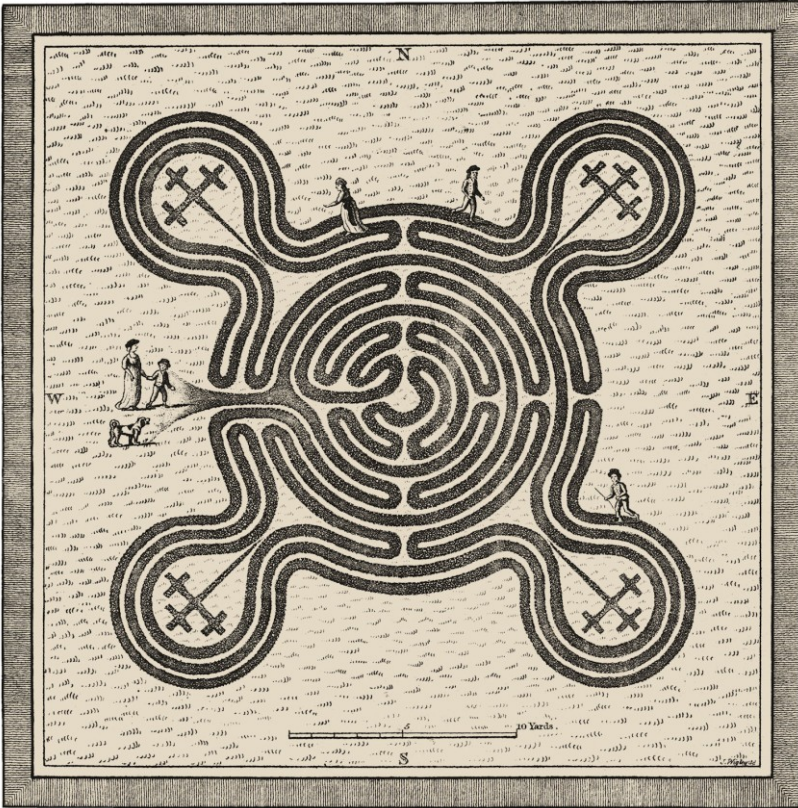


CAERDROIA

THE JOURNAL OF MAZES & LABYRINTHS



: XLII :

CAERDROIA 42

CAERDROIA

The Journal of Mazes & Labyrinths

42nd Edition



The newly installed (January 2013) pavement labyrinth in Wakefield Cathedral, West Yorkshire, England. The first permanent labyrinth installed in an English cathedral since the example at Ely in 1870. Photo: Jeff Saward, June 2013

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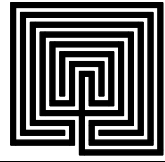
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Caerdroia 43 is due for publication July 2014

Caerdroia 44 is due for publication May 2015, submissions by December 2014 please

Editorial - Caerdroia 42



Jeff Saward, Thundersley, March 2014

Welcome to the 42nd edition of Caerdroia, considerably delayed by the combination of a lengthy illness and then a serious accident, all of which conspired to keep me out of action for much of the latter half of 2013. With broken bones now mended and the resulting backlog of work cleared, production of Caerdroia can now continue apace. This edition contains several lengthier articles that had accumulated on file since the last edition (and my apologies to the patient contributors whose work can now finally see the light), Caerdroia 43 is scheduled for publication during the summer of this year and will contain several items on labyrinths in the north of Europe, and an extended Notes and Queries section. As always, if you have a paper or shorter article you wish to submit for inclusion in the subsequent edition, Caerdroia 44, send it to me as soon as possible, along with the usual labyrinthine snippets and curios that help fill the pages...

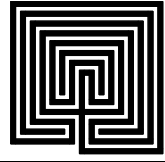
Looking further ahead, the ongoing increases in mailing costs here in the UK, especially for copies mailed beyond Europe, are providing the impetus for a gradual shift over to online publication of future editions of Caerdroia. These will probably be produced in PDF format and available via the Labyrinthos website, although my cut and paste upbringing (back in the days of scissors and glue!) would suggest that a printed version of the journal will still be available for the foreseeable future.

Jeff Saward – E-mail: jeff@labyrinthos.net – Website: www.labyrinthos.net



Theseus and Ariadne, with the labyrinth on an island in the distance, as illustrated in Crispin de Passe's 1602 edition of Ovid's Metamorphosis. Original engraving: Labyrinthos Archive

The Alatri Christ in the Labyrinth Fresco Restored



Giancarlo Pavat

On Saturday April 21, 2012 in the hall of the Municipal Library in Alatri, a conference was held to present the conclusions of the restoration of the enigmatic frescos, including that of "Christ in the Labyrinth," situated in a tunnel beneath the cloister of the church of San Francesco in Alatri, in the province of Frosinone in Italy. Originally discovered in 1996, the frescos were in poor condition and in danger of disappearing forever. However, since 2006 there has been increasing local and international interest in the frescos, and this resulted in the Italian government granting 100,000 Euros for their restoration, finally carried out during 2011.

Present at the event was the Mayor of Alatri, Joseph Morini; Carlo Fantini, the adviser with responsibility for Culture; Senator of the Italian Republic, Oreste Tofani; Dr. Graziella Frezza, district manager of the Superintendence of Historical, Artistic and ethno-anthropology, who oversaw the restoration; the fresco restorers Sergio Salvati and Antonella Docci from Rome, and many of the researchers and scholars, including Thomas Pellegrini, who over the years have dealt with the mysterious Alatri frescos.

After the customary greetings and acknowledgments, Mr. Fantini thanked his predecessor Giulio Rossi, the original discoverers of the fresco in 1996 (Ennio Orgiti, Paris and Quadrozzi Orestino Fanfarillo), and myself for all my work drawing media attention and disseminating knowledge of the frescos, especially the "Christ in the Labyrinth."



Dr. Graziella Frezza, who oversaw the restoration work, then outlined the various stages of the restoration program and procedures and also explained how, as a consequence of the restoration, some of the mysteries of the fresco have been solved.

The Alatri "Christ in the Labyrinth" fresco prior to recent restoration.

Photo: Nello Rinaldi

The depiction of “Christ in the Labyrinth” is a unicursal labyrinth formed from 12 concentric black circles, with a pathway identical to that of Chartres. At the centre is a depiction of Christ, his face bearded, and his head surrounded by a halo inscribed with a cross. He wears a grey tunic and a golden cloak. His right hand, fingers extended in benediction, points to the path of the labyrinth, his left hand holds a book of scripture.

Despite the claims of a local researcher in 2009, there was no trace of the “snake” that was supposedly painted on the path of the labyrinth, and likewise no sign of the two additional faces that others claimed in 2011 to have identified on the sides of the head of Christ – this latter statement in particular sparked much controversy. These misleading interpretations were nothing but marks left by the spatula used to spread the plaster on the wall, just before the frescos were painted.

But even if the three faces of Christ and the snake had never convinced the vast majority of researchers, the same cannot be said for the ring on Christ's left hand. First reported in 2002, it was so obvious, there seemed no reason to doubt its existence. However, the restoration process revealed that what seemed to be a ring was in fact just a flake in the plaster. Likewise, a hand protruding out of the entrance of the labyrinth, seemingly apparent in some early photos of the fresco, was also an artefact of the scratches in the plaster, caused by the spatula.

Equally interesting were the accounts of the fresco restorers, Sergio Salvati and Antonella Docci, who explained how they managed to save the crumbling frescos and discover more detail of the decorations, especially in the third room of the tunnel. Under the thick layers of grime, accumulated over the centuries, they patiently uncovered entire walls covered with branching foliage, colourful circles, "Flowers of Life" and other symbols such as spirals, stars, "Triple circles" of different colours and a painted "velarium."

The restoration work has also confirmed the dating of the frescos, including the labyrinth, between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries AD. But the renovations have not been able to solve some of the other mysteries surrounding the frescos. We do not know the original environment in which they were made –they were not originally situated in a tunnel, as they are now, the current front wall was built in the eighteenth century. Perhaps they were formerly on the wall of a large chapter room of a monastery. And it was not possible to determine who were the architects and contractors, so the various theories, including one that credits the Knights Templars as patrons of the Christ in the Labyrinth fresco, remain unresolved.



The restored labyrinth fresco and adjacent designs. Photo: Giancarlo Pavat

Following the conference, the audience went enthusiastically to the cloister of San Francesco. Here, after the traditional ribbon cutting ceremony performed by Dr. Frezza, small groups were able to finally access the tunnel (indeed, a new entrance to the tunnel has been created for convenient access) and view the restored decorations and stand in awe at the Christ in the Labyrinth. "A fantastic job" was the unanimous opinion of those present, some with tears in their eyes. A mission to save the frescos, begun in 1996 and continued with great difficulty, was finally over. A job, that of the Superintendent, of the restorers, of the municipal administration, and all those who in any way have contributed over the years, to ensure that such a day would finally arrive, should be proud of. This work of art, the mysteries revealed and those that still remain, has finally been restored for all to see.

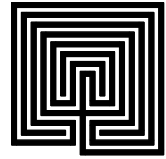


The restored "Christ in the Labyrinth" fresco. Photo: Giancarlo Pavat

The fresco of "Christ in the Labyrinth" is always visible when the cloister of San Francesco is open for exhibitions and cultural initiatives. On other days it may be seen by referring directly to the Museum of Alatri or the public library. For information you can call +39775459009 or send e-mail to culturaeturismo@comune.alatri.fr.it

Giancarlo Pavat, Rome, Italy; August 2012
giancarlo.pavat@gmail.com

The Babylonian Labyrinths



Richard Myers Shelton

Abstract: Labyrinthine patterns on three Old Babylonian tablets, ca 2000–1600 BC, are now probably the oldest confidently datable “labyrinths.” Two of the tablets display sophisticated maze-like patterns, and a third displays a collection of much simpler ones – two different but related paradigms that do not accord precisely with modern notions of either multicursal mazes or unicursal labyrinths.

The earliest unicursal labyrinth that we can date securely comes from the Mycenaean palace of Pylos in the south-western Peloponnese in Greece. This square version of the Classical labyrinth (Kern 103–104) was inscribed on the reverse of a clay accounting tablet (fig. 1) – and three millennia later was discovered in the archaeological remains of the palace. The excavation yielded a treasure-trove of early Greek history; for many of the clay tablets, which ordinarily did not last long when merely dried, were accidentally fired when the palace was burnt and destroyed at the collapse of Mycenaean Greece sometime around 1200 BCE.

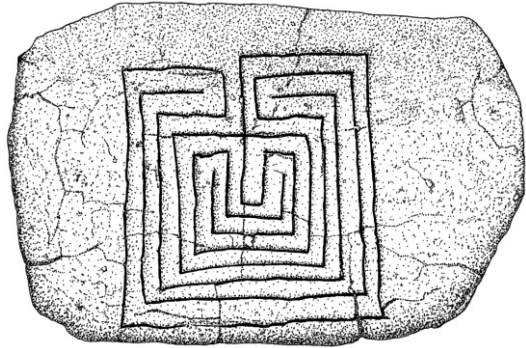


Figure 1: The Pylos labyrinth tablet. Illustration: Jeff Saward

This extraordinary event is what allows us to date the Pylos labyrinth with such precision. Although we suspect other labyrinths of being older, it is difficult to date rock formations or carvings or graffiti with anything like the confidence we have at Pylos. Even when a labyrinth appears in the context of other things that *can* be dated, it is nearly impossible to be sure that the labyrinth was not added at a much later date. So despite our suspicions that the Classical 7-course design and its seed pattern may well date to Neolithic times, the Bronze Age at Pylos remains the oldest date of which we can be sure.

Recently, however, another set of old labyrinthine designs has surfaced – again on clay tablets – to which probable dates can be assigned. I first ran across these on the website of the Norwegian Institute of Palaeography and Historical Philology (PHI), which shows photos of a well-preserved square maze and four not-so-well-preserved simple square patterns. The only descriptive information posted there is this tantalizingly brief paragraph:

“These [four small patterns] are details of an Old Babylonian clay tablet with 8 labyrinths. The [website’s homepage] shows the photograph of a large labyrinth on a clay tablet, with two entrances (on the left and right side) only one of which is leading to the centre (the world’s oldest known illustrations of a labyrinth, dating from 2000–1700 BC; private collection).”

Later I discovered that the private collection in question is the Schøyen Collection (Schøyen), assembled over the latter half of the 20th century by Norwegian businessman Martin Schøyen. He began as a teenager, and currently the collection of over 13,000 items, spanning a period of 5,000 years, is one of the largest private manuscript collections in the world. In addition to parchment manuscripts, it includes many clay tablets. The curators are putting together an online catalogue, and many images are already available on their website. Some of the Schøyen tablets have also been included in the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative at UCLA, which posts high resolution images on its website (CDLI).

The Babylonian mathematical tablets from the Schøyen cuneiform collection – some 120 texts and over 150 miscellaneous tablets – have been extensively studied and documented by Jöran Friberg (Friberg 2007), whose book provides diagrams and plates that include the labyrinth tablets. Friberg's work generally is of very high calibre, but I disagree with several aspects of his interpretation of the labyrinths. It is evident from comparing Friberg's plates with the CDLI photos that the tablets were subjected to more cleaning after Friberg examined them, and most of my differences with Friberg can be attributed to the greater clarity of the CDLI photos taken after this cleaning.

For our purposes there are three tablets of primary interest, which are discussed in Section 8.3 of Friberg (pp. 219–229):

MS 3194, “the Rectangular Labyrinth” (fig. 8) – an elaborate rectangular labyrinth with two paths that enter from opposite sides, intertwine with each other, and meet in the centre. Friberg's drawing of this is not quite accurate, and his plate is so severely pixilated that the details are impossible to make out. Fortunately, there is a very good photo on the Schøyen website. The tablet is in good condition, except that one edge is broken off. The path in the missing area, however, can confidently be reconstructed.

MS 4515, “the Square Labyrinth” (fig. 12) – a smaller but otherwise similar labyrinth, roughly square, again with two paths meeting in the centre. The condition of the tablet is not as good as MS 3194: there are several cracks, and bits of the path have fallen out during the cleaning process (including one critical piece where the two paths meet). This tablet has a good plate in Friberg showing the state before cleaning, a fine high-resolution photo at CDLI taken after cleaning, and a smaller version of the CDLI photo (slightly elongated) at PHI. Friberg's diagram again is not entirely accurate.

MS 4516, “the Small Mazes” (figs. 19, 20 & 21) – an oblong tablet with two columns, each holding four small square mazes, for a total of eight. The tablet is badly damaged – so much so that reconstruction of at least half the mazes is speculative – as are Friberg's diagrams of them, even before reconstruction. After cleaning, however, it is reasonably clear that each maze was intended to be a simple closed path (or in some cases an outside and an inside path) with four-fold 90-degree rotational symmetry, much like the Greek key pattern (fig. 2) found later on some Cretan coins (Kern 40, 44–46, 49). Friberg's plate of the tablet before cleaning is too small for details of the paths to be clearly visible, but PHI gives photos of four of the eight, and CDLI gives a high-resolution photo of the entire tablet and a composite at even higher resolution showing each of the eight individual mazes.

Figure 2: Rotationally symmetric closed path from Cretan coins

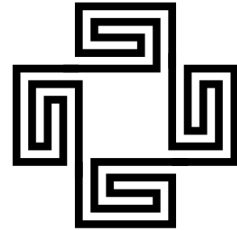
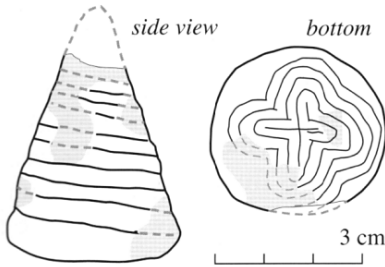


Figure 3: MS 3195, after Friberg

Friberg also discusses another Schøyen item, MS 3195, as a possible labyrinth precursor. This is a clay cone with two paths spiralling together up the sides (fig. 3). On the circular base of the cone the two paths spiral around each other in a cruciform pattern and meet in one of the angles of the cross. The tip of the cone is missing.

The Problem of Provenance

The source, date, and context of many of the Schøyen tablets is unclear. Friberg says (p. 142) that “the great majority of the mathematical cuneiform texts in the Schøyen Collection are new additions to the corpus, probably emanating from relatively recent excavations in Iraq.” The barely hidden subtext is that these recent excavations were undoubtedly informal and unofficial, and likely carried out by dark of night (Stanford CHR).

The looting of archaeological sites to meet the ready market for antiquities is an ever-present problem. With the fall of the Iraqi regime, for example, the previously productive site of Tell Jokha (the ancient Sumerian city of Umma) has been nearly destroyed; recent aerial photos show the site crisscrossed by looters’ trenches. Countries with rich archaeological heritage naturally resent the expatriation of cultural material, but looting poses a graver problem; the sites do not receive proper archaeological attention; the items lose their proper archaeological context; and questionable origin often forces them into secrecy, so that whatever archaeological value they do retain remains hidden from the rest of the world.

This is not a new problem. Even from the period of the first excavations in the mid-1800’s, local diggers discovered that archaeologists would pay good money for apparently worthless objects, and surreptitious finds began to hit the market. Every major museum in the world – including those in the Middle East – holds material whose precise provenance is unknown, whether because the objects were purchased in the local bazaar or were obtained through exporters whose *bona fides* turns out to be suspect. But placing archaeological expeditions under the nominal auspices of local museums (to keep items under local control) is not fool-proof either, as the recent destruction of the Museums of Kabul and Baghdad demonstrates all too well. And more recently, the city of Aleppo, where one of Syria’s premier archaeological museums is located, has been heavily shelled. The problem of preserving the common archaeological heritage of humankind is, unfortunately, an intractable one with no ideal solution.

Even without proper archaeological provenance, however, cuneiform texts can generally be dated to within a few centuries. Cuneiform writing was used over a period of nearly three thousand years, but it evolved constantly during that period, so that the language of the text, the choice of the signs used, and the way they were written give a good indication of the age of the text. Although many of the Schøyen mathematical tablets come without precise provenance, the cuneiform writing itself indicates that most come from the Old Babylonian period, dating roughly (depending on your preferred chronology) to 2000–1700 BCE (as in Friberg) or 1900–1600 BCE (per CDLI).

The three labyrinth tablets, however, bear no inscription, so the presumption that they also come from this same period depends largely on their recent acquisition with the other mathematical tablets. This presumptive association has become, as it were, their provenance. As Friberg puts it (p. 219), “There is no way of dating those clay tablets, but since the overwhelmingly great majority of the mathematical clay tablets in the Schøyen Collection are unmistakably Old Babylonian, it is quite likely that the labyrinth texts, too, are Old Babylonian, hence from the first half of the second millennium BC.” This has not quite the force of syllogism; but it reinforces the likelihood that the Babylonian labyrinths predate Pylos by a few hundred years.

The “Babylonian Paradigm”

Several tablets from earlier excavations have also been called labyrinths. The best known is probably the “Berlin Labyrinth” (Kern 2), one of the first such designs found (fig. 4). This round clay tablet is numbered VAT 744 in the Near-East Museum (Vorderasiatisches Museum) of Berlin (see note 1), and exhibits a double path that coils into the centre. The paths turn back on themselves before reaching the centre, and finally join to form a single pathway that leads from the outside to the centre on one track and then back out along the “parallel” track. Although Kern characterizes the design as a “double spiral,” the doubling back renders the actual path somewhat more complex than two simple parallel spirals.



Figure 4: The Berlin Labyrinth, VAT 744, Kern 2

Several other tablets show an essentially similar pattern: a double path, both leading from the outside in a more or less parallel fashion through a coiled shape to meet in the center. The relatively unknown “Leiden Labyrinth” (fig. 5), purchased by Franz Böhl in the antiquities trade in Baghdad in 1932 (Böhl 1935), shows an even more regular double spiral, but adds a fork at one end and a peculiar nodule that seems to sit astride the two paths. In other examples, one path or the other may have some extra kinks or bends, but the pathway is always double: one in, the other out. If these were in fact meant as labyrinths, they follow a slightly different paradigm than the usual Western notion of a single path ending at the centre, as in the Classical labyrinth.



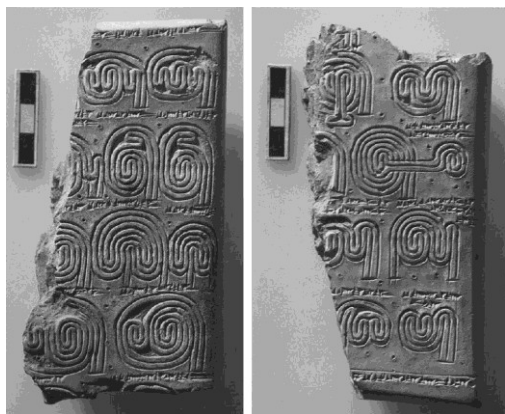
Figure 5: The Leiden Labyrinth, after Böhl

Significantly, Friberg (p. 223) interprets VAT 744 as a pair of roughly spiral paths that *do not connect* to form a single path. This is a fair reading of the tablet, as the ends of the two paths in the centre are capped by a piece of clay that can be taken as a barrier. Given the evidence of the other examples, however, I think the cap was meant to *join* the paths rather than to separate them. This is an argument that we will revisit below.

Not long after VAT 744 was found, another tablet (VAT 984) turned up with several such designs, all somewhat different from one another, but all following the same idea of leading from the outside through a coiled arrangement back to the outside again. In some cases the two paths no longer closely parallel each other. VAT 984 has in addition some text (unlike VAT 744), which, it was hoped, might clear up what these coils represent; but the text proved too indistinct and fragmentary to be legible.

Figure 6: Multiple diagram tablets

6a (right): VA Bab 2343 (Lyngsgård 1992)



**6b: Aleppo E 3384, recto (left) and verso (right),
Tell Barri, Syria (Salvini 2004)**



The key was provided by another multiple specimen, VA Bab 2343, found by Robert Koldewey's expedition to Babylon in the early 20th century. This crucial tablet is illustrated by Lyngsgård (Lyngsgård 1992) and shown here, figure 6a; a similar tablet found in 2001 at the excavation of Tell Barri (ancient Kahat) in Syria (Salvini 2004) is shown in figure 6b. The inscriptions on these tablets make clear that the designs portray the intestines of sacrificial animals (Weidner 1916). These tablets with multiple diagrams are, in effect, handbooks for diviners, describing how the various configurations should be interpreted for oracular purposes. The labyrinths, in short, represent sheep's guts – which explains why they have separate ends for entry and exit.

This ancient practice of extispicy – the examination of viscera to read the will of the gods – was practiced widely in Mesopotamia over a long period of time. Neighbouring peoples learned it as well, including the Etruscans, the Greeks, and the Romans. Examination of the

liver (haruspicy) was often the method of choice, but the intestines were also used, as many textual tablets on divination already had made clear before the connection with the “labyrinth” diagrams was understood. So these were not just sheep’s guts; they were signs from the gods – the gods speaking to us – and in consequence the symbolism of the coiled intestines acquired a deeply sacred significance, representing in some sense a reminder of the gods’ influence over our destiny. And at some point, the double path began to find a life of its own, transcending the literal depiction of entrails.

There is a fine example of this. The demon Huwawa (or “Humbaba” in later Babylonian texts) was a servant of the sky-god Enlil, who set him to guard the divine forest (identified in later texts with the cedars of Lebanon). He is routinely described as a towering figure, with a loud, piercing voice and penetrating glance. He left many surviving images that typically include several signature features: a fearsome visage presented face-on, with hair rising vertically, lips drawn back in rictus, sometimes in a rigid grin, baring a double row of teeth, often framed by tufts of hair hanging down in a short curled beard, and eyes staring straight out at the viewer with a stern fixed gaze. A representative example can be seen in MS 4573/1 from the Schøyen collection (fig. 7).



Figure 7: Schøyen item MS 4573/1: Mask of Huwawa

His image is so common (MS 4573/1 for example comes from a casting form that was used for mass production) that we suspect it was used routinely for apotropaic effect – to turn away demons, curses, and other forms of bad luck. Indeed, Clark Hopkins argues (Hopkins 1934) that this common good luck charm from the Near East provided the inspiration for a new and remarkably similar style of representing the Gorgon Medusa that began to appear on Greek pottery around 700 BCE, during a period when we know that contact with the Assyrians led to significant influence in Greek art. (And it is worth remembering that Medusa’s head ended up on the shield of Athena as a gruesome “charm” to intimidate her enemies.)

Humbaba appears famously in the Epic of Gilgamesh, where Gilgamesh and Enkidu encounter him in their raid on the cedars of Lebanon. They overcome Humbaba, who pleads with Gilgamesh for his life; but Enkidu insists that Humbaba must die, and this, in part, leads the gods to decree that Enkidu himself must die. Even in death, Humbaba’s baleful influence, in effect, contributes to the death of Enkidu – and reminds Gilgamesh, at this turning point of the epic, of his own mortality.



Figure 8: British Museum item ME 116624: Mask of Huwawa

And so we come to the stunning mask of Huwawa in the British Museum (fig. 8). Like the Schøyen labyrinths, this comes from the Old Babylonian period. The cuneiform inscription on the back attributes the mask to the diviner Warad-Marduk, who warns us that entrails in the form of the face of Huwawa would signify (as we are not surprised to learn) an ominous portent – it means Revolution, a reversal of fortune. The mask does indeed maintain the metaphor of entrails: the face is constructed from one long path beginning and ending at the eyes, on either side of the bridge of the nose. But the mask remains a metaphor – a work of art; it is not a realistic record of actual entrails. Its symmetry is too precise, and it incorporates several of the easily-recognized conventional features of Huwawa’s face: the vertical hair, the rictus around the lips (which in this case rather snarl than grin), the bared teeth, and perhaps a suggestion of the short beard. It is a powerful piece that makes effective use of the symbolism of the double path. This is no good luck charm – it is a chilling reminder aimed directly at *you*, the observer – and you can fairly feel the cold wind at the back of your neck.

It is impossible to say whether these ideas extend to the two Schøyen labyrinths. Since they have no clear parallels and bear no writing, we can’t tell whether they bore any similar philosophical or religious intent. They could represent something else entirely, or nothing at all. But even if they were intended merely as designs, we should not be surprised that the path does not end in the centre; for Mesopotamia thought of labyrinthine paths as leading not *to* a centre, but *through* it.

The Rectangular Labyrinth

MS 3194 (fig. 9) with its striking pattern is the best preserved of the Schøyen labyrinth tablets. It is roughly 10 x 12 cm, and the pattern fills most of it. I have followed the Schøyen website in orienting the tablet so that the broken edge is at the bottom; Friberg’s plate and diagrams place that edge at the top.

The maze has two entrances, which appear in the middle of the two longer sides. The two paths spiral around the tablet in a complex pattern, filling up all the space within the rectangular boundary, and finally engage each other in a square double spiral in the centre of the tablet, where the paths meet. The paths are laid out in vertical and horizontal segments of approximately equal width, but the whole has a characteristic twist to accommodate alternating areas of wider and narrower segments, and this makes it hard to regularize the pattern onto a true rectilinear grid.

Figure 9: The Rectangular Labyrinth tablet, MS 3194 (Schøyen Collection)



Much of the complexity of the layout stems from short barriers jutting in from the perimeter, which the paths either double back upon or jog around – and these jogs ripple inward as the path spirals in to fill the internal space. Friberg likens the design to a city with gates; the entrances are open gates, the barriers are closed gates. Given the urban metaphor commonly found among labyrinths, this may well have been the inspiring idea, though there's no hard evidence for that.

But the detail you should not miss is the nearly symmetric construction: each path reflects what the other is doing, and a 180-degree rotation of the tablet comes close to mapping one path into the other (fig. 10). This symmetry lends confidence in reconstructing the small bit that is missing where the tablet is broken off. The only significant deviation from the symmetry appears where one of the four double-backs in the interior corners (fig. 11) is missing a jog. Curiously, this one little asymmetry is almost entirely responsible for the need to give the pattern its over-all twist to finagle the widths of the paths. If a symmetric jog is added (fig. 12), the pattern fits the available space much more comfortably, and becomes easier to render on a rectilinear grid.

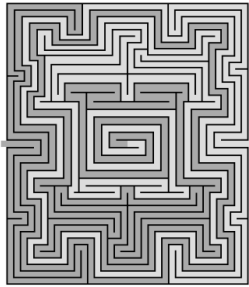


Figure 10: The paths of the Rectangular Labyrinth

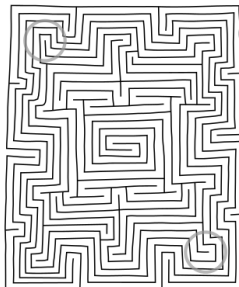


Figure 11: Asymmetric feature in MS 3194

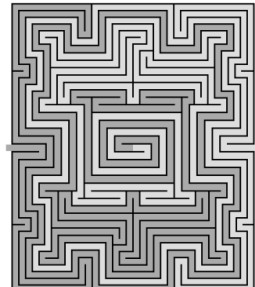


Figure 12: Symmetric version of MS 3194

It is clear from the photo on the Schøyen website that the two paths do meet in the centre. Friberg, by contrast, describes the pattern as having two paths of which only one leads to the centre (a characterization repeated on the Schøyen website). His diagram indeed shows a line across the common path at one end of the central segment, so that one path crosses over the centre before dead-ending at the line, and the other dead-ends there before reaching the centre. But the photo is quite clear: there is no such dead-end. The two paths join to form one continuous path from one entrance through the centre to the opposite entrance. Since Friberg's plate for this tablet is of such poor quality, it may be that he did not have a good photo to work from; but I suspect, as I discuss below, that he was influenced by the notion that labyrinths should have a final goal and should stop at the centre. As I have argued above, however, this is probably not the Babylonian way.

The Square Labyrinth

MS 4515 is a slightly smaller tablet (fig. 13a), roughly 10 cm square, with a less ambitious design. Again, Friberg's drawings present the tablet rotated 180 degrees from the photos (including his own plate). My diagram (fig. 13b) follows the orientation of the photos rather than Friberg's drawings.



Figure 13a: The Square Labyrinth tablet, MS 4515 (Schøyen Collection)

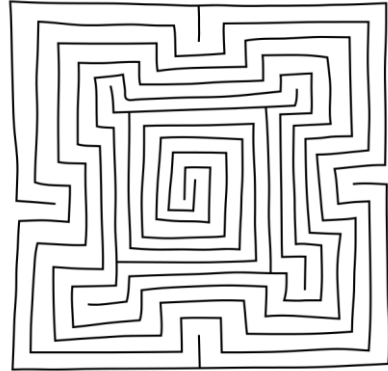


Figure 13b: The Square Labyrinth (reconstructed design)

This tablet is not as well preserved as MS 3194: there are more cracks, and several bits of the clay path between the incised walls have fallen out. The final cleaning seems to have been a harsh process for this tablet, for comparison of Friberg's plate and the later CDLI photo shows that many places that were intact in the former are missing in the latter. Fortunately, the general design is still easy to make out.

This labyrinth gives an impression similar to the Rectangular Labyrinth, though the hand seems less practiced, and the paths vary more in evenness and width. There are again two entrances (open doors) at the middle of the side walls, and this time only two barriers (closed doors), at the middle of the other two sides.

The two paths follow a similar pattern of spiralling into the centre in a symmetric fashion, culminating in a square double spiral. Again there is a pronounced twist to accommodate the changing density of the lanes of the path – and for essentially the same reason: one path (the one entering on the right) diverges from symmetry to make an extra pass down and up from the right-hand side of the central spiral, and then makes a vertical jog instead of a horizontal one in the upper right. This makes the paths on the right narrower than on the left, and introduces a disruption that ripples across the pattern. Curiously, this more extensive asymmetry is easier to accommodate on a grid (fig. 14) – though I can attest that the self-interlocking nature of the pattern makes finding a good solution a non-trivial proposition!

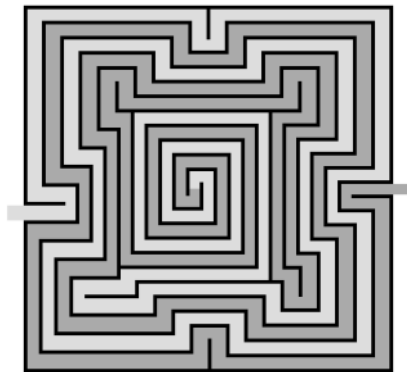


Figure 14: Paths in the Square Labyrinth

Here again Friberg describes the paths as separate, with one reaching the centre and the other not (and PHI repeats this description). This time he shows the two paths dead-ending in two different places, and he posits these breaks at locations where path pieces have fallen out of the tablet – so at first blush it is harder to argue (as I do with MS 3194 above) that the breaks simply are not there. But by cutting off one of the paths so far from the centre, Friberg assumes that the other path must spiral tightly *with itself* to reach the centre; and this requires ignoring two walls (that could perhaps be read as extraneous cracks) and extending another wall through a space where there clearly is no wall. So again I think the photographic evidence is more consistent with two paths that spiral around each other all the way to the centre (see note 2).

At this point we should be wondering *why* Friberg describes the paths in these labyrinths as separate and not meeting. The answer, I think, is that he wants at least to suggest that the Babylonian labyrinths might be forerunners of the Classical labyrinth in general, and of Pylos in particular. He devotes a long discussion to detailing how the Square Labyrinth is built up from the entrances by extending the paths in succession around the barriers that jut in from the sides, and another discussion to describing the Classical seed pattern and how it determines the layout of the Classical labyrinth; and he suggests explicitly an analogy between these construction techniques.

But the analogy is specious. There is no similarity in the *mechanism* of the two constructions: in one case you are connecting loose ends of the seed pattern, in the other merely avoiding barriers and walls previously added to the construction. While the barriers *influence* the Babylonian pattern, they do not *determine* it in the same way that the Classical seed pattern determines the Classical labyrinth: there are still choices involved – choices about whether to double back at a barrier or to jump over it, or when and how to leave the perimeter and branch into the centre, or how to arrange the paths in the centre. The construction technique that Friberg suggests explains how the scribe could maintain the symmetry of the two paths, but does not explain the details of their layout. The deviations from symmetry I mention above make good counter-examples: they significantly alter the connections of the walls, but are not determined by the starting barriers.

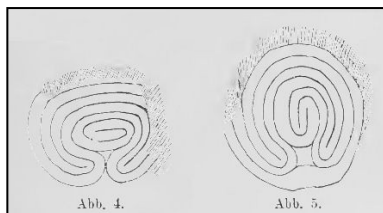
Ironically, Friberg opens his book with a cogent and useful discussion of how to avoid anachronistic readings of the mathematical tablets – and he diligently translates the Sumerian and Akkadian of the verbal tablets into language that scrupulously avoids modern mathematical terms. Yet in discussing the labyrinths he proceeds to introduce anachronistic notions of how mazes and labyrinths *should* behave – by explicit analogy with the Classical pattern, which on his account is a later development. I think it far more likely that the Babylonians elaborated their labyrinths following their own motif of paired paths that intertwine and join; and that no direct link connects these mazes with the Classical labyrinth that stops at the centre.

The “Babylonian Origin” of the Labyrinth?

In fairness, Friberg is by no means the first to suggest that the “Aegean” labyrinth that we find in Greece and Italy came originally from Mesopotamia. From the break-through moment in 1872 when George Smith discovered that tablets from ancient Nineveh contain an early version of the story of the Flood, we have come to recognize an enormous debt to the land of Sumer and Akkad for much of what we take for granted as civilization.

Already in the early 20th century, Ernst Weidner suggested that the labyrinthine oracular tablets foreshadow the Classical labyrinth. His article *On the ritual Babylonian examination of entrails* (Weidner 1916) describes how the labyrinthine tablets came to be understood as representations of extispicy – but he adds the telling subtitle “and likewise a contribution to the history of the labyrinth.” At the end of the article he is eager to share a drawing (fig. 15) of a tablet that seems to point toward the Classical labyrinth: for (uniquely among the Near Eastern labyrinth patterns) the path shown on one side of the tablet ends in the centre.

Figure 15: Weidner's drawing of the “Mystery Tablet” (VAT 9560)



Beyond this drawing, Weidner gives us no details about the tablet, except that it has an unspecified inscription, from which (presumably) the tablet can be classified as Neo-Assyrian. Two decades later, Fritz Böhl (Böhl 1935) is still anxiously awaiting its publication; but I have found essentially no further information about it. I began to think of it as “Weidner’s Mystery Tablet”, though Julia Buckenauer of the Vorderasiatisches Museum was able to identify it for me as VAT 9560.

There are several observations to make here. The first is simply to wonder – without trying to prejudice the matter – why the tablet seems not to be discussed anywhere despite its obvious interest. The second is to note that its labyrinth is not, after all, the Classical labyrinth. It could be described as a 3-course labyrinth with an approach on the outside and a spiral on the inside. If genuine, it indicates familiarity with labyrinths that end in the centre – but it would be a late witness for that: the Neo-Assyrian period (911–612 BCE) is significantly later than the much more competently drafted tablet from Pylos. Weidner, of course, would not have known of the Pylos tablet, as it was only discovered in 1957. So the Mystery Tablet is not a clear witness: in this period of known contact between Greece and Assyria, it may signify simply that the idea of ending in the centre had finally arrived from the West.

Böhl’s article from 1935 advances more explicitly “the Babylonian origin of the labyrinth”. Our increasing knowledge, however, has outpaced many of his arguments. On the one hand, the Pylos tablet (still unknown, of course, in 1935) gives clear evidence for the early presence of the Classical design in the West; and beyond the Mystery Tablet, there is no evidence for anything similar in the East. Indeed Böhl’s paper makes no case that the Classical design itself arose in the East; he argues instead that the *idea* of the labyrinth – and several themes associated with it – come from the East.

Böhl points out that the Akkadian term typically used in the tablets for sacrificial entrails is *ēkal tīrāni* “palace (or fortress or city) of the entrails”, and from this he conjectures the body as a metaphor: the liver and womb surrounded and protected by the ribs and entrails become the acropolis and inner sanctum of the ziggurat surrounded by the seven-fold walls of the labyrinth. The labyrinth thus forms a protective way guarding the sacred source of life. Bolstered by early modern conjectures linking the word *labyrinth* with rock or stone, Böhl then associates this source of life with underground passages and caverns (the reader should think of the caverns of Gortyna in Crete) signifying the underworld and death, transforming the metaphor into one signifying the endless cycle of death and rebirth.

Böhl also adduces a close parallel between the legends of Theseus and Gilgamesh: Gilgamesh is guided by Ishtar to the Land of the Dead (Lebanon), where Humbaba, a spirit of the underworld, guards its famous cedars. Gilgamesh struggles across seven mountain ranges (at least in the early Sumerian version) and through a labyrinthine forest to the centre, where he finds and slays Humbaba. He fells the cedars and returns, only to spurn Ishtar's advances, much as Theseus abandons Ariadne.

There are some intriguing ideas in this welter of free association. The notion of the labyrinthine entrails as a palace or city is well-attested in the oracular texts, and these oracular practices and their terminology were well known throughout the Near East. It is certainly possible that the idea of "labyrinth as sacred walled city" started here. Cities were often described conventionally as having seven gates or seven walls, and most of the cities later associated with labyrinths are in fact in the East. Böhl even speculates (without much evidence) that some linguistic variant of *tírāni* may have ended up via folk etymology as *Troia*.

The rest I find completely unconvincing. A cycle of death and rebirth does not describe what any of these early civilizations believed: for the Mesopotamians the path through life was a one-way street. Near Eastern legends describe the Land of the Dead as a dry and dusty place from which there is no return, and this is echoed in the Sheol of the Old Testament and the Underworld of Homer. Without outside help even demons and gods like Humbaba and Ishtar could be trapped forever in the underworld; and no human ever comes back to life. This is indeed the essential message of Gilgamesh, which was probably the most widely circulated work of the time.

The parallels between Theseus and Gilgamesh also fall apart as we find more archaeological sources for the epic. The two tales bear some resemblance, of course, as tales of heroes from all over the globe fall into common psychological patterns that by now are well-known. But the details don't mesh well. It is hard, for example, to imagine the West borrowing Gilgamesh without getting Enkidu as well. As new tablets fill in more lines, we find that it is the sun god Shamash, not Ishtar, who guides Gilgamesh to Humbaba, so the comparison with Ariadne is not particularly apt. The number seven should not sway us either, for in Gilgamesh things routinely happen by sevens – and the number shows up in many other tales as well. Böhl counts seven turns in the Berlin and the Leiden Labyrinths, but that depends on how you count – and on knowing the answer ahead of time. Other diagrams in the tablets clearly do not have seven turns; indeed the differing number of windings in the entrails is an important aspect for the proper reading of the omens.

Most importantly, the land of the cedars is not the Land of the Dead. It is instead a land of wonders, burgeoning with life; and the earlier Sumerian version of the Gilgamesh poems calls it "The Land of the Living" (see note 3). This is where Enkidu the Wild Man was created and where he ran freely with the wild beasts. It represents wilderness, the "other" – like Faëry or Tír-na-nÓg ("The Land of the Young") – a mythological space distinct from the human space of civilization. Enkidu is brought from there to become civilized, and after Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh returns there from civilization to search for life.

Nor is Humbaba a spirit of the underworld – until he is killed by Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Once dead, he too must go to the Land of the Dead, and must remain there. His native power gives him high status there, and the living pray to him as a power of the underworld to ward off evil. But before killing him, Gilgamesh seeks him in the Land of the Living.

More generally, there is no real evidence for reading the Land of the Living as a labyrinth. It is difficult terrain to traverse – but that is what every Hero finds. There is a monster within – but that is what every Hero seeks. The attempt to tie it to the Land of the Dead (and therefore, dubiously, to the labyrinth) has no textual warrant. In short, these associations are not in the text; they are read into the text by someone familiar with the later story of Theseus and the Labyrinth of Crete.

The Alternative View

Against Böhl's thesis, I would push back with the following points from the evidence. First, I grant the association of the word *labyrinth* with subterranean caverns: the Minoan word borrowed by the Mycenaeans evidently signified caverns like those at Gortyna (Sarullo 2008). It appears to have nothing to do with stone or palaces or double axes, despite many early suggestions that fix upon chance resemblance to words in other languages. The meaning one finds in all of the Classical Greek texts is confusion, not unicursality. Verbal descriptions of the Minotaur's prison and the original depictions of the labyrinth on Cretan coins (*cf.* Kern 43) suggest confusing multicursal mazes where Ariadne's clew would be useful, and Pliny uses the word to describe confusing subterranean multicursal constructions. Absent further evidence, this should be taken as the original and primary meaning of the term.

Second, the Classical design appears early in the West, not at all in the East. Pylos indicates that the design was already known in Mycenaean Greece, and old rock carvings are still being discovered in Spain and Portugal. The carvings are hard to date, but archaeological consensus is growing that the dense cluster in Galicia probably dates to the late Neolithic. This may well be where the design originated, and the tin trade in the early Bronze Age may account for its dissemination (see note 4).

Third, we have little early evidence for what the Classical design meant originally. In particular, there is no evidence for its association with the word *labyrinth* or with the Theseus legend until it suddenly appears on Cretan coins around 400 BCE. This is why Kerényi's argument (Kerényi 1976) that both the word and the associated house of Daedalus were originally understood as unicursal is unconvincing. Kerényi cites a passage from Plato's *Euthyphro*, where Socrates likens the convoluted discussion of the dialogue to a path through a labyrinth that ends back at the starting point rather than reaching the desired goal. In the first place this does not imply unicursality, quite the opposite, but in addition, Plato's passage represents evidence from a time *after* the association of diagram and labyrinth had already been made on Cretan coins – so Kerényi's conclusion concerning the *original* understanding of the term begs the question entirely. Similarly, Böhl's argument that themes from Theseus (much less Gilgamesh) can shed light on the *origin* of the design ignores the fact that the design arose long before Theseus pulled it into his orbit.

Finally, of the other ideas that later became associated with the Classical labyrinth – the dancing floor of Ariadne, the Crane dance, the walls of Troy, the close circular manoeuvres on horseback – none is attested in the company of the Classical design until centuries after the Pylos tablet. The earliest example is the 7th century Etruscan *oenochoe* of Tragliatella (Kern 110–112), whose meaning is completely unclear and hotly debated: does it refer to Troy? to Theseus? to a wedding? to a sacrifice? to military games? to none of the above? Virtually all discussion of this item prejudices the issue through assumptions about what is being shown: that the soldiers are “dancing,” for example, or that the riders “emerge” from

the labyrinth design. The design is clearly being associated with *something*, but with what we cannot tell. It is only with the design's appearance on the Cretan coins that it is firmly drawn into association with Theseus and with the other ideas that came to adhere to his legend. These associations appear to be relatively late, and none, with the possible exception of the urban metaphor, has any analogue in the East.

This should not detract from our appreciation of the Babylonian labyrinths – they are striking developments – but the case for their influence on the West is not a strong one.

Meanders

Meanders, on the other hand, are a different matter entirely. Meandering patterns were common throughout Eastern Mediterranean lands from an early date. The so-called “Hyksos scarab seals,” for example – small stone artefacts whose tops are carved in imitation of a scarab and whose bottoms typically serve as seals incorporating meandering patterns (fig. 16) – are found in Egypt and the Levant from the Middle Kingdom to the Hyksos period (*i.e.*, roughly the same time as the Old Babylonian period in Mesopotamia). They appear with such frequency that Böhl characterizes them as “index fossils” for this period.



Figure 16: Scarab seal, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

The walls of the meanders on the seals typically don't connect from one meander to the next, and “open” meanders of exactly this type appear in Minoan frescos and pottery (see note 5). So there is no question that the Greeks were familiar with such patterns from Mycenaean times – and essentially the same open “Greek key” pattern (now typically squared off) appears on vases in Classical times, as in the first two examples in figure 17. If you interpret them as walls enclosing a path, the path is not unicursal, but has several branches that cross the meander from one side to the other.

These exist side by side with “closed” meanders, whose path can be seen as one continuous enclosed thread from one end of the meander to the other – or (reversing the sense of background and foreground) as walls enclosing multiple dead-ends that do not cross the meander. The artists probably thought of either kind of meander primarily as stock decorative motifs, rather than as paths (and they often drew them inconsistently without care to delineate a path of one type or the other). But the last design in figure 17 is a meander-like pattern that appears in Kern 3, a 5th century *kylix*, specifically to represent the House of Daedalus. Clearly here a path *is* intended, and the meander is neither open nor closed. It represents a pathway that is not unicursal, whether you take the white or the black to represent the path. Nevertheless, the pattern clearly comes from the meander tradition – right down to the checker-board figure, which was commonly interpolated in decorative meanders.

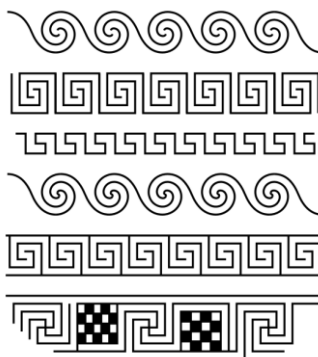


Figure 17: Meanders on Greek pottery, 7th – 4th century BCE

So the question arises: how did meanders come to suggest the House of Daedalus? It is in this context that the small closed rotationally symmetric meanders of the Small Mazes from Babylonia start to get our attention, for it is just such a meander (fig. 2) that appears on Cretan coins to represent the labyrinth immediately before the Classical labyrinth design is pressed into service. This meander, like the Classical design, is already unicursal, and therefore the process had already departed from a strict reading of the legend that required Ariadne’s clew. A natural first step in that process may well have been the open meander: a common decorative motif that suggests twists and turns without being unicursal. If open meanders came to represent the labyrinth, then the virtually interchangeable closed variants might have acquired the same connotation – and the association could also have extended naturally to the closed rotationally symmetric meander. Athenian pottery painters, clearly influenced by Assyrian designs, were already experimenting with rotationally symmetric patterns; so the similarity of figures 2 and 21 suggests that these meanders might be the *true* Babylonian contribution to the process that led to the advent of the Classical labyrinth as *the* labyrinth.

The case is not clear, however. Before they turn up on Cretan coins, there are few examples of closed meanders precisely like figure 2, and with so few examples, there is little evidence for transmission of such designs from Assyria. Patterns like figure 2 might have arisen independently from well-known figures like the swastika. The fascinating vase IV 1622 from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Boardman 1996) is covered with decorations that clearly aim for rotational symmetry, and some of the elaborated swastikas there are in fact symmetric – but others (fig. 18) fall somewhat short.

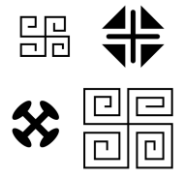


Figure 18: Rotational patterns on Greek pottery: from the vase IV 1622, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

The Small Mazes

Schøyen’s MS 4516 is frustrating to analyze, for some parts are very clear and others almost totally obliterated (fig. 19). My general impression is that this tablet is an exercise in generating small mazes, some laid out on a 10 by 10 array of squares, some on a 12 by 12 array; and that each was intended to consist of one or two rotationally symmetric closed paths that together cover all the squares of the array. I say “exercise” because the stylus here is not as practiced as the one that executed either of the larger labyrinths: there are many guide marks, both along the perimeters of the mazes and in their interiors, and the pathways are not as evenly drawn. Moreover, I believe some of the patterns were trials that did not work out as the scribe expected, and that some were abandoned without being completed.



Figure 19: The Small Mazes tablet, MS 4516 (Schøyen Collection; photo CDLI)

Even where the path of the maze is intact, the interpretation is not always straightforward. Sometimes a score mark may be simply a guide mark, rather than a barrier in the path. In other places, separate pieces of clay butt up against each other with a visible join between them that may be a barrier between two separate lanes or a join that links two lanes together. My inclination leads me to see continuity where there would otherwise be a dead-end, but I try to confirm such joins with other examples at the corresponding spots in the rotational symmetry.

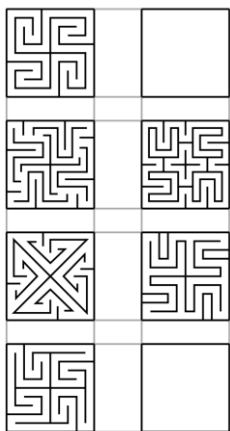


Figure 20: Mazes of MS 4516, Friberg reconstruction

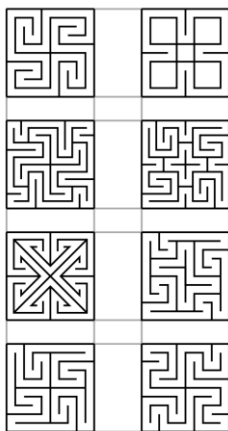


Figure 21: Mazes of MS 4516, Shelton reconstruction

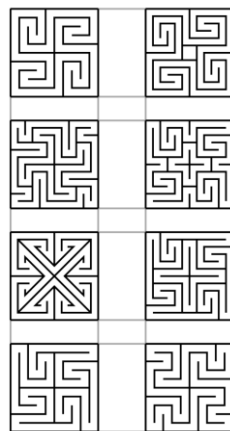


Figure 22: Mazes of MS 4516, Shelton speculation

Although there are some random jagged cracks across the tablet, there are places where the damage is not entirely random. The score marks that separate adjacent lanes can encourage deeper cracks to develop along the same lines, which can extend into adjacent areas; this can make it appear that two lanes are separated though they were not so originally. In several places the tablet seems to have been constructed (or possibly corrected) by placing clay over existing deep scores, and many of these overlays have fallen out, again making divisions appear that probably were not intended in the original. One must be careful here. On the one hand, it is tempting to claim damage wherever you want a path to cross a crack; but on the other, there are several places where no sense can be made of the pattern unless you can make a reasonable case that a break really is unintended damage. To follow my arguments closely, you will need to refer to the photos on the CDLI and PHI websites.

Friberg's drawing and plate show this tablet in the same orientation that I have adopted from the CDLI photo, so I can without confusion label the eight mazes by column (left or right) and by number from top to bottom (1 to 4): L1 through L4 on the left and R1 through R4 on the right. The four photos on the PHI website show L2, R1, R2, and R3. I refer to individual quadrants within a maze by compass point: NE, SE, SW, or NW, assuming North at the top. Friberg gives both an unreconstructed drawing of the tablet and a set of reconstructed patterns that attempt to divine what the scribe had in mind. I give Friberg's reconstruction as figure 20 and my own as figures 21 & 22. All three are speculative to some degree and not entirely consistent with the lines found on the tablet.

For this tablet in particular, the final cleaning made a big difference. The structure of several of the mazes is much clearer in the CDLI photo than in Friberg's plate, and as a consequence Friberg's drawings and reconstructions are now largely obsolete.

Friberg attempts reconstructions for six of the eight mazes: all except R1 (which is probably incomplete) and R4 (which is heavily damaged). All of his reconstructions assume 4-fold rotational symmetry, which is also my default assumption, for this is evidently the common theme of the tablet. Friberg accepts branching and dead-ends more readily than I do, but the cleaning makes it fairly clear that the mazes were intended to be non-branching continuous closed paths. Of the eight, I believe four (L1, L2, L4, and R2) can be recreated quite confidently; two (L3 and R4) have reasonable if not conclusive solutions; and two (R1 and R3) can be reconstructed only through significant speculation.

The easy mazes: L1, L2, L4, and R2

There is no problem at all with L1: it is a simple four-fold key design on a 10 by 10 array, and it sets the theme for the entire tablet. The pattern is clearly drawn and almost completely undamaged. Even here, though, there are occasional guide marks across the path that might be taken for barriers had the design been less clear. Another clue worth noting is that guide marks along the perimeter mark some of the places where the path turns inward from the perimeter. Here, as elsewhere in the tablet, a guide mark generally corresponds with the intersection of the perimeter with the wall that forces the path to jog inward, though guide marks are occasionally paired, with one on each side of the segment turning inward.

L2, laid out on a 12 by 12 array, is almost as easy. Despite a couple of path bits that have fallen out, and a diagonal-trending transverse crack that mostly follows the score marks, the pattern is easy to reconstruct as I have done in figure 21. Friberg mostly agrees; but there is a clay smudge in one spot in the SE quadrant that obscures one of the walls, making the path appear to branch there, and Friberg has chosen to replicate this in the rotation pattern. But the corresponding spot in the NE quadrant is visibly unicursal in Friberg's plate (though it has fallen out in the CDLI photo), and the corresponding spot in the NW quadrant in the CDLI photo of the cleaned tablet is also clearly unicursal. Again, there are several guide marks along the perimeter marking places where the path turns inward.

Although about half of L4 has fallen out, enough remains of this 10 by 10 array to suggest that it was rotationally symmetric. There is, moreover, only one way to complete it as a rotationally symmetric pattern, and Friberg and I agree in doing so.

R2 is laid out on a 12 by 12 array, and although it has sustained more damage than L2, it is still easy to read as two continuous paths, one inside the other, as I have drawn in figure 21. Friberg reads it almost the same way, but he makes two small alterations in the quadrant pattern that he rotates into the four quadrants. Those small changes turn the outer path into one continuous piece and four isolated U-shaped segments. In the CDLI photo, however, the continuous nature of the path is quite clear. Moreover, Friberg's reconstruction makes the outer path jog from the perimeter into the centre of each U-shaped segment, and the path on the clay simply does not do that – nor are there correspondingly placed guide marks along the perimeter to suggest it.

A diagonal exercise: L3

L3 is an outlier. It alone among the eight is not laid out exclusively on horizontal and vertical lines, but incorporates bold diagonals. From the CDLI photo I think it is reasonably clear that the scribe had in mind something like my admittedly free reconstruction in figure 21 – but his execution was not up to the challenge. The flanges along the sides of the “arrowheads”, for example, are inconsistently placed – only the NE arrowhead survives intact, but all of the surviving areas that should have flange marks display them inconsistently.

But more seriously, the scribe has made a fatal error in the path: he has drawn only one path in from the perimeter on the right, not two as a continuous path would require. He has, in effect, conflated one of the flanges of the NE arrowhead with the wall separating the NE and SE quadrants, with the result that in this arrowhead the path is boxed in (fig. 23). Having realized that something has gone awry, the scribe appears to have abandoned this maze before finishing it.



Figure 23: The scribe's error (dotted lines) in maze L3

Friberg's drawing of L3 shows closer to what is visible in his plate, but the final cleaning makes clear that the pattern actually on the clay is not as regular as he shows it; and any warrant for a branching path evaporates.

A failed analogue: R1

R1 hardly appears to be a maze at all: it has large squares centred in the quadrants with only a minimal path surrounding them and joggling between them toward the centre (at points marked by guides on the perimeter). Friberg's unreconstructed drawing is a fair statement of what is more or less clear on the tablet, and I show a similar pattern in my reconstruction in figure 21. But it is also clear that this is not a finished state, for the scribe did begin a foray into the interior of the SE quadrant before stopping altogether. He didn't get very far, and Friberg is quite justified in offering no reconstruction.

But it is worth asking why the scribe stopped. This maze, like the neighbouring L1, is set out on a 10 by 10 grid, as guide marks and the width of the existing paths indicate. What remains of the tentative path in the SE quadrant is shown in dark gray in figure 24. It is impossible to be certain, but it looks like the scribe may have attempted an analogue of L1, with a spiral in each quadrant, but in this case connecting the spirals along the *inside* of the maze instead the outside: the tentative connecting lane appears to cross the quadrant boundary at the centre instead of along the perimeter.

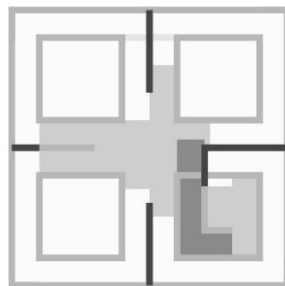


Figure 24: Early development of maze R1

Unfortunately, as the scribe must have realized fairly early if this was in fact his goal, this doesn't work on a 10 by 10 array; it requires a 12 by 12 array to get both into and out of the spirals without getting boxed in. This would also leave a 2 by 2 hole at the centre of the maze, which the scribe may not have counted on. I show this tentative reconstruction of the scribe's intent in figure 21. This possibility is particularly striking as it is essentially the same as the closed meander pattern found on Cretan coins (fig. 2).

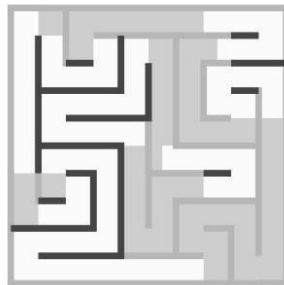
(In the reconstruction diagrams of figures 23–27, I generally use light gray for the eventual rotationally symmetric wall pattern; but in the case of R1 it is not clear what the scribe was aiming for. In this case I have left the squares in gray, though the finished pattern would undoubtedly have crossed the square boundaries. I have also de-emphasized in very light gray two heavy score marks across the path at the top, since these are not reflected in the other rotational positions.)

The puzzle: R3

I admit that trying to make sense of R3 gave me fits. Some measure of the difficulty can be seen in that Friberg had trouble with it too: and in this case I disagree not only with his reconstruction, but even with his drawing of the unreconstructed maze, which shows spacing that differs materially from the detailed CDLI photo.

The difficulty stems from the fact that, while the maze is badly damaged, enough remains to make clear that the pattern in the clay simply does not have four-fold rotational symmetry. I have attempted a reconstruction of the actual clay path in figure 25, which shows in white the parts of the remaining path that are reasonably clear. Unfortunately a critical surface piece is missing in the SW quadrant, and the deeper score marks underneath make it hard to know how to reconstruct the connections along the left perimeter here (and for once there is a *surfeit* of guide marks: the path simply cannot turn in at every one of them!). At the corresponding spot in the NE quadrant, cracks have extended along the score marks, which again make it unclear how the paths were originally connected.

Figure 25: Surviving paths in maze R3



But the real difficulty is that the two longest and clearest parts of the path – the outline of an arm of a cross in the NW quadrant and the “2”-shaped piece in the SW quadrant – cannot both co-exist in a four-fold rotationally symmetric whole, as their rotated copies would overlap. Two-fold symmetry can still be salvaged, and this is what I have assumed to complete figure 24. This shows a lopsided central cross as one path and an outer path that winds around it; and this is consistent with the surviving clay.

I don't find this solution convincing, however; it's out of character with the rest of the tablet. My guess is that the scribe settled for this as the best he could salvage from another 10 versus 12 mix-up. I think he intended R3 as an analogue of R2: with a central cross as in R2 but with longer arms, and with similar symmetric eddies in the external corners. His mistake was trying to develop this as a 10 by 10 pattern, for it needs the 12 by 12 array of R2 to work. I have given the lopsided version of R3 in figure 20, but I offer also in figure 21 my suspicion of what the scribe really had in mind. This more symmetric second version is

precisely what you get if you push the arms of the central cross of R2 out by two steps. It is possible that L4 represents an attempt to rework the lopsided version of R3 into a more symmetric shape, for the details of L4 strongly resemble the lopsided version of R3.

A design ex nihilo: R4

The last maze, R4, is so damaged that Friberg does not attempt a reconstruction, and indeed gives no lines even in his unreconstructed drawing. But the final cleaning helped, and if you will grant me a few assumptions, I can produce a reasonable (if speculative) solution even for this one. I illustrate the process in figure 26, where the surviving path is shown in white, and the clear breaks between path segments in black.

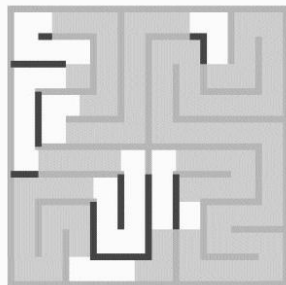


Figure 26: Surviving paths in maze R4

The first assumption is easy to grant: that the maze is a 10 by 10 pattern. This is fairly clear from the guide marks along the perimeter and from the width of the surviving path segments in the NW quadrant.

The second assumption is at least a natural one: that the maze, like most of the others on the tablet, is meant to have four-fold rotational symmetry. There is some internal evidence for this. The surviving paths in the NW and NE quadrants seem to be rotations of each other, and guide marks along the left and bottom perimeter suggest that the long path segments along those two edges have the same length and lie in corresponding positions.

The clinching third assumption requires a bit of hand-waving. In the bottom half, straddling the border between the SE and SW quadrants, there is what looks like a continuous S-shaped path. (In this orientation the S is lying on its back facing North.) My suggestion is that it is not in fact continuous, for two reasons. First, there is a long but very fine surface line along the right-hand segment (the bottom of the S) that appears to separate it from the other two segments. Such fine lines paralleling the length of various segments can be seen in several of the other mazes, and may be an artefact of the tool used to make the designs. Second, if this path fragment were in fact continuous, the S could not be replicated symmetrically without overlapping itself, thereby destroying the putative four-fold symmetry. The boundary between the centre segment and the right-hand segment must therefore go all the way to the centre of the maze.

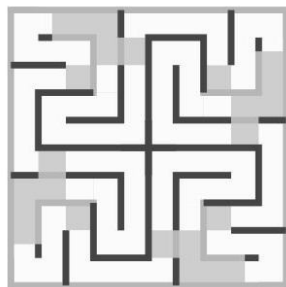


Figure 27: Applying the assumptions to maze R4

Once we have assumed this much, the surviving pattern can now be replicated around the rotations (fig. 27); and without using dead-ends or very small loops, the result can be completed in only one way, which I posit as my reconstruction in figure 21.

Richard Myers Shelton, Roseville, MN, USA; October 2012

Appendix

This is a brief and incomplete catalogue of tablets with divinatory diagrams representing intestines. Other such tablets exist: Jeff Saward saw two single-diagram tablets in the stock of an antiquities dealer in London in 2002 (one is illustrated on his Labyrinthos website), and I recently came upon a completely unidentified photo of a multiple-diagram tablet on the Internet. I know of no comprehensive catalogue, and I have no clear notion how many more such tablets there might be.

VAT 744	Berlin	The Berlin Labyrinth = Kern 2 = VAN 61
VAT 984	Berlin	First tablet with multiple diagrams (Neo-Babylonian)
VAT 8687	Berlin	Multiple diagrams (Assur, Neo-Assyrian) = KAR 431
VA Bab 2343	Berlin	Koldewey (Babylon, Middle Babylonian) = VAN 9447
VAT 9560	Berlin	Weidner's Mystery Tablet (Neo-Assyrian)
	Leiden	The Leiden Labyrinth
AO 6033	Louvre	Single diagram with inscription (Umma, Old Babylonian)
AO 3073	Louvre	Double diagram with inscription
E 3384	Aleppo	Multiple diagram tablet (Kahat, Syria)

See note 1 for standard abbreviations.

Periods

Old Babylonian: ca 1900 to 1600 BCE

Middle Babylonian: ca 1400 to 1100 BCE

Neo-Assyrian: ca. 911 to 612 BCE

Neo-Babylonian: ca. 626 to 539 BCE

According to Böhl, the provenance and dates of the Berlin and Leiden Labyrinths are unknown. Weidner describes the Berlin Labyrinth as “probably Neo-Babylonian”. Böhl purchased the Leiden Labyrinth in the antiquities trade in Baghdad in 1932. Although Koldewey's VA Bab 2343 is sometimes described as Neo-Babylonian, Weidner assigns it instead to the end of the Middle Babylonian period (as the Vorderasiatisches Museum does currently as well.)

For the other items I have not found the location or date except as noted. AO 3073 in the Louvre has an inscription, so is presumably datable, but I have seen no information or illustration for this tablet. Likewise, the tablet from ancient Kahat (Tell Barri) is presumably datable, but the preliminary expedition report (Salvani 2004) gives no date.

Tablet AO 6033. Photo courtesy of the Louvre



Images

VAT 744:	Kern 2 (fig. 3 above), Weidner 1916, Böhl 1935
VAT 984:	Weidner 1916, Böhl 1935
VAT 8687:	CDLI item number P369391
VA Bab 2343:	Lyngsgard 1992, Weidner 1916, Böhl 1935
VAT 9560:	Weidner 1916 (fig.14 above)
Leiden:	Böhl 1935 (fig. 4 above)
AO 6033:	CDLI item number P386355
E 3384:	Salvani 2004 (fig. 5 above)

Notes

1. VAT = Vorderasiatisches Tontafel (Near East Museum clay tablet)
VAN = Vorderasiatisches Negativ (Near East Museum photographic negative)
VA Bab = Vorderasiatisches Babylonian collection
KAR refers to Ebeling's illustrated catalog (Ebeling 1924).
I am deeply grateful to Dr. Joachim Marzahn and Julia Buckenauer of the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin for information relating to the museum's holdings.
2. My argument is based on the CDLI image, but the continuous nature of the path is even clearer in Friberg's earlier plate; the walls that Friberg ignores in order to form the tight spiral are more clearly deliberate walls and not cracks.
3. Most translators agree in translating the titular phrase as "The Land of the Living", or "The Land (or Mountain) of the Living One," and it is clear in the text that "the land" is the place toward which Gilgamesh leads his expedition. The Sumerian word for "land" is *kur*, whose literal meaning is "mountain." It is also used specifically for the Land of the Dead – which is why it is modified here to make it clear that this is not the intended meaning.
4. I learned of the recent archaeological developments in Spain and Portugal from Jeff Saward. The articles by Campos (Campos 2008) and Soreto (Soreto 2008) in *Caerdroia* 38 cover small parts of this growing awareness of the old Iberian tradition of labyrinths, and I expect to see a more comprehensive synthesis in future issues.
5. See, for example, the "Dolphin Fresco" at Knossos, whose border has an open meander on the left. Several pottery pieces in the Heraklion museum display open meanders – good photos are available at Wikipedia Commons in the category "Minoan pottery": http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Minoan_pottery

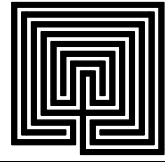
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http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/me/c/clay_mask_of_the_demon_huwawa.aspx
- CDLI: website of the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative, UCLA.
Search page: <http://cdli.ucla.edu/cdlisearch/search/>

In the search page field “CDLI number” enter any of the following:
P253616 (for Schoyen MS 4515), P253617 (for Schoyen MS 4516), P369391 (for VAT 8687),
P386355 (for AO 6033).

- Campos, Juan Carlos. “Labyrinth Petroglyphs in Maragatería, Spain” *Caerdroia* 38, 2008, p. 22–25.
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Toc page (with links to MS 4516): <http://instphi.org/Front%20page.html>
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Home: <http://www.schoyencollection.com>
MS 3194: <http://www.schoyencollection.com/smallercollect.html>
Tablet image: http://www.schoyencollection.com/smallercollect_files/ms3194.jpg
MS 4573/1: <http://www.schoyencollection.com/literatureBabylonian.html>
Mask image: http://www.schoyencollection.com/babylonianlit_files/ms4573a.jpg
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Home: <https://www.stanford.edu/group/chr/drupal>
Discussion touching on the Schoyen collection:
<https://www.stanford.edu/group/chr/drupal/ref/aramaic-incantation-bowls>
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The Hommel Festschrift is available online from the Open Library at the University of Toronto: <http://archive.org/details/orientalistische0102hommeloft>
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The Pont-Chevron Mosaic Labyrinth



Jill K H Geoffrion & Alain Pierre Louët

Daedalus, celebrated for his skill in architecture, laid out the design [of the labyrinth], and confused the clues to direction, and led the eye into a tortuous maze, by the windings of alternating paths. No differently from the way in which the watery Maeander deludes the sight, flowing backwards and forwards in its changeable course, through the meadows of Phrygia, facing the running waves advancing to meet it, now directing its uncertain waters towards its source, now towards the open sea: so Daedalus made the endless pathways of the maze...¹

Many ancient labyrinths await further study and documentation, including the second century Roman mosaic labyrinth at Pont-Chevron, near Ouzouër-sur-Trézée in France (pictured below right).² Visiting, studying, and placing labyrinths like this one in the larger context of the history of labyrinths grows more compelling as worldwide interest in labyrinths continues to increase, and new labyrinth discoveries come to light. We would like to offer an accurate, detailed description and images of the Gallo-Roman labyrinth at Pont-Chevron, identify key themes that relate to its existence and form, and present an up-to-date bibliography. It is our hope that this article will serve as a reminder of the continued need for further documentation of the many historic labyrinths found around the globe, as well as the on-going identification and discussion of salient questions and issues related to labyrinth research.



The Pont-Chevron Labyrinth. All photos: Jill K H Geoffrion

Water and Labyrinths

The myth of the labyrinth can be traced back to a watery beginning when Poseidon answered Minos' request for a sacrificial animal. A beautiful white bull emerged from the sea. This bull became the father of Asterion, the Minotaur, who was imprisoned in the labyrinth created by Daedalus.³ Theseus, the young hero who killed the Minotaur and found his way out of the labyrinth with the help of Ariadne's string, had many mythic connections with water. His extensive sailing adventures included his journey with Ariadne to Naxos, where according to some versions of the myth a celebratory labyrinth dance took place. Even more significant is the myth of the ring in which Theseus clearly demonstrated to Minos that he was the son of Poseidon, God of the Sea.⁴ A connection between labyrinths and water would have been evident to those living during the Gallo-Roman period,⁵ as the introductory quote from the Roman writer and poet, Ovid, illustrates.⁶

When one considers the labyrinth mosaic at Ouzouër-sur-Trézée, water emerges everywhere. The original chateau at Pont-Chevron, where this mosaic labyrinth was constructed, was built on an island in the middle of a sixty six acre pond.⁷ The chateau is located less than six miles (10 km.) from the Loire River in a region filled with underground springs. The labyrinth itself was discovered while searching for a well for the chateau. Furthermore, the large mosaic of which the labyrinth is a part is one of two large mosaics that have been discovered on the site. The second features a large head found inside a hexagon, illustrated here.⁸ The exact identity is disputed, but all scholars agree that it represents the face of a water divinity, whether Neptune,⁹ Triton,¹⁰ Ocean,¹¹ or a lesser water genie.¹² That the meandering Gallo-Roman labyrinth of Pont-Chevron might have been conceived and understood in terms of mythic references and contemporary realities of water cannot be documented. It seems very likely, however.



Description of the labyrinth at Pont-Chevron

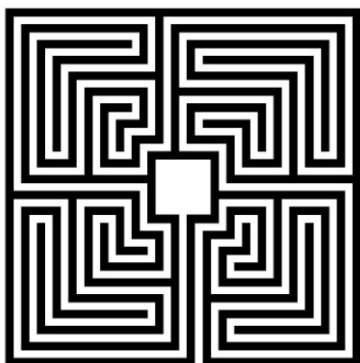
The unicursal, four-quadrant geometrical labyrinth at Pont-Chevron occupies the central square of a 35 panel mosaic (7 x 5 squares) composed of 17 different designs.¹³ Each of the 35 squares measures 0.835 meters.¹⁴ Gitton dates the mosaic to no later than the middle of the second century.¹⁵ This labyrinth is made of small black and white cubed tiles, each measuring approximately 8 millimetres square.¹⁶ The white tiles are made from local limestone; the black tiles are similar in composition to stone found in Volvic, site of a well-known ancient quarry of black volcanic stone,¹⁷ as well as a famous thermal water spring.



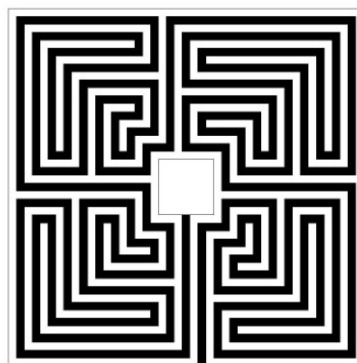
As is common in Roman mosaic labyrinths, which Hermann Kern, the author of the most complete compilation of labyrinths, calls quadrant or city labyrinths,¹⁸ the pathway of this labyrinth winds through four quadrants, traversing each completely before passing to the next, and finally reaching the centre. Jeff Saward sheds light on Roman labyrinth designs:

Researchers have attempted various classifications of these Roman designs, usually based on mathematical or geometrical properties, but basically the majority of the sixty or so Roman mosaic labyrinths documented or preserved can be designated as meander, serpentine or spiral types, with just a few complex designs falling outside this simple system.¹⁹

This labyrinth with nine circuits in each quadrant would be considered a meander-type.



*Design of the Pont-Chevron labyrinth
Diagrams: Jeff Saward*



Pathway of the Pont-Chevron labyrinth

From the entrance of the labyrinth²⁰ at Ouzouër-sur-Trézée, the white stone path leads to the first quadrant in the northeast.²¹ The path moves next into the northwest quadrant. It connects to the third quadrant in the southwest, and moves through the fourth quadrant in the southeast into the center. The entryway, located in the east, is blocked by black tiles.²² This seems to be a recent development,²³ since a photo of this labyrinth published by Stern in 1967 shows white cubes (open) for the entrance,²⁴ as do both the photo published in *Nea Paphos* in 1977²⁵ and the photo taken by François Decaris and published in the 1980's in Kern.²⁶ We must assume that the black tiles were substituted for white ones at a later date.²⁷

The central motif of this labyrinth is a structure that fills the 16 x 16 square tiled area. An inverted 'V' design, resembling a sloped roof, touches the vertical sides of the surrounding square on both sides and rising above this are two extensions, each made up of two lines of five black tiles forming ninety degree angles. There is another small ninety degree angle made of two and three black tiles that points upward underneath what appears to be the edifice's gable.



The white double-tiled pathway of the labyrinth leads directly into this structure, arriving at three vertical lines that are laid out in a checkerboard pattern.²⁸ The bottom of the structure is formed by two horizontal lines that begin on either side of the entryway. They are composed of three (right hand side) and four (left hand side) black tiles each that continue outwards, with two additional black tiles sloping downward at approximately the same angle as the sloping lines nearer to the top of the structure. The two outer vertical limits of the structure are made up of 9 alternating black and white tiles. Within the structure are two vertical lines of composed of six black tiles that are separated from the upper and lower horizontal lines by one white tile on each side.

Charles Picard speaks of the central motif of the labyrinth as a *tempietto* (temple).²⁹ Gitton calls it a small *temple à fronton*³⁰ (temple with a triangular pediment).³¹ Daszewski refers to it as simply an “edifice.”³² Kern, quite out of sync with the other authors, describes it as a house.³³ The most common central motif in Roman mosaic labyrinths involve images relating to the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. It seems important to note that no other examples of Roman labyrinths with temple-like or house structures in the centre have been identified. This detail of the Pont-Chevron labyrinth seems unique and somewhat mysterious.

We have no original documents relating to the construction of this mosaic or its labyrinth, so the exact nature and purpose of the central structure has not yet be identified. Given all the connections to water at Ouzouër-sur-Trézée, one avenue of exploration might lead in the direction of the shape of temples dedicated to water divinities in Italy and Gaul during the first and second centuries.³⁴

Questions for Further Study

While many Roman mosaic labyrinths have been found in Europe and northern Africa, the further study of each, and the search for original or other historic documentation must continue if our understandings of their construction, purposes, symbols, and themes³⁵ is to grow. Further study of ancient texts that may have influenced the designs of labyrinths should be undertaken. Consideration of specific symbols as they relate to labyrinths could help in furthering our understanding of how labyrinths were understood by those who constructed and viewed them. For example, the symbolic and physical connections between water and labyrinths seem a fertile field of inquiry. Contemporary interest in labyrinth usage might be enhanced by detailed study of ancient labyrinths, including how their uses might relate to contemporary labyrinth experience.³⁶

Jill K H Geoffrion and Alain Pierre Louët, Chartres, France; April 2012

Visiting the Pont-Chevron Labyrinth

For those who would like to visit the Pont-Chevron labyrinth, information posted on the internet may not be reliable, and telephone calls with people on-site have not always yielded accurate information. The best information we can offer is that you are most likely to be able to view the labyrinth from June 15 to August 31. Hours posted in 2012 were midday to 6 pm. The museum is closed on Tuesdays. Group visits for 10 or more people can be arranged throughout the year. Address: Château de Pont-Chevron, 45250 Ouzouër-sur-Trézée, (Loiret) France. Téléphone: +33 02 38 31 92 02. Website: www.pontchevron.com

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Notes

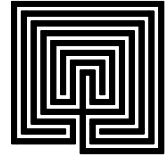
- 1 Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Book 8, lines 152-182.
- 2 Excavations of the Roman town that had been destroyed by fire were begun in the mid 1800's and reported in *Mémoires de la Société Archéologique de L'Orléanais*. Two Gallo-Roman mosaics were unearthed in 1898 near the Pont- Chevron château when workers were seeking a water source for the château that had been constructed in 1897. The mention of this discovery was reported by the owner of the property, The Marquis d'Harcourt in the *Bulletin de la Société historique et archéologique de l'Orléanais*, 1898. He recovered the mosaics, leaving the work of further study to his descendants. In 1962, Bernard Gitton, the local curé, with the blessing of the owners, members of the de La Rochefoucauld family, and with the on-site assistance of the young Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the future president of France, directed the re-excavation of the mosaics, one of which included a labyrinth. He published his findings shortly thereafter. Henri Stern wrote a more comprehensive study relating to the mosaics in 1967, mentioning Pont-Chevron as one of 23 Roman mosaic labyrinths that was known at that time. In 1977, as part of a study of images relating to Theseus and the Minotaure in labyrinths, W. A. Daszewski, mentioned the Pont-Chevron labyrinth, and included a mock-up of the entire mosaic of which this labyrinth forms the central square. (See bibliography for more information on the works cited.)

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- 3 Those commissioning Gallo-Roman labyrinths would almost surely have been familiar with Virgil's first century reference to this myth. See *The Aeneid*, Book 6: 14-30.
 - 4 Bacchylide (5th century BCE) wrote about Theseus' connection with water in "Youths, Or Theseus." *Dithyrambs* (Dithyramb 3, Ode 17). In Greek mythology Theseus was understood to have an earthly father, King Aegeus, and a divine Father, Poseidon.
 - 5 From the early second century BCE and lasting for approximately six centuries.
 - 6 Ovid, whose Latin name was Publius Ovidius Naso, (43 BCE – 17/18 CE)
 - 7 See Charles Picard. "Circonscription de Paris (région sud). Région de Gien: Ouzouër-sur-Trézée." *Gallia* 1963: Tome 21 (Fascicule 2): p. 415 for a brief reference to a pond that was dammed up in the middle ages. See also www.pontchevron.com/histoire.html and www.chateau-fort-manoir-chateau.eu/chateaux-loiret-chateau-a-ouzouer-chateau-de-pont-chevron.html The size of the pond is equivalent to 27 hectares.
 - 8 We would like to offer our sincere thanks to Monsieur Jean de La Rochefoucauld, son of The Count de La Rochefoucauld, for his correspondence relating to this labyrinth and his availability to help us with our research. We would also like to express our gratitude to his family, whose vision and generosity have made it possible for this labyrinth to be preserved.
 - 9 Picard, 415.
 - 10 Son of Neptune, the messenger of the big sea.
 - 11 Henri Stern. "Mosaïques de Pont-Chevron près d'Ouzouër-sur-Trézée (Loiret)." *Gallia* 1967: Tome 25 (Fascicule 1), p. 61- 63. Stern discusses the relevance of the presence of what he identifies as a rudder on the left shoulder of the figure as a crucial clue in discovery his identity. Picard interprets this shape as an oar (see Gitton, p. 40 for a discussion of the subject). Either way, the relationship of the presence of a rudder or an oar clearly establishes a link between this figure and navigation in water.
 - 12 Gitton, p. 40.
 - 13 The geometric labyrinth design is situated within a black square that is two tiles thick. There is an intermediary white square between the edge of the labyrinth and this outer black frame that is comprised of three lines of tiles. The labyrinth is separated from other elements of the larger mosaic by the same black pointed squares that are found around each.
 - 14 Bernard Gitton, "Les Mosaïques gallo-romaines de Pont-Chevron à Ouzouër-sur-Trézée (Loiret)." *Revue Archéologique du Centre de la France* (Tome 2, fascicule 1) 1963, p. 40.
 - 15 See Gitton, p. 42 for a full discussion of its age.
 - 16 Gitton, p. 38.
 - 17 Volvic is located in the Auvergne region of France, about 270 kilometres from Ouzouër-sur-Trézée.
 - 18 Hermann Kern. *Through the Labyrinth. Designs and Meanings over 5,000 Years*. (New York: Prestel, 2000) see p. 91, entry 129.
 - 19 <http://www.labyrinthos.net/typolab04.html>
 - 20 On the eastern side of the labyrinth, or, on the bottom right hand side as you face the beginning of the labyrinth pathway.
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- 21 “Les mosaïques dont il sera question ici ornent ces deux pièces et sont orientées dans le sens de la longueur, la première d’est en ouest, la seconde du sud au nord. Cette orientation est donnée pour la première par le dessin d’un labyrinthe au centre qui s’ouvre vers l’est...” Henri Stern. “Mosaïques de Pont-Chevron près d’Ouzouër-sur-Trézée (Loiret).” *Gallia* (1967, Tome 25, Fascicule 165), p. 50.) Kern, who used literary sources to research the labyrinth, falsely reports that the entrance “opens to the west,” see p. 98, reference 161.
 - 22 The discovery of this alteration is a good example of why it is valuable for researchers to actually study ancient labyrinths on site.
 - 23 The only Roman mosaic labyrinths whose entrance does not open to the outside are from Orbe, Switzerland. (Kern 152, p. 96) and Villa di Diomede at Pompeii (Kern 156, p. 97).
 - 24 Stern, p. 50.
 - 25 Wiktor A. Daszewski, *Nea Paphos II: La Mosaïque de Thésée. Études sur les mosaïques avec représentations du labyrinthe, de Thésée et du Minotaure*. (Varsovie: Éditions Scientifiques de Pologne, 1977). See the photo and diagram, planche 45.
 - 26 This photo must predate 1981 when Kern first published an Italian exhibition catalogue that included this labyrinth.
 - 27 Upon seeing the black tiles surrounding the labyrinth, it is very likely that a worker replaced two displaced white tiles with two black ones, thereby closing the entryway to the labyrinth and creating a black outer square. After careful study of the various photos available it is seems that this happened during the period when the labyrinth was transported and reconstituted in the outbuildings of the chateau under the supervision of Monsieur Mackenzie, a specialist from the Louvre Museum. The change appears definitively in photos taken during the opening of the labyrinth in 1982. We have notified the de La Rochefoucauld family and the French authorities responsible for the care of this labyrinth of the error. It will surely be rectified in the coming years.
 - 28 Kern refers to this as a “door,” p. 98. Its placement within the walls of the building suggest caution when identifying it in this way.
 - 29 Charles Picard, “Circonscription de Paris (région sud). Région de Gien: Ouzouër-sur-Trézée.” *Gallia* (Tome 21: Fascicule 2, 1963) p. 414.
 - 30 Gitton, p. 40.
 - 31 These found on many Greek & Roman temples, including temples dedicated to Poseidon and Neptune.
 - 32 Daszewski, p. 34.
 - 33 Kern, p. 98.
 - 34 Perhaps clues may be found on coins from this period as well.
 - 35 Daszewski’s detailed study of the representations of Theseus and the Minotaure is a stunning example of this type of contribution.
 - 36 For example, in her doctoral dissertation MJ McGregor *Walking the Labyrinth in the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Chartres: The Lived Experience of Middle-age North American Pilgrims. A Ground Theory Study* (Union University, 2011) speaks of the recurrent theme of “home” identified by contemporary labyrinth walkers in the Chartres cathedral. How might her findings relate to the existence of structures found in the centre of labyrinths from earlier periods?
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Amazing Hamlet...

by indirections find directions out



Sophie Chiari

The myth of the labyrinth has always been strongly associated with the ancient ritual of a warlike dance. In the *Iliad*, as Homer describes how Vulcan cuts a maze on the shield demanded by Thetis in order to protect her son, he alludes to a “dancing place” comparable to the twists and turns designed for fair Ariadne:

[...] Next to these he cut a dancing place
All full of turnings, that was like the admirable maze
For faire-hair'd Ariadne made by cunning Daedalus;
And in it youths and virgins danc't, all yong and beautious,
And glewed in another's palmes.

[...] Sometimes all wound close in a ring, to which as fast they spunne
As any wheele a Turner makes, being tried how it will runne
While he is set; and out againe, as full of speed, they wound,
Not one left fast or breaking hands. A multitude stood round,
Delighted with their nimble sport: to end which, two begun
(Mids all) a song, and turning, sung the sport's conclusion.

(Chapman 1967, 387, Book 18, II. 536-49)

The mythical labyrinth, however, has long been regarded as a real geographical place, and Herodotus was the first writer who, in his *Histories* written towards 450 BCE, mentioned a labyrinth, i.e. an Egyptian palace full of underground, tortuous, and secret passages (II.148). Diodorus Siculus stuck to the idea of an Egyptian maze (I.61), and Strabo did the same in his *Geography* (X.4.8). The Roman geographer Pomponius Mela then followed suit, and described the wonders of Egypt. His description was far from original, but as cosmography became fashionable in the Renaissance era, it attracted the attention of Arthur Golding who decided to translate *The Worke of Pomponius Mela*, thus providing his readers with the following development on the maze in the 9th chapter of his book:

Also a Maze mad by Sammetichus, conteining (within the compasse of one whole entire wall) a thousand houses and twelve palaces, builded wholie of Marble, rooffe and all: which having but one going downe into it, had within it waies almost innumerable, turning hither and thither, with many windlasses, altogether doubtfull with continual stepes, and often reere-vaultes, which winding rounde one above another, and eftscones retyng backe, as much as they had gone forward, made it to busie and entangled, that a man could not devise how to winde himselfe out. (Golding 1585, 18)

Shakespeare's learned contemporaries also had access to Pliny's *Natural History*, rendered into English by Philemon Holland in 1601. In Book 36, chapter 13 was entirely devoted to “the Mazes or Labyrinths in Aegypt, the Isle Lemnos, and in Italie,” and Pliny made his readers discover the magnificence of the Egyptian underground, tortuous palaces:

[...] let us enter into the Labyrinths; which we may truly say, are the most monstrous works that ever were devised by the hand of man: neither are they incredible and fabulous, as peradventure it may be supposed; for one of them remaineth to be seen at this day within the jurisdiction of Heracleopolis, the first that was ever made [...]. (Holland 1601, 578)

The most potent aspect of the myth, however, remains that developed by Ovid. In the first section of Book 8, the Latin poet gives special prominence to the bold artisan Daedalus and his work, the labyrinth. In 1567, as Arthur Golding published a complete translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, he wrote the following lines about Daedalus:

[...] He confounds his worke with sodaine stops and stayes,
And with the great uncertaintie of sundrie winding ways
Leades in and out, and to and fro, at divers doores astray.
And as with trickling streame the Brooke Maeander seemes to play
In Phrygia, and with doubtfull race runnes counter to and fro,
[...]
even so of winding ways
Unnumerable Daedalus within his worke convayes.
Yet scarce himselfe could find the meanes to winde himself well out:
So busie and so intricate the house was all about.

(Golding 1961, 164, II. 213-14)

If the Latin word “labyrinth” is notably absent from the translation, its English equivalent, the word “maze,” is used once by Golding when he eventually writes that “Within this Maze did Minos shet the Monster [...]” (I. 225). As already noted by Raphael Lyne, rather than attempting to paraphrase the original, Golding often tended to replace Latin words endowed with specific cultural associations with English equivalents. As a result, his translation was immediately popular (Lyne 2001, 54), and the Renaissance labyrinth, both a marvellous palace and a horrible jail, came to embody the Horatian ideal of *discordia concors* through its paradoxical combination of values such as order and chaos, or attraction and repulsion.

This is echoed in Shakespeare's work, where the words “labyrinth” and “maze” both appear. The “labyrinth” is associated with destructive passion in *1 Henry VI* and *Troilus and Cressida*.¹ It can also be found in *Venus and Adonis*, where Venus gets lost in the daedalian meanderings of her unrequited love.² As to the popular word “maze,” more easily associated with comedies, it is found in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Tempest* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, where the heroine's internal torments are made more intense thanks to the image of a “winding maze” encompassing a “poor frightened deer.”³

As far as *Hamlet* is concerned, there is no real labyrinth mentioned in the play.⁴ Still, one can easily speak of a labyrinthine, plural, ambiguous text, endowed with the characteristic instability of playhouse scripts during the Renaissance.⁵ Besides, the text is sometimes so tortuous that it indeed calls to mind the adjective “labyrinthine.” One could also add that the play presents a labyrinth of time, which is characteristically defined by Hamlet himself as “out of joint” (1.5.186). The problem is that the very idea of a labyrinth of time, now familiar to us, was probably unknown to Shakespeare's contemporaries. A greater difficulty lies in the fact that the principles of mythical emergence and irradiation as defined by Pierre Brunel are not relevant to analyse the labyrinthine aesthetics of the play (1992, 81-86).⁶

In spite of this, I will however argue that there is a labyrinth in *Hamlet*, first of all because this somewhat anamorphic play of mirrors and “curious perspectives” in which “everything seems double” introduces men and women unable to “suit the action to the word” (3.2.18), all of them “amazed” characters – or characters more or less lost in a maze. Hamlet’s best friend, Horatio, is the first to express his astonishment at the sight of the Ghost: “It would have amazed you” (1.2.234). Hamlet himself soon acknowledges such power of amazement, as he firmly believes that players should be able to “[c]onfound the ignorant and amaze indeed / the very faculties of eyes and ears [...]” (2.2.500-01). As to Gertrude, Rosencrantz reports that Hamlet’s behaviour “hath struck her into amazement” (3.2.318). This is soon confirmed by the Ghost, who exclaims: “But look, amazement on thy mother sits”! (3.4.10). So, I will examine several labyrinthine features characterizing Shakespeare’s play, from Hamlet’s metaphorical maze garden to the labyrinth imagined by David Morgan in a challenging production of *Hamlet* onstage.

Hamlet’s “Unweeded” Garden

Towards the end of the play, Ophelia expresses her melancholy mood by singing a sad little song: “He is dead and gone / At his head a grass-green turf” (4.5.30-31). Incidentally, Renaissance maze gardens often had in their centre a “grass-green turf.” Ophelia’s song may thus mean that the anonymous man standing for Polonius, now dead, is buried in the middle of a green maze. Interestingly enough, the front cover of Barbara Everett’s *Young Hamlet: Essays on Shakespeare’s Tragedies* (1989) is illustrated by a young man wearing black clothes and situated in the very middle of a maze garden which could also be called an “unweeded garden” (1.2.135). The sitter, reminiscent of the Prince of Denmark, is Lord Edward Russell, depicted by an unknown artist in the early 1570’s. The painting as a whole actually represents a full-length portrait of the young man grasping in one hand some snakes with this motto, “Fides homini, serpentibus fraus” while in the background, the same man is depicted as standing in a labyrinth, above which is inscribed, “Fata viam inuenient” (“Fate will find a way”). This motto, a very famous one at the time, had already been used by the French Claude Paradin in *Devises Heroïques*, a book of emblems first published in 1551. Paradin himself had borrowed the sentence from Virgil’s *Aeneid* and associated it to a circular, labyrinthine design. In England, William Kearney translated Paradin’s *Devises Heroïques* in 1591, and the Latin motto became “Fortune shall shew the way,” a vernacular formula destined to the masses. The picture of the maze remained unchanged, showing that “we are led by the grace of God to finde the way” (Kearney 1591, 118). So, by choosing such an emblematic front cover for her book, did Barbara Everett mean that Hamlet actually seems led by the grace of God to find the way in Shakespeare’s play? In other words, is Hamlet’s personal god the Ghost of his father who tries to show him the ‘good’ path?

This interpretation is not to be dismissed, but it is complicated by the fact that the Prince encounters a multiplicity of labyrinths in the tragedy. Not only does he have to walk through God’s labyrinth, he also has to tread Denmark’s metaphorical garden, a garden whose weeds must be pulled up. All Elizabethans were familiar with the links between the garden and the maze, and such links were further popularised by Thomas Hill, whose *Most Briefe and Pleasaunte Treatise, Teaching How to Dresse, Sowe, and Set a Garden* first appeared in 1563. A few years later, in 1577, the same author published *The Gardeners Labyrinth*, a bestseller which went through several editions. According to Hill’s treatises, a garden is dependent upon two things, i.e the rule of nature and the tender care of the gardener. In

Hamlet, Claudius, the gardener, does not tend to his garden, Denmark, adequately enough so the garden begins to decay and eventually succumbs to his poor care.

Throughout Renaissance literature, mazes and gardens alike are both womb and tomb, reflecting our lost immortality and the transient, mortal existence we are forced to accept in its place. As already noted by Marjorie Garber, the Ghost fable is “a kind of Eden myth, taking place in a medieval *hortus conclusus*, an enclosed garden. Old Hamlet, the innocent upholder of ancient values, sleeping in a garden, is set upon by the serpent, Claudius, whose world is motivated by the sins of lust, pride, envy, and the desire for power. This fable has a peculiar and far-reaching resonance. Positioned as it is near the beginning of the play, the story will come to mind again and again. In effect it is this play’s riddle, the centre of its radiating imaginative energy, a scenario that could also be called its primal scene” (2004, 489). Claudius, the serpent, could then be seen as the equivalent for the Minotaur, trapped at the centre of his own maze. Of course, Claudius is never directly shown to be a villain in the play. He is only reported as such by a ghost - or, as it were, by a mere fantasy. Therefore, up to a certain point, he may rather appear as a consummate monarch who effectively transacts private and public business. But, according to the Ghost, the usurper kills in an “orchard” (1.5.59), defined by Garber as “an Edenic garden, a garden of attempted innocence” (2004, 489).

Is Claudius the only inhabitant of the centre of the maze? If we choose a different perspective, then we can say that the Queen he has just married lives there, too. In many Renaissance mazes of love, there was no monster in the centre, but either Cupid or his mother, Venus. Interestingly enough, in *Hamlet*, Gertrude obviously stands for Venus. In Q1 (1603), here is what Hamlet tells his mother about her new, Vulcan-like husband:

Looke you now, here is your husband,
With a face like Vulcan.
A looke fit for a murder and a rape,
A dull dead hanging loeke, and a hell-bred eie,
To affright children and amaze the world:
And this same haue you left to change with this.
What Diuell thus hath cosoned you at hob-man blinde? (Act 3, scene 4)

This excerpt from Q1 shows well that Shakespeare first thought to refashion the mythological episode involving Mars and Venus caught in a net by Vulcan. In his own version of the myth, Vulcan becomes the illegitimate character taking the place of the legitimate, Mars-like, Old Hamlet. Strangely enough, Vulcan disappears in Q2 (1604) and he is actually replaced with the ambiguous figure of the Moor. Mars, however, is still there:

Ham. That roares so low’d, and thunders in the Index,
Looke heere vpon this Picture, and on this,
The counterfeit presentment of two brothers,
See what a grace was seated on this browe,
Hiperions curls, the front of *Ioue* himselfe,
An eye like *Mars*, to threaten and command,
A station like the herald *Mercury*,
New lighted on a heaue, a kissing hill,
A combination, and a forme indeede,
Where euery God did seeme to set his seale
To giue the world assurance of a man,

This was your husband, looke you now what followes,
 Heere is your husband like a mildewed eare,
 Blasting his wholesome brother, haue you eyes,
 Could you on this faire mountaine leaue to feede,
 And batten on this Moore; ha, haue you eyes? (3.4.52-67)

Implicitly, thus, Gertrude continues to be associated with the lascivious Venus, caught in a web of love and laughed at by the gods. Shakespeare's contemporaries knew that the goddess could be found at the core of early modern love labyrinths, and had a famous example in mind. Indeed, there was a hedge labyrinth at Theobalds, Hertfordshire (circa 1560) which was rectangular. It had a small rise at the centre, which was referred to as "Venus Hill."

Hell(sinore)

Hamlet is thus a labyrinth of love, whose sensual delights are never far removed from hellish ones. Indeed, the play's scattered actions occur in a place endowed with all the characteristics of hell, a place where rites are maimed, relief is impossible, and suffering never ceases. Of course, the presence of the Ghost has been traditionally associated with purgatory. But the reality of purgatory is being repeatedly challenged by the simple fact that Hamlet may well be the only one, if not to see, at least to hear the Ghost. To paraphrase Theseus' famous lines on the poet's imagination in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (5.1.17-18), it actually seems that "[t]he forms of things unknown," Hamlet "[t]urns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name" (Greenblatt 2001, 161).

In Elsinore, as already demonstrated by Pierre Iselin, lights and shadows do not belong to an explicitly defined universe, but they can be considered as an independent element generating mystery and tension throughout the play:

[...] the pomp and ritual of the court are place in sharp relief to the images of the land of Denmark as a prison, their lavish entertainment and drinking rituals stand in strong contrast to the ascetism of Hamlet and his circle, their flourishes and peals of ordinance are in gaudy contradistinction to night and silence, or even to the recorder with which Hamlet identifies himself. (1997, 39-40)

Light, in such a place, can only be equated with the fire of hell. All the more so as, right from the beginning, the realm is explicitly compared to the underworld. When Horatio exclaims, for instance, that the sight of the ghost "harrows [him] with fear and wonder" (1.1.43), he may possibly allude to the harrowing of hell, even though critics generally tend to emphasize the agricultural metaphor in a play otherwise dominated by the garden imagery. Incidentally, the image of the labyrinth has always been associated to Hell. According to Mircea Eliade, the motif of the *descensus ad infernos* is already present in the Antiquity, most particularly in myths and sagas of both the Oriental and the Mediterranean worlds.⁷ The descent into hell would be an element characterizing heroic initiations aiming at the immortality of the body (Eliade 1997, 134). No wonder then that, according to Virgil, Theseus, the hero of the labyrinth, also experimented the sufferings of hell as he sat on the Chair of Forgetfulness.⁸

Hamlet's world is a hellish one in which the ghost may be a dead corpse or even a devil, for "the de'il hath power / T'assume a pleasing shape" (2.2.534-35). A few lines before he learns that his father's ghost has appeared, Hamlet is already groping for a mythology that will allow him to imagine death as reversible, capping his complaint about his mother's

hasty remarriage with the assertion that Claudius is “no more like my father / Than I to Hercules” (1.2.152-53). Given the themes of the soliloquy, this allusion recalls Hercules’ expedition into the underworld to return the conjugally loyal Alcestis to her noble husband: if Hamlet were indeed like Hercules, then he could have his real father again in place of his step-father. Later on in the play, the Prince keeps alluding to Hercules, ready as he is to vie with the hero (1.4.83). Hamlet can thus either be seen as a failed Hercules or, more plausibly, as Hercules’ own cousin, Theseus, stuck in the Chair of Forgetfulness. As his father constantly asks him to remember what happened, he seems to consider that his son forgets much too easily to enact his revenge upon Claudius.

Hamlet feels so helpless that he clearly contemplates suicide, wishing that “the Everlasting had not fixed / His canon ’gainst self-slaughter” (1.2.131-21), and that, from time to time, his mind turns to what would come in the underworld “[f]or who would bear the whips and scorns of time” (3.1.69). These whips actually ensue from a long literary tradition initiated by Virgil, thus recalling the sounding lashes (“saeva sonare verbera,” VI.557-58) which were supposed to cause the suffering of the damned.⁹ For Hamlet, Hell is “[t]he undiscovered country, from those bourn / No traveler returns” (3.1.78-79). On the one hand, this undiscovered country is defined by the Ghost as the “sulphurous and tormenting flames” where he will have to “render up” himself (1.5.3-4).¹⁰ On the other however, it also proves to be the very castle of Elsinore, with its dark alleys, its twists and turnings, which ultimately correspond to the maternal body, at the beginning and at the end of each human life.

Elsinore is thus a disquieting place which is, more often than not, synonymous with chaos. Significantly, as Horatio hears music, Hamlet explains that “the King doth wake tonight and takes his rouse, / Keeps wassail and the swaggering upspring reels” (1.4.8-9). Ann Thomson and Neil Taylor, the editors of the play for *The Arden Shakespeare*, write in a footnote that “the general meaning is that a riotous form of dancing accompanies the drinking”.

In Homer’s *Iliad*, the Cretan maze already was a dancing-ground made for Ariadne (XVIII.590-53). In Book V of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the labyrinth became a dance, an apotropaic ritual of controlled confusion (also called “*ludus trojae*”) performed to celebrate Anchises’ death. As noted by Thomas M. Greene, “the placement of the performance at the close of the funeral games directs the attention of the spectators and of the reader away from the buried grandfather towards the adolescent skill of the grandson” (Greene, 2001, part 2: Troia and Truia). In *Hamlet*, dances are never shown, but they are far from being mere drunken revelling, they provide a similarly apotropaic function. Indeed, they aim at directing the people’s attention away from the dead king towards the power of the new sovereign.

If the court is a masculine world given up to the pursuit of power, Hamlet’s attachment to Wittenberg is given pride of place in the play, Wittenberg being the place of light, knowledge and reason, as opposed to the dark labyrinth of Elsinore. Of course, it is impossible to ignore that Wittenberg was Faustus’s university, which may well suggest darker undertones, but the murderous court and castle constitute the real maze of the play. Some have interpreted the allusion to “sledded Pollacks” (1.1.62) - to be read as “pole-axe”, and thus referring to the weapon - as a possibly veiled reference to the myth of the labyrinth whose sinuous corridors seem reproduced in the secluded castle of Elsinore (Laroque 2000, 107).¹¹ Indeed, scholars have long thought that the word *labyrinth* derived from the Carian word “*labrys*,” meaning “double-edged axe.” However, this (false) etymology¹² was not known by Renaissance contemporaries, who associated the “labyrinth” with the medieval “*laborintus*” (“much work within”).

Still, Elsinore can be seen as a daedalian palace. It is a stifling place where Hamlet is seen walking “out of air,” as emphasized by Polonius (2.2.203). At Elsinore castle, someone is hidden behind every curtain, and everything has been corroded by fear: marriage, love and friendship. Film directors have deliberately stressed this. The 1948 Olivier *Hamlet* was a *film noir*. In the Franco Zeffirelli version (1990), as the protagonist starts his most famous soliloquy, his face is lit from above, which makes both his features and the shadows more defined, and which gives the impression that he is in Daedalus’s maze, where light only came from above. Indeed, in his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid had Daedalus escape by the air. In 1996, Kenneth Brannah’s Elsinore was riddled with secret doors and passages and spy-holes. In Brannah’s film, the same soliloquy is delivered to a two-way mirror, turning the scene into Hamlet’s simultaneous threat to himself and to his spying uncle.

Elsinore is thus a labyrinth of inwardly twisting, secret, underground passages delved by Hamlet himself, who explains how he will eventually catch his treacherous friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: “But I will delve one yard below their mines / And blow them to the moon” (3.4.192-93).

Elsinore, I would suggest, is not only a geographical place. It is also a locus of memory where Hamlet aims at performing his own rites/rights of memory. In other words, Elsinore can be regarded as a memory palace, in which Hamlet must use mnemonic techniques that rely upon memorized spatial relationships to establish order and recollect memorial content. While Ophelia remembers her father with the rosemary she give Laertes (4.5.169), Hamlet remembers his with a labyrinth, as it were. As the ghost comes to fight against his son’s oblivion, he instils the duty of memory in Hamlet: “remember me” are the last words he utters (1.5.91). From then on, Hamlet will consider memory as a force, holding “a seat / in this distracted globe” (1.5.96-97). As a consequence, he keeps remembering (so much so that he almost forget to act), possibly practising the art of memory. Significantly, the image of the labyrinth was used in Renaissance treatises on the art of memory: mazes looked like small, circular theatres, where it was relatively easy to place people and objects to be remembered. To take a concrete example, in the theatre of memory as imagined by the Italian Giulio Camillo in 1550, Pasiphae and the bull sat in the 5th rank and, like Gertrude in Shakespeare’s play, the Cretan Queen “symbolized the soul attracted by the body” (Culiano 1987, 36).¹³

The Labyrinth of the Ear

“Do my ear that violence” (1.2.171): the preponderance of ears and hearing in a play marked by the aesthetics of secrecy has often been noted by the critics. There are more references to ears than in any of Shakespeare’s other plays and those ears are most often at risk of some form of violence: not only are they literally poisoned, but they are also “abus’d” (1.5.38), “[t]ake[n] prisoner” (2.2.473), “cleave[d]” (2.2.557), “mildew’d” (3.4.64), and metaphorically stabbed (3.4.95). Therefore, and as suggested by Peter Cummings, the play might be read as a text on early modern beliefs about the anatomy and physiology of the ear (1990, 83).

Of course, one facet of *Hamlet’s* exploration of the difficulty of attaining true knowledge is the slipperiness of language. Words are used to communicate ideas, but they can also be used to distort the truth, manipulate other people, and serve as tools in a corrupt quest for power. Claudius, the shrewd politician, is the most obvious example of a man who manipulates words to enhance his own power. The sinister uses of words are represented by images of ears and hearing, from Claudius’s pouring poison into the ear of the king to

Hamlet's claim to Horatio that "[he] ha[s] words to speak in [his] ear [that] will make [him] dumb" (4.6.21). The poison poured in the king's ear by Claudius and coursing through the labyrinthine "gates and alleys of the body" (1.5.67) is used by the Ghost to symbolize the corrosive effect of Claudius's dishonesty on the health of Denmark. Declaring that the story that he was killed by a snake is a lie, he says that "the whole ear of Denmark" is "[r]ankly abused" (1.5.36-38).

Now, why mentioning the omnipresence of ears in *Hamlet* instead of sticking to my point, the image of the labyrinth in the play? Not only is the ear responsible for hearing, it is also responsible for balance. There are three components to the ear: the outer ear, the middle ear and the inner ear. All three are involved in hearing but only the inner ear is responsible for balance. It is a warren of tubes filled with fluid encased within the temporal bone of the skull. The bony tubes are called the bony labyrinth.

In 1651, John Cleveland, in a poem called "To the State of Love," mentioned the labyrinth of the ear: "And I dissolve at what I hear, / As if another Rosomond [Rosamond] were / Couch'd in the Labyrinth of my Ear" (II. 63-65). Cleveland's poem, it might be argued, appeared much later than *Hamlet*, but if we examine Chapman's *Ovids Banquet of Sense*, published in 1595, and thus before *Hamlet*, we already find the same association between the labyrinth and the ear.¹⁴ In a poem on hearing from John Davies' *Nosce Teipsum* (1599), the labyrinth does not appear as such, but the lexical field of the maze informs the following lines:

Because all sounds doe lightly mount aloft;
And that they may not pierce too violently,
They are delaied with turns and windings oft.
For should the voice directly strike the braine,
It would astonish and confuse it much;
Therefore these plaits and folds the sound restraine,
That it the organ may more gently touch. (Davies 1975, 106)

Here, however, it is not the inner, but the outer ear which is described as labyrinthine: its circumvolutions are thought to protect the inner ear from the violence of sounds. Thus, according to Mark Robson, "the ear functions as an organ of delay and deferral." Incidentally, Joel Fineman was one of the first to "mak[e] the familiar connection between this organ and Derrida's notion of *différance*" and, Robson notes, "its labyrinthine convolutions allow its identification with 'temporal distension and dilation' (230)" (Robson 2001, paragraph 19).¹⁵ Shakespeare was therefore perfectly able to see the relevance of the image of the maze used in connection with the anatomy of the ear.

In *Hamlet*, the folds of the ear keep delaying the unfolding of the action. As the Ghost "unfold[s]" his tale (1.5.15) for instance, Hamlet listens to him but cannot act immediately, thus failing to satisfy his father. Similarly, when Claudius pours the poison in the labyrinth of Old Hamlet's ear, he stops the harmonious development of his own country. In fact, he metaphorically pours it into the ear of the whole country which is going to be infected by rumours. No wonder then that the Ghost declares: "[...] The whole ear of Denmark / Is by a forgèd process of my death / Rankly abused" (1.5.36-38). Hamlet will follow an identical logic when he tries to revenge his father by pouring poisonous words in the labyrinth of his mother's ear. He partly succeeds, since the Queen eventually tells him that his words "like daggers enter in [her] ears" (3.4.93). The folds of Gertrude's labyrinth cannot protect her well enough from the violence of Hamlet's words.

A Labyrinthine Strategy

We will come back to Gertrude later on, but at this point, it is worth remembering that a large proportion of the main events which carry forward the action of the play look like chance events. The Prince of Denmark has no straightforward strategy, and his uncertainties, expressed in various soliloquies, have been commented upon by most of Shakespearian scholars. Incidentally, it is generally acknowledged that Shakespeare uses the device of the soliloquy not for clarification (as he did elsewhere) but for complication instead, so that the audience is made to see Hamlet's character as consisting of diverse ingredients, a personality fragmented rather than whole.

His strategy of sorts is based on delay because he experiences difficulty both in getting started and in coming to a stop. And whereas the young man criticizes "the law's delay" (3.1.71), he himself keeps waiting for something that does not come. He is, as already noted by critics, the exact opposite of Laertes, whose revenge comes immediately after Ophelia's death.

If the Prince of Denmark tries to convince himself that he "know[s] his course" (2.2.533), it is precisely because his lack of any certainty about it. This will be acknowledged in his most famous monologue, as he declares that the "currents" of his enterprise "turn awry" (3.1.86).

The fact is that he "put[s] an antic disposition on" (1.5.170) and feigns "confusion" (3.1.2) to the point of becoming really mad. He "feels himself distracted" (3.1.5) Rosencrantz explains. The word "distracted" not only refers to Hamlet's folly, it also alludes to his deviant path, leading him away from the centre of thing. Indeed, his internal meditations to exact revenge on Claudius create the twists and turns of a mental labyrinth, while the various obstacles which prevent him from killing the king recreate the twists and turns of an external daedal. The only plot he eventually unravels is that of his two former friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the "two crafts" who "in one line" will "directly meet," to paraphrase Hamlet's remark (3.4.208). Indeed, they will soon collide with each other in their own labyrinth.

Words instead of swords: this could be one of Hamlet's principles. Indeed, his main weapon to unveil the monstrous truth is not a dagger, for he relies on words. His letters, for instance, aim at discovering such a truth, but they are so confused, so labyrinthine, that even Laertes gets "lost" in them (4.7.52). Hamlet also believes in the power of drama and as such, his main sword is a play whose labyrinthine plot should "catch the conscience of the King," (2.2.540). Indeed, he asks the first player he can perform the "Murder of Gonzago" (2.2.474). As already noted by many critics, Shakespeare may have known something about the historical Duke of Urbino, reputedly murdered in 1538 by having poison poured in his ears. More generally speaking, the name Gonzago is somewhat reminiscent of the Gonzaga family, who ruled Mantua from 1328 to 1707, and whose most notorious device was a labyrinth. In the Palazzo del Te, one of the rooms happened to be decorated with an impressive labyrinth painted on the ceiling. Another Gonzaga maze, once again painted on a ceiling, displayed the words "FORSE CHE SI, FORSE CHE NO,"¹⁶ written in capital letters, and running continuously throughout the maze decoration. "Maybe yes, maybe no": that's exactly Hamlet's strategy. Ironically, his tactics are not that different from Polonius, whose similarly labyrinthine strategies are bound to fail. The old counselor eventually seems to be a rather poor Daedalus, unable as he is to find the exit of his own prison. Instead of escaping from above and taking the proper distance, he keeps on going sideways, at best,

and backwards, most of the time. No wonder, then, that Hamlet, feigning madness, compares Ophelia's father to a crab which "could go backward" (2.2.200-01). Eventually he will metaphorically imprison him in his own maze: "Let the doors be shut upon him that he may play the fool nowhere but in's own house," he tells Ophelia (3.1.131-32). In Ovid's version of the myth, Daedalus is trapped in his own work, too, but he is regarded as an exceptionally cunning carpenter. Polonius lacks the spark of genius. This is acknowledged by Claudius in Act 1, scene 2, when he notices that the state is "disjoint and out of frame" (1.2.20): his councillor cannot do much about it. In *Hamlet*, the grave-digger is always stronger than the carpenter (5.1.37-55), for "the house he makes lasts till doomsday" (5.1.55).

According to Harold Skulsky, Polonius' theory of espionage - that one can "With windlasses and assays of bias / by indirections find directions out" (2.1.62-63) - is as much an object lesson in fatal arrogance as his personal claim to "wisdom" and "reach" (Skulsky 1974, 477). For as we watch him plying the craft of "lawful espial" it becomes increasingly obvious that one indirection can lead only to another. All the more so as Polonius's discourse is as complicated as the strategy he wants to apply, and which ultimately consists of lying in order to squeeze out the truth, as already pointed out by François Laroque (2000, 106). Incidentally, Polonius's method is reflected by Hamlet's ironical answer to Guildenstern who asks him: "What should we say, my lord?" (2.2.243). Indeed, the young man's reply could as well come from the tortuous old man: "Anything but to th' purpose" (2.2.244). In other terms, he asks for delays, and for still more twists and turnings.

If the Queen seems rather annoyed by such labyrinthine strategies and would like Polonius to act more in a straightforward way ("more matter with less art", 2.2.95), her new husband does not share her reticence. For as Claudius concedes, his councillor's "positive" assertions have never been wrong, and on this record Polonius declares himself willing to stake his life: "Take this from this, if this be otherwise" (2.2.156). The irony of the rhetorical forfeit is that Polonius will eventually be made to pay for it in earnest: "If circumstances lead me, I will find / Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed / Within the centre" (2.2.156-58).

Eventually, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern follow the same dubious methods as Polonius, and so they will ape his behaviour. As they intend to "drive [Hamlet] into a toil" (3.2.339), i.e. to trap him in an inextricable net, their failure becomes more and more obvious. They "must sweep [Hamlet's] way / And marshal [him] to knavery" (3.4.202-03) but the young man easily outwits them. The problem is that they apparently know nothing of the Renaissance ideal of *discordia concors*. Unable as they are to play the recorder in order to produce harmonious tones (3.2.353-55), they can merely produce jarring sounds and eventually become the victims of their own daedalian enterprise.

Hamlet-Theseus

On the one hand, Hamlet tends to see himself as the embodiment of Icarus, with "wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love" (1.5.29-30). As noted by Julia D. Staykova, "in devotional literature, the practice of meditation and godly love are advocated as two spiritual habits that will elevate the soul to God" (2010, 381). Here, not only does the title-part intend to assert some kind of spiritual elevation, he also dreams of escaping from the maze, i.e. the corrupted Court of Elsinore. As his dead father seems to show him the way out, Hamlet gradually comes to see him as the embodiment of Daedalus: "Save me and hover o'er me with your wings, / You heavenly guards! [...]" (3.4.100-01). This, however, is

wishful thinking, for the good reason that the Ghost already stands for Minos, and cannot play the role of Daedalus at the same time. Moreover, if the Prince of Denmark dreams of escaping, he paradoxically does everything he can to remain trapped inside the maze of Elsinore until the very end of the play: “[...] Let the door be locked,” he eventually says in the last act of the play (5.2.296).

On the other hand, right from the beginning, Hamlet’s very appearance connects him, albeit in a superficial way, to the labyrinth. His “knotted and combined locks” (1.5.18), for instance, make him a labyrinthine character. This detail is all the more striking as Hamlet still wears his mourning garb: his fashionable hair-style seems irrelevant. But his paradoxes make him humane, and the fact is that, according to Claudius, “He’s loved of the distracted multitude” (4.3.4), probably because people are able to identify with this erring young man, full of imperfections.

Like Theseus the procrastinator, the Prince of Denmark is repeatedly confronted by external obstacles and, paradoxically, he seems to enjoy confusion. Indeed, he asks his own mother not “to ravel all this matter out / That [he] essentially [is] not in madness” (3.4.184-85), because he prizes entanglements above everything else. Like Theseus, he needs to fight against his own monstrous self. Entering the maze marks the beginning of his spiritual metamorphosis, acknowledged as such by Claudius who speaks of “Hamlet’s transformation” (2.2.6) and this is echoed by Gertrude who worries about her “too much changed son” (2.2.36). Like the mythical Athenian, his itinerary can be qualified as labyrinthine. He leaves Wittenberg to return to Denmark, then is forced to go to England, and then comes back to Denmark once again. Obviously, his road is not a straight one.

Shakespeare’s contemporaries knew of Theseus’ exploits. Still, he had a rather bad reputation. His desertion of Ariadne, daughter of Minos of Crete, after she had aided him in escaping the labyrinth, was well known enough to have given rise to at least two interpretations of the labyrinth as an emblem of sensuality and luxurious living. His “marriage” to Hippolyta [...] was found in a variety of sources available to the Renaissance, as were his marriage to Phaedra, daughter of Minos and sister of the deserted Ariadne (Pearson 1974, 277). According to Laertes, the Prince of Denmark is a similarly unfaithful and superficial lover, for this is what he tells Ophelia at the beginning of the play:

For Hamlet and the trifling of his favour,
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,
A violet in the youth of primy nature,
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance of a minute,
No more. (1.3.5-9)

Hamlet is inescapably depicted as a lustful young man, “primy,” a Shakespearian coinage, reminding us of Othello’s comparison “as prime as goats” (3.3.406). Love, for the Prince of Denmark, is nothing but a pastime. About Theseus, D’Orsay W. Pearson observed that “[w]hether in translation, in the original, or through allusion, then, the image of Theseus available to the Renaissance was hardly one of total reason and honour” (1974, 278). Theseus was thus reputed to follow a tortuous course not only literally speaking, as he was treading the maze leading to the Minotaur, but also metaphorically speaking, as he repeatedly made debatable choices in his private life. In Shakespeare’s play, Hamlet seems to follow a similarly dubious path. Unsurprisingly, allusions to his “course” permeate the tragedy, and the first comes from Claudius: “[...] but to persever / In obstinate condolment

is a course / Of impious stubbornness” (1.2.92-94). According to Claudius, Hamlet follows a deviant, profane course. Hamlet would thus tread an irreligious maze full of winding ways. Scholars such as Hermann Kern have opposed the labyrinth, made of one long winding path, to the maze, which was made of several tortuous roads. By doing so, they have established a clear distinction between religious, unicursal labyrinths such as the French medieval labyrinths traced on the pavement of the churches, whose only way represented a substitute for pilgrimage and which necessarily led to God, and pagan, multicursal mazes, favoured both by the Classical Antiquity and the early modern culture. This distinction also implies that the labyrinth is a sacred design, contrary to the secular path of the maze, generally associate with festive events. The Maze at Saffron Walden, which probably dates back to the Renaissance, was “the gathering place of the young men of the district who have a system of rules connected with walking the maze, and wagers in gallons of beer are frequently won or lost. For a time it was used by the beaux and belles of the town, a young maiden standing in the centre, known as home, while the boy tried to get to her in record time without stumbling” (Fisher and Loxton 1997, 25).

If we decide to adopt such clear-cut distinctions between the labyrinth and the maze, it appears that Hamlet’s tortuous course is defined as a maze by his enemies, while Hamlet himself probably regards it as a labyrinthine pattern. He cannot be lost in his labyrinth. First because, as his friend Horatio acknowledges, Heaven is likely to “direct” his course (1.4.91). Second because he knows where has to go and what he has to do. In this perspective, Hamlet has to face two dangers: namely, the lack of patience and the lack of will.

Depraved Women: Gertrude-Pasiphae and Ariadne-Ophelia

Gertrude is the archetype of the sinful woman who cannot be forgotten for her sins, for her first husband possessed everything she needed. He can certainly be regarded as another Minos figure, and this comparison seems reinforced by the fact that, according to several mythological traditions, Minos is nothing but an amalgam of two different figures—the old Minos, son of Zeus and Europa, who became judge of Hell, and his grandson, the ruler of Crete, who ordered Daedalus to build a labyrinth. This composite mythological character would indeed have become a judge of the dead after his murder by Cocalus’ daughters, who scalded him to death with boiling water as he was searching for Daedalus. In Book VI of the *Aeneid*, Virgil made Minos judge of the souls and entrusted him with the task of assigning them to a particular place where each damned soul must spend eternity (l. 432). Later on, in Canto V of Dante’s *Inferno*, where the Lustful are forever buffeted by violent storm, Minos still indicates the Circle of Hell by wrapping his tail around him the required number of times.

Elizabethans also liked to think of Minos, Pasiphae’s husband, and Minos, the Judge in Hell, one and the same person. On 1564 for instance, Thomas Peend devoted the following entry to Minos: “Begotten by *Jupiter* in the likenes of a white bull, on the fayre *Europa*, daughter to *Agenor* kyng of *Phoenicia*. And for his justyce is fayned of the poets to be a judge in Hell” (2009, 64). In Shakespeare’s play, Minos is this dangerous “extravagant and erring spirit” (1.1.159) ruling over the fate of Hamlet. He is also the one who “unfold[s]” (1.5.6 and 1.5.15) complicated stories in order to unveil an inexpressible truth.

His wife appears as wholly corrupt woman, whose appetites contrast with Ophelia’s proclaimed virginity. As such, she proves to be a possible avatar of the luxurious Pasiphae who, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, is guilty of the sin of flesh. The Ghost imparts to his son his sense of his wife’s depravity:

But virtue as it never will be moved,
 Though lewdnesse court it in a shape of heaven
 So thought to a radiant Angle linckt,
 Will sort it selfe in a celestiall bed
 And pray on garbage. (1.5.52-6)

The Queen betrays King Hamlet allegedly to indulge in her own wilful pleasure for the sake of King Claudius whom the Prince endows with bestial, even monstrous, characteristics.

What is striking in the play, too, is that in spite of her centrality, we know almost nothing about Gertrude. But when Hamlet tells Ophelia to go to a nunnery and exclaims: “Why, wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?” (3.1.121-22), he is probably thinking of his mother, as Gertrude and Ophelia collapse into one figure (Adelman 1992, 14).

“I did love you once” (3.1.114), Hamlet tells Ophelia. Indeed, at first sight, Ophelia appeared to be the treasure of Hamlet’s labyrinth. Laertes, assuming that her sister is still virgin, advises her to avoid listening to Hamlet with “too credent ear” (1.3.29) and opening her “chaste treasure” (1.3.30). In order to preserve her treasure, Ophelia must wear a metaphorical chastity belt: “’Tis in my memory locked / And you yourself shall keep the key of it” (1.3.84-85). Doing so, she gives the clue of her private labyrinth to her own brother, but she fails to provide Hamlet with another key: “I [...] denied / His access to me” (2.1.106-07), she tells Polonius Act 2 scene 1. In a sense, she is a failed Ariadne. And even though Gertrude hopes that Ophelia’s virtues “will bring [Hamlet] to his wonted way again” (3.1.40), the girl feels helpless when faced to Hamlet’s entanglements or, as he puts it, to his “mortal coil” (3.1.66), a phrase probably coined by Shakespeare.¹⁷

Ophelia, however, seems to know all about labyrinthine designs, and she is able to make the distinction between a maze and a labyrinth:

[...] But, good my brother,
 Do not as some ungracious pastors do
 Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven
 Whiles, a puffed and reckless libertine,
 Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads
 And recks not his own rede. (1.3.45-50)

The unique, thorny way to heaven is the labyrinth she has chosen for herself. As to the roads of pleasure, they may well lead to Hell, but is Hamlet following the paths of hell? Is he that dissolute? She does not seem so sure of it or, at least, she does not want to believe that he is.

Arthur Kirsch (1981, 30) shows that it is she who first reports on his melancholy transformation, “with a look so piteous in purport / As if he had been loosed out of hell to speak of horrors” (2.1.82). It is also she who remains most acutely conscious of the nobility of mind and form which has, she says, “been blasted with ecstasy” (3.1.160). And it is she, after Hamlet has gone to England, who most painfully takes up his role and absorbs his grief to the point of real madness. However, just like Ariadne, she is the shadow of her beloved or, as Barbara Everett puts it, “a moon by his sun” (1989, 31). It is a lonely, abandoned Ophelia, who refuses to “get [her] ways to a nunnery” but drowns herself instead. This is highly significant, since in Ovid’s tale, Ariadne is left on her own as she falls asleep on the isle of Naxos. Surrounded by water, she may well drown herself, but Bacchus arrives just on time to avoid the disaster.

There is no equivalent of Bacchus in Hamlet. Ophelia is bound to express her grief without any possibility of relief. In the 3rd act of the play, her speech thus tends to reproduce the archetypal discourse of the forlorn lady betrayed by her lover:

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
[...]
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey of his muscked vows,
Now see what noble and most sovereign reason
Like sweet bells jangled out of time and harsh—
That unmatched form and stature of blown youth
Blasted with ecstasy. O woe is me
T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see. (3.1.149-60)

Ariadne's complaints were not developed in the *Metamorphoses*, but in Ovid's *Heroides*, the Cretan princess depicted her predicament in detail, and in the Middle Ages, her woes became part and parcel of the *Ovide Moralisé*, in which the heroine was given the opportunity to moan loudly (VIII.1349-61). In the wake of this tradition, Ophelia chooses to fall in the snare of passionate love, knowing that she will soon become a deserted woman.

Further on in the play, a gentleman will tell the Queen that Ophelia's speech "doth move / The hearers to collection" (4.5.8-9). This means that, contrary to her father, Ophelia, like Ariadne, knows how to make coherence out of incoherence. Still, her thread has been to no avail. Eventually, as she compares the true lover to a pilgrim with a "cockle hat and staff" (4.5.25), she in fact describes Hamlet's state without even realizing the bitter truth of her own statement. Indeed, she remains convinced that Hamlet rejected her, and dies unaware of his real feelings.

The Monster in the Labyrinth

If courtiers such as Osric are compared to beasts (5.2.73) in *Hamlet*, they are not monstrous. Apart from "[t]hat monster Custom" (3.4.159), metaphorically designed as such by Hamlet, the labyrinthine court of Elsinore does not openly display its monsters. They can only be found at the end of a long, circuitous path.

First of all, I would like to insist on the fact that the Ghost cannot be the monster of Hamlet's labyrinth. Of course, he is trapped in a "prison-house" (1.5.15), like Pasiphae's offspring. However, the Minotaur does not vanish, whereas the Ghost does, for he comes at midnight before disappearing. The Minotaur desperately stands in the middle of the maze, whereas the Ghost treads the labyrinth, too. This is suggested by the way he moves. Indeed, even though it is possible that the Ghost ascended through a trapdoor, the dialogue between Marcellus and Barnardo in Act 1, scene 1, suggests movement across the stage. Old Hamlet is much more likely, as has been noted earlier in this paper, to be a double of King Minos, deceived by his wife before becoming a terrifying Judge in Hell.

Claudius, then, provides an apparently plausible solution: he might be the monster of Hamlet's universe. The first thing we can notice about him is that he has no name in *Hamlet*. Nowhere in the dialogue, in any of the three texts, is he ever called anything except the king. Stephen Orgel observes that "[t]he name Claudius appears only once, in the second quarto and folio texts, in the stage direction for his first entrance" (2003, 42). This is for Shakespeare's benefit, thus. But we, as spectators, do not know anything related to the name

of the king. He stands here, dehumanized, stuck as it were in the middle of the way: “I stand in pause where I shall first begin” (3.3.42), he says to himself.

He is, according to the Ghost, “that incestuous, that adulterate beast” (1.5.42). He is the “bloat king” tempting Hamlet’s mother to bed (3.4.184). He is, for Hamlet, the monster of the labyrinth, the one to kill with a sword. And this monster is, as the young man puts it, “fit and seasoned for his passage” (3.3.87). Hamlet will indeed use his sword, after many delays. Maynard Mack sums up his murder in a very simple way:

There are two arras in his mother’s room. Hamlet thrusts his sword through one of them. Now at last he has got to the heart of evil, or so he thinks. But now it is the wrong man; now he himself is a murderer. The other arras he stabs through with his words – like daggers, says the queen (Mack 1977, 92).

If Hamlet fails to kill the Minotaur, it is probably because Claudius has more to do with the white bull which seemed so enticing for the married Pasiphae than Pasiphae’s monstrous son, half-human, and half-bull. Consequently, the real monster of Elsinore cannot be but Hamlet himself. “[...] wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them” (3.1.138), he tells Ophelia. Is he, at his precise moment, thinking of him? This is probably the case.

More precisely, the Prince of Denmark is at the same time both Theseus trying to find his way out of the maze and the desperate monster eager to kill its opponents. As a result, he is his greatest enemy and this partly corroborates Freud’s popular assessment of Hamlet as victim of his unconscious.

There is no need, however, to adhere to the psychoanalytic interpretation of Shakespeare’s play to emphasize the links between the Prince of Denmark and the hybrid creature of the labyrinth, half-man, and half-bull. In both Medieval and Renaissance writings, including books of emblems, the figure of the Minotaur was traditionally associated to secrecy — secrecy being thought of as one of the most efficient military strategies to win battles. In Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale* (1387) for instance, the banner of Theseus the conqueror was described as follows:

And by his baner born is his penoun
Of gold ful riche, in which ther was ybete
The mynotaur, which that he slough in crete.
Thus rit this duc, thus rit this conquerour. (Chaucer 1968, 26)

Chaucer’s association between the Minotaur and the rule of silence remained implicit. But years later, in Alciati’s *Book of Emblems* (*Emblematum Liber*, 1531), the monster represented in the 12th emblem was this time explicitly depicted in connection with the motto: “non vulganda consilia,” i.e. “plans should not be revealed.” More generally speaking, Paolo Santarcangeli observes that “the motif of the Minotaur with a finger on his lips, being itself a double symbol of secrecy, became quite frequent in very different contexts, from the Late Antiquity onwards” (1974, 266-67), and the relevance of such a remark can be easily verified in a popular work like *Ovid’s Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologized and Represented in Figures*, in which George Sandys asserts that:

[t]he Romans bore a Minotaure in their ensignes, to declare that the counsels and stratagems of a General should be muffled in the unsearchable darknesse of secesy, such as not to be traced or discovered by the Enemy: nay often to be concealed from

their nearest friends, according to that saying of Metellus. If I thought that my shirt knew my purpose, I would tear it from my body. (Sandys 1970, 383)

Right from the beginning of the play, Hamlet seeks to “be muffled in the unsearchable darkness of secrecy.” He similarly emphasizes the virtue of the unsaid, and refuses to tell Horatio and Marcellus what the Ghost has just explained him (“you will reveal it” 1.5.118). He can thus be regarded as the embodiment of the Minotaur with a finger on his lips, more particularly as he orders his friends: “Let us go together / And still your fingers on your lips, I pray” (2.1.784-85). Strangely enough, such a behaviour also recalls that the Secretary of the Council of State of King Charles I of Spain, Gonzalo Perez, whose personal emblem represented a Minotaur standing in the middle of a labyrinth and with a finger on his lips (Ruscelli 1566, 441). The motto, *in silentio et spe* (“in silence and hope”), would definitely fit Hamlet’s tactics...

Edification by the Margins: Conclusion

With so many clues pointing to the motif of the maze throughout Shakespeare’s tragedy, it is not surprising to see this very motif come to life onstage. In 2007, David Morgan, the play’s director, proposed a new American *Hamlet* for the BYU Pardoe Theater. Time was thus truly out of joint in Morgan’s production, for the play, which consisted in a flashback, immediately started with the duel between the title-part and Laertes. Then, the rest of the scenes followed in a rearranged chronological order. As a consequence, the dramatic impact of the tragedy did not come from Hamlet’s death, which was made clear right from the beginning, but by the combination of events who led to Hamlet’s tragic end. Still more surprisingly, playgoers who arrived 20 minutes early did not wait doing nothing. On the contrary, they could see a designed presentation on a large screen in front of the set. Brief written comments and historic visuals set up the origin of the play and explained the image of the labyrinth as a metaphor for man’s spiritual journey. In addition, M. C. Escher’s drawings of twisting perspectives were related to the labyrinth concept and inspired Eric Fielding’s set.¹⁸ David Morgan said he decided to focus on Hamlet’s psychological state and he wanted the audience to feel a part of this psychological drama.

“I wanted to play with the idea of Hamlet being trapped,” Morgan said. “I communicated to the designer what I wanted to show visually – that something was wrong.”¹⁹ In order to do so, Morgan strayed from the chronological order of the play. He decided to open with a scene that is toward the end of *Hamlet* and use flashbacks to show how all of the previous events lead up to the ending sword fight.

Such an adaptation shows that *Hamlet* itself has become a literary myth: it is as flexible as a myth, and it continues to speak to us years after its creation. And of course, if Shakespeare’s play seems ‘modern’ even though it draws on archaic Nordic and classical legends, it is precisely because myths never die, but keeps feeding man’s imagination. The structure of the labyrinth has always been food for thought and *Hamlet*, with its numerous delays, its sense of amazement, its monstrous souls and its unreachable centre, is strongly reminiscent of pagan mazes already described by classical writers. Like those Renaissance mazes which were perceived as harmonious from the outside but chaotic in the inside, the tragedy is characterized by its complicated plot while it is held firmly together by the cogent structure of the revenge tragedy. *Hamlet* is, etymologically speaking, an amazing play, where all the plotting characters become ensnared in their own traps, and where the title-part, who goes through “sore distraction” (5.2.207), has no other choice but to “be edified by the margins”

(5.2.137), as Horatio puts it. Discoveries are only made by those who are willing to go through the distractions and the delays of earthly life. Those who want to reach the centre of the maze without treading its circuitous paths cannot be edified in any way. As a consequence, in the play, each character follows a labyrinthine course. Not only Hamlet himself, this “[p]oor intricated Soule” or, to put it differently, this “riddling perplexed labyrinthical Soule,” but also sovereigns, even dead ones who, in Shakespeare’s tragic universe, “go a progress through the [labyrinthine] guts of a beggar” (4.3.30).²⁰ In spite of the usurper-king’s leitmotifs, such as “[d]elay it not” (4.3.53) or “make haste” (4.3.55), the labyrinth of man’s life is not to be trodden that easily.

Sophie Chiari, Aix-Marseille University, France; July 2011

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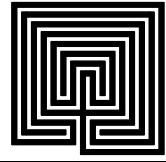
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Notes

- 1 See 1 Henry VI, 5.5.143-45: "O, wert thou for myself- but Suffolk stay./ 'Thou mayst not wander in that labyrinth. / There Minotaurs and ugly treasons lurk" and Troilus and Cressida, 2.3.2: "How now, Thersites? What, lost in the labyrinth of thy fury? Shall the elephant Ajax carry it thus? He beats me and I rail at him."
- 2 *Venus and Adonis*, ll. 683-84: "And when thou hast on foot the purblind hare, / Mark the poor wretch, to overshoot his troubles, / How he outruns the wind, and with that care / He cranks and crosses with a thousand doubles. / The many musits through which he goes / Are like a labyrinth to amaze his foes."
- 3 *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1.2.53-55: "Antonio, my father, is deceased, / And I have thrust myself into this maze / Happily to wive and thrive as best I may." *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.1.96-100: "The fold stands empty in the drownèd field, / And the crows are fatted with the murrain flock. / The nine men's morris is filled up with mud, / And the quaint mazes in the wanton green / For lack of tread are undistinguishable." *The Tempest*, 3.3.1-4: "By'r la'kin, I can go no further, sir. / My old bones ache. Here's a maze trod indeed / Through forthrights and meanders. By your patience, / I needs must rest me" and 5.1.245-48: "This is as strange a maze as e'er men trod, / And there is in this business more than nature / Was ever conduct of. Some oracle / Must rectify our knowledge." *The Rape of Lucrece*, ll. 1149-53: "As the poor frighted deer that stands at gaze, / Wildly determining which way to fly, / Or one encompassed with a winding maze, / That cannot tread the way out readily, / So with herself is she in mutiny."
- 4 All references to *Hamlet* are taken from William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, eds. Ann Thomson and Neil Taylors, London, Thomson Learning, The Arden Shakespeare, 2006.
- 5 Three different early versions of the play have survived in print: the First Quarto (Q1, 1603), the Second Quarto (Q2, 1604) and the First Folio (F1, 1623). For detailed comparison between the texts, see for instance the Internet site of the Shakespeare Quartos Archive: <http://www.quartos.org/>

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- 6 The surfacing of external elements in a given text is termed “loi d’émergence” (“emergence law”) by Pierre Brunel.
 - 7 Mircea Eliade, *Initiation, rites, sociétés secrètes*, Paris, Gallimard, (1959), 1997, p. 134.
 - 8 Theseus is indeed famous for having followed his friend Pirithous into hell, where Hades tricked them both into a Chair of Forgetfulness. Hercules was able to save Theseus, and Pirithous alone remained in hell forever. This story was a familiar one for Shakespeare’s contemporaries. Spenser alludes to it in the first Book of his *Faery Queene*, for instance (Canto 5, stanza 35).
 - 9 Thomas Phaer did not explicitly mention Virgil’s sounding lashes in his translation and his euphemism erased the connotations of the original text. See *The .xiii. Bookes of Æneidos. The first twelve beeing the woorke of the diuine Poet Virgil Maro, and the thirteenth the supplement of Maphæus Vegius. Translated into English verse to the fyrst third part of the tenth Booke, by Thomas Phaër ... and the residue finished, and now the second time newly setforth for the delite of such as are studious in Poetrie: By Thomas Twyne, 1584. Phaer writes: “From thence wer howlings heard, & wretches wawling tost in paines, / And clinching loud of Iron, and gingling noise of dragging chaines” (VI.590-91). Shakespeare could rely on his “small latin” (Ben Jonson’s phrase) to decipher the original text.*
 - 10 Cf. *King Lear*, 4.5.124-126: “There’s hell, there’s darkness, there is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption”.
 - 11 The axe is also mentioned by Claudius later on in the play (4.5.210).
 - 12 In the same way, “the house of the Double Axe” for the palace at Knossos was an imaginative innovation of Sir Arthur Evans at the very beginning of the 20th century.
 - 13 See Giulio Camillo, *L’Idea del Teatro dell’eccellen M. Giulio Camillo*, Florence & Venice, 1550. For further details on Camillo’s project, see See Yates 1984, p. 136.
 - 14 See George Chapman, *Ovids Banquet of Sence* (1595): “And as guilt Atoms in the sunne appeare, / So greete these sounds the grissels of myne eare, / Whose pores doe open wide to theyr regreete, / And my implanted ayre, that ayre embraceth / Which they impresse; I feele theyr nimble feete / Tread my eares Labyrinth; theyr sport amazeth / They keepe such measure; play themselves and dance. / And now my soule in Cupids Furnace blazeth, Wrought into furie with theyr daliance: / And as the fire the parched stuble burns, / So fades my flesh, and into spyrit turns” (1963, p. 214).
 - 15 Robson quotes from Jacques Derrida’s *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*. See bibliography.
 - 16 According to Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins, “this is the first verse of a *frottola* written ca 1505 by the leading musician at the Gonzaga court, Marchetto Cara” (2001, 121, note 54).
 - 17 *OED*, coil, n.², 4b. “mortal coil: the bustle or turmoil of this mortal life. A Shakespearian expression which has become a current phrase.”
 - 18 See the review by Jean Marshall in *The Desert Morning News*: http://resource.uvu.edu/pdf/03_07/03.29.07_UVSC_s_O_Pioneers_moving_powerful.pdf
 - 19 See the article in the *Daily Herald*: www.heraldextra.com/entertainment/article_e5f3aa5b-a22c-5c3e-b757-6e9503f5db79.html
 - 20 The first two quotes come from John Donne, *Sermon xviii* (1628).
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The St. Euverte Labyrinth, Orléans



Alain Pierre Louët & Jill K H Geoffrion

Restricted access has made study of the “labyrinth” in the desacralized church of Saint-Euverte in Orléans, France difficult. References exist which speak of a thirteenth century labyrinth in the church.¹ A 9 x 9 meter labyrinth in this location, dated between 1855 and 1858, is also cited briefly in Kern, accompanied by a photograph with a partial view.² In “*L’énigme du labyrinthe*,” Jean Villette identifies it as “perhaps only a decorative floor paving that is sometimes mistaken as a labyrinth.”³ After recently receiving permission to visit,⁴ we discovered a black and white square pavement maze that dates to the period after the French Revolution when building restoration was undertaken during the episcopate of Bishop Dupanloup.

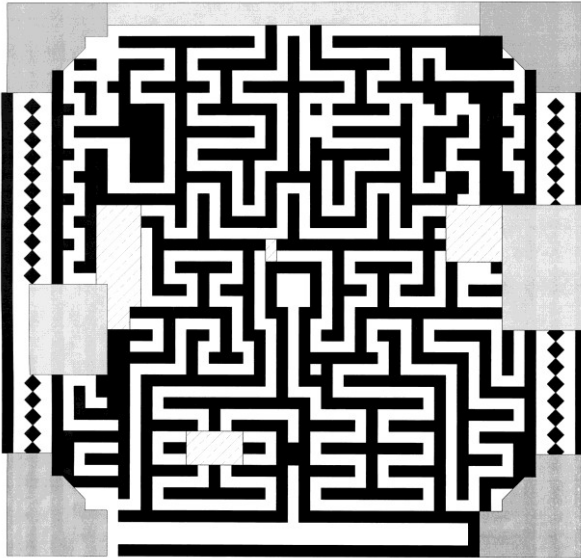
Situated in the east of the building, one step below and directly bordering the altar area, the maze extends westward from four entry points. The pattern covers the width of the nave. It was clearly laid around the pre-existing tomb of the fourth century bishop Saint Euverte on the north side; it was also built around the pre-existing pillars. On the south-western side the installation of a small, modern organ has partly obscured part of the design.



*The pavement ‘labyrinth’ in the nave of the church of Saint-Euverte, Orléans, France.
Photo: Jill K H Geoffrion, 2012*

The labyrinth at St. Omer, also in France, comes to mind as one considers the design of this example in Orléans. 1,849 alternating black and white tile squares measuring 22 centimetres (8 11/16 inches) on each side make up the maze, bordered on each side by larger tiles (12 30.7 cm, 12inches) laid in a diamond pattern. A number of decorative crosses can be easily identified as one looks at the maze pattern and areas of restorations are also clearly visible. By offering this note, a diagram, and a photograph of the maze we are pleased to contribute to the growing body of knowledge of ancient and modern labyrinths and mazes in France.

Alain Pierre Louët and Jill K H Geoffrion, Chartres, France; November 2012

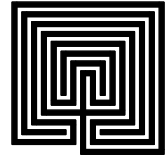


This diagram represents the 'labyrinth' as it currently exists. There have certainly been restorations that have changed the original design, and obvious repaired areas are marked with hatching in this diagram. The gray shaded areas represent the organ on the right and the tomb of Saint Euverte with its iron-work enclosure on the left. The pillars are also marked at the corners, where they impinge on the design. Plan drawn on site by Alain Louët in 2012, final graphic by Jeff Saward.

Notes

- 1 For example, French scholar Camille Enlart speaks of a silhouette of a church with three towers that may be linked to the city of Jerusalem in a 13th century labyrinth in the church. Enlart, Camille. *Manuel d'Archéologie Française: Depuis les Temps Mérovingiens jusqu'à la Renaissance. Tome II: Période française, dite gothique, style flamboyant.* Paris: Editions Auguste Picard, 1929, p. 818.
- 2 Kern, Hermann. *Through the Labyrinth. Designs and Meanings over 5,000 Years.* New York: Prestel, 2000, p. 157 (illustration 273).
- 3 "Enfin, ce que l'on prend parfois pour un labyrinthe à Saint-Euverte d'Orléans n'est peut-être qu'un pavage décoratif." Villette, Jean (1983). "L'énigme du labyrinthe." *Notre Dame de Chartres; Revue Trimestrielle.* Chartres, France: no.58, 1984, p. 5. This information is missing in the English translation (by Malcolm Millar) of this publication produced by the Cathedral, but is reproduced in a translation (by Robert Ferré and Ruth Hanna), published as *The Enigma of the Labyrinth.* St. Louis, Missouri: One Way Press, 1995, p. 7.
- 4 Robert Ferré and Linda Ricketts also joined us.

The Tree of Life Labyrinth at the Ayrshire Hospice



Mazda Munn

Recently I was privileged to begin a creative journey which culminated in the creation of a labyrinth in the gardens of the Ayrshire Hospice, Ayr, Scotland. The 'Tree of Life' Labyrinth fits comfortably into the environment in the walled garden of the Hospice and promises to fulfil many different functions for the patients, staff and visitors, who are encouraged to experience the many beneficial effects of travelling the paths of the labyrinth.

Inspiration for this project came from a chance encounter during one of the many visits to both my mother and mother-in-law who were patients at the hospice. I was intrigued by a rudimentary labyrinth which had been mown in the grass in the beautiful, peaceful garden. I have been using the labyrinth motif in my artistic work for many years as an inspiration for paintings, illustrations, public artworks and community art events. I discovered that this labyrinth had been created by the Hospice Chaplain who had been using it as part of his therapeutic work within the hospice. He had found that encouraging hospice day-patients to travel the labyrinth was both inspirational and beneficial, and it was proving a popular focus for participation by staff and visiting families. The temporary mown labyrinth was created to pilot his idea of having a more enduring labyrinth structure constructed in the garden, and he was hoping to be able to generate some funding for this project. The coincidence of discovering our shared passion soon inspired us to work together towards creating a permanent labyrinth in the hospice garden.

We were extremely fortunate that we soon found a sponsor who made a generous donation allowing us the means to cover the costs of materials, landscape gardening work and the commissioning and manufacture of bespoke seating. Our brief for the labyrinth design included suitability for wheelchair users, a path which was not too long, the inclusion of resting places and easy maintenance. It must fit comfortably into the available space and be an attractive garden feature.

I designed the five circuit labyrinth based on concentric circles. The paths were made wider than normal to accommodate the width of a wheelchair. An outer ring was added to balance the design, creating an optional extra circuit which could be followed by the more able travellers. I attached an entrance path for access which gave the labyrinth a tree-like appearance, and inspired the appropriate name, 'Tree of Life Labyrinth'. The finished labyrinth is 15metres in diameter with grassed paths which are one metre wide. We used plastic web under the turf to strengthen and protect the path, and create a flat, level surface for wheelchairs. The evergreen walls are pot-grown box and there is a Himalayan birch in the centre surrounded by a circular bench constructed from locally sourced oak. Other natural oak benches are situated on the perimeter of the labyrinth.



The labyrinth opening ceremony took place on a lovely spring day in May 2012. Many hospice staff, patients and friends attended the ceremony and walked the labyrinth. Commemorative badges were given to all who travelled the labyrinth. While working on this project I was inspired to create a painting based on the labyrinth design. This colourful, symbolic version of the 'tree of life labyrinth,' painted on canvas, now hangs in the Hospice. A limited edition of prints of this painting have been auctioned in aid of the Hospice. 'Tree of Life' labyrinth greetings cards have also been produced to sell for Hospice funds.



We have had some excellent feedback about the project and are very pleased to have created a permanent and useful feature at the hospice in Ayr. The labyrinth has become integrated into the environment and the ethos of the hospice and is currently in use as a therapeutic and spiritual aid. Staff and visitors are encouraged to travel the labyrinth to experience the calming effects and patients are guided through the labyrinth as a symbol of their journey through life. It provides a unique space for patients and families, children, staff, and volunteers to slow down, still the mind and find time for reflection, or simply participate playfully.



Ian Sterling, the Hospice Chaplain who conceived and managed the project, plans to extend the use of the labyrinth in his support work and perhaps embark on a research project in the near future which involves evaluating the benefits its use and presence within the hospice.

Mazda Munn, Millport, Cumbrae, Scotland; November 2012

The Labyrinth Society

The Labyrinth Society, affectionately known as TLS, was founded in 1998 to support all those working with, or interested in labyrinths. Although based in the USA, it is an international organization with members around the world. Membership in the Society not only connects labyrinth enthusiasts to a worldwide community, but also supports websites and other labyrinth projects that provide information and resources to the world at large, including the Worldwide Labyrinth Locator website that now lists 4400 labyrinths, and a few mazes, worldwide: www.labyrinthlocator.org

The TLS Gathering 2014, will be held November 14-16, in Delray Beach, Florida – to learn more about The Labyrinth Society and for details of the 2014 gathering, visit their website: www.labyrinthsociety.org



LABYRINTHOS

53 Thundersley Grove, Thundersley,
Essex SS7 3EB, England, UK.

Telephone : +44 (0)1268 751915

E-mail : info@labyrinthos.net

Website : www.labyrinthos.net



The story of mazes and labyrinths is as long and tortuous as their plans might suggest. For many, mention of the labyrinth may recall the legend of Theseus & the Minotaur. An increasing number will know of the ancient labyrinth symbol which occurs around the world, at different points in time, in places as diverse as Brazil, Arizona, Iceland, across Europe, in Africa, India and Sumatra. This symbol and its family of derivatives have been traced back 4000 years or more, but its origins remain mysterious. Modern puzzle mazes, however complex their form, are but the latest episode in this labyrinthine story.

Labyrinthos is the resource centre for the study of mazes and labyrinths, with an extensive photographic & illustration library and archive, offering professional consultation and services for owners, designers, writers and publishers. Labyrinthos also provides consultation for maze and labyrinth design and installation, lectures, workshops & slideshows. We also specialise in personalised tour guide services to labyrinth locations. Contact Jeff Saward or Kimberly Lowelle Saward at the address above, or visit our extensive website www.labyrinthos.net for further details.

Our annual journal *Caerdroia*, first published in 1980, is dedicated to maze and labyrinth research and documentation. Produced by labyrinth enthusiasts for fellow enthusiasts, it keeps in regular contact with correspondents throughout the world, exchanging information and ideas, to help create a clearer picture of the origins and distribution of the enigmatic labyrinth symbol and its descendants, from the earliest rock carvings and artefacts through to modern puzzle mazes of ever increasing complexity and ingenuity.

Current subscribers to *Caerdroia* include maze and labyrinth researchers and enthusiasts, archaeologists and historians, artists and authors, designers and owners, and members of The Labyrinth Society. As a non-profit making journal, dealing with a very specialised subject, *Caerdroia* relies on reader contributions, submissions and subscriptions for support. If you are interested in the history, development, diversity or potential of mazes and labyrinths in any of their forms, perhaps you would care to join us on the path...

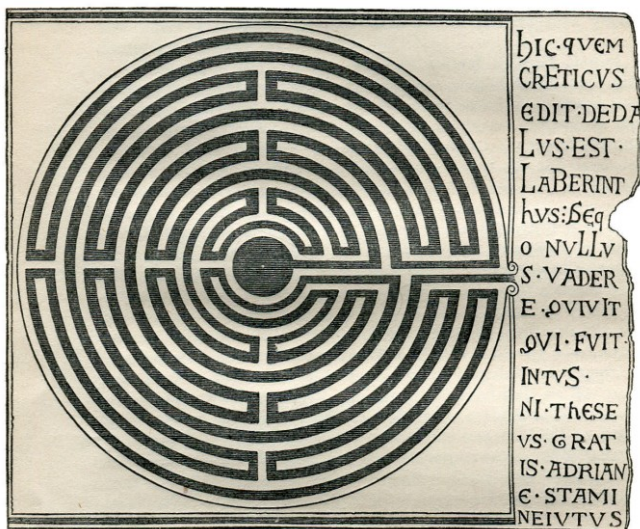
Caerdroia 42 was produced during 2013 and early 2014 by Jeff Saward and Kimberly Lowelle Saward at Labyrinthos HQ. Opinions stated by contributors are not always those of the editors, although *Caerdroia* welcomes open discussion and endeavours to provide a forum for all who are lured by the labyrinth.

For submission guidelines visit: www.labyrinthos.net/submission.html

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