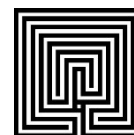


Nordic Church Labyrinths

John Kraft & Jeff Saward



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The Nordic countries are rich in small parish churches with mediaeval wall paintings still intact. This is a marvellous hunting ground for the iconographer, and one particular motif that occurs on some of these church walls and vaults is the labyrinth. Some of these are in the form of graffiti, scratched on the walls, probably without permission; but others, painted as frescos on the walls or ceiling vaults by artists, were probably paid for by the parish or some wealthy parish member. To date, some 32 labyrinths at 25 locations have been recorded, including one example inscribed on a church bell and another (now destroyed) on a churchyard memorial cross.

The labyrinths in churches of the Nordic countries are never found in the floor pavement and their designs are also different from those commonly found in France, Italy and Britain. With only one exception, they are all of the old classical, or angle-type, a design that is quite rare in churches in central Europe. They were probably inspired directly from local folk tradition and there is no reason to expect a close relationship between them and the church labyrinths found elsewhere in Europe. Labyrinths built of stones and boulders were surely widespread in Scandinavia at this time and it is difficult to say to what extent the church labyrinths are modelled on the stone labyrinths, or vice versa.

It would appear that the labyrinths in Scandinavian churches all belong to roughly the same period, as the majority of those that can be dated seem to be from the fifteenth century, with a few that may be a little earlier or later. But that does not mean that they all belong to one homogenous group. On the contrary, it would seem that there are four different geographical groups, with a number of different characteristics and several examples difficult to place in any specific group.



Labyrinths in Nordic Churches

The southern group includes twelve labyrinths in Denmark and two in southern Sweden. All of these labyrinths are fresco paintings, and they are all found on such exposed surfaces in the churches, that it is apparent that the labyrinths belonged to the official and accepted adornment of the building. The labyrinths at Tåning, Bryrup, Skørring and Nim in Jylland, Denmark, are situated in close proximity to each other and they are all of the same type with 16 walls. It is reasonable to guess that perhaps some of these labyrinths were painted by the same artist, or at least that one example has inspired another. A similar close relationship might explain the short distance of 7 km separating the labyrinths at Båstad and Östra Karup in southern Sweden.

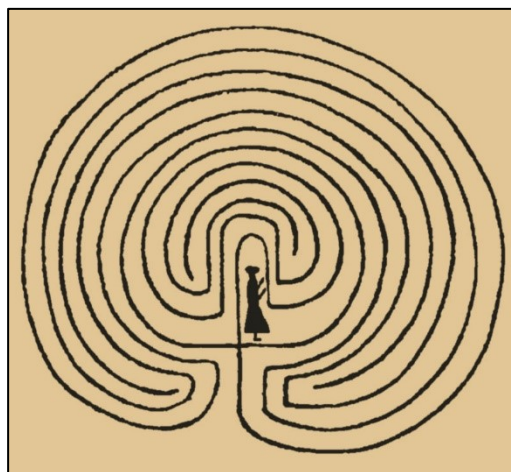
The two Norwegian labyrinths form the western group. What is most striking about their appearance is that they are not found inside the churches! The example at Seljord is painted on the west facade, close to the entrance to the church. The labyrinth at Vestre Slidre is to be found in the church doorway, on the exterior side. The location of both of these labyrinths might suggest that they served some kind of apotropaic or protective purpose. Labyrinths adjacent to church doorways are not found elsewhere in the Nordic countries.

Another group of five labyrinths are found on the island of Gotland, including three executed in the form of graffiti. Only one of the church labyrinths on Gotland, at Hablingbo, is a fresco painting. A very interesting characteristic of this group is that the labyrinth painting and two of the graffiti are located on the dark ground floors of church towers. It would seem the artists had chosen places where the labyrinths could not easily be discovered and this might suggest that these labyrinths were not accepted as part of the original adornment of the churches. Possibly there was a magical or superstitious purpose behind them. The churches of Hablingbo, Lye and Ganthem are situated fairly close to each other and also close to Levide, where a remarkable labyrinth-inscribed stone cross was originally made, so maybe some of these examples have the same artist in common.

The eastern group consists of eight labyrinths in four churches in the south of Finland. They are all painted as frescos on the walls or vaults and are in no way concealed. The surrounding art makes these labyrinths particularly interesting. In a number of mediaeval churches in southern Finland the paintings are of an unusual style, with motifs that seems to be borrowed from the popular, secular art of the agrarian society of the time. The pictures are difficult to relate to the common collection of religious motifs found in the mediaeval churches of Scandinavia. There are demons, dogs, ships, mermaids, mounted soldiers in tourney, men blowing trumpets, etc. The four churches where labyrinths occur all have examples of this strange, seemingly non-religious church art. Anna-Lisa Stigell, who has studied them extensively, interprets the labyrinths as one of the elements belonging to this greater complex of church art.

The painting from Sibbo church of a labyrinth with a woman at the centre is justly famous. It surely depicts the springtime "Jungfrudans" (virgin dance) game, which was still played in different parts of Finland and Sweden at the end of the nineteenth century, and in a few rare cases, even into the 20th century. The object of this game was that one or two boys should try to run or dance along the winding path of the labyrinth and bring out a young girl from its centre. This painting of a virgin dance was no doubt inspired directly from real life in the parish, not from any scholars who had learnt of labyrinths in foreign countries.

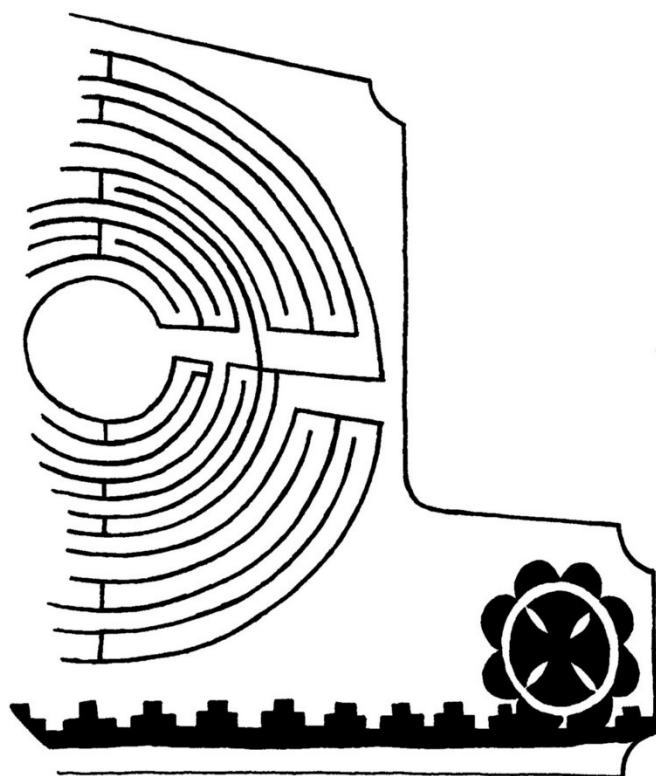
Labyrinth wall fresco, Sibbo, Finland



Even if it is possible that the labyrinths, as well as the ships, tourneys and trumpet-blowers, were given some new, symbolic meaning when painted on the church walls, it still seems obvious that the labyrinth had been borrowed from local folk tradition without any significant transformation of its meaning. The girl really wanted to remind the church visitors of the popular *jungfrudans* in the labyrinth, not of a figure used as a more abstract symbol for some aspect of the new religion.

The church labyrinths in Finland seem to be a motif borrowed directly from the popular labyrinth games played at springtime. The examples on Gotland also have a flavour of popular beliefs, of magic with roots in earlier, pagan times. The Norwegian church labyrinths might have served as a protective sign, a use which also points more in the direction of old magic than to more the modern religious symbolism bought in from continental Europe.

The southern group of church labyrinths in Denmark is more difficult to analyse. While they often appear alongside Christian saints, biblical characters and scenes, the frescos in general would have provided a means for preachers to illustrate their sermons, a picture book for the common people, but the exact role of the labyrinth in this mix is unclear. However, it seems safe to assume that this group too has firm roots in local folk tradition. The classical or angle-type design that dominates among Scandinavian labyrinths in general, and is the only type known in the southern church labyrinth group, clearly suggests that the figure has been borrowed by the painters from local folk traditions, rather than from imported manuscripts from elsewhere in Europe.



If the idea of painting labyrinths in churches had been imported from the continent it is probable that the Danish labyrinths would have been influenced by the medieval or Chartres-type labyrinth design, so far found only at Grinstad in Sweden. But there are no traces of such continental designs in Denmark. The fact that all the church labyrinths in Denmark are wall frescos also hints that the idea has not been brought in from the continent, where wall paintings of labyrinths are not common at all. In fact, the church labyrinths in the territory of old Denmark gives firm support to the conclusion that the labyrinth motif was commonly known and widespread in southern Scandinavia during the middle ages.

Labyrinth wall fresco, Grinstad, Sweden

A number of "Trojeborg" place-names suggest the former locations of turf labyrinths in southern Scandinavia, especially in Denmark. The labyrinth paintings in Danish churches also provide a hint that those turf labyrinths, of classical or angle-type, might have been in existence at that time. It is of course possible that a new symbolic dimension was added to the labyrinth when the motif was used on the walls of mediaeval churches, but it is difficult to find what such a transformation could have meant.

More obvious are the links to old local beliefs of heathen origin. Several of the Nordic church labyrinths seem to have had an apotropaic or else magical function. The Virgin Mary is mentioned alongside the labyrinth at Hesselager church in Denmark, and is also on the church bell from Horred, Sweden, but this is not enough to build any theory about a general connection between Nordic church labyrinths and the worship of Mary.



Labyrinth ceiling fresco, Hesselager, Denmark
Photo: Jeff Saward

Likewise, ships occur in three of the four churches in Finland where there are labyrinths, there are also ships in the tower rooms of Lye and Hablingbo churches on Gotland, and what might be a boat or small ship is painted close to the labyrinth at Seljord church in Norway. One possible interpretation is that these depictions of ships could have served as votive symbols, but it is still difficult to see how these ships could build any bridges to the Christian symbolism from the continent.

On the contrary it is tempting to interpret the combination of ships and labyrinths as another typical Nordic phenomenon. The great majority of preserved stone labyrinths in the Scandinavia are situated on the seashore, often on small islands, far out at sea. It is known that they have been used for magical purposes, to control dangerous weather and to increase the catch for the fishermen at sea. This aspect of labyrinth magic could possibly explain the combination of labyrinth paintings and ships in churches. But in that case we must once again draw the conclusion that the labyrinth motif in Nordic churches has no obvious ties with the use of labyrinth figures on the continent.

Only at one location, at Grinstad church in Sweden, is it possible to trace an obvious, indisputable diffusion of continental influence to the Nordic church labyrinths. Here the labyrinth has obviously been based on the medieval or Chartres-type, but Grinstad does not belong to any of the above-mentioned groups, it is an exceptional example without parallels or close neighbours, the exception that proves the rule.

John Kraft, Västerås, Sweden; 1991
Jeff Saward, Thundersley, England; 2005

Bibliographic notes:

The labyrinths in Finland have been described and discussed by Anna-Lisa Stigell in "Kyrkans tecken och årets gång" in *Finska fornminnesföreningens tidskrift* 77, Helsinki, 1974. p. 82-89.

The Danish labyrinth enthusiast Jørgen Thordrup wrote an article on Nordic church labyrinths in *Iconografisk Post* nr.1-2, Copenhagen, 1976, p.23-36, where he mentioned four Danish churches with labyrinth paintings, and more recently published much fuller, illustrated documentation of the Nordic church labyrinths in *Alle Tiders Labyrinter*, published by Dixit, Silkeborg, Denmark, 2002.

Hermann Kern mentioned ten Nordic churches with labyrinths in his *Labyrinthe*, published in 1982, but this list was far from complete. The revised English-language edition of this work, published as *Through the Labyrinth* by Prestel, 2000, contains an up to date catalogue and additional notes provided by Jeff Saward.

Jeff Saward's *Labyrinths & Mazes* published by Lark Books and Gaia, 2003, also contains a summary of this important group of labyrinths, with a distribution map and colour photographs of the finest examples.

Catalogue of Nordic Church Labyrinths
Destroyed and hidden examples marked in *italics*

<i>Location</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Design</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Denmark			
<i>Bryrup</i>	Wall painting	16-wall classical	Not currently visible
Gevninge	Wall paintings	12-wall classical	Two faded examples, above vault
<i>Gylling</i>	Wall painting	Classical?	Traces, not currently visible
Hesselager	Vault painting	12-wall classical	Very good condition
<i>Nim</i>	Wall painting	Classical?	Traces, not currently visible
Roerslev	Vault painting	16-wall classical	Recently uncovered, splendid
Skive	Wall painting	16-wall classical	Recently restored, but obscured
<i>Skørring</i>	High on wall	16-wall classical	Traces of 2nd example
<i>Tåning</i>	Wall painting	16-wall classical	Not currently visible
<i>Vissenbjerg</i>	Wall painting	8-wall classical	Covered for protection
Sweden			
Båstad	Vault painting	Classical	Poorly preserved
Ganthem	Graffiti on pillar	12-wall classical	Large, but difficult to see
Grinstad	Wall painting	Medieval type	Unique design, early 1200's?
Hablingbo	Wall painting	19-wall classical	2nd unfinished graffito opposite
Horred	Inscription	12-wall classical	Inscription on church bell
Levide	Inscription	12-wall classical	Churchyard cross, destroyed
Lye	Graffito on wall	12-wall classical	Alongside Runic inscription
Östra Karup	Wall painting	Classical?	Only partially preserved
Sorunda	Vault sculpture	12-wall classical	Sculpted shield in vault
Norway			
Seljord	Wall painting	12-wall + spiral	Unusual design
Vestre Slidre	Wall painting	12-wall classical	Well preserved
Finland			
Korpo	Wall paintings	8-wall classical	2nd partial example
Maaria, Turku	Vault paintings	6/12-wall classic	Four labyrinths, splendid
Pernå	Wall painting	12-wall classical	Faded but preserved
Sibbo	Wall painting	12-wall classical	Central figure of woman

Catalogue of Nordic Church Labyrinths

Denmark

Bryrup Church, Jylland

Uncovered during restoration work in 1989, this labyrinth, dated to ca. 1500 and around 55 cm. in diameter, was still faintly visible. Although parts of the design were badly damaged, it was clearly of the triple angle classical type, but apparently contained several drawing errors and was fairly crudely executed. It is no longer visible.

Literature:

Danmarks Kirker, Aarhus Amt, Bd.8, p.3916. Seward & Thordrup, 1993, p.57. Thordrup, 2002, p.87. Seward, 2003, p.108-111.

Photo: National Museum, København



Gevninge Church, Sjælland

Two labyrinths painted on the triumphal wall, now situated above the line of later vaulting and partly obscured by the vault. Neither is visible from inside the church and can only be viewed by climbing over the top of the vaulting from a small hatch in the wall of the church tower. Both are of double angle, or classical, type with 12 walls, and approximately 50 cm in diameter. They were both originally painted in two colours; red, which is still visible, and possibly blue, which has almost totally faded with time. One has the centre and two outer circuits painted in red; the other has alternate walls painted in different colours. The vault is from the 15th century, implying that the labyrinths must predate it and were probably painted sometime in the late 14th century.

Literature:

Danmarks Kirker, lidgivet af Natioalmuseet: Københavns Amt, Bd.11. Copenhagen, 1946, p.873-880. Thordrup, 1976, p.23-36. Seward & Thordrup, 1991, p.39. Kern, 2000, p.279. Thordrup, 2002, p.114-115. Seward, 2003, p.108-111.



All photos: Jeff Seward unless stated otherwise

Gylling Church, Jylland

Parts of a labyrinth design were recorded in this church during restoration work in 1907, situated to the left of the window on the north wall, although no trace of this is now visible. Nearby was a depiction of Saint Christopher, as at Skive. The frescos were dated to the late 1300s or early 1400s.

Literature:

Danmarks Kirker, Aarhus Amt, Bd.16, p.2819-20. Seward & Thordrup, 1993, p.57. Thordrup, 2002, p.87. Seward, 2003, p.108-111.

Hesslager Church, Fyn

Only around 40 cm. in diameter, this labyrinth painted in dark red pigment high on the vault of the nave is of double angle classical type with 12 walls. The labyrinth is quite unusual: the dots at the corners of the central 'seed pattern' are enclosed within small circles and the outer circuit of the labyrinth is decorated with 11 leaf-like appendages. Immediately to the left of the labyrinth are some confusing figures that should probably interpreted as a date (commonly quoted as 1487) and to the lower right of the labyrinth the word "Maria." While the date alongside the labyrinth is uncertain, a late 15th century origin would seem quite plausible. Adjacent to the labyrinth are several geometric figures and a scene depicting a dog, or fox, and a bird (a Crane?) apparently drinking from a jug.

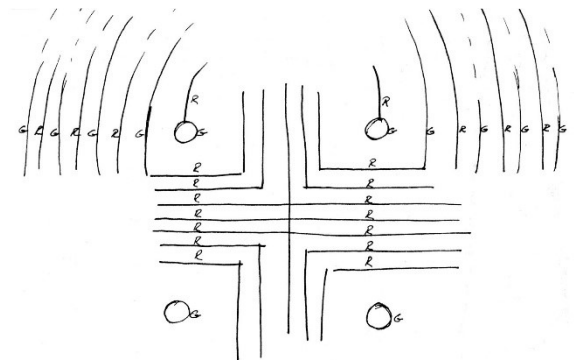


Literature:

Danske Kalkmalerier: Sengotik 1475-1500, Bd.5. Copenhagen, 1991, p.78-79. Thordrup, 1976, p.23-36. Seward & Thordrup, 1991, p.38-47. Kern, 2000, p.280. Thordrup, 2002, p.105-106. Seward, 2003, p.108-111.

Nim Church, Jylland

During restoration work in 1990 traces of a large labyrinth were uncovered painted on the north wall of the church. Although only part of the labyrinth had survived, it is probable that it would originally have been around 1.75 metres in diameter and was of the double angle classical type, but with a curious error in the drawing technique, that would have given it 14 walls, instead of 12. As at Hesslager and Roerslev, the dots normally found in the corners of the 'seed pattern' were drawn as small circles. The remains of the fresco was subsequently covered and is not currently visible.



Literature:

Danske Kalkmalerier: Sengotik 1475-1500, Bd.5, 1991, p.32. Seward & Thordrup, 1991, p.40. Thordrup, 2002, p.93. Seward, 2003, p.108-111.

Roerslev Church, Fyn

Discovered during restoration work in 1995, this well-preserved 16-wall triple angle classical labyrinth is situated on the vaulting above the choir arch. 125 x 110 cm in diameter, it is one of the largest known and similar to the examples at Nim and Hesselager, also has circles at the corners of the 'seed pattern.' Probably painted sometime in the 15th century, the labyrinth is rendered in red and blue pigment, with the central 'seed' and the first nine walls out from the centre in red, and the remaining seven outer walls in blue. Whether this had significance to the unknown artist, or maybe they ran out of red paint half way through completing the design, it does demonstrate clearly the freehand process used to construct this complex design.



Literature:

Kern, 2000, p.280. Thordrup, 2002, p.107-108. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.

Skive Old Church, Jylland

A large labyrinth, ca. 125 cm. in diameter, of triple angle classical type with 16 walls, is painted in red on the west wall of the church, partly obscured behind the church organ. The church (and presumably the labyrinth) dates to the 1520s and the wall frescos were restored in 1991-92. The labyrinth adjoins a depiction of St. Christopher, patron saint of travellers, who holds a large fish in his hand. Scandinavian folklore mentions the walking of labyrinths to ensure good conditions and catches before setting out to sea; perhaps this painting shows a link between the protector of travellers in Christian iconography with the traditional practices of fishing communities in medieval Denmark.

Literature:

Danske Kalkmalerier: Sengotik 1475-1500, Bd.5, p.135. Thordrup, 1976, p.23-36. Saward & Thordrup, 1991, p.40. Kern, 2000, p.280. Thordrup, 2002, p.96. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.



Skørring Church, Jylland

During restoration of the church in 1962, two labyrinths, both ca. 90 cm. in diameter and painted in red, were uncovered. The better preserved of the two was of the typical triple angle classical type with 16 walls and carefully drawn. The other example was only partly visible. Both were dated to c.1500 CE, but neither are currently visible.

Photo: National Museum, København



Literature:

Danmarks Kirker, Aarhus Amt, Bd.16, p.1931.

Saward & Thordrup, 1993, p.57. Thordrup, 2002, p.97. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.

Tåning Church, Jylland

A triple angle classical labyrinth with 16 walls, dated to ca. 1500 CE, was discovered painted on the vault of the church and subsequently covered with limewash for protection in 1957. A man with a yoke or paddle over his shoulder carrying a bucket, and an animal, probably a dog or a fox, tied to a tree trunk, accompanied the labyrinth. The connection between the various design elements is unclear, but may possibly illustrate a popular folktale of the time.

Photo: National Museum, København



Literature:

Danmarks Kirker, Aarhus Amt, Bd.48, p.4602-03. Thordrup, 1976, p.23. Saward & Thordrup, 1991, p.41. Kern, 2000, p.280. Thordrup, 2002, p.99. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.

Vissenbjerg Church, Fyn

Uncovered during 1976 on the north wall of the nave, this 8-walled single angle classical labyrinth was painted in red pigment, 80 x 75 cm. in diameter. Dated to 1480-90, the labyrinth was subsequently covered for protection.

Photo: National Museum, København



Literature:

Danske Kalkmalerier: Sengotik 1475-1500, Bd.5, p.82-83. Saward & Thordrup, 1993, p.57. Thordrup, 2002, p.109. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.

Sweden

Båstad Church, Skåne

A poorly preserved labyrinth painting was discovered during restoration in 1936, and is still visible above one of the vault arches. The remains consist of eleven or twelve concentric arched lines, which most probably formed a labyrinth of classical double angle type. The church was built sometime during the period 1470-1520.

Photo: National Museum, København

Literature:

A Catalogue of Wall-Paintings in the Churches of Medieval Denmark 1100-1600: Scania, Halland, Blekinge, Bd.II, p.76-80. Copenhagen, 1976. Kern, 2000, p.280. Thordrup, 2002, p.43. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.



Gantheim Church, Gotland

In 1979, Anna Nilsén, an iconographer searching for mediaeval wall paintings, discovered the faint traces of a labyrinth graffito lightly incised on the northern side of the western vault. Although difficult to see, the graffito is still preserved. Of double angle-type, with 12 walls, the labyrinth is nearly 1 metre in diameter. The church is from the 13th century, but dating the labyrinth is difficult, it could have been scratched on the wall at any time, although a late medieval date is highly likely.

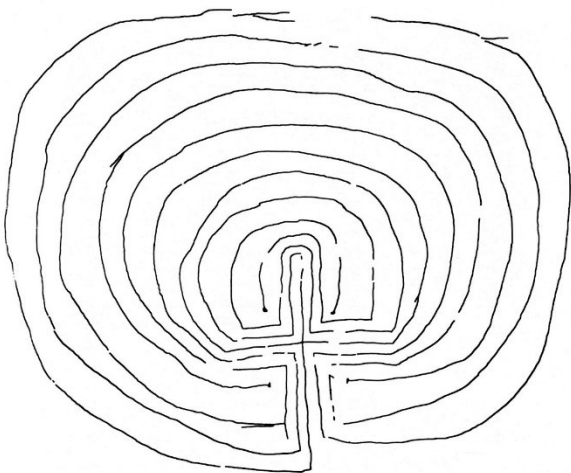
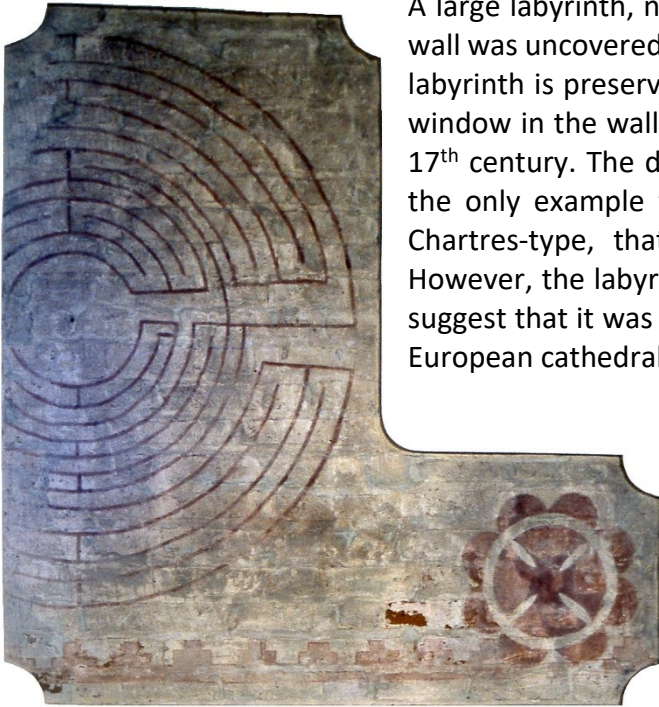


Diagram: John Kraft – Photo: Jeff Saward

Literature:

Kraft, 1983, p.76. Thordrup, 2002, p.44. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.

Grinstad Church, Dalsland



A large labyrinth, nearly 1 metre in diameter, painted on the north wall was uncovered during restoration work in 1913. Only half of the labyrinth is preserved, the rest was destroyed by the insertion of a window in the wall, probably when the church was enlarged in the 17th century. The design of the labyrinth fresco is exceptional; it is the only example from the Nordic countries of the medieval, or Chartres-type, that dominates elsewhere in mediaeval Europe. However, the labyrinth has a number of design errors, which might suggest that it was copied from a poor sketch of an example from a European cathedral, or from an old manuscript.

As the church was originally built during the 13th century, it is possible that the labyrinth fresco is also from this period, the time when labyrinths were being constructed in the cathedrals of central Europe. Although no dating evidence for the fresco is available, it would seem to be painted on the original wall surface and is now deeply recessed below the current level of plaster.

Literature:

Sveriges kyrkor: Dalsland, Bd.1, häfte 1, p.33, 40. Stockholm 1931. Jeperson, Barbro. *Grinstad Kyrka*. (Church guide book), n.d. Kern, 2000, p.283. Thordrup, 2002, p.43. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.

Hablingbo Church, Gotland

A large labyrinth, 1.56 metres in diameter, is painted on the western wall of the dark ground floor of the church tower. The design is of the classical or angle-type, but most unusual, with 19 walls and the final path terminating to the upper left of the normal centre. The labyrinth is now rather faded and difficult to discern. A stick-figure, overpainted in red on the right-hand side, has been variously interpreted as a man with a sword or a dancer on the paths, but may simply be an estate sigil of a type commonly seen on tombstones in Gotland. The tower dates to the 14th century, and presumably the labyrinth is of a similar age or a little later?



In the same dark tower on the southern wall is another partial labyrinth, a graffito that has not been completed - only the 'seed pattern' and the first three loops at the top of the design have been drawn. Had it been completed, it would have resulted in a regular labyrinth with 12 walls. Maybe the artist was disturbed before the graffito was completed. This example demonstrates clearly how the labyrinth was drawn from a central cross, angles and dots. The walls of the tower room are covered in similar scratched graffiti; to the left of the labyrinth 'seed' are several ships of 15th/16th century style.

Hablingbo Literature:

Kraft, 1983, p.74-75. Kern, 2000, p.281. Thordrup, 2002, p.44-45. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.

Horred Church, Västergötland

On one of the bells in the tower of Horred Church there is an engraved labyrinth, 23 cm in diameter, of classical double angle type with 12 walls. Above the entrance to the labyrinth is a small cross and on the same bell the text "Help Maria." This example of the labyrinth on a church bell is quite unique, and while the age of the bell is unknown, it is considered to date to the late Middle Ages.



Diagram & photo: John Kraft

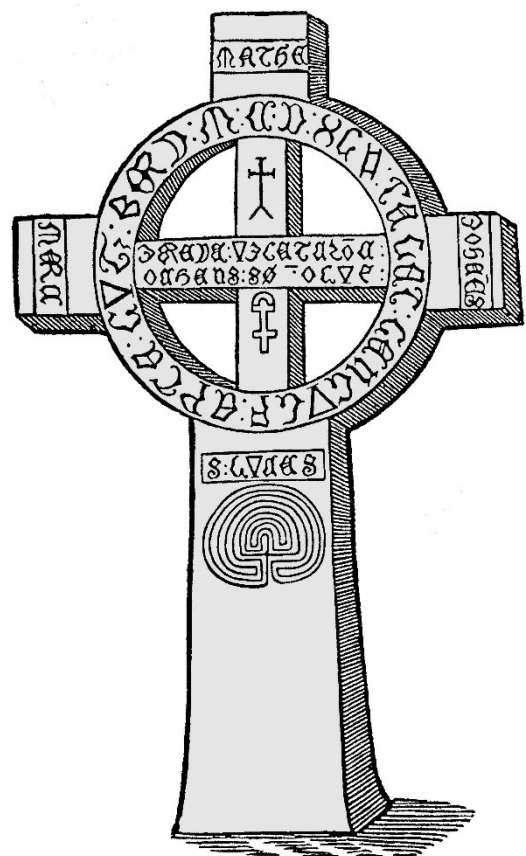


Literature:

Åmark, Mats. *Sveriges medelfida kyrkklockor*, p.213-14 & p1.59. Stockholm, 1960. Thordrup, 2002, p.43. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.

The Julskov Cross, Levide, Gotland

Later moved to the Julskov estate in Kullerup parish, Fyn, Denmark, but now destroyed, this stone cross was decorated with a labyrinth of classical double angle type. Ole Worm, a pioneer expert on runic inscriptions, published a drawing of the cross in 1643 (reproduced opposite), based on an original drawing made by Jon Skonviq in 1627. From these it is possible to conclude that the designer forgot to add the four dots, a mistake that reduced the number of walls to 10 and made it impossible to reach the centre of the labyrinth from the entrance. Erik Moltke has interpreted the text on the cross as "(the year) after the birth of God 1442 Gengulf at Levede and his son Oluf had this cross made". On the arms of the cross are the names of Mark, Matthew, John and Luke, The cross was obviously made in 1442, probably at Levide on Gotland, and was probably moved to Julskov by Emmike Kass, who was governor of Gotland 1576-84 and married the heiress of Julskov in 1580. Late in the 18th century the cross was broken up and used as building material for a dam and a stone bridge. The pieces have never been recovered.



Literature:

Moltke, Erik. *Julskovkorset*. Fra Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark, p.153-57. Copenhagen, 1950. Worm, Ole. *Danicorum Monumentorum libri sex: e spissis antiquitatum tenebris et in Danica ac Norvegia extantibus ruderibus eruti*, p.243. Copenhagen, 1643. Kraft, 1983, p.77. Kern, 2000, p.278. Thordrup, 2002, p.106-107. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.

Lye Church, Gotland

A well-preserved labyrinth graffito, 24 cm in diameter, of double angle-type with 12 walls, is to be found on the south wall of the ground floor of the church tower. This tower is especially rich in graffiti and immediately above the labyrinth is a short text in runic letters - "I am a poor, sinful man" - a sentence from the Lutheran confession, introduced to the Swedish liturgy c. 1540 by Olaus Petri. Among the graffiti on the opposite wall of the tower room are some ships, which seem to be of types dating to the latter part of the 15th century. The tower room itself is from the 13th century, but it is difficult to know when the labyrinth was scratched.



Literature:

Jansson, Sven B.F. & Elias Wessén. "Gotlands Runinskrifter" in *Sveriges Runinskrifter*, p.173-83, Stockholm 1962. *Sveriges Kyrkor: Gotland*, vol.5, p.54-56. Uppsala, 1972. Kraft, 1983, p.74-75. Thordrup, 2002, p.44. Seward, 2003, p.108-111.

Östra Karup Church, Halland

Discovered in 1963, and situated only 7 km from Båstad, the partially preserved remains of five arched lines painted on the wall of this church were probably once part of a labyrinth design, to the right of a ship of a type known as a Kogg. The church was built during the early 12th century, but the frescos are presumably later (13th - 15th century?), to judge from the form of the ship.

Photo: National Museum, København



Literature:

A Catalogue of Wall-Paintings in the Churches of Medieval Denmark 1100-1600: Scania, Halland, Blekinge, Bd.III, p.278, Copenhagen, 1976. Kern, 2000, p.280. Thordrup, 2002, p.43-44. Seward, 2003, p.108-111. Swärd, 2012, p.16.

Sorunda Church, Södermanland

A small labyrinth, 26 cm wide, inscribed on a shield sculpted in the vaulting of the Fleming burial chapel. The design, although of classical double angle type, has only 11 walls and contains several errors, leaving unfinished connections around the entrance of the labyrinth. Maybe the designer had forgotten the art of drawing a perfect labyrinth? The design of the shield seems to be from around 1500, the probable time when the vault was built.



Literature:

Sveriges kyrkor: Södermanland, Bd.III, häfte 1, p.27, Uppsala 1972. Kern, 2000, p.278. Thordrup, 2002, p.43. Seward, 2003, p.108-111.

Norway

Seljord Church, Telemark

A labyrinth, ca. 80 cm in diameter, is painted in red pigment on the west façade, next to the doorway of this fine church, built in the late 12th century. Uncovered during restoration in 1926, the labyrinth is of 12-wall double angle classical type with the entrance to the top left, but with an unusual spiral centre and a 'floating' outer wall, that causes the first three circuits to spiral inwards in a simple fashion with no 'switch-backs' or turns in direction. The curious look of this labyrinth can be explained by the way the designer has started to connect the cross, angles and dots. The conventional way of drawing is to begin with a connecting arc between one of the arms of the central cross and the closest angle, but in this case the drawing has begun with a connecting arc between a dot and its adjacent angle, resulting in the spiral at the centre. To the right of the labyrinth is a depiction of a small ship.



Literature:

Marstrander, Sverre. 1937. Mindre meddelelser. Universitetets Oldsaksamlings Årbok 1935-36, p. 147. Aschehougs konversasjons Leksikon, bd.12, p.8-10. Kern, 2000, p.281. Thordrup, 2002, p.42-43. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.

Vestre Slidre Church, Valdres

A perfectly drawn, 12-wall double angle classical type labyrinth, ca. 40 cm in diameter and drawn in black pigment, is preserved on the wall of the southern doorway, on the exterior side, to the east of the door. As with the example at Seljord, the entrance of the labyrinth is to the top.

Literature:

Kern, 2000, p.282.
Thordrup, 2002, p.42.
Saward, 2003, p.108-111.



Finland

Korpo Church, (Korppoo), Turku Achipelago

Two labyrinths are to be found in the church on the island of Korpo. The larger example is well preserved alongside a high window and is of the classical single angle type, with 8 walls. The smaller example is on a pillar in the western part of the church and only partly preserved. Other frescos within this church include a man with a staff and a ship, a mermaid, a man blowing a trumpet, hunters with dogs and shooting bow and arrows, several ships, mounted soldiers in tourney and St. George and the dragon.

Literature:

Nikala, Sigrid. *Finlands kyrkor*, Borgå stift, pt1, Åbolands prosteri I, p.33. Helsinki, 1973. Thordrup, 2002, p.45. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.



Maaria Church, Turku (Åbo)

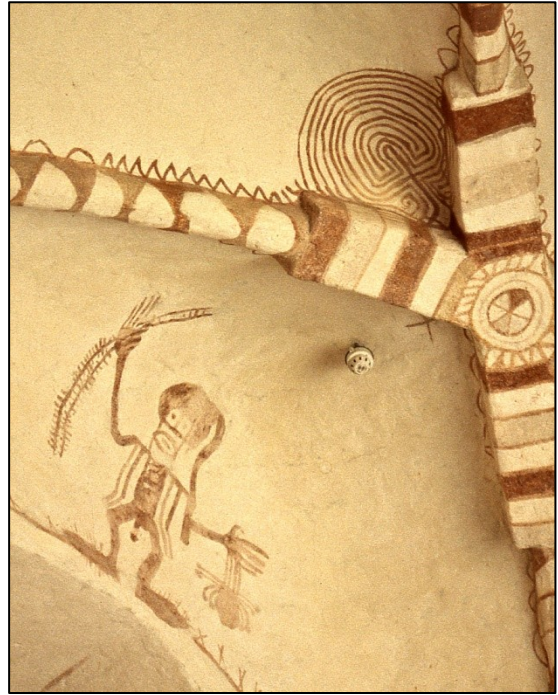
This is without doubt the most interesting of all the Nordic churches with labyrinths. Formally situated in the village of Rântämäki, and now within the boundaries of the city of Turku, the church was built during late 14th century and further extended during the 15th century, so presumably the frescos also date from this latter period. It has a large number of wall and ceiling frescos with motifs that seem to have been inspired from folk art rather than by the common art of mediaeval churches.

In total there are four labyrinth paintings, three of classical double angle type with 12 walls, including one that preserves a curious construction error that results in a labyrinth with no entrance path! The fourth example is very small and of a simple design that while possibly intended to represent a labyrinth, is in fact little more than a spiral. As well as the labyrinths, there is also a King, Christ's face, a man blowing a trumpet and mounted soldiers in tourney, several ships, stars and other geometric devices, a 'chessboard' and several curious figures, presumably representing well known characters from local folk-tales.

Literature:

Riska, Tove. *Suomen kirkot, Turun arkkhiippakunta III OSA, Turun tuomiorovastikunta I*, p.71-78. Helsinki, 1964. Stigell, Anna-Lisa. "Kyrkans tecken och årets gang," *Finska fornminnesföreningens tidskrift* 77, Helsinki, 1974. p.82-89. Kern, 2000, p.281. Thordrup, 2002, p.45-46. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.





Frescos in Maaria Church



Pernå Church, (Pernaja), Uusimaa

A small labyrinth, only partly preserved, is to be found high on the south wall. Of classical double angle type with 12 walls, it is rendered in red pigment. Other frescos within this church include a tree, ships, a mermaid, soldiers in tourney, two men with crossbows and blowing trumpets and two creatures resembling human beings, one with big ears.

Literature:

Utterström, Anita. *Pernå Kyrka*. Pernå, 1989.
Thordrup, 2002, p.46-47. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.



Sibbo Old Church, (Sipoo), Uusimaa

The church was probably built at the beginning of the 15th century and was abandoned in 1885, but is now maintained as a historic monument. High on the interior north wall is a labyrinth fresco, 124 cm in diameter and now very faded, with a woman standing at the centre. Of classical double angle type with 12 walls, this has frequently been interpreted as a depiction of the *Jungfrudans* (Virgin dance), traditionally played in labyrinths in Finland until recent times. Other frescos within this church include a horse, a tree, two opposing dogs and a man blowing a trumpet.



Literature:

Rancken, A.W. *Kalkmålningarna i Sibbo gamla kyrka*. Finskt Museum XLII, p.15-32. Helsinki, 1935.
Kern, 2000, p.281. Thordrup, 2002, p.46. Saward, 2003, p.108-111.

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