

THE LABYRINTH AND THE MINOTAUR

Merlin Peris

According to the legend,¹ the blind and ageing Oedipus, shunned by one and all as a man polluted by the great sins of patricide and incest and wandering over the land of Greece, came at length to Colonus in Attica. Here the Attic hero Theseus extended him the hand of friendship and afforded him the longed-for refuge; and when the voice of the god called to him and he vanished from the face of the earth amid holy unspeakable mysteries, it was Theseus alone who was permitted to witness this miraculous end.

In his *Oedipus Colonus*, presented by Sophocles to an Athenian audience of near thirty thousand, the dramatist gives us reason for thinking that there existed in Attica in his day a cult of Oedipus of which the mysteries, together with the spot where his body lay, were known and transmitted in succession (the *diadoche* of mystery teachings) from generation to generation within the line of the Theseadae. What these mysteries were we do not know except that they left Theseus 'holding his hand before his eyes as if he had seen some terrible sight that no one could bear to look upon' ². But the tradition Sophocles is using must have been quite clear on the point that, whatever these mysteries were, they were vouchsafed to Theseus and his line by Oedipus himself. We cannot see what other implication the following words of Oedipus in that play³ had for the Athenians who witnessed it:

'What follows,
A holy mystery that no tongue may name,
You shall then see and know, coming alone

Merlin Peris is a lecturer in Classics at the Peradeniya Campus of the University of Sri Lanka.

¹ As known to Attic writers and treated by Sophocles in his *Oedipus Colonus*. The hero's self-blinding, his exile and miraculous death in Attica are all unknown to Homer. The legend certainly developed quite a lot between then and Sophocles' day, probably round the Attic cult of the hero. It seems unlikely that Sophocles himself was responsible for any significant part of the elaboration.

² 1647 - 1652.

³ 1526 - 1532 Tr. E. F. Watling (*Sophocles: The Theban Plays*. Penguin Cl. p. 117-118)

To the appointed place. There is no one else
Of all this people to whom I can reveal it;
Not my own children, though I love them well.
You are to keep it forever, you alone;
And when your life is drawing to its end,
Disclose it to one alone, your chosen heir,
And he to his, and so for ever and ever'.

According to the earliest version of the story of Oedipus, that found in the *Odyssey*,¹ when the gods made known to man what Oedipus was guilty of, Epicaste his wife hanged herself; as for Oedipus, he is said to have continued to rule among the Thebans. The *Iliad*² adds to this the information that when he died, and that probably by violence, he was buried in Thebes itself and with the customary funeral games.

Despite this however the problem seems to have arisen in Classical times itself as to the actual whereabouts of the tomb of Oedipus. The scholiast on Sophocles' *Oedipus Colonus*,³ making uses of two older historians (Lusimachus and Arizelus), gives the tradition, which may well be old, that there were difficulties concerning the question of Oedipus' interment, that his remains were not thought of as blessing the land which held them, that at last his friends succeeded in burying him in Eteonos (in the temple of Demeter) and that an Apollonine oracle forbade the inhabitants disturbing 'the suppliant of the goddess'.

This so-called Oedipodeion was in Thebes. But Pausanias⁴ says he saw a sepulchral monument thought to be of Oedipus in

¹ xi. 271 - 280

² xxiii. 679 - 680

³ 91

⁴ 1. 28. 7. Valerius Maximus (v. 3 Ext. 3) says that the bones of Oedipus were buried between the Areopagus and the Acropolis and were worshipped as those of a hero, an altar being erected to him. Sophocles' description of the location may have been clear to the Athenians of his audience but leaves us guessing whether it was in Colonus or in Athens. J. G. Frazer (*Pausanias's Description of Greece* Lond. (1913) vol. 1. p. 366 note to i. 28.7) argues for Athens on the ground that if these bones were a talisman for the city's security, it is hardly likely that they would have been left outside the city wall. He thinks that the tomb was originally in Colonus and that the remains of the hero were later removed to Athens, early in the Peloponnesian War. But see Aristides *Or.* xlvi. vol. ii p. 230 ed. Dindorf and the scholiast on Eur. *Phoen.* 1707 who speak of Oedipus as buried at Colonus

the precincts of the Avengers near the Areopagus in Athens and learnt that the bones of the hero had been brought there from Thebes. He also knew of a heroon in Colonus which Oedipus shared with Adrastus.¹

Sophocles, while admitting that there existed in the grove of the Avengers in Colonus 'a hallowed resting-place' (*theke hiera*),² calls it a 'tomb' (*tumbos*)³ or a 'grave' (*taphos*),⁴ which was the repository of the hero's body when he vanished from the earth before the eyes of Theseus, implies that the exact location of this was known at the time to Theseus alone, and thereafter, to but one person in each generation, and that too, a direct descendant of his. All that the others knew was perhaps that the spot was somewhere in the sacred grove where the Chasm was, near the hallowed objects there, the Basin which commemorated the covenant of Theseus and Peirithous, the Rock of Thoriscus, the Hollow Pear Tree and the Stone Tomb.⁵

The palpable reason for Attica's desire to possess the bones of Oedipus was an oracle attributed to Delphi that they would insure Athens' safety against any Theban aggression.⁶ At the height of Athenian imperialism, it would be recalled, Theseus' own bones were happily discovered in the island of Skyros and removed to Athens by Cimon.

The myth-version used by Sophocles however seems to go beyond the immediate wish to have the bones of Oedipus in Attic soil. It brings Oedipus to Attica alive and it makes his end take place there itself rather than in Thebes. And whereas his death in Homer seems to have been one by violence and not in any way remarkable, his departure from the earth is now made something miraculous and awe-inspiring, attended by peals of thunder amid which is heard the voice of the god. Mysteries, which not

¹ i. 30.4. See L. R. Farnell *Greek Hero-cults and Ideas of Immortality*. Oxford (1921) p. 332 ff.

² *Oed. Col.* 1763

³ *Soph. op. cit.* 1756

⁴ *Soph. op. cit.* 1732

⁵ *Soph. op. cit.* 1590 - 1596

⁶ *Soph. op. cit.* 1518 - 1534, 1760 - 1765; Aristides *loc. cit.* This may also be a good reason why the location of the tomb was not to be known to any and everyone.

even his own children were permitted to see, take place; the earth seems to have gaped open and swallowed him up.¹

What then, it may be asked, made the story of Oedipus undergo this sea-change and what the great desire of the people of Attica to bring this spiritual leper, who pollutes city and individual alike with whom he comes into contact, to their own land alive and to establish an association between him and the noble founder of their state, the hero Theseus?

The first of these questions we attempted to answer in an earlier article.² We hope some light will be thrown on the second by the discussion here of what may be the special significance of Theseus which qualifies him for the role he plays in this final episode of the life of Oedipus, a significance which seems to us to lie in the parallel of his adventure with the Minotaur with that of Oedipus with the Sphinx.

Theseus is accredited with a number of adventures in which he slays or overpowers men and beasts which have terrorized various lands through which he travelled. In this respect he tries to emulate his own hero, Hercules, whose fame in such feats was however established beyond rivalry. Indeed, as if to put Theseus in his place, it is narrated that he was rescued from Hades, where his attempt to help Peirithous abduct Persephone had ended in a fiasco, by no less a person than Hercules himself who had gone down there in the course of his labours to fetch the dog Cerberus.

Theseus' encounter with the Minotaur, however, seems to have been of an altogether different order of things, involving as it does historical and ritualistic material that is easily suspected even if not easily interpreted. It may have its basis in the history of Knossos of the period when Minos held thalassocracy over many cities and islands and suggests that Athens under Aegeus was herself subject to some degree to his power and provided a quota of men and women, perhaps for the building of the great palace-complex which Sir Arthur Evans identified as the famous Labyrinth

¹ Soph. *op. cit.* 1656 - 1665.

² 'The Riddle of the Sphinx' *The University of Ceylon Review* vol. xxv. Nos. 1 & 2 p. 103 - 127.

of Daedalus.¹ The presence of Minos himself, and before him, of his son Androgeos, in Attica may have been connected with this subjection of Athens to Cretan power. Correspondingly, if the bull be taken to symbolize the royal power of Minos, Theseus' defeat of the bull of Marathon (who arrived in Attica from Crete) as well as his killing of the Minotaur may represent the two victories, if not the variant versions of one, whereby Attica was eventually freed from her bondage. For what more obvious battle ground would there be for a naval power invading Attica than that of Marathon?

Most scholars, while not denying some historical basis for the story, see in it what they suspect are elements of ritual belonging to Knossian religion, though in the interpretation of these elements they have not always been in accord. Some fascinating and often plausible theories have been advanced in connection with this myth from time to time. But for the most part they have concerned themselves with investigating these ritual elements of the myth rather than what we concern ourselves with, the mystical significance that is found to underlie even these and is to be discovered only by a scrutiny of the symbols and symbolic actions of which the rituals themselves are constituted.

The myth of Theseus' encounter with the Minotaur, it will be found, grows out of two separate stories, the one, with Crete as its background, which goes on to derive the birth of the monster, Minotaur, the other, with Attica, which explains how Theseus happened to arrive in Crete and kill him. As for the true epilogue of the myth, it is neither Theseus' desertion of Ariadne nor the death of his father Aegeus as a result of his forgetting to change the colour of his ship's sail, but the dance he is said to have

¹ See Plutarch's *Theseus* 15. He says that according to Philochorus, these prisoners were awarded as prizes for games held in honour of Androgeus, until which time they were kept in the labyrinth. The so-called Minotaur, according to this account, was really a man called Taurus who was the principal victor and who treated the Athenians who were his prize with cruelty. See Palaephatus *On Incredible Stories*. ii. Plutarch (*ad loc.*) cites the opinion of Aristotle given in his discussion of the form of government of the Bottiaeans. that these youths were not slain by Minos but spent the remainder of their days in slavery in Crete. Plutarch (*Romulus and Theseus Compared*) thinks the boys and virgins were either a prey to a monster, victims upon the tomb of Androgeus or, according to the wildest form of the story, lived vilely and dishonourably in slavery to insulting and cruel men. See also Servius on Virgil *Aen* vi. 14.

danced in Delos with his fellows which imitated the twistings and windings of the labyrinth.

The birth of the Minotaur is best traced in the account of Apollodorus.¹ After telling how Zeus for love of Europa became a bull and carried her off across the sea to Crete, how there she bore him three sons, Minos, Sarpedon and Rhadamanthys, how Asterion, ruler of Crete, reared the lads, how they, when they had grown up, quarrelled and scattered, Sarpedon to Lycia, Rhadamanthys to Boeotia, while Minos staying in Crete, married Pasiphae, daughter of Helios by Perseis, Apollodorus goes on as follows:

'Now Asterion died childless, and Minos desired to become king of Crete, but was prevented. However, he asserted that he had received the kingdom from the gods, and by way of proof declared that whatever he prayed for be vouchsafed to him. So he sacrificed to Poseidon and prayed that a bull might be sent up from the deep, promising that he would offer it in sacrifice when it appeared. Thereupon Poseidon heard him and sent up a magnificent bull; and Minos received the kingdom. But the bull he despatched to join his herds and sacrificed another. He was the first to establish maritime sway and became lord of well nigh all the islands. But Poseidon, wroth with him because he had not slain the bull, maddened it and caused Pasiphae to hanker after it. She, being enamoured of the bull, asked help of Daedalus, a master craftsman who had fled from Athens by reason of manslaughter. He made a wooden cow on wheels, hollowed it out inside, flayed a cow, sewed the hide round about his

¹ iii. 1. 3-4. Cp. Diod. iv. 77. 1-4; Tzet. *Chil.* i. 473 ff. The device adopted by Daedalus for satisfying Pasiphae's desire for the bull remarkably anticipates the dummy cow used by modern veterinarians for collecting bull-semen for artificial insemination purposes. The perverse love of Pasiphae for the bull appealed to the poets of Hellenistic Alexandria with their taste for the bizarre and the macabre. Such themes interested the *fin de siècle* poets of the 1890's, and then Montherlant, whose *Pasiphae* (1928) was illustrated by Matisse (1944) and Cocteau (1948). The Minotaur was a favourite of Picasso who combines his understanding of the classical myth with a hereditary passion for bull-fighting. His work of the early 1930's including the Skira ed. of Ovid's *Met.* reveals his obsession with the monster as a symbol of brutish untamed strength amid the haunting imminence of catastrophe. His *Minotauromachia*, at New York, plays on the double theme of violence and truth, light and darkness, menace and hope. See M. Grant *The Myths of the Greeks and the Romans*. Lond. (1963) p. 389.

handiwork, placed it in a meadow where the bull was wont to pasture, and put Pasiphaë within it. The bull came and mated with it as though it were a real cow. Pasiphaë then bore Asterios, who is called Minotauros. His face was the face of a bull, but the remaining parts were those of a man. Minos in accordance with certain oracles shut him up in the Labyrinth and guarded him there. The Labyrinth was the one made by Daedalus, a building which by means of intricate windings led astray those that would escape from it.

The bull who fathered the Minotaur is lost sight of in the rest of the myth and the spotlight thereafter shifts on to his offspring. But there was an independent adventure of Theseus in which he had slain a killer bull called the bull of Marathon. Soon mythological economy neatly identifies this creature with the former, accounting for its presence in Attica by the story that it was brought from Crete to Argos by Hercules (ever ready for transporting intransigent monsters) and driven from thence to Attica by Hera, a goddess revered by Argos even in Minoan-Mycenaean times.¹ With a fine sense of drama this same bull is made the original cause of the tribute of the seven youths and seven maidens who were sent periodically from Attica to feed his offspring, the Minotaur. For a popular variation of the story of how Minos' son (thus step-brother of the Minotaur) Androgeos died in Attica states that Aegeus sent him out against the bull of Marathon. It was to avenge his death that Minos is said to have invaded Athens, ultimately being appeased by the promise of this strange tribute to be paid every ninth year to feed the Minotaur.

Twice tribute had been sent to Crete in accordance with this pledge when the myth brings Theseus into the picture. Apollodorus² writes as follows:

¹ According to Apollodorus ii. v. 7 Acusilaus said that the bull Hercules brought from Crete in his seventh labour was the bull which ferried Europa across for Zeus; but others said it was the bull Poseidon sent out of the sea for Minos. Hercules brought it to Euristheus and then released it. It wandered over Sparta and Arcadia and finally made its way to Marathon, where it harried the inhabitants. On this bull, see also Diod. iv. 1. 3-4. Paus. 1.27.9 ff. and v. 10.9; Tzet. *Chil.* ii. 293-298; Hyg. *Fab* 30. This labour of Hercules was the subject of one of the metope-friezes of the temple of Zeus at Olympia (now at the Louvre).

² *Ep.* i. 7-9.

'He was numbered among those who were to be sent as the third tribute to the Minotaur; or as some affirm, he offered himself voluntarily. ...And when he came to Crete, Ariadne, daughter of Minos, being amorously disposed to him, offered to help him if he would agree to carry her away to Athens and have her to wife. Theseus having agreed on oath to do so, she besought Daedalus to disclose the way out of the labyrinth. And at his suggestion she gave Theseus a clue when he went in; Theseus fastened it to the door and, drawing it after him, entered in. And having found the Minotaur in the deepest region of the labyrinth, he killed him by smiting him with his fists; and drawing the clue after him made his way out again, And by night he arrived with Ariadne and the children at Naxos'.

The Labyrinth is an ancient and widespread symbol; taken together with another and equally popular symbol which is implicit in it, the symbol of the Centre, it represents the idea of exclusion as a mechanism of protection. What it protects is what the Centre stands for. In mystic religion, in which context the labyrinth appears, the *ambages* thrown around the Mystery at the Centre thwart the approach of the profane and uninitiate by leading them into error. The predicament in which the confounded find themselves is enhanced by the idea of death, in our myth, as we shall see, symbolized by the monster, Minotaur. Similarly, access to the Centre implies guidance, of whatever nature that be.

As a symbol the labyrinth or maze may have evolved from a primitive device of fortification belonging to ancient cities, the earthworks or walls surrounding them being laid out in a maze in which the confounded enemy was harried and attacked by the citizen soldiery who knew their way around. This may be the explanation of the name of the game 'Troy' played by the Romans, which an Etruscan potter¹ depicted by drawing of armed horsemen with what must be the ground design of a maze behind

¹ On an *oinochoe* from Tragliatella. On the shields of the two horsemen appear pictures of some big bird, a partridge or a duck. Behind the first horseman sits a foetus like creature. The crudely-drawn maze appears like a cobweb behind the second horseman, with the word 'Truia' written in its outermost ring.

them, and Virgil¹ compared with the labyrinth of Crete. In Finland and Lapland the game of treading a maze is called 'Babylon'.²

Diodorus³ and Pliny⁴ state that the Cretan labyrinth was an imitation of the famous labyrinth of Egypt described by Herodotus in his *Histories*.⁵ According to Pliny⁶ different interpretations have been given of the labyrinth of Egypt, Demoteles taking it to be the palace of Moteris, Lykeas the tomb of Moiris. Diodorus⁷ thinks it to be the tomb of the king who had constructed it and Manetho⁸ is found in agreement with him. Pliny's own guess is that it was a building sacred to the Sun and this, he says, is the popular belief.

This great labyrinth seems to have been a complex structure which, in the characteristic manner of labyrinths, as mentioned by us, seems to have afforded further protection to the pyramid which surely was its *sanctum sanctorum* and which Herodotus tells us lay at the back of the building. Describing the labyrinth the historian

¹ *Aen.* v. 588 ff. The game is said to have been introduced to Latium by Ascanius and his Trojans (v. 596). See also Pliny xxxiv. 85 and schol. on Eur. *Andro.* 1139. The game itself, or its basis, whatever form it took, may have been in existence in Asia Minor. It may have originated as a military exercise held among the walls and fortifications of Troy. See Edith B. Schnapper *The Inward Odyssey* (Lond.) 1965. p. 27.

² In Norway and Sweden mazes are constructed of stone and called *Trojin*, *Trojehorg*, *Trojenborg* and *Troborg*, that is, 'Troy' or 'Troy town'. On Hallands Vadero, an island in the Kattegat, a maze is called *Trelleborg* (i. e. *Trolleborg*, the 'giants' castle'). See A. B. Cook *Zeus: a Study of Ancient Religion* vol. 1. p. 488, n. 5.

³ i. 61 and 97.

⁴ xxxvi. 84 ff.

⁵ ii. 148.

⁶ *loc. cit.* See Demoteles Frag. 1. (Frag. Hist. Gr. iv. 386 Müller) and Lykeas Naukratities frag. 1 (Frag. Hist. Gr. iv. 441 Müller). Strabo 811 took it to be a vast palace composed of as many palaces as there were formerly nomes. If the Cretan labyrinth was adapted from the Egyptian, could not its monster too have been the Cretan version of the bull-headed, human-bodied Egyptian nome-god Mentou (Minotauros) an agency of the Sun. A statue now in the Louvre shows the god seated Pharoah-like in loin-cloth with a horned bull's head from which however hair hangs down on to the front of the shoulders in two thick strands. (Compare the the Minotaur on the Knossian coin referred to in p. 52 and n.)

⁷ i. 61.

⁸ Frags 34 - 36 (Frag. Hist. Gr. ii. 560 Müller).

writes, 'The baffling and intricate passages from room to room and from court to court were an endless wonder to me, as we passed from a courtyard into rooms, from rooms into galleries, from galleries into more rooms, and thence into more courtyards'. The underground floor, which he says he was not allowed to see, contained the tombs of the kings who built the labyrinth and also of the sacred crocodiles.

Sir Arthur Evans has the support of this evidence then when he claims that the labyrinth of Crete was surely the famous palace that he excavated in Knossos.¹ Most scholars agree with him, and he could well be right. A. B. Cook² however thinks that even if the whole palace of Knossos came to be known as the labyrinth, the strict labyrinth was no more than a pattern (*swastika* or a variation upon the *swastika*) upon its orchestra or dance-floor on which there was performed a 'labyrinthine dance'. This dance-floor, Cook thinks, is none other than that place in the palace-complex called 'the Theatrical Area' by Evans.³ And this, he believes, is the selfsame dancing-ground which Homer⁴ says Daedalus 'once wrought in Knossos for the fair-haired Ariadne'.

Whatever was the architectural structure which was thought of as a labyrinth in the story of the Minotaur, the labyrinth design seems to have been already familiar to the Knossians in the Bronze Age. For in one of the corridors of the second palace of Knossos Evans⁵ himself found the fallen plaster revealing the

¹ *Ann. Brit. Sch. Ath.* 1899-1900 vol. vi. p. 33. On the excavation of this palace see his major work *The Palace of Minos* (Lond.) 1935. Diod. 1.61 and Pliny xxxvi. 90 says that in their time the labyrinth was not to be seen. Some later writers (Claud. *de sex. cons. Hon. Aug.* 634, Kedren. *Hist. comp.* 122c (i. 215 Bekker) place the Cretan Labyrinth at Gortyna. This consisted of many chambers hewn out rock and connected with each other by tortuous passages. During the revolution of 1822-28 the Christian villagers of the neighbourhood lived in it for months. It was in Gortyna, it will be recalled, that the sacred cattle of the Sun were kept, so that it may have been a prominent cult-centre of the Sun. Indeed Virgil (*Ecl.* vi. 53 ff.) represents Pasiphae's bull as lying beneath an evergreen oak or following the Gortynian cows. Bronze coins of Gortyna show Zeus as a bull galloping over the sea or carrying Europa on his back. In both cases a surrounding circle of rays stamps him as a god of light.

² *op. cit.* p. 479 ff.

³ *Ann. Brit. Sch. Ath.* (1902-1903) vol. ix. p. 99-112. fig. 68 plan and section, fig. 69 view.

⁴ *Il.* xviii. 591 ff.

⁵ *Ann. Brit. Sch. Ath.* (1901-1902) vol. viii, p. 103 and 104 fig. 62.

remains of an elaborate series of mazes based on the motif of the swastika. Swastikas, square and circular mazes and frieze meanders appear frequently in the coins of Knossos¹ from around 500 B.C., all clearly symbolizing the labyrinth, while the fact that not even then do they show any indication that it was a palace of any sort confirms us in our belief that the labyrinth as a symbol was independent of the labyrinth-palace in Knossos. If anything, the palace must have emulated the labyrinth. The appearance of Doric or Ionic columns in the Attic painters of red-figure vases, who represent Theseus dragging the Minotaur from his his habitat, is of no point. These columns may represent the portals of a maze which was otherwise an intricacy of blank walls, or again, be the portals of its innermost recess, the central vault in which the Minotaur dwelt. By themselves they are hardly sufficient to suggest a palace. Similarly the partitions, patterned with meanders, zigzags and whirls, which appear in vase paintings of this episode, may be a stylized representation standing for a labyrinth.

Even if then Evans is right in identifying the Knossian palace he excavated as the labyrinth of the Minotaur, its historical nature seems to have been supervened in the myth by the ancient symbol upon which itself this palace and its Egyptian original were an architectural elaboration. The historical drama, whatever form it took, may have been enacted in the great palace; the mythical drama seems to work itself out within that abstract religious symbol. The Minotaur in the myth dwells within a labyrinth and in the representations of this labyrinth, be it in coin or vasepainting, it is the idea of the maze that is foremost, not of a palace of any sort.

The labyrinth which, as we suggested, may have originated as a device of earthwork or walls for the defence of a citadel or stronghold not surprisingly continues as a popular motif in architecture in the ancient world as it persists as a popular symbol in religion. In Britain, Scandinavia, the north-east of Russia and Iceland rough mazes of one form or another are to be found. They may have reached Britain with the Romans for turf-cut mazes there are commonly called 'Troy-town', and in Wales 'Troy-walls'. The siting of many a maze in the proximity of a

¹ For line-sketches of the coins referred to see Cook *op. cit.* p. 476-477.

church or chapel has led to the theory that they served a penitential purpose. At the same time it is possible that the ritual 'treading' of a maze symbolized the tortuous and difficult entrance to Heaven, here identified with the Centre. The labyrinth was too complicated a design for the architecture of churches themselves. Even so, the Christian love of this symbol is amply borne out by the many representations of it in mosaic and paint found on the walls and floors of churches, some even including Theseus and the Minotaur.¹

Knossian coins which depict the swastika have in the centre of it an astral body, the sun, a star or even the moon. Sometimes the astral body appears on one face of the coin while the other depicts a maze or the Minotaur. Some coins represent the labyrinth with a frieze of meanders, reminding us of Ovid's² likening of the Cretan labyrinth's turnings and twistings to those of the river Maeander itself. One of these coins has its frieze of meanders encircling the head of a bull, another that of a god, while a third encircles the full figure of the same or a different deity.

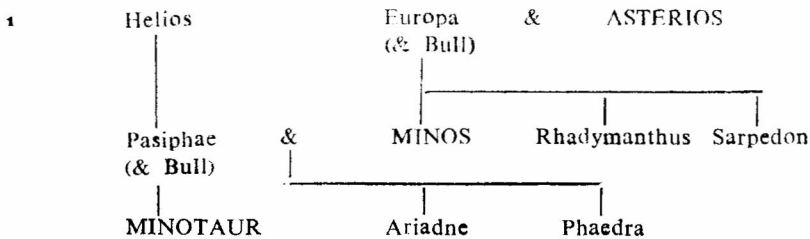
Maze, swastika and meander all represent the labyrinth, that remarkably widespread and famous mystic symbol of exclusion. But what then of the star and the Minotaur found in conjunction with it?

¹ Such a maze was called in the Middle Ages *domus Daedali* or *maison Daedalu* or even, as in the inscription at Amiens, *maison de Dalus*. Church-mazes mostly occur in France, Italy, Germany and England. For a list of the best known, see Edith Schnapper *op. cit.* p. 208, n. 7. The majority belong from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, the period of the Crusades, when pilgrimages to the Holy Land were not possible. Thus the labyrinth may have been either trodden, traversed on the knees or, where it was only a diagram, traced with the finger in a symbolic journey to Jerusalem or the stations of the cross. Theseus fighting the Minotaur appears in the centre of the labyrinth in the Church of St. Michele Maggiore at Pavia (11th century), and in the cathedral of Lucca (12th century). Daedalus, Theseus and Ariadne are mentioned in the accompanying inscription; and in the greatest of all church mazes, that of Chabres (12th century). The biblical equivalent of this fight is that of David and Goliath or, in the New Test. interpretation, of Christ and Satan. For Theseus in Christian symbolism represents Christ, the Minotaur the forces of evil, and the labyrinth itself the path to Heaven through the dangers of error and temptation. For a comprehensive study of outdoor labyrinths see W. H. Mathews *Mazes and Labyrinths*, Lond. (1922).

² *Met.* viii. 157-168 Roman mosaics represent Theseus slaying the Minotaur within a large framework of a meander-pattern. See Welcker *Att. Denkm.* ii. p. 303 ff.

Looking back at the myth, we find that, if Minos had no part in the birth of the Minotaur, Asterios had as little to do with the birth of Minos himself. In other words, Asterios is in no way the true grandsire of the Minotaur, nor the Minotaur the true grandchild of Asterios.¹ So then, when we find the monster alternately called Asterios or Asterion, the question occurs to our minds whether the Minotaur derived his starry nature from his nominal grandsire's name (passed down to him in traditional manner) or whether the nominal grandsire derived his name from the starry nature of that monstrous creation.

However that may be, the more important question is what it is that there is about the Minotaur that has made the name 'starry one' seem an appropriate appellation for him. Pictorial representations of the monster on vase-paintings and the like show him with his body decorated with various markings. One of these, on an amphora from Nola, shows markings resembling stars on his body to suggest that his name Asterios was given to him for an asterisk characteristic of his own. Apart from this, there is an interesting painting on a Corinthian *pinax*² of the early sixth century B. C. which shows him standing in the centre of what are four unmistakable stars, these stars by no means looking like purely decorative filling.



The Minotaur, it will be noted, is truly the grand-child of Helios, the Sun, and the child of Pasiphae ('all-shining'), the Moon. The bull of Crete may originally have been a symbol of earthquakes (see Leonard Cottrell *The Bull of Minos*. Lond. (1953) or of the sea and thus the creature of Poseidon before it became, perhaps under Egyptian influence, symbolic of the Sun. This would explain why the bull of Pasiphae was sent by Poseidon from the sea and also why Theseus was asked to sacrifice the Minotaur to Poseidon. Naturally the bull also represented the royal power of the great sea-kings of Crete. See James Baikie's *The Sea-Kings of Crete*, Lond. (1910).

² Found on Pente Skouphia in 1879 and now in the Berlin Museum. See Cook *op. cit.*, p. 495.

J. G. Frazer¹ conjectures that the Minotaur is the representation or embodiment of the Sun-god and thus an alternate to the symbol of the star; the dance of Ariadne was danced as a kind of magic to help the sun in its journey through the ecliptic. To our mind, however, Cook is more correct in taking the bull-headed creature in the context of the labyrinth to be not the sun itself but a human being wearing a tauric-mask. Since this masked figure has earned the name Minotaur, we may assume that he is the king (Minos being a common titular name for the kings of Knossos) officiating in the aspect of a bull-priest in a cult of the sun, this cult being in a sanctum within the labyrinthine palace or temple. This could easily give rise to the mythical account of a bull-headed monster called Asterios investing the innermost recess of the Cretan labyrinth. Such an assumption does not preclude the possibility of the sun itself having been conceived of as a bull. Indeed it seems a reasonable explanation for the appearance of its king-priest as a bull. The deity, and alternately, the head of a bull which appear surrounded by a meander in Knossian coins may stand for the sun, even if the Minotaur in is them rather its priest.

Of the Egyptian labyrinth Pliny² had remarked that most authorities supposed that it was a building sacred to the Sun and that that was the common belief too. If then, as Diodorus and he state, the Cretan labyrinth was an imitation of the Egyptian, there is reason for thinking that such buildings were popular with cults of the Sun and that with the construction of it Daedalus was establishing in Crete a cult of the Sun which he had derived from Egypt.

What rites and rituals the priest with the bull-mask performed within the sanctum of this remarkable building there is no knowing. If the seven youths and seven maidens who were sent to Minos from Attica periodically were not labour gangs demanded by the thalassocrat for service in his land, one may suspect that they were victims of a grim periodical human sacrifice performed by the priest-king to propitiate the Sun.

¹ *Golden Bough: the Dying God*, p. 77. Cp. *ibid: The Magic Art*, i. p. 312. In Frazer's theory the Sun is helped in its course by the labyrinthine dance of Ariadne, whereas Cook *op. cit.* p. 496 (who holds that the Minotaur was not the Sun but its priest, a Knossian prince masquerading as a bull) thinks the labyrinthine dance was done by the Minotaur himself.

² *loc. cit.*

Translated to myth the bull-masked priest-king becomes not only a dread monster that haunts the labyrinth but one who used to feast on human victims. As servant of the Sun, he is called Asterios, the Sun being the *aster* he serves - though even then, an attempt is made to draw a red herring across the path by the attribution of the same name to his grandfather with the implication that this was how he himself came to receive it. (Such attempts at misleading hearers from the true meaning are only too well known in the case of esoteric myths).

Indications that we may be on the right track on this point are provided by a Knossian coin and certain representations of the labyrinth in Christian art. The coin¹ referred to shows on the reverse a labyrinth arranged in swastika formation and on the obverse the Minotaur staff in hand. Two distinct plaits of hair escaping down to the shoulders of the Minotaur here betray the fact that the bull's face is only a mask donned by a human being.

That the centre which this masked figure guarded was a holy sanctum is evident from the words 'Sancta Ecclesia' which are written, interestingly enough, in a complicated form, in the labyrinth found among the mosaics of the Christian basilica (founded in 324) in Orleansville, Algeria. Likewise the centre of the *chemine de Jerusalem* trodden by way of penance in the days of the Crusades by those who had broken the vows of pilgrimage was often termed *le ciel* (Heaven). More interesting is the labyrinth of gold and pearls upon one of the state robes of the Christian emperors prior to the ninth century, for it shows a Minotaur of emerald who signifies that what he guards are mysteries (*muein* = close the lips) by holding a finger to his lips.²

In the mythological redaction of this religious cult of Knossos, the Sun is the Centre, the mystery that the labyrinth with its errors protects from the approach of the uninitiate, the bull-headed priest the monster Minotaur who guards the Centre and renders dead all those not fit to approach it. The labyrinth figures as a metaphysico-ritual symbol which comprises the ideas of difficulty,

¹ A stater from Knossos in the McClean collection at Cambridge. See Cook *op cit.* p. 492. A black-figure *lekynos* at Athens which represents Theseus killing the Minotaur in the presence of two females, shows the monster with a bull's tail but a human head.

² See W. E. J. Knight *Cumaean Gates*. Oxford (1936) p. 79.

of danger, of death and of initiation.¹ It also figures as a 'knot' or 'binding' symbol which calls for 'unravelling' or 'unbinding' (*lusis*). In this latter sense it implies the inner feeling of tightness or constriction of the impure and the polluted which is attributed often to a magical or magico-religious agency, 'the god who binds'.²

Understood in this light the labyrinth is not unlike its verbal counterpart, the esoteric riddle. In riddle-mythology riddles are often propounded by monsters who are said to kill those who fail to give the correct answer, the monsters themselves dying with the solution of the riddles.³ Similarly those who fail to answer riddles are often described as 'dead', a description which, while overtly stating that they lost their lives, in esoteric language implies the fact of their being uninitiate. Thus labyrinth and riddle, both protecting a secret at their core, do so by misleading the intruder into error and 'death', while the solution of them involves the triumph of the hero over that element, symbolized by the monster, which vitiates the endeavours of the others.

In our study of the riddle of the Sphinx, we attempted to show that the Sphinx, a creature composite of parts of the various kinds of living things and standing for this impediment of the soul, may have symbolized corporeality. The same may have been possible with the bull-man of the labyrinth, at least when the myth into which history and ritual had been transformed came to be reviewed in Classical times in the light of esoteric religion.

- ¹ Mircea Eliade *Images and Symbols* (Lond.) 1961 p. 116. See p. 53 when he likens the placing of a neophyte in a *mandala* to initiation by entry into a labyrinth.
- ² See also Eliade *op.cit.* ch. on 'The God who Binds.' In the viewing of the labyrinth as a 'knot' symbol it is again comparable to the riddle, both calling for 'unravelling'. In this capacity the Minotaur, like the Sphinx, becomes the creature of the god who binds, or even the god himself. Knots which only the hero can unravel figure in myths, fairy-tales and legends, and both knots and tangled thread designs appear in profusion in medieval, mainly Irish, illuminated manuscripts. Their symbolism comes close to that of the labyrinth. See G. H. Hocke *Die Welt als Labyrinth*. Hamburg Rowohlt (1967).
- ³ Riddle mythology usually involves a giant or a monster who guards a maid in a castle and asks a riddle of all who essay to enter. Failure involves their death; but with the solution of the riddle, the giant or monster kills himself or loses his power and is killed by the hero. See Hastings *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* on 'Riddles'. p. 769. See p. 46 n. 2 above for an instance where the labyrinth is called a 'giants' castle'. Like the riddle the labyrinth or maze is used by young and old for amusement, though even these games may hold reminiscences of their more serious intent.

So if those who were said to have died in the labyrinth must be understood to be 'dead' in the same context, that is 'uninitiate', the impediment must be recognized as something that this emblem of corporeality, the Minotaur, stood for, and in that capacity, stood between neophyte and initiation. Theseus alone proves his initiation or obtains it by reaching the centre of the labyrinth where the mysteries are occult. And in so doing, like Oedipus, the Theban hero, he too vanquishes the monster of corporeality that bars the way to their *adytum*.

The clue of thread Theseus uses to enter the labyrinth also figures prominently in the symbolic interpretation that is due to this myth. We are told that Ariadne was given it by Daedalus, no less a person than the builder of the labyrinth and the establisher as well perhaps of the mysteries it held. So that it may be supposed to be no ordinary thread. This is just what it is not; for the clue is a well recognized symbol of the Way, coiled up in itself and ready to unwind itself to lead the devotee through to the Truth or Mystery he seeks.¹ In this respect it is the key to the labyrinth; and this too explains why it should come from no less a hand than the hand that built the labyrinth.

¹ See Michael Grant *Myths of The Greeks and the Romans* (Lond.) reprint 1963. p. 389-390. He quotes G. R. Levy who says 'both the winding path, and the rope or clue, appear in European tales of entry into an actual or subjective spiral maze', and adds: 'This labyrinthine path, found in medieval churchyards, relates to the life after death and gives initiation, on terms, to the mysteries of the dead. The clue, Theseus' thread, is like the fatal spindle of Sleeping Beauty, and the ball of wool which the kitten unwinds before Alice goes through the looking glass'. See E. L. Backman *Religious Dances in the Christian Church and Popular Medicine*. (Lond.) 1952. p. 67 ff. A ball linked the chain of clerks dancing the labyrinthine dance in the Auxerre Cathedral. There is a saying attributed to Erasmus 'mea est pila' 'I got the ball', meaning 'I have obtained the victory'. See C. Hardwick *Traditions, Superstitions and Folklore their Eastern Origin and Mythical Significance*. Manchester (1872) p. 72. And see William Blake's poem *Jerusalem*

I give you the end of a golden string
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at Heaven's gate
Built in Jerusalem's wall.

Edith Schnapper *op.cit.* p. 207 n. 5 points to the use of the image as common idiom. For example, 'thread' is the spiral part of a screw; to lose the thread is to get lost in argumentation; likewise the clew, or ball of thread, used to guide through the labyrinth has now become 'clue' i.e. abstract, a line of thought, the thread of a story or a guiding principle.

Diodorus,¹ writing on this episode, says that Theseus obtained the help of Ariadne and not only slew the Minotaur but got safely away, 'since he had learnt from her the way out (*tēn exodon*) of the labyrinth'. Similarly Apollodorus² talks as if the real problem was not entrance into the labyrinth but exit from it. 'Now the labyrinth which Daedalus built was a chamber which with its tangled windings perplexed the outward way (*tēn exodon*)'. The clearest description of the clue and its service is given by the Scholiasts³ and Eustathius⁴ on Homer. From them we learn that it was a ball of thread which Ariadne had begged of Daedalus for the use of her lover Theseus. He was to fasten one end of the thread to the lintel of the door on entering into the labyrinth, and holding the ball in his hand to unwind the skein while he penetrated deeper and deeper into the maze, till he found the Minotaur asleep in the inmost recess; then he was to grab the monster by the hair and sacrifice him to Poseidon; after which he was to retrace his steps, gathering up the thread behind him as he went. According to the Scholiast⁵ on the *Odyssey* the story was told by Pherecydes, and later authors may have followed him.

The same idea that the difficulty about the labyrinth was that of getting out of it rather than getting into its centre is implied by the accounts of those who think Daedalus built it to imprison the Minotaur. To quote Diodorus⁶ again, 'As a place in which to keep the monstrous thing (sc. the Minotaur) Daedalus, the story goes, built a labyrinth, the passage-ways of which were so winding that those unfamiliar with them had difficulty in making their way out.' And this is what Apollodorus⁷ too thinks of the Minotaur in the labyrinth.

We may be sure however that this impression given by the myth is misleading or that in the understanding of it, some writers

¹ iv.61.4

² iii. 1.4; *Ep.* 1.8 and 9. See also Paus. ii.31.1.

³ On *Od.* xi. 322 and on *Il.* xviii. 590.

⁴ On *Od.* xi. 320, p. 1688. See also Plut. *Theseus* 19; Hyg. *Fab.* 42; Servius on Virgil *Aen.* vi. 14 and on *Georg.* i. 222; Lact. Placid. on Statius *Theb.* xii. 676; *Scriptores rerum myth.* Lat. ed. G. H. Bode vol. i, p. 16, 116 ff. (First Vatican Mythographer, 43; Second Vatican Mythographer, 124).

⁵ *loc. cit.*

⁶ iv 77.4

⁷ iii. 1.4 See also Tzet. *Chil.* i. 479 ff. Plutarch *loc. cit.* however seems to have deliberately confused the details, perhaps indicating that things were not as popularly narrated.

misconstrued the significance of the clue of thread, if they did not deliberately perpetuate a misrepresentation they had found. For such a view of the significance of the clue not only belittles Daedalus, who is said to have given it to Ariadne on her plea for help, but also takes a wrong perspective of the labyrinth, looking at its mazes as a device for inclusion rather than for exclusion. What we suspect to be a key to the way in which the clue was used is to be found in the story of how Minos, looking for Daedalus who had escaped from Crete, discovered him. Apollodorus¹ gives it as follows:

'Minos pursued Daedalus, and in every country that he searched he carried a spiral shell and promised to give a reward to him who should pass a thread through the shell, believing that by that means he should discover Daedalus. And having come to Camicus in Sicily, to the court of Cocalus, with whom Daedalus was concealed, he showed him the spiral shell. Cocalus took it and promised to thread it and gave it to Daedalus; and Daedalus fastened a thread to an ant, and, having bored a hole in the spiral shell, allowed the ant to pass through it. But when Minos found the thread passed through the shell, he perceived that Daedalus was with Cocalus, and at once demanded his surrender'.

Here again we come across a familiar religious symbol, the spiral shell. Such an object combines both a circuitous movement towards a centre and at the same time an upward movement to a summit, centre and summit being one and the same. It varies from the labyrinth symbol in that it emphasises difficulty as against error in the attainment of the desired religious experience.² But

¹ *Ep.* 1. 14. The story of the strange device by which Minos set out to detect the whereabouts of Daedalus is repeated by Zenobius (*Cent.* iv. 92) who probably copied Apollodorus. This device was mentioned by Sophocles in a lost play *The Camicians* which dealt with Daedalus' residence at the court of Cocalus in Sicily. See Athen iii. 32, p. 86 c-d; *The Fragments of Sophocles*, ed. A. C. Pearson ii. p. 3 ff. Gk. *kokkalia* or *kokalia* are a kind of land-snail with a shell. Did Cocalus' name inspire the story?

² On the subject of spirals, see Evelyn Underhill *The Spiral Way*, Lond. (1922). Where the spiral ascends, it is the Pilgrims' Progress to heaven or truth, to reach which the aspirant 'about must and about must go'. The edifice of the great temple of Borobudur in Java imitates this; to an extent so does the zig-zag path of our own Sri Pada. The downward spiral is the way of initiation into the mysteries of death, e. g. the sanctum of Asclepius at Epidaurus. The spiral often occurs as a labyrinthine spiral in ancient temples and tombs, as in

what is equally interesting is the clue of thread in respect of the spiral. For in its symbolism as the Way the skein is often found wound spiralwise.²

Thus when Minos went looking for one who could thread the spiral shell, he was looking for no other than the man who threaded the labyrinth, in other words, the man who had initiated Theseus at the request of Ariadne into the mysteries of the cult of the Sun. It is for this that he had punished Daedalus, and it is by the same test that he discovers him. What is most worth noting however is the use of the thread. What Minos required of Cocalus to do, and what Daedalus in fact did, was to take the thread *in* through the windings of the shell, just as Theseus took the thread through the windings of the labyrinth, and not by any means follow it *out*.

As a consequence of his solution of the riddle of the Sphinx and his killing of the monster, Oedipus won the queen Jocasta for his wife. This is in the pattern of riddle-mythology, so that when we find Theseus bestowed a bride in consequence of his solution of the labyrinth and his killing of the monster who is associated with it, the parallelism is not to be missed. If he abandons her later, it only goes to show that this winning of a bride is a detail of no significance to the esoteric meaning that the myth has come to assert. In Oedipus' case the bride Jocasta had been of significance prior to and outside the episode of the Sphinx and her riddle; there is no such reason for sparing Ariadne from abandonment.

In Oedipus' episode with the Sphinx, the hero proves his superiority to other men by the possession of some kind of

the Irish Royal Tomb of New Grange. See C. N. Deedes. *The Labyrinth* (Lond.) 1935 esp. p. 16 and 21. It will be noted that Virgil (*Aen.* vi. 27) located the representation of a labyrinth painted by Daedalus himself near the entrance to the underworld at Cumae. The *Etymologicum Magnum* defines the labyrinth as 'a mountain cave' but Eustathius (on *Od.* xi. p. 1688) as 'a subterranean cave'. Lars Porsena made a labyrinth for his tomb (Varro cited by Pliny xxxvi. 91-93) and there were labyriaths in the Cyclopean i. e. pre-Hellenic, caves near Nauplion (Strabo viii. 6.2), on Samos (Pliny xxxiv. 83) and on Lemnos (Pliny xxvi. 90). It thus appears that the centre of the labyrinth represented death and its mysteries and thus also (conceived as a descending spiral) a descent to the underworld (*katabasis* es 'Adou). Coming out of the labyrinth symbolizes, we believe, the return from *katabasis* i. e. from a revelation of the mysteries of death, and only secondarily reincarnation.

² See Edith Schnapper, *op. cit.* p. 29-30.

knowledge or insight which the riddle probes. This is summed up in the answer to the riddle 'Man'. The Sphinx symbolizes the enigma of death and those who are said to have died by her are 'dead' in the sense of the mysteries. As a result of his solution of the riddle Oedipus realizes, or maybe, manifests, the awful truth that he is Apollo's man, a *theios aner*. His self-blinding, together with the inner vision that he acquires and the miraculous nature of his departure from life, all show the hand of the god.¹

Theseus is no different; he obtains initiation through Daedalus, his entrance into the labyrinth being that of a neophyte who is guided to the mysteries by that which is symbolic of the Way, the skein or clue of thread. With this induction he kills the monster, symbol of the body and death, who had rendered 'dead' all the youths and maidens who encountered him in their attempt to pierce the mazes of the labyrinth and reach *per ardua ad astra*.

Two details of the myth are worth adverting to briefly before we pass on to the anecdote of Theseus' doings in Delos, which have aroused a great deal of interest and in which we find a confirmation of the interpretation we have given to the core myth. The first of these is the trace of magical numerology that the myth displays. The number of victims sent to the Minotaur each time, though fourteen, is represented as a make up of the magical seven—seven youths and seven maidens². Similarly, the tribute, which may have been an annual one,³ is said to have been due every ninth year, again under the same influence and notwithstanding the fact that then the final tribute, the third, which included Theseus, would have been sent out as much as eighteen years after the first. This tribute is, in its turn, the third—thus giving us the primary magical numbers, three, seven and nine,

¹ See our article cited.

² Virgil *Aen.* vi. 21 says *septena corpora natorum*, reducing the victims but emphasising their number—seven. But see vi. 38-39 which follows immediately—the priestess asks Aeneas to offer seven heifers and an equal number of sheep.

³ Virgil. *loc. cit.* Theseus killed the Marathonian bull, that killed Androgeus, that led to the tribute. If he was a youth when he killed the Marathonian bull, he wouldn't have been reckoned a youth eighteen years later to be able to join the third tribute. But even if, as we said, mythology is careless of history, the nine year interval certainly appears interesting. Why nine?

just as in the riddle of the Sphinx we see an attempt to work out the first four integers, one, two, three and four.¹

The other detail is that of the manner in which Theseus slew the Minotaur when he discovered him. Many scholars have been led to connect this in some way or other with the magnificent Cretan ritual sports and ritual sacrifices depicted in seal and fresco in which athletes and priests are seen handling horned bulls. The confusion which arises when this same monster is first identified as priest-king-Sun and then as sacrificial victim offered by the priest to the Sun can be taken as the result of mythological superimposition. Vase-paintings depicting the encounter often show Theseus with sword in hand as though he slaughtered the monster with a weapon, and the literary version corresponding to this may be that of his having sacrificed the monster to Poseidon or some other god. Apollodorus² says Theseus killed the Minotaur by smiting him with his fists. A few instances however depict Theseus holding or dragging the Minotaur by the horns, even if in these too the hero holds a sword in his hand.

So just as the story of Zeus as a bull carrying off Europa to Crete may have derived from depictions of Cretan women 'bull-jumping', the episode of Theseus' killing of the Minotaur may have been inspired by the associated sport in which Minoan cowboys killed or controlled wild-bulls, holding them by their horns and twisting their necks, or the Cretan priests' sacrifice of rampant bulls by a deft stroke of the sword or dagger. By contagious magic the ritual handling of the horns of powerful bulls would have been thought to invigorate the athletes, or by ritual sacrifice of the bulls themselves, invigorate the Sun itself.

It is thus no surprise that when Theseus went ashore in the island of the Greek Sun-god, Apollo, the labyrinthine dance which he is said to have danced there was danced round the *Keraton*, an altar made of the horns of bulls sacrificed to that same god. Plutarch³ describes what took place there as follows:

¹ The version referred to is that which appeared appended to the text of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The *ainigma* in this form is carried back to at least the earlier part of the fourth century B. C.

There is on earth a *two-footed*, *four-footed* and *three-footed* creature, having but *one* voice. Of all the creatures that go about on earth and in the air and on the sea, it alone changes this nature of it's. But when it moves upon the most number of legs, then is the speed of its limbs most weak.

² *Ep* i. 1.

³ *Theseus*, 21.

'Now, Theseus, returning from Crete, put in at Delos and, having sacrificed to the god of the island, dedicated to the temple the image of Aphrodite he had received from Ariadne and danced with the young men a dance, which they say is still kept up by the Delians, which consists of certain measured turnings and returnings imitative of the windings and twistings of the labyrinth. This dance, Dicaearchus writes, is called among the Delians 'the Crane'. Theseus danced it around the Keratonian Altar, so named because it consists of horns (*kerata*) all taken from the left side of the head. They state also that he instituted games in Delos, where he was the first to award a palm to the victors'.

What is all this about? What is the significance of this strange dance that Theseus danced in Delos? Was it an expression of joy at having killed the Minotaur and escaped with his fellows from the land of Crete, or is it something more serious than that? Cook,¹ using this dance as evidence, conjectured that the labyrinth itself was no more than a stylized labyrinth-pattern on a dancing-floor of the great palace at Knossos. But the truth must be far otherwise; the labyrinthine dance itself, as this account betrays, is an imitation of the labyrinth with its windings and twistings. So that, if anything, Theseus was, by the imitative magic of his dance, creating an imaginary labyrinth in Delos in the likeness of the one he traversed in Crete. The long passages of the building he mimicked by the queue of his fellows strung out behind him, its windings by the twistings and turnings of this queue. To maintain the line, they may have held each other by the waist or shoulders; more likely they all held on to a thread or rope, as in the dance called the *kordax*.²

Why the dance was called 'the Crane' we do not know. Lucian thinks it resembled the flight of the crane, but then, the comparison cannot have been very apt with a dance which involved close 'turnings and returnings'. Could the movements of the

¹ See n. 47 above.

² *Antiquity, Archaeol.* 540; cf. 555. This was an unseemly and indecent rope-dance of the Old Comedy. Cook discussed a 'Minoan' precursor of the *kordax* in *Journal Hell. Stud.* 1894, vol. xiv, p. 101 ff. See p. 54 n. 1. The dance is mentioned by Lucian and Plutarch (*Pollux* iv, 101). Lucian (*de Salt.* 49) specifies Cretan dance themes as Europa, Pasiphae, both the Bulls, the labyrinth, Ariadne, Phaedra, Androgeus, Daedalus, etc. He also talks of a dance (*op. cit.* 13) which Daedalus taught Ariadne. I. R. Arnold *Am. J. Arch.* (1935) vol. xxxvii, p. 455 shows that the Delian dance had rope (*chumot*) to guide the dancers.

dancers have in some way resembled the walk of cranes? And could these movements have been determined by a three-step measure, the 'tripudio' of the priests of the Auxerre Cathedral?

The important point however is that this dance was, by its imitation, weaving an imaginary labyrinth and doing so around no less a thing than an altar of horns consecrated to the Greek god-equivalent of the Sun, Apollo, and in no less a place than his own sacred island, Delos¹. And when this is viewed in the light of the Cretan labyrinth, and the Cretan labyrinth viewed in the light of the Egyptian, it becomes clear that what Theseus is doing in Delos is just what Daedalus had done in Knossos, instituting a cult of the Sun or Sun-god (in the aspect of a bull) together with the mysteries he had learnt in Crete through the initiation he received from Daedalus and his own entrance into the labyrinth.

If Theseus duplicated an entrance into a labyrinth in Delos to initiate in the name of Apollo mysteries of the Sun that he had learnt in Crete, the larger myth also makes him kill an equivalent of the Minotaur for this god. This is the bull of Marathon. Like the Minotaur this animal had destroyed a number of human beings² before it itself was killed by Theseus. Now, like the Minotaur, he is made to come from Crete, and soon, even the manner in which he is killed is changed so as to be meaningful in the light of what Theseus had done in Crete and intended to repeat in Delos. For Plutarch³ says that, having overcome the monster, Theseus brought him in triumph to the city and afterwards sacrificed him to the Delphinian Apollo.

¹ See Plut. *Terr. an aquat. anim. sint. callid.* 35. He regards this alter one of the seven wonders of the world. (see also Anon. *de incred.* 2 and Mart. *lib. spec.* 1.4). The *naos* of the temple, which includes this alter, is separated from the innermost portion of the edifice by two pairs of Doric half-columns forming three intercolumniations; the middle opening has on either side of it a pilaster, the capital of which is the fore-part of a kneeling bull. The colonnade (125 metres) which runs on the northern side of the precinct, has its triglyphs decorated with bulls' heads. It is interesting to note the predominance of the bull-motif in this temple of Apollo.

² According to some versions, they included Androgeus, the son of Minos, just as the victims of the Sphinx included, according to one version, Haemon, the son of Creon. See our article cited p. 117 and n.

³ Plut. *Theseus* 14. Paus i.27 10 says the sacrifice was made 'to the goddess', meaning Athena. This could be a slip as the gender is only determined by the article, Paus using the common gender *theos* for the noun. On this adventure see also Apollod. *Ep.* i.5; Servius on Virgil *Aen.* viii. 294; First Vatican Mythographer 47; Hesych. sub. *Bolynthus*.

The fact that Theseus had killed the bull of Marathon prior to his going to Crete, while his creation of a labyrinth in Delos took place after he left Crete, does not disconcert mythology, in which historical sequence diminishes in significance together with the historicity of the incidents. Thus while the killing of the bull of Marathon appears a prelude to Theseus' killing of his offspring, the Minotaur, the subsequent connection of that bull with Crete and the dedication of him to Apollo show how much the story has been revised in terms of Theseus' adventure with the Minotaur himself. That he sacrificed him to Apollo in the Delphinion in Athens whereas he had danced the labyrinthine dance for the god in Delos is quite understandable; for he surely could not have been expected to take the beast over and across the sea from Marathon to Delos!

It will be evident then that when Theseus' killing of the Marathonian bull is superimposed on the labyrinthine dance he danced at Delos, we have all the elements of the adventure that he underwent in Knossos—labyrinth, Minotaur, victims, hero and all. And when it is realized that what he performed in Delos he performed in honour of Apollo, the Greek equivalent of the Cretan Sun or Sun-god, can it be doubted that what he had done in fact was that he had established in a cult of Apollo mysteries that he had been initiated into by Daedalus in Crete? Just as in the case of the legend of Oedipus, with the rise of Apollonine religion, the significance of this god begins to assert itself at every turn in the myth, so much so that even the invocation made by Theseus to Aphrodite to be his guide on his adventure is said to have been on the advice of Delphi.¹

It would then appear that both Oedipus and Theseus have a special relationship with Apollo; their respective myths, the one, with a monster who propounds a riddle, the other, with a monster who guards a labyrinth, stand for danger, difficulty and initiation. As riddle-mythology they both entail the winning of a bride; but as esoteric mythology they both indicate a religious experience of their respective heroes which relates them intimately with the great god of Delos, Apollo.

¹ See Plut. *op. cit.* 18. On setting out to Crete Theseus sacrificed to the Delphinian Apollo, the same to whom he sacrificed the bull of Marathon. It was the Delphic Apollo who bade him have Aphrodite as his guide. The cult he instituted at Delos was to the Delian Apollo. The fact remains that all this was done with or for Apollo. The difference of cults is merely incidental.

It is thus nothing but appropriate that Oedipus, when his time was up, should have come to Attica, the home of Theseus, and that he should have received sanctuary from him. But more important than that is the fact that in Theseus Oedipus recognized at once the one man who may be permitted to witness the mysteries with which the god would terminate his life and the one man to whose care he could entrust them together with his cult.