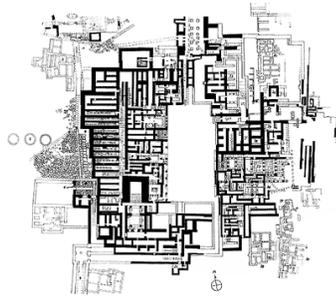
This talk examined the literary and artistic representations of the myth of Icarus in the classical world and then post-classical representations, including some instances in the works of Jean-Michel Basquiat, for whom the myth also serves as a metaphor of his life characterized by a quick rise to fame and sudden demise.

[What follows is a basic outline/summary of this talk.]

Background of the myth:

- Queen Pasiphae, wife of King Minos of Crete
- Anger of Aphrodite
- Daedalus, craftsman/inventor, constructs wooden cow for Pasiphae
- Minotaur: bull (taurus) of Minos, half-human, half-bull progeny of Pasiphae and the bull
- Daedalus the craftsman/inventor builds labyrinth at Knossos to contain minotaur
- Eventually Theseus kills minotaur with help of Ariadne
- Daedalus and son Icarus attempt to escape from Crete by air (on wings constructed by Daedalus)

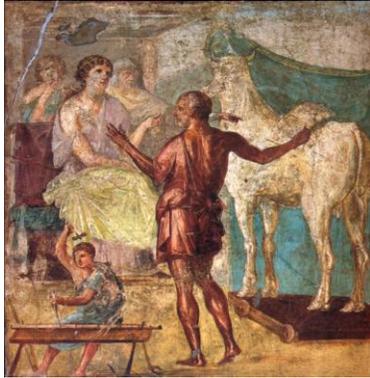
Palace at the site of Knossos on Crete likened to a labyrinth:



Bull iconography on Crete:



Pasiphae, Daedalus and Icarus (wall painting from Pompeii):



Daedalus and Icarus in classical literature:

- Apollodorus of Alexandria (2nd c. BCE)
Pseudo-Apollodorus (2nd c. CE)
 - *Bibliotheka*
- Gaius Iulius Hyginus (1st c. CE)
 - *Fabulae*
- Publius Ovidius Naso (43 BCE – 17 CE)
 - *Metamorphoses*

Daedalus and Icarus in classical art:



Cameo, 1st c. CE, Naples



Mosaic, 1st c. CE Roman villa, Zeugma

Daedalus and Icarus in post-classical art:



Bruegel, 16th c.

Daedalus and Icarus in post-classical literature:

- Landscape with the Fall of Icarus by William Carlos Williams (1962)
- Musee des Beaux Arts by W. H. Auden (1940)
- To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph by Anne Sexton (1962)

Daedalus and Icarus in modern culture:

- Icarus Canopies company
- Icarus skydiving school
- Hellenic Air Force (on emblem)

Icarus in the works of Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988)



"Icarus Esso" (close-up of portion)



Untitled



Untitled

The myth as metaphor for Basquiat's life:

- "Since I was seventeen, I thought I might be a star. I'd think about all my heroes, Charlie Parker, Jimi Hendrix...I had a romantic feeling of how people had become famous." --Jean-Michel Basquiat (1985)
- "To some people he was a meteor, a shooting star that burned out." --Ingrid Sischy *Interview Magazine* (1996)
- "Before he reaches the sun, the wings of this young Icarus are cut." --Kazembe Bulagoon *nyc.indymedia.org* (2005)

For more information on Basquiat:

- *Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art*, by Phoebe Hoban (1998)
- *Basquiat*, a film by Julian Schnabel (1996)
- *Downtown 81 / New York Beat Movie*, a film starring Basquiat about a struggling artist in 1981 NYC
- *The Radiant Child*, a film by Tamra Davis (2010)
- Numerous websites, exhibit catalogues, and pieces in various museums.

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