



# Ancient Greek Myths in Modern Greek Poetry: Angelos Sikelianos and Daedalus as a Symbol of Freedom

Aslı DAMAR ÇAKMAK<sup>1</sup> 



<sup>1</sup>Research Assistant, Ph.D., Istanbul University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Modern Greek Language and Literature, Istanbul, Türkiye

ORCID: A.D.Ç. 0000-0002-8940-4866

## Corresponding author:

Aslı DAMAR ÇAKMAK,  
İstanbul Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi,  
Çağdaş Yunan Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim  
Dalı, İstanbul, Türkiye  
E-mail: asli.damar@istanbul.edu.tr

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## ABSTRACT

Ancient Greek myths, which have emerged as one of the main sources of inspiration in literature throughout history and have been interpreted many times with different meanings by various authors, have become a powerful tool in conveying themes such as human nature and social values. This relationship, a symbol of cultural continuity, has consistently existed in literary works through its outcomes, such as keeping individual and collective memory alive and enriching the aesthetic and intellectual realms of societies. Myths, which stand out not only as narratives of the past but also by their continual reappearance in literature with different meanings and interpretations across eras, are recorded as one of the key parameters in the poetry of Angelos Sikelianos, a figure regarded as one of the foremost poets of Modern Greek Literature. This study focuses on Sikelianos' method of establishing connections among Greek history, mythology, nature, and mystical thought, as well as his method of adapting motifs specific to antiquity to the modern period. In this context, his poem *Daedalus*, analyzed in this study, stands as one of the successful attempts of the poet to build a bridge between the past and the present through poetry, by utilizing mythological characters. It has been determined that Sikelianos portrays the mythological character Daedalus not merely as an architect and inventor, he also depicted him as a figure symbolizing the artistic spirit striving to transcend the boundaries of the world, emphasizing themes such as freedom and creativity.

**Keywords:** Modern Greek Poetry, Angelos Sikelianos, Ancient Greece, Ancient Greek Myths, *Daedalus*

## Introduction

The idea of utilizing mythological symbols and characters to express identity and philosophical quests has been frequently used in Modern Greek Literature, and both direct references to well-known stories and characters and the inclusion of ancient myths into works by adding new dimensions in a modern context have played a significant role in shaping Modern Greek poetry. The use of ancient myths in literature in Greece is generally seen as influenced by literary developments following the



romanticism in the West. This influence evolved in parallel with other movements, such as folklore studies and the movement of the Demotic Greek<sup>1</sup> (Pallis, 1975, p. 14).

We see that the myths we trace in many poets appear in various forms and shed light on contemporary issues. When we look at the Greek poetry of the 19th century, it is observed that references to Homer or various ancient myths are explicitly presented in the works of Dionysios Solomos<sup>2</sup> (David, 1993, p. 49). In Andreas Kalvos<sup>3</sup> work *Odes* (Ὀδές)<sup>4</sup>, mythological references merge with the romantic passion of a patriot. Under the influence of classicism, the poetic use of myths emerges as a national necessity, enabling a comparison between the glorious past and the modern reality of Greece, as it reflects the struggle to uphold the grandeur of the ancestral heritage. From the mid-19th century onwards, ancient Greek myths have been used more intensively, delineating distinct boundaries between the past and the present (Despotidis, 2018, p. 1518).

As the pioneer of the New Athenian School<sup>5</sup> and one of the most important poets of Modern Greek Literature, Kostis Palamas sought to introduce Western literary movements to Greece while highlighting their connections to the literary heritage of Greece. Palamas, inspired by the symbols of power, virtue, and wisdom found in ancient myths, aimed to highlight ancient glory; through his efforts, Ancient Greece emerged as a profound source of inspiration for modern Greek cultural life (Harmouzos, 1974, p. 81). He perceived the symbols and characters of antiquity through the lens of modern sensibilities, adapting, altering and transforming them according to the needs of the era. The 1880s Generation, pioneered by Palamas, acknowledged the influences of French Parnassism and Symbolism, and although it broke away from Classicism, it continued to be inspired by ancient Greek myths. In some cases, rather than serving merely a decorative purpose or symbolizing the continuity of Hellenism, myths became

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- 1 An intellectual movement that aimed to intervene in the language in the 20th century advocated the idea of purifying Greek from Katharevousa (an artificial language created by combining elements of Ancient and Modern Greek, which was the official language of Greece until 1976) and archaic elements.
  - 2 Dionysios Solomos is one of the most important poets of Modern Greek Literature and the most important representative of the Heptanese School of Literature. He is called the national poet because the national anthem of Greece was written by him.
  - 3 Andreas Kalvos was among the representatives of the Heptanese School of Literature and was a contemporary of the poets Dionysios Solomos and Ugo Foscolo.
  - 4 Ode (Ancient Greek: Ὀδὴ) is a special type of lyric poetry with its origins in Ancient Greece.
  - 5 This school is also known as the 1880s Generation because the first renewal works appeared in 1880. The poets of this generation were young poets that were interested in the establishment of a common language in poetry.

structural components of poetry and were linked to the national perspective as well as the personal vision of the poets (Despotidis, 2018, p. 1518).

At this point, it is seen that Konstantinos Kavafis acted with a similar approach. The Alexandrian poet was inspired by mythology in many of his poems, utilizing mythological themes as background and symbols, particularly referencing Homer's epics and ancient tragedies. By transforming ancient myths or highlighting only certain aspects, he usually transported the people of his own era, along with their issues, into another era (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 31).

Starting from the early 20th century, it is observed that poets began to approach myths with a new understanding while questioning their connections to the past. While in traditional poetry myths were generally handled within a specific narrative framework, modern poets preferred to disrupt this structure and use myths as metaphors. This approach aimed not only to recount mythological stories but also to encourage readers to question their relevance in contemporary life. This modern adaptation of myth, characterized by the intense use of anachronisms, offers the reader a rich and multilayered experience. Myths simultaneously blur the boundaries between the past and the present while situating human experience within a universal context. Ultimately, in Modern Greek poetry, myths function as both a narrative element and a tool for existential inquiry (Vagenas, 1994, p. 61).

This study will provide information about the three main poetic periods of Angelos Sikelianos, focusing on his relationship with Ancient Greece, and will analyze the symbols he attributed to the mythological figure in his poem *Daedalus*, along with his approach to these symbols.

## The Life of Angelos Sikelianos

Angelos Sikelianos, who was born in Lefkada in 1884, started to study at the Faculty of Law, but did not complete it and turned to poetry, which he had been inclined to since his early ages. He took on diverse roles in the theatre stage of Konstantinos Hristomanos<sup>6</sup> "Nea Skini" (New Stage) (Prevelakis, 1990, p. 29). Although he possessed a character that was resistant to systematic instruction, he nevertheless managed to cultivate himself in various aspects. His intellectual pursuits extended beyond classical

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6 Founder of the theatre called "Nea Skini," theatre writer and poet, who lived between 1867 and 1911.

Greek literature, encompassing Homer, ancient lyric poetry, pre-Socratic philosophers, and ancient tragedy. He also delved into the fields of history and sociology. Following his marriage to American Eva Palmer and with her encouragement, Sikelianos initiated the Delphic Festivals, a series of events held between 1927 and 1930 that celebrated Greek culture through sports competitions, folk art exhibitions, torch races, and performances of both ancient and modern Greek dances. Sikelianos conceived of Delphi as a global cultural center, where all people could come together regardless of religion, language or nation, and where the main goal was universal brotherhood (Δελφική Ιδέα/The Delphic Idea). To further this aim, he published articles, organized conferences, and invited international intellectuals to Delphi. Despite the significant achievements recorded during the festivals, the organization encountered numerous challenges. In 1933, his wife, Eva, travelled to America in 1933 to seek financial support for the organization. However, as she was denied re-entry to Greece, the couple had to leave, resulting in the cessation of the festivals (Stergiopoulos, 2019, p. 207). Despite the failure of the Delphic Festivals, they played a significant role in revitalizing ancient theatres and elevating Delphi to international prominence (Frangou-Kikilia, 2002, p. 120). Sikelianos, who assumed the presidency of the Greek Literary Association in 1947, passed away in Athens in 1951 and was subsequently interred in Delphi (Stergiopoulos, 2019, p. 207).

From his earliest years, Sikelianos exhibited a profound affinity for art and poetry. His mature, powerful early verses bear the influence of the Romantic, Parnassian, and Symbolist movements, as well as the works of Solomos and German ballads (Prevelakis, 1990, pp. 30–31). Sikelianos initiated his literary career in 1902, publishing his early poems in literary magazines of the period such as *Dionysos*, *Panathinaia*, *Noumas*, *Zoi*, and *Akritas*. His debut poetry collection, *Alafroiskiotos*<sup>7</sup> (Αλαφροϊσκιωτος), was published in 1907. Subsequently, his works such as *Prologos sti zoi* (Prologue to Life/Πρόλογος στη ζωή), *Mitir Theou* (Mother of God/Μήτηρ Θεού), *Pasha ton Ellinon* (Easter of the Greeks/Πάσχα των Ελλήνων), and *Delfikos Logos* (Delphic Logos/Δελφικός Λόγος) were presented to the readers. His complete poetic works were later compiled and published in three volumes under the title *Lyrikos Vios* (*Lyrical Life/Λυρικός Βίος*). Sikelianos was not only a renowned poet but also a prolific playwright. In addition to his extensive body of poetic work, he penned several tragedies such as *O Dithyramvos tou Rodou* (Dithyramb of the Rose/O Διθύραμβος του Ρόδου), *Sivylla* (Sibyl/Σίβυλλα), *O Daidalos stin Kriti* (Daedalus in Crete/O Δαίδαλος στην Κρήτη), and *O Thanatos tou Digeni* (The

7 The meaning of the word: A person who sees fairies and ghosts. / Light sleeper.

Death of Digenis/O Θάνατος του Διγενή) (Kolektif, 1980, pp. 84-85). Despite their technical shortcomings in terms of dramatic action, these works exhibit a vibrant energy that is essential for theatrical performance. All of the tragedies, most of which have an intensely lyrical character, demonstrate an exceptional mastery of language and poetic form (Dimaras, 2000, p. 569).

In *Alafroiskiotos*, the pivotal moment in his poetic journey, the poet fully embraced his lyrical identity, employing a diverse range of expressive techniques. Drawing inspiration from the joy of sensation and the evocative power of language, he seemingly intertwined with nature and composed his verses. His profound sensitivity to the natural world allowed him to perceive the essence of objects, fostering a mystical connection with them. His works such as *Mitir Theou*, *Pasha ton Ellinon*, and *Delfikos Logos*, which employed mythological, religious, and historical elements as symbolic devices, are distinguished by their intense lyricism and the rich simplicity of expression (Dimaras, 2000, pp. 564–566). While deeply rooted in tradition, Angelos Sikelianos introduced significant innovations to Modern Greek poetry, securing a prominent position among his contemporaries. Alongside notable contemporaries such as Nikos Kazantzakis and Kostas Varnalis, Sikelianos contributed significantly to the literary movement initiated by the 1880s Generation. Together, they infused Greek literature with renewed vitality, aligning it with the evolving cultural landscape of the time. By harmoniously blending traditional elements with innovative techniques, they laid the foundation for the emergence of Modernism in Greek literature (Kapsomenos, 2019, pp. 15–16).

Including elements specific to Greek culture in his poetry did not prevent the poet from turning to the West, where he sought inspiration to refine his art and broaden his perspective. With new techniques drawn from the West, including the surrealism movement, he enriched his poetic language and seamlessly integrated these innovations into Greek cultural traditions. The 1880s Generation of endeavor to synthesize elements of Greek culture with the intellectual achievements of the West found its culmination in the works of Sikelianos (Dimaras, 2000, pp. 567–571).

## Angelos Sikelianos and Ancient Greek Motifs in his Poetry

Sikelianos' poetic works extensively reference and reinterpret ancient myths and works of art, thereby conveying visual imagery into textual expression. His poetic rendition of the ancient artwork imbued it with a dynamic presence, as if it were

articulating itself through his words. From this standpoint, his poetry generates a purely iconic image (Ladia, 1983, p. 11). Disappointed by the cultural decline of his time, Sikelianos embarked on a search for a cultural identity in modern Greece, drawing inspiration from ancient Greek myths. Influenced by mystery cults, especially Orphism, the poet sought to revitalize the unifying principles embodied by Ancient Greek centers such as Eleusis, Olympia and Delphi and to apply them to the challenges of modern existence (Politis, 2009, pp. 237–238). This integrative framework, which unites direct and universal poetic awareness, theoretical understanding, and mystical experience, profoundly intrigued the poet. Myths and symbols, encoded within the names of the gods of Ancient Greece, offer profound poetic interpretations of the world and life. In Sikelianos' works, these elements were deployed with a potent and symbolically dense style that engages the reader (Papanoutsos, 2019, p. 78).

Sikelianos' poetry, characterized by lyricism, nature imagery, youth vitality, and Dionysian fervor, reflects his vision of a universal myth that blends elements of primitive matriarchal religions, classical Greek spirituality, Orphism, and Christianity. From his earliest works, the poet sought to revitalize traditional forms through innovation, merging Hellenistic antiquity with modern Greek culture and exploring the interplay between natural landscapes and cultural heritage. While not strictly a romantic poet, he nonetheless exhibited a mystical sensibility (Stergiopoulos, 2019, pp. 207–208).

Sikelianos' engagement with the Greek tradition was profoundly influenced by his direct exposure to the Greek people, ancient ruins, and artifacts, which deepened his understanding of both Greek antiquity and mythology. His orientation towards people is associated with the rise of the movement of Demotic Greek, which is based on the fact that the people are not only the source of the originality and the integrity of the language, but also the foundation of all kinds of national, social and cultural values. The poet's works creatively reflect the enduring influence of ancient Greek mythology on the language and cultural traditions of the Greek people. His connection with the Greek people enabled him to gain in-depth knowledge of the tradition and the rich cultural heritage of the land. Throughout his life, Sikelianos consistently sought to understand the traditions of the people (Fylaktou, 2003, pp. 38–40). Moreover, his intimate and methodical study of ancient ruins enabled him to imaginatively reconstruct the past. The poet's contact with the ancient ruins of Greece not only enriched his knowledge of myths but also created a series of experiences based on myths that have survived to the present day. Living for a long time on his birthplace, Lefkada Island,

and visiting Epirus, Thessaly, Delphi, Sparta, Epidavros and many other places in Greece, provided him with a wealth of firsthand experiences that enriched his understanding of ancient Greek culture (Giofyllis, 1952, p. 15). His interest in Ancient Greek literature, cultivated since his student years, propelled him to translate Homer's epic poems into the common language shortly after completing his secondary education (Savvidis, 2003, p. 25). Sikelianos' acquaintance with ancient Greek myths was enriched not only by classical texts but also by the works of modern Greek and foreign poets/writers who engaged with these myths. Sikelianos' understanding of ancient Greek mythology was significantly shaped by the works of several notable figures, including Edouard Schuré, Gabriele D'Annunzio, Maurice Barrés and Nietzsche (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 42).

Ancient theatre, along with other classical influences, inspired Sikelianos's deep interest in ancient Greek myths. This interest led him to Athens in 1901, where he joined Konstantinos Hristomanos' movement called "Nea Skini" (New Stage). The inaugural production of "Nea Skini" was Euripides' *Alcestis*, in which Sikelianos himself assumed a minor role. This experience with ancient theatre ignited his passion for tragedy, inspiring his subsequent work as a playwright. Many of the tragedies he wrote, such as *Asklepios*, *Daidalos stin Kriti*, and *O Dithyramvos tou Rodou*, draw their themes from ancient myths (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 44). Sikelianos' conception of theatre as a vehicle for social betterment led him to incorporate elements of ancient Greek tragedy and myths into his productions. For example, his work *O Dithyramvos tou Rodou* reflects the Delphic Idea. The prominence of the rose, an Orphic symbol, in this work underscores the poet's concern with the decline of traditional values, such as beauty, love, peace, and virtue (Panselinos, 2019, p. 235).

The poet's innovative reimagining of ancient Greek myths constitutes a significant contribution to the field of literature. This approach is characterized by a comprehensive integration of the myths into the poet's personal worldview. The poet's idiosyncratic interpretation of the myths functions as a distilled representation of his philosophical insights. Moreover, he utilized rhetorical strategies to forcefully impose his own interpretation of the myths upon the reader. In Keeley's words, "his approach presents a mythological teaching in a way that captures both our minds and hearts"<sup>8</sup> (Keeley, 1987, p. 85).

The first period of Angelos Sikelianos, initiated by *Alafroiskiotos* and reaching its zenith in the *Rapsodies tou Iouniou* (June Rhapsodies/Ραψωδίες του Ιουνίου), extolls the vivacity

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8 All translations from Greek to English in this article belong to the author.



of the Homeric world. The mythological sources in these works were largely drawn from the Homeric epics. The pantheon, including Apollo, Athena, and Artemis, and the heroic figures Odysseus and Achilles, are central to these works. The satyrs provide a vehicle for the poet's exploration of Dionysian themes. In this early period, Sikelianos' engagement with ancient myths is characterized by brevity and simplicity (Fylaktou, 2019, p. 315).

The second period begins with the *Delfikos ĩmnos* (Delphic Hymn/Δελφικός Ύμνος), continues with *Epinikoi* (Epinicions/Επίνικοι), reaches its peak with *Syneidisi* (Consciousness/Συνείδηση) and continues until the *Orfika* (*Orphic*/Ορφικά). Ancient Greek myths occupy a prominent place, especially in his work titled *Syneidisi*. Sikelianos' references to the heroic figures of Heracles and the Argonauts function as a literary device to transcend the historical and political turmoil of the Balkan Wars. The heroic deeds and moral values associated with the gods and heroes are proffered as a moral compass for the generation that experienced the Balkan Wars, especially for the youth of Greece. The mythological repertoire of this period, in contrast to the more limited range of the first period, draws upon the full breadth of ancient Greek mythology. The gods Dionysus and Apollo, the goddess Demeter, and especially the hero Heracles, hold a permanent place in his work *Lyrkos Vios* (Fylaktou, 2019, p. 318).

The last period of ancient Greek myths in *Lyrkos Vios* began around 1935 with the work *Orfika* and reached its peak with the *Epinikoi* during World War II and the National Resistance (1940-1946).<sup>9</sup> Among the gods, Dionysus and Demeter are emphasized, while other mythological characters like Adonis and Daedalus also stand out. The poetic language of this period utilizes metaphors and symbols to convey both transcendent spiritual experiences and specific historical circumstances. It is observed that the poet's enduring optimism persisted even during the tumultuous period of World War II. Ancient myths constitute a fundamental instrument for Sikelianos in both formulating his contemporary identity and envisioning future possibilities (Fylaktou, 2019, p. 318).

Sikelianos, who unwaveringly believed in temporal regeneration, where the sources of the future time are found among the ruins of the past, revived his poetic voice with the idea that gods, nymphs, and all kinds of mythological beings jumped out from the ruins, narrating their stories (Ladia, 1983, p. 14). Perhaps more than any other writer, Sikelianos extolled the inherent nobility of humanity and maintained a steadfast belief in the continued existence of the ancient gods in familiar forms (Keeley, 2019, p. 147).

9 The Greek National Resistance comprised armed and unarmed groups from across the political spectrum, united in their resistance to the Axis occupation of Greece during World War II.



## Analysis of the Poem *Daedalus*

Daedalus, a celebrated figure in the ancient world for his skills in architecture, craftsmanship, and invention, possessed a remarkable intelligence and creative flair, especially in the fields of architecture, sculpture, and stonemasonry. His skills were so astonishing that he was said to have learned these arts directly from the Goddess Athena. The sculptures produced by Daedalus, who became famous for perfecting the sculpture technique, were so remarkably realistic that it was rumoured that they possessed the capacity for movement, and even locomotion, if not physically restrained. While previous masters built the statues with their eyes closed and their arms hanging down to their sides, Daedalus stood out as the first person who added eyes to the statues and also dared to separate the legs and move the arms away from the body to make them look like they were moving (Kakridis, 1986, p. 37).

When his nephew Talos, who worked as his apprentice, invented a saw inspired by the snake's jaw, Daedalus became jealous and killed him by throwing him down from the Acropolis. When the murder was revealed, he was exiled from Athens. Daedalus went to Crete, where he became the chief architect for King Minos, and built the Labyrinth, which consisted of winding corridors in which the king imprisoned the Minotaur.<sup>10</sup> Concerned about the life of Theseus, the Athenian hero who had volunteered to confront the Minotaur, Princess Ariadne, daughter of the king, turned to the cunning architect Daedalus for assistance. Upon the advice of Daedalus, Ariadne provided to Theseus a ball of thread, a crucial tool for his perilous quest. Theseus methodically unrolled the thread as he navigated the intricate corridors of the Labyrinth, using the thread as a guide to retrace his path and escape the deadly maze. However, when King Minos learned of Daedalus' role in facilitating Theseus' escape from the Labyrinth, he imprisoned both Daedalus and his son Icarus in the Labyrinth. Utilizing the ingenious design of wings made from feathers and wax, Daedalus and Icarus attached the contraptions to their bodies, enabling them to soar above the Labyrinth and escape their imprisonment. Daedalus, ever mindful of the limitations of their makeshift wings, warned Icarus to maintain a moderate altitude. However, Icarus, filled with youthful exuberance and a desire to touch the heavens, ignored his father's advice and ascended

<sup>10</sup> A mythical creature depicted as having the head and tail of a bull combined with the body of a man. The word Minotaur originates from the Ancient Greek "Μινώταυρος" (Minotauros), a compound of the name "Μίνωας" (Minos) and the noun "ταύρος" (tauros) meaning "bull", thus it is translated as the "Bull of Minos". According to tradition, every nine years, the people of Athens were obliged by King Minos to select fourteen young noble citizens to be sacrificed to the Minotaur as reparation for the death of Minos' son, Androgeos.

towards the sun. The intense heat from the sun softened the wax that secured Icarus' wings to his body. As the adhesive weakened, the wings detached, and Icarus fell into the sea (Grimal, 2022, pp. 134, 317).

Sikelianos, who strived to perceive the ancient myths that reveal universal values as a sacred and mystical source of wisdom, delving into the depths of the human soul, attached particular significance to the mythological character named Daedalus, whose story is given above. It is seen that he elevated this significance to a higher level by also writing a tragedy titled *O Daidalos stin Kriti*, in addition to the poem *Daedalus*.

The poem examined in this study is included in the collection titled *Orfika* and was first published in the magazine *Nea Estia*, dated 15 June 1938 (Politis, 2009, p. 242). In this poem, we observe a new approach to the myths, particularly the ancient Greek myths, enabling the poet to adopt a more assertive and expressive voice. The poet does not merely utilize the mythical material as a framework for personal commentary or experience. Instead, he infuses the myth with deeper significance, offering a unique interpretation and poetic expression of the wisdom inherent within it. Sikelianos elevates the interpretation of myth to a poetic act form, presenting the mythological teachings in a manner that stimulates both cognitive and affective responses.

In this poem, the poet focuses not on Icarus, who, overflowing with youthful exuberance, was driven to an inevitable end, but on Daedalus, the artist dedicated to his work:

Μοίρα στον Ίκαρο ήταν να πετάξει  
και να χαθεί... Τι, ως ήβρε σταφνισμένες  
τις φοβερές της λευτεριάς φτερούγες  
απ' τον τρανό πατέρα του μπροστά του,  
η νιότη έριξε μόνη το κορμί του  
στον κίνδυνο, κι αν ίσως δεν μπορούσε  
το μυστικό, το αγνό τους νά βρει ζύγι!<sup>11</sup> (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 1–7)

11 Fate for Icarus was to fly  
and to be lost... What, as he found the terrifying  
wings of freedom prospering  
from his mighty father in front of him,  
youth alone cast his body  
into danger, and if perhaps he could not  
find the balance of their secret, pure essence.

What brought Icarus so close to the sun was the unstoppable sense of youth within him; thus, a different ending could not have been expected for him. The poet sets aside this part of the myth's mystery and turns his attention to the more compelling figure of Daedalus. This part is illuminated from the father's perspective, as it becomes clear from the opening lines of the poem that the father fatally encourages the youthful bravery (Papadaki, 1995, p. 32).

Sikelianos commences with a mythological framework and a presentation of a purportedly real event, yet gradually evolves toward an emotional nucleus that serves as the basis for the poem's subsequent interpretation. The event presented as factual is the lamentable loss of Icarus. The emotional realm surrounding the event is characterized by mourning, especially the mourning of those who have not yet experienced significant suffering. The narrative established in the opening lines also informs the structural framework of the poem. The poet's role as a narrator begins with the emotional outbursts of people who are unable to bear the loss of Icarus. The poet's interpretation stands in contrast to the mourning of those who are unaccustomed to pain. The poet's arguments against mourning are ultimately intended to highlight Daedalus' position as a heroic figure who transcends ordinary human limitations. At this point, the poet's argument is based on particular events from Daedalus' life history. As will be seen in the following lines, the idea that earth and sky could become one and merge, the disintegration of the arms and legs of statues, and the creation of wings to break free from the earth—all these events lead Daedalus to the decision to resist the urge of paternal feelings (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 307).

As can be inferred from the lines above, Icarus, embodying the impulse of youth, fails to achieve a balance between freedom and restraint. Due to his youth, he is driven into danger and destruction, as he lacks the secret of the balance between body and soul, one of the most significant ideals of antiquity. Conversely, Daedalus, a creative genius, dreams of wings on his shoulders, a fighter who rises above the crowd and the boundaries of mourning. Those who mourn for this inevitable fate, along with their untested and weak companions, perceive Daedalus as a cruel, self-centered figure, perhaps even as one chasing the impossible, for he invented the wings that may have led to the tragic loss of his son. However, Sikelianos sees in Daedalus, an artist who, through his unwavering dedication to his craft, seeks to elevate himself and humanity above the mundane constraints of existence and the confines of grief. Here, the poet masterfully anthropomorphizes the mythical teachings

and, more importantly, allows his voice to carry this magnificent style that befits the greatness of his belief (Keeley, 1987, pp. 86–88).

The architect of the Labyrinth, utilizing his own inherent fortitude, discovers the path to freedom entirely on his own. He sees the sky and the earth as a whole, and with this vision, he embarks on a journey of salvation. This section, which also conveys a perspective on a person who views the world in such a manner, adds a philosophical dimension at the point of existence. From the following lines, it is understood that the person perceives life in a holistic manner, seeing the connection between the material and the spiritual, the divine and the worldly. The poet proposes that human consciousness actively shapes the world through the process of perception. Here, the poem embraces a worldview that does not separate matter from spirit, seeing them as interconnected parts of a whole:

Μ' αν άντρας που, απ' την πρώτην ηλικία του,  
είπε ουρανός και γη πως ήταν ένα,  
και στια του κόσμου η ίδια η συλλογή του.<sup>12</sup> (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 19–21)

Daedalus is regarded as the first master who succeeded in freeing ancient sculptures from immobility and giving them life and movement by spreading their legs and extending their arms alongside them. In the following lines, the poet focuses solely on the aspect of freeing the hands and feet of the sculptures, without making any references to the eyes. At this point, Daedalus becomes the symbol not only of the master who liberated the limbs of the statues from the stasis, but also of the struggle to liberate the human being spiritually and emotionally. By liberating statues and creating mechanical beings that represent humanity, Daedalus assumes the role of a savior for humankind. He becomes the guide not only for craftsmen but also for people who desire freedom (Fylaktou, 2003, pp. 304–305). He aspires to imbue the inanimate with life, give life to the inert, and bring it to the light that symbolizes knowledge, truth, and hope:

αν άντρας  
που είδε πως όλα σε ταφής εικόνα  
τ' ανθρώπινα είναι, κι οι ψυχές και τα έργα·  
κι όπως στ' αγάλματα έλυσε και χέρια  
και πόδια, να βαδίζουν μοναχά τους

12 But if a man, from his earliest youth,  
said that the sky and earth were one,  
and in the focus of the world is his own vision.

στους δρόμους του φωτός, αναλογίστη  
και τις καρδιές να λύσει των ανθρώπων.<sup>13</sup> (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 25–30)

For Sikelianos, Daedalus is also a symbol of the struggle for leadership. He is a visionary leader who makes plans to realize his dreams. Beyond infusing the ancient myth with new content, the poet reshapes it by dramatizing the event, offering the myth in a different form. To emphasize the distinction between Daedalus and immature individuals, the poet depicts a scene in which men and women speak contemptuously about Daedalus' decision to abandon his deceased child and continue flying. (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 305).

Sikelianos adds a different dimension to Daedalus' escape from the Labyrinth. The tomb, intended as a place of confinement, ironically becomes a gateway to immortality. His nature undergoes a radical transformation within death. He flies out of the Labyrinth with the wings woven by his thoughts, and ultimately defeats death and frees himself from the passions that represent the masses and the emotions that dominate the souls of weak people. The poet calls upon Daedalus, the savior of humanity, to help him overcome human values (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 309):

αν άντρας που κλεισμένος  
στη φυλακή πόχτισε ο ίδιος —όπως  
η κάμπια υφαίνει μόνη της τον τάφο  
'πού θα κλειστεί, απ' το θάνατο ζητώντας  
ν' αλλάξει φύση σύρριζα— νειρεύτη,  
στα βάθη του Λαβύρινθου, φτερούγες  
πως φύτρωναν στους ώμους του, κι αγάλι  
αγάλι η πλήθια αγρύπνια του μετρήθη  
με τ' όνειρο, και βγήκε αυτή νικήτρα.<sup>14</sup> (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 36–44)

13 If a man  
who saw that all human things are but an  
image of burial, and souls and deeds alike,  
and as he released both hands and feet  
from statues, to walk on their own along  
the paths of light, also contemplated freeing  
the hearts of humankind.

14 If a man who, imprisoned in the cell  
he himself built —like the caterpillar  
that weaves its own tomb to be  
confined in, seeking from the death  
to change his nature from the root — dreamed,  
in the depths of the Labyrinth, wings that  
were sprouting from his shoulders, and slowly  
his abundant wakefulness was measured against  
the dream, and the wakefulness emerged victorious.

The lines above, depicting a symbolic and existential struggle for liberation and rebirth from the self-imposed traps or prisons within, emphasize the limitations and psychological ties in human life. The image of the caterpillar digging up its grave is used as a powerful metaphor for the desire for transformation and rebirth. Moreover, the line "...wings were sprouting from his shoulders..." symbolizes that humans possess wings like Icarus, and this image expresses the deep desire for freedom by escaping the confines of the prison and reaching for freedom.

Despite the misinterpretations of those who label Daedalus a "cruel father," for persisting in his journey to save his own life, the following lines reflect a vision of creation to which this hero clings to (Keeley, 1987, p. 69):

στη γη μεγάλα κύματα απ' αστάχου—  
 πιο πάνω κι απ' τον όχλο, κι απ' το κύμα  
 που το παιδί του σκέπασε, πιο πάνω  
 κι απ' του πένθους τα σύνορα, να σώσει  
 με την ψυχή του την ψυχή του κόσμου.<sup>15</sup> (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 55–59)

Although the voice here displays personal characteristics, it possesses qualities markedly distinct from the majority of the poet's early works. In this poem, the poet no longer assumes the role of a prophet delivering a divine message through a sacred rhetoric. By positioning the myth at the core of the poem, the poet enables it to take on a life of its own within the narrative, subsequently immersing himself into the myth and intertwining his personal experience with it. However, to prevent the personal dimension from overshadowing the metaphorical aspect, the poet redirects his focus toward the meaning generated by the myth (Keeley, 1987, p. 71). In the following lines, Daedalus is portrayed as the guardian of those who, by overcoming the fear of death, strive to save the soul of the world through artistic expression (Papadaki, 1995, p. 33). The poet bestows upon Daedalus the title of "father" not only for his role as the progenitor of artisans but also as a symbol of leadership for all who challenge the established order and seek to change it through thought or action (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 307):

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15 On the earth, great waves of wheat—  
 higher than the crowd, and above the wave  
 that covered his child, higher  
 even than the borders of grief, to save  
 with his soul the soul of the world.

Μα εσύ, τρανέ πατέρα,  
 πατέρα όλων εμάς οπού σε εικόνα  
 ταφής, από την πρώτην ηλικία μας,  
 έχουμε ιδεί τα πάντα και, ή με λόγο  
 ή με σμιλάρι, με την πνοή μας όλη  
 απάνω απ' το ρυθμό το σαρκοφάγο  
 να υψωθούμε αγωνιόμαστε.<sup>16</sup> (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 72–78)

In the final lines seen below, the poet's voice recedes in the background, with the first-person plural employed to represent those who struggle. The poet's admiration for the rebellious character stands out prominently in the poem and reaches its peak in the final line. Daedalus achieves eternal existence, transcending the limitations of the earthly realm and becoming identified with the rebellious figure of Lucifer (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 307). The poet approaches Daedalus with a sense of admiration, recognizing his enduring legacy and his transformative influence on both the material and intellectual dimensions of human existence. Individuals characterized by a lively and honest will perceive Daedalus as an enduring power, a herald of the dawn, perpetually inspiring thoughts of renewed hope and future possibilities:

τις ώρες του όρθρου, που μοχτούμε ακόμα,  
 σαν κι οι νεκροί κι οι ζωντανοί πλαγιάζουν  
 στον ίδιο ανόνειρο ή βαριόνειρο ύπνο,  
 μη σταματάς να υψώνεσαι μπροστά μας  
 σκαλώνοντας με αργές, στρωτές φτερούγες  
 τον ουρανό της Σκέψης μας ολοένα,  
 Δαίδαλε αιώνιε, απόκοσμος Εωσφόρος!<sup>17</sup> (Sikelianos, 2000, lines 91–97)

16 But you, mighty father,  
 father of all of us, who in an image of  
 burial, from our earliest youth,  
 we have seen everything and, either with words  
 or with a chisel, with all our breath  
 we struggle to rise above the  
 thing that prey on our minds.

17 In the hours of dawn, when we still struggle,  
 as if both the dead and the living lie down  
 in the same dreamless or heavily slumber,  
 do not cease to rise in front of us  
 climbing with slow, steady wings  
 ever higher into the sky of our Thought,  
 Daedalus eternal, otherworldly Lucifer!



Sikelianos associates Daedalus with Lucifer, acknowledging not only the hero's skillful and rebellious character but also his capacity to illuminate the poet's thoughts, like the star that shares the same name (Fylaktou, 2003, p. 308). The line "... do not cease to rise in front of us..." highlights the importance of Daedalus as a guide or symbol of human aspiration, illuminating the path toward self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment. The phrase "sky of thought," where he ascends with slow and steady wings, symbolizes the ideal of knowledge and spiritual ascension.

## Conclusion

We see that Greek mythology continues to be a reference point for poetic exploration, offering poets a rich source of inspiration and symbolic resonance. Sikelianos, who extensively incorporated elements of the ancient past into his works, amplified these motifs to grand proportions, as demonstrated in many of his poems. He aimed to revive the spirit of the ancient Greeks, constructing all his works on this basis. He created images and symbols in his poetry using the ancient Greek tradition. These elements reflect not only the poet's aesthetic inclination but also underscore the aspiration to achieve cultural revival through the ancient spirit in his poetry. In addition, the famous Delphic Idea, which constitutes the core of Sikelianos' worldview, and the accompanying Delphi Festivals were significant aims for the poet. Through these, he sought to preserve and promote timeless human values such as freedom, peace, justice, and friendship, fostering a harmonious and equitable world.

In the poem analyzed in this study, Daedalus is depicted as a brilliant craftsman and architect, renowned as the father of Icarus. This character symbolizes the spirit of freedom and the boundless potential of the human mind, both as an artist and an innovator. At this point, the poem calls for a life imbued with truth, light, and meaning, emphasizing the importance of transcending the limiting aspects of existence in the pursuit of freedom. It expresses the deep longing for a world characterized by physical and spiritual freedom, liberated from the burdens of mortality. Through the figure of Daedalus, Sikelianos engages with profound human concerns, exploring the intricate interplay of inner conflicts, the creative impulse, and the fundamental questions of existence. By reimagining the figure of Daedalus through a contemporary lens, the poet establishes a bridge between the past and the present, inviting readers to contemplate the enduring relevance of ancient myths in addressing the challenges and aspirations of modern humanity. The story of Daedalus occupies a significant place in Sikelianos'

literary universe, serving as a vehicle for exploring the themes of creativity, freedom, and the transcendence of boundaries. The poet's engagement with this character brings the legacy of the past into the present, illuminating universal themes that resonate with the depths of the human spirit.

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