

# Labyrinth Prayer: Session I

## The History of Labyrinths

Myanmar Institute of Theology  
Yangon, Myanmar 2013



# Simple Gifts

An Appalachian Shaker Song

Joseph Brackett

'Tis the gift to be sim-ple, 'tis the gift to be free. 'Tis the  
gift to come down where we ought to be. And when we find our-selves in the  
place just right, 'Twill be in the val - ley of love and de-light.  
When true sim-pli-ci-ty is gained. To bow and to bend we shan't be a-sham'd. To  
turn, turn will be our de-light, Till by tur-ning, tur-ing we come round right.

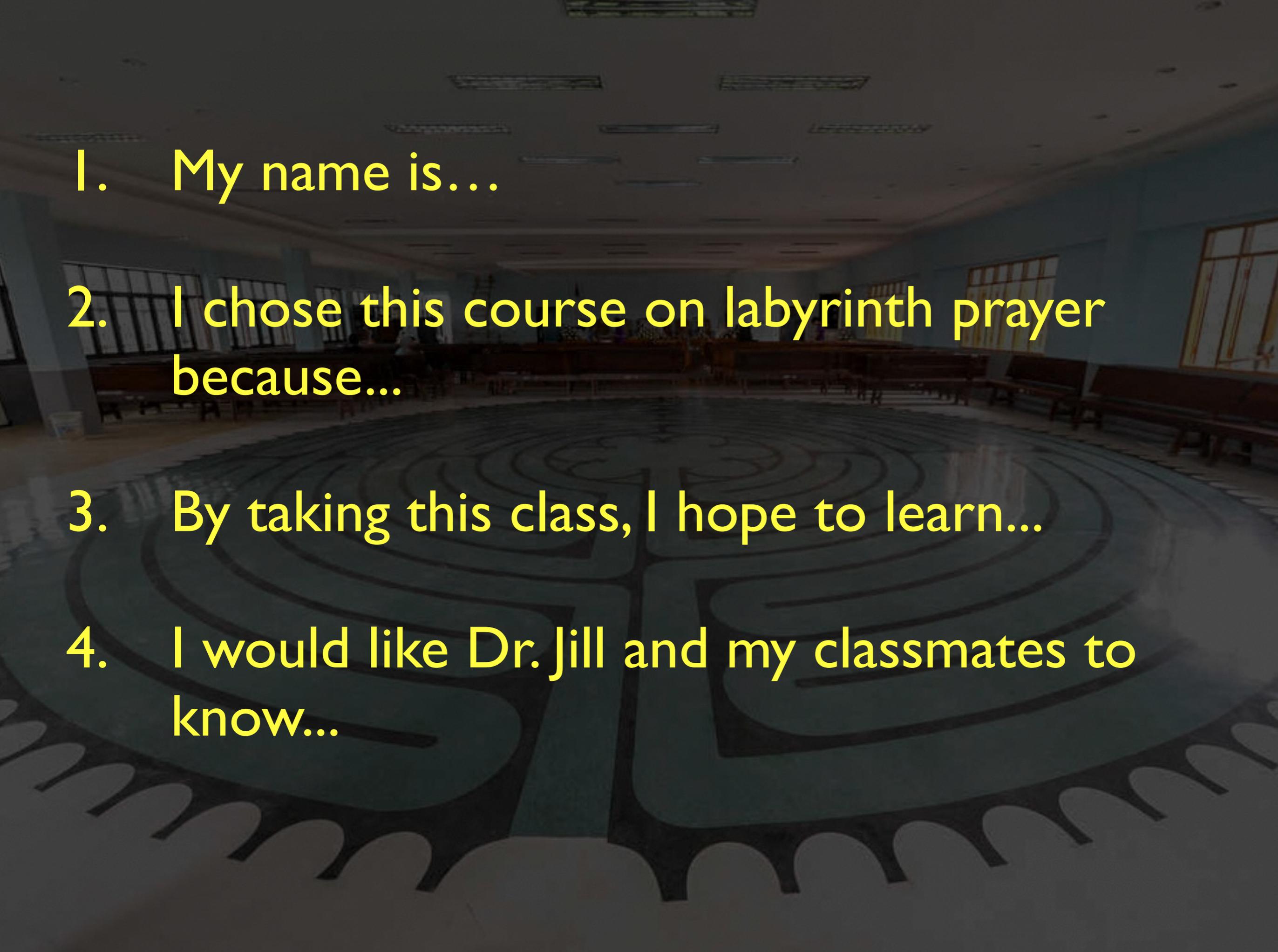
# Prayer as we begin



# Course Description

Labyrinths continue to attract people's interest all over the globe. Labyrinth prayer can be used as communities and individuals seek to deepen and broaden their experience of God. Regular usage of the labyrinth on the floor of the Faith, Hope and Love Chapel, visual presentations, lectures, and group presentations will all be used to explore contemporary possibilities for prayer.

During this course students will learn the history of these ancient pathways, how to introduce the labyrinth to others, construction methods for labyrinths of various sizes and designs, how to design labyrinth events for Christian and ecumenical gatherings, and contextual implications for labyrinths in the Myanmar.

- 
1. My name is...
  2. I chose this course on labyrinth prayer because...
  3. By taking this class, I hope to learn...
  4. I would like Dr. Jill and my classmates to know...

## Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course you will

1. have experienced labyrinth prayer as a discipline for spiritual growth
2. understand the history of labyrinth designs and practice
3. be able to introduce labyrinth prayer to others and facilitate meaningful labyrinth events
4. be familiar with a broad variety of written, artistic, and web resources relating to labyrinth prayer

# CLASS SESSIONS FOR LABYRINTH PRAYER

1. Introduction to Labyrinths: *History, Including Asian History of Labyrinths*
2. Christian Labyrinth Prayer: *Biblical Touchstones, Theological Implications, and Pastoral Implications*
3. Non-ambulatory Labyrinth Prayer Experiences & Symbology of the Labyrinth
4. Labyrinth Construction: *Part 1. Patterns, Materials & Other Considerations*
5. Creating Labyrinth Events for Special Events: *Rituals for Special Events and, Growth The Church Year*
6. Pastoral Care and Counseling Using Labyrinth Prayer, Including Creating Rituals for Healing
7. Personal Growth on the Path. *Pilgrimages, Retreats, Daily Walks on Labyrinths*
8. Community Use of Labyrinths: *Social Justice, Ecumenics, and Inter-religious Labyrinth Usage*
9. Creativity, the Arts, and Labyrinth Exploration: *Music and Labyrinths*
10. Creativity, the Arts, and Labyrinth Exploration: *Dance, Patterned Movements, & Story-telling*
11. Labyrinth Construction Part 2: *Large Scale Labyrinths*
12. Hospitality and the Labyrinth
13. Facilitation of Labyrinth Events: *Considerations of Space, Supplies, etc.*
14. Labyrinths for the Long-Term: *What's Involved in Labyrinth Ministries*
15. Contextualization of Labyrinths in Myanmar: *Part 1*
16. Contextualization of Labyrinths in Myanmar: *Part 2 Next Steps*

# Expectations for class members

## Assignments

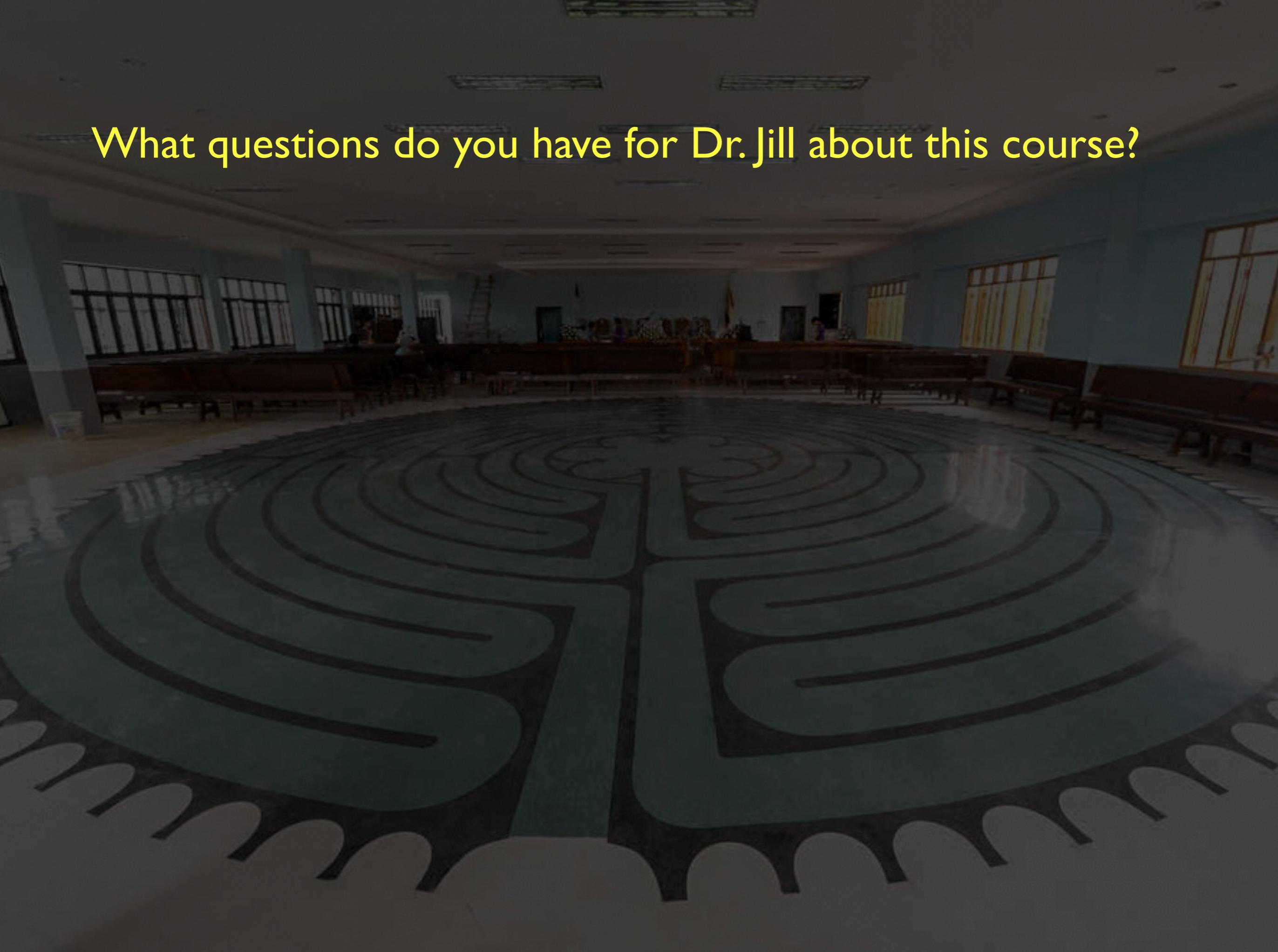
- ★ Weekly reading assignments as announced
- ★ Each student will keep a labyrinth journal that will include written and/or artistic responses to all labyrinth walks made during the semester (minimum of 32 entries). When willing, s/he will also fill out a labyrinth research questionnaire after each walk.
- ★ Brief presentation (five minutes) made to the entire class introducing a labyrinth walk. This can be for a general walk or a specific event that is of interest to the student.
- ★ Final projects will be chosen to demonstrate the student's integration of theory and practice. These may take the form of a research paper (10 pages minimum), creation of a large-scale labyrinth, creation of a significant visual presentation on a labyrinth-related topic, or another significant project proposed by a student and agreed upon with the professor.

## Evaluation:

Class Grades will be based on

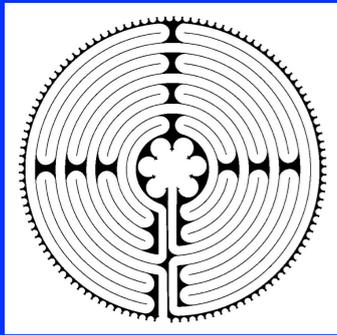
- 20 % Labyrinth Journal (assignments completed; content will not be graded)
- 30% Class attendance and participation
- 10 % Presentation: Introduction of a labyrinth walk to the class
- 40 % Final Project

What questions do you have for Dr. Jill about this course?

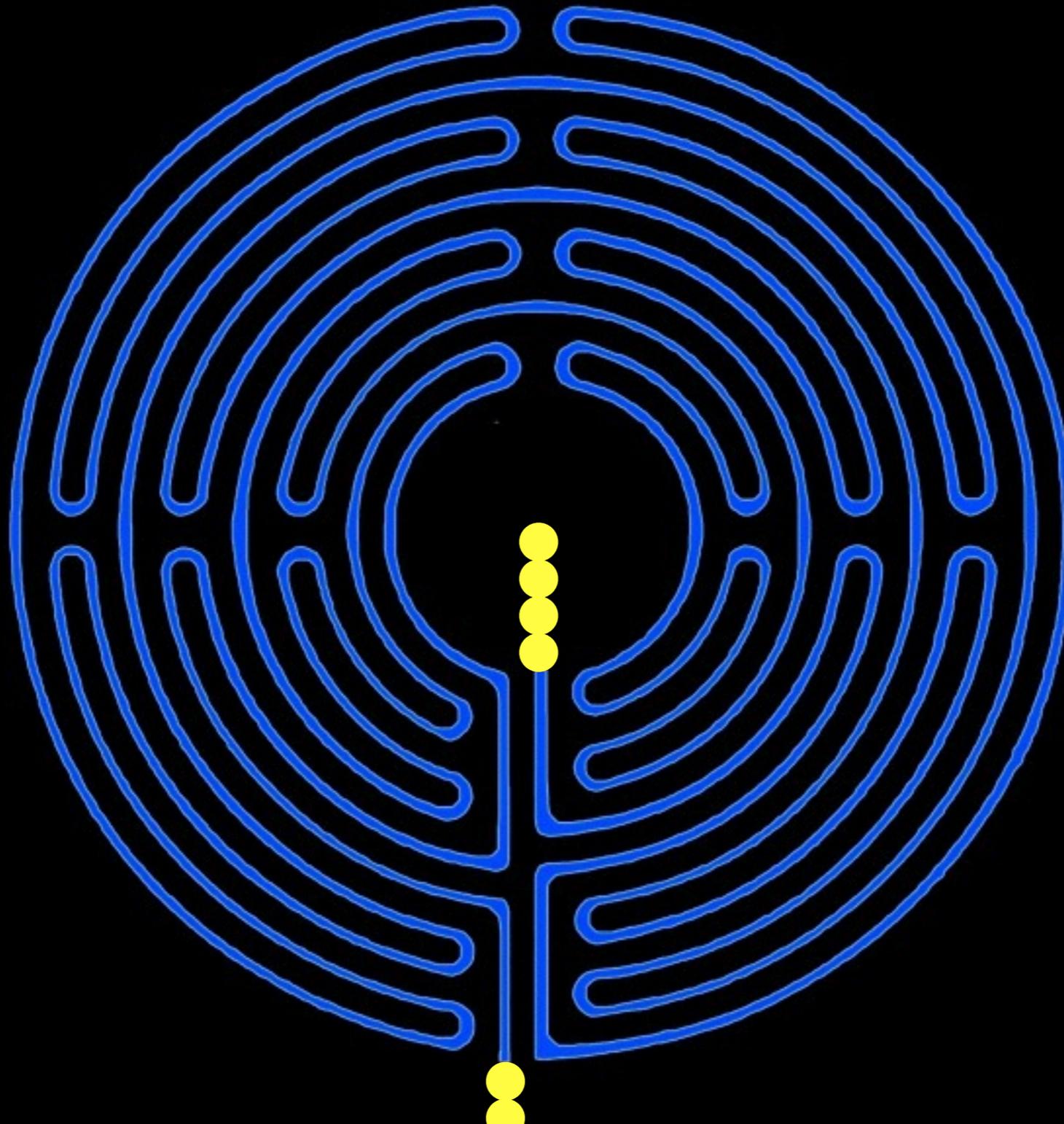
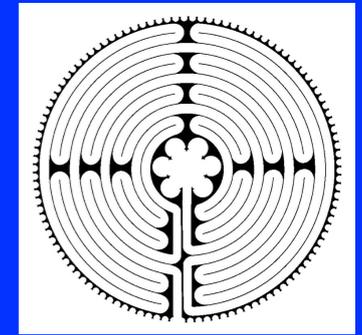


# Introducing Labyrinths



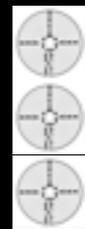


**Labyrinths are designs that consist of a single, winding path that begins at the periphery and leads to a central space. The way out is on the same path, but in the opposite direction.**



# It is important to distinguish between labyrinths and mazes.

Labyrinths have one pathway (unicursal)



leads to a center; no detours for spiritual growth  
safe place with a way out, just follow the path



Mazes have many pathways (multicursal) & dead ends

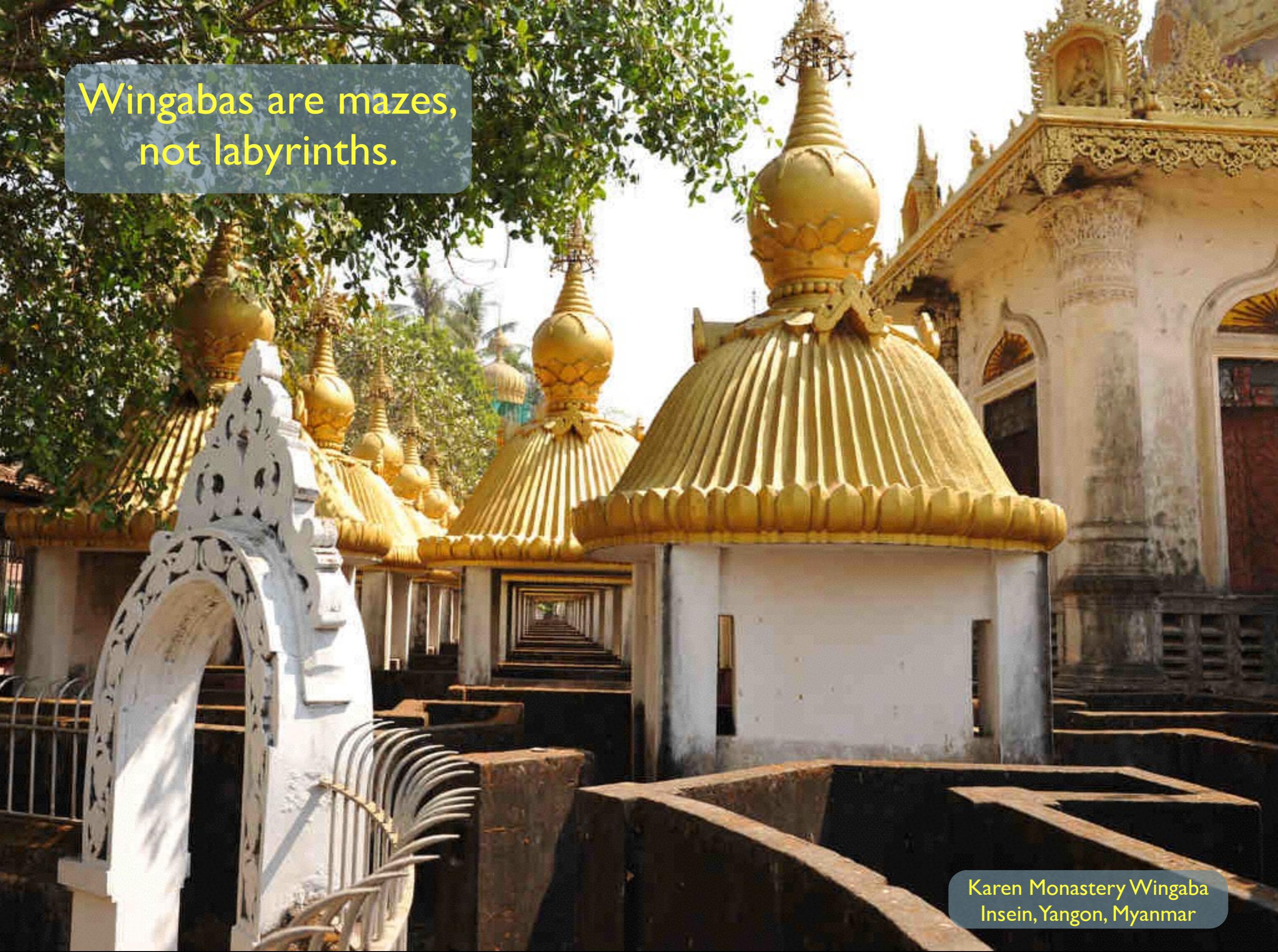
A maze is an intricate network of paths, usually designed as a puzzle. Thus, a maze having branches is said to be multicursal.



designed to confuse for "fun" designer versus walker



Wingabas are mazes,  
not labyrinths.



Karen Monastery Wingaba  
Insein, Yangon, Myanmar

Labyrinths have only one entrance/exit and only one pathway.



Kiev, Ukraine



Labyrinths have a center that can be reached by staying on the path.

Milleneum Park  
Plymouth, Minnesota, USA

Labyrinths incorporate forms found in nature.  
There is a relationship between spirals and labyrinths, but they are different.



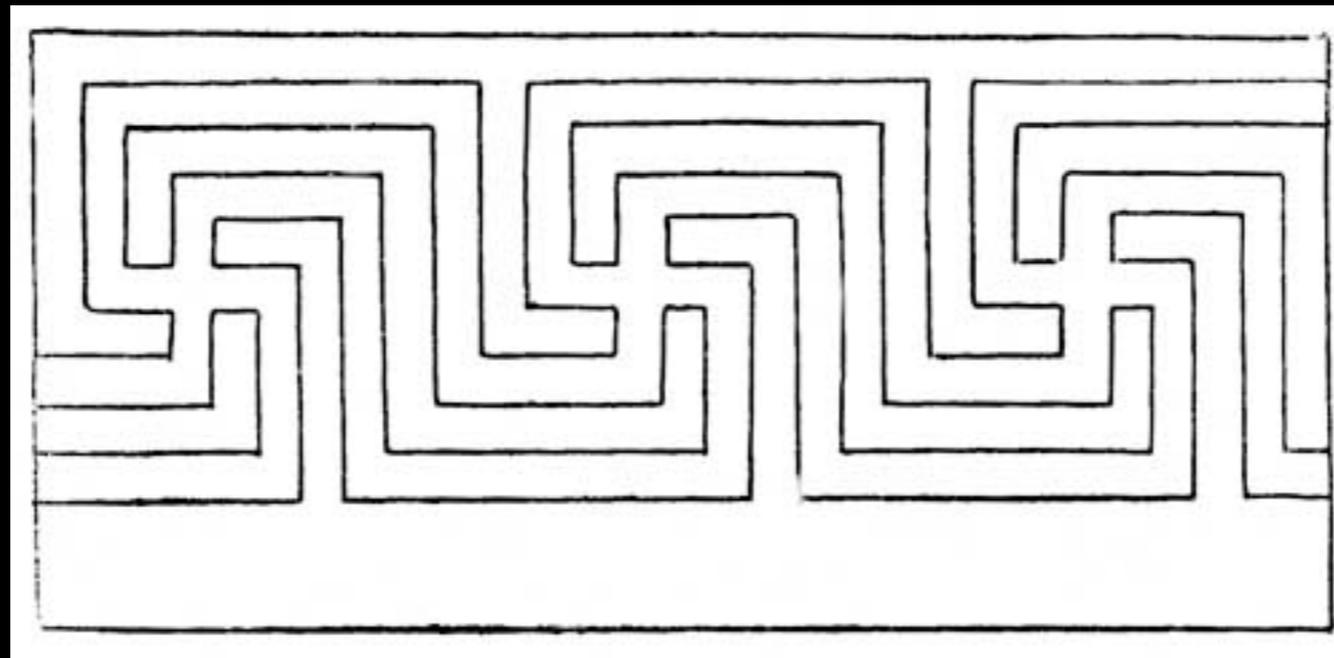
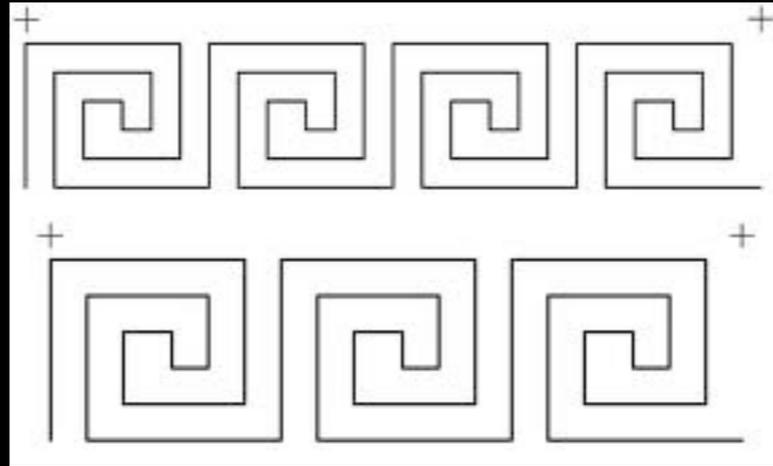
Labyrinths move back and forth  
like the meanders formed by waterways.

This movement  
ensures continual change .





# The Greek Key Pattern: A meander/labyrinth



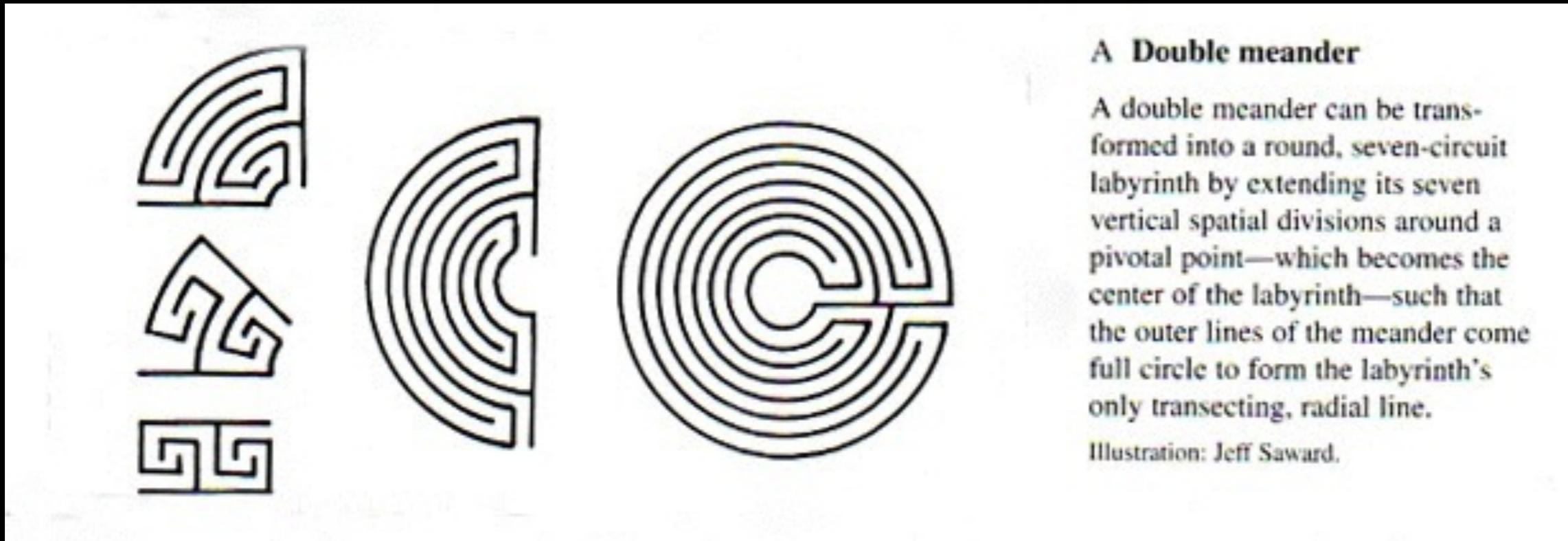
<http://karenswhimsy.com/ancient-greek-architecture.shtm>

From at least the 8th century BCE on, the Greek key meander pattern is said to have symbolized eternity or the eternal flow of things.

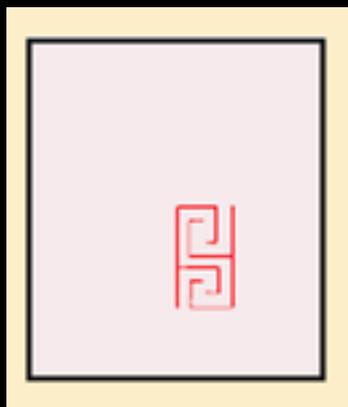
The Greek Key may also symbolize unity, bonds of friendship, love, and devotion.

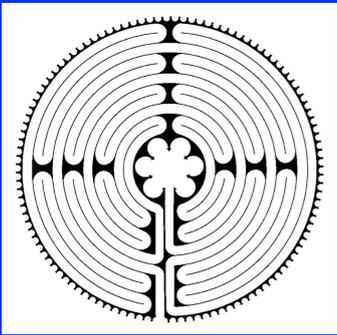


# The Greek Key Pattern: A meander becomes a labyrinth



From Hermann Kern, *Through the Labyrinth*, p. 38





A labyrinth is a single, winding path that turns back on itself before leading to a center.

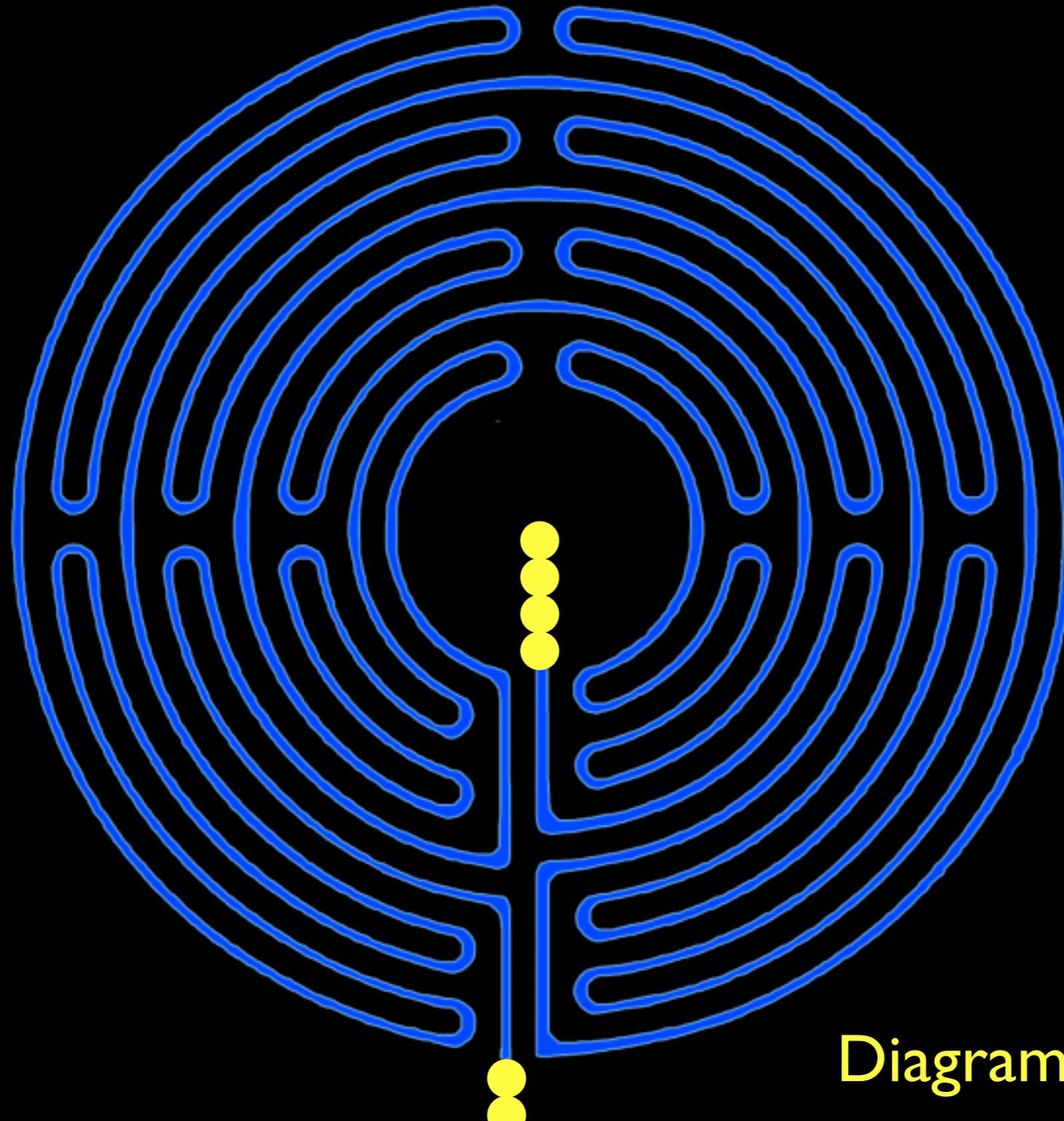
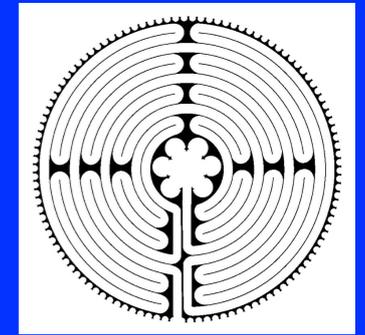


Diagram of the Pathway

# History of Labyrinths



We are still seeking the exact origins of labyrinths.

# Labyrinth: History of the word

Note: The first mention of the term labyrinthos appears in Herodotus' History in the 5th century BC. The historian uses the word to define a monumental building that he visited in Egypt." Giulia Sarullo, The Cretan Labyrinth: Palace or Cave? Caerdroia 37: 2008) 32.

Theory 1: Laura meaning passage or mine (Latin) Also translated: Coil-of-rope walk.

Theory 2: Labyris from Egyptian labyrinth connection at Hawara Labyris was another name for Senusret III (an Egyptian pharaoh).

Theory 3: labyrs in Asian Minor languages denotes an axe and was related to Zeus Labarndeus in Labaranda, Caria.

Theory 3a: The labyrinth in Knossos (Crete) was the house of the double axe (relates to theory #3) since many depictions of double axes were found when the site was excavated in the 20th century.

● Theory 4: We simply do not know the etymology (history) of the word labyrinth.

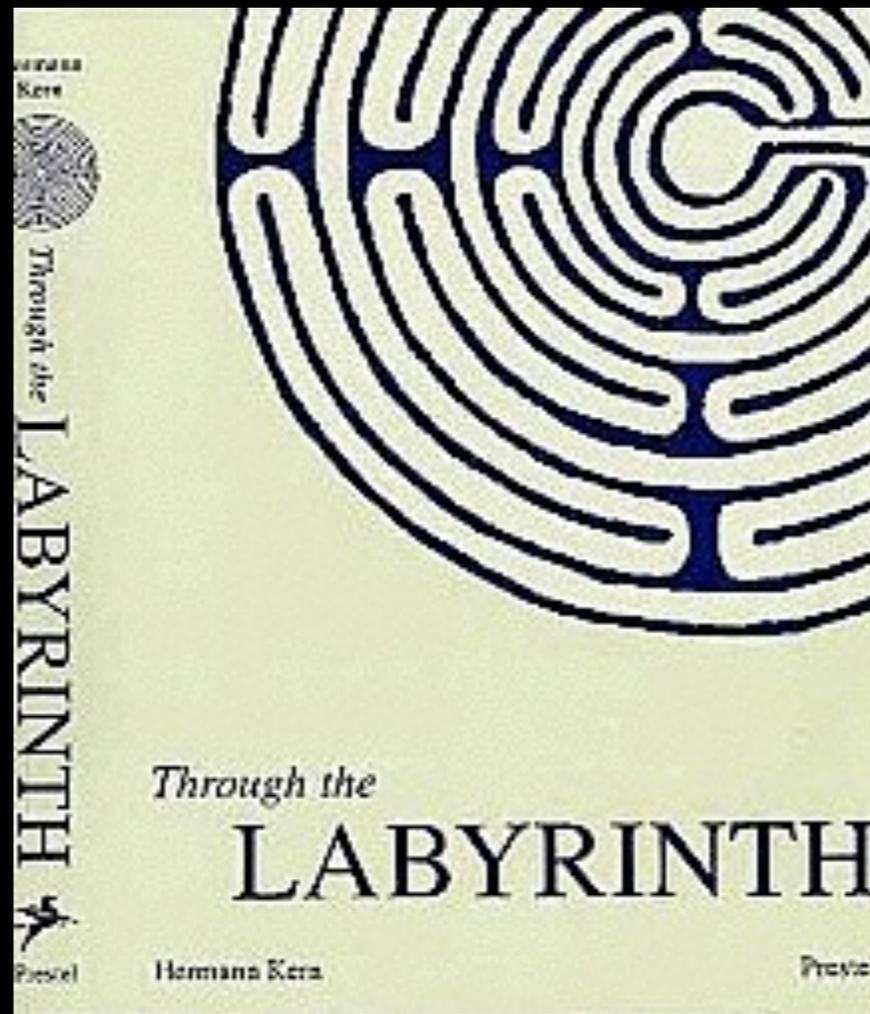
We do not know the exact origins of labyrinths.  
There are many ancient examples.

Where do we find historical references relating to labyrinths?

1. Movements and dances

2. Graphic designs

2. Literary references



The definitive book  
on labyrinths by  
Hermann Kern,  
*Through the Labyrinth*  
(New York, Prestel)

# Oldest known labyrinth in Asia



Goa, India 2,000-2500 BCE  
Pansaimol Labyrinth

©Jeff Saward see [Labyrinths and Mazes](#) & [www.labyrinthos.net](http://www.labyrinthos.net)



# Oldest known labyrinth in Europe: Petroglyph by the sea (At least 2,000 BCE)



Marin, Spain  
approximately 2,500-1,800 B.C.E.

# Early labyrinth in Europe: 7 circuit labyrinth on clay tablet from Pylos, Greece

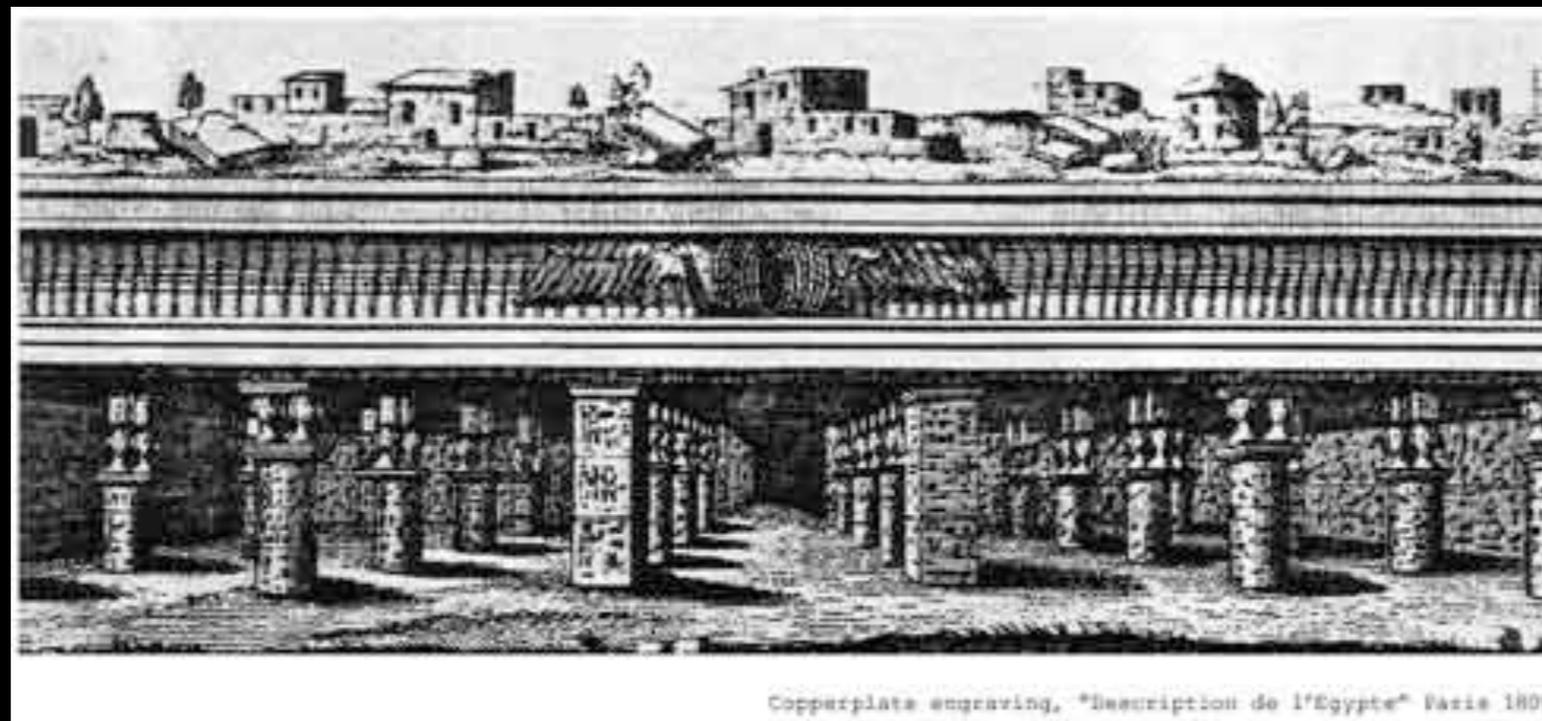
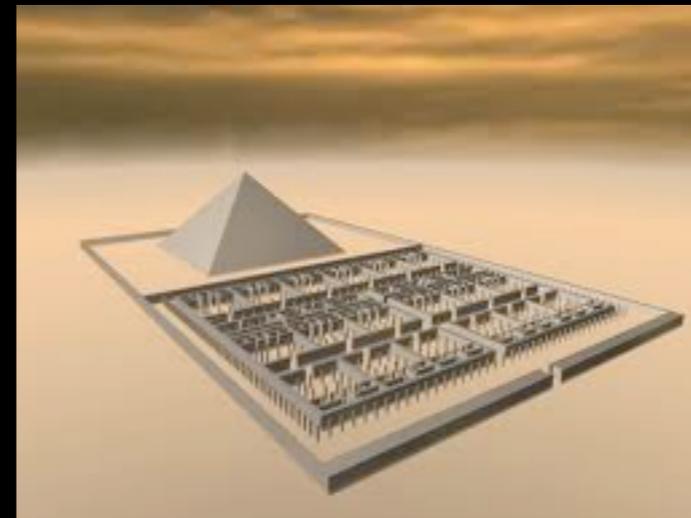


Pylos

approximately 1,600- 1,100 B.C.E.  
During the Mycenaean Period

# Oldest known “labyrinth” in Africa

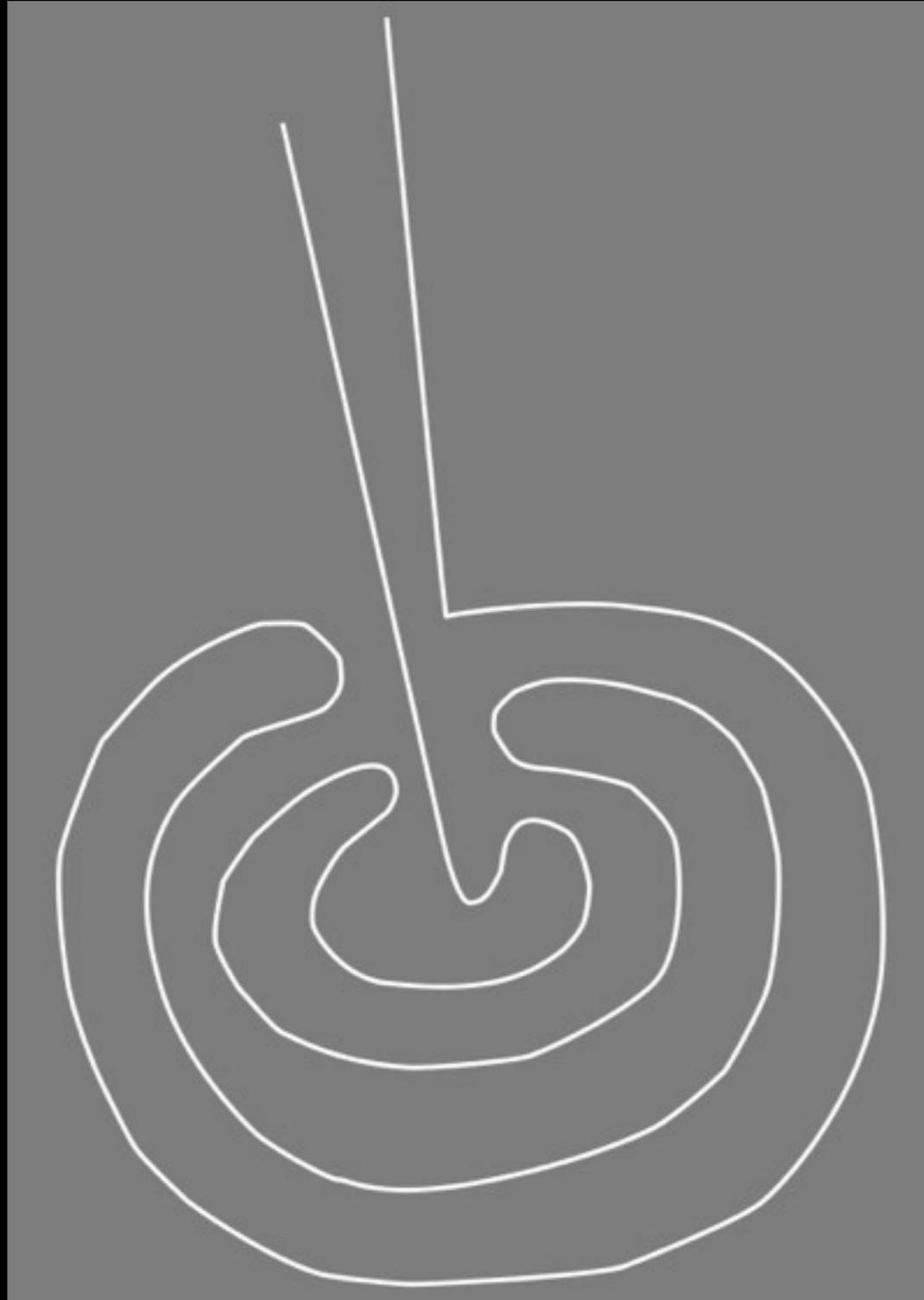
It is a maze...



**Herodotus' Egyptian labyrinth/maze (had 3,000 rooms and the tombs of kings and sacred crocodiles). Fifth cent. B.C.E.**



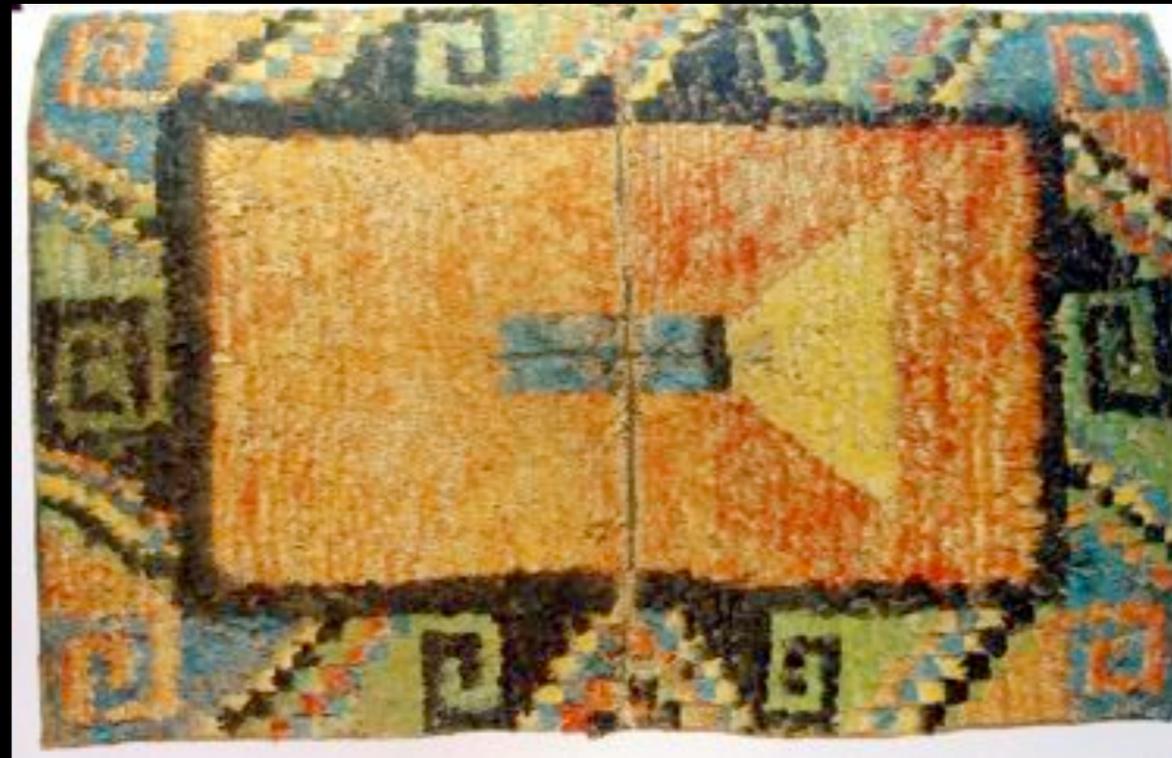
# Oldest known labyrinth in South America 500 CE



Geoglyph-  
drawing on the ground

# Ancient Greek Key in South America

## Peru: 200 BCE-200 CE



From: <http://thedreamstress.com/2010/02/greek-keys-a-little-history/>



# Oldest labyrinths in Africa

Images by permission, [www.labyrinthos.com](http://www.labyrinthos.com)



Graffiti El-Salamuni  
Egypt 4th to 2nd century BCE



Petroglyph  
Toauz, Morocco  
500-200 BCE

# Oldest known labyrinths in North America

Petroglyphs in New Mexico and Arizona 1,600-1,700 CE

Images used by permission, [www.labyrinthos.com](http://www.labyrinthos.com)



Arroyo Hondo, NM



Casa Grande, AZ



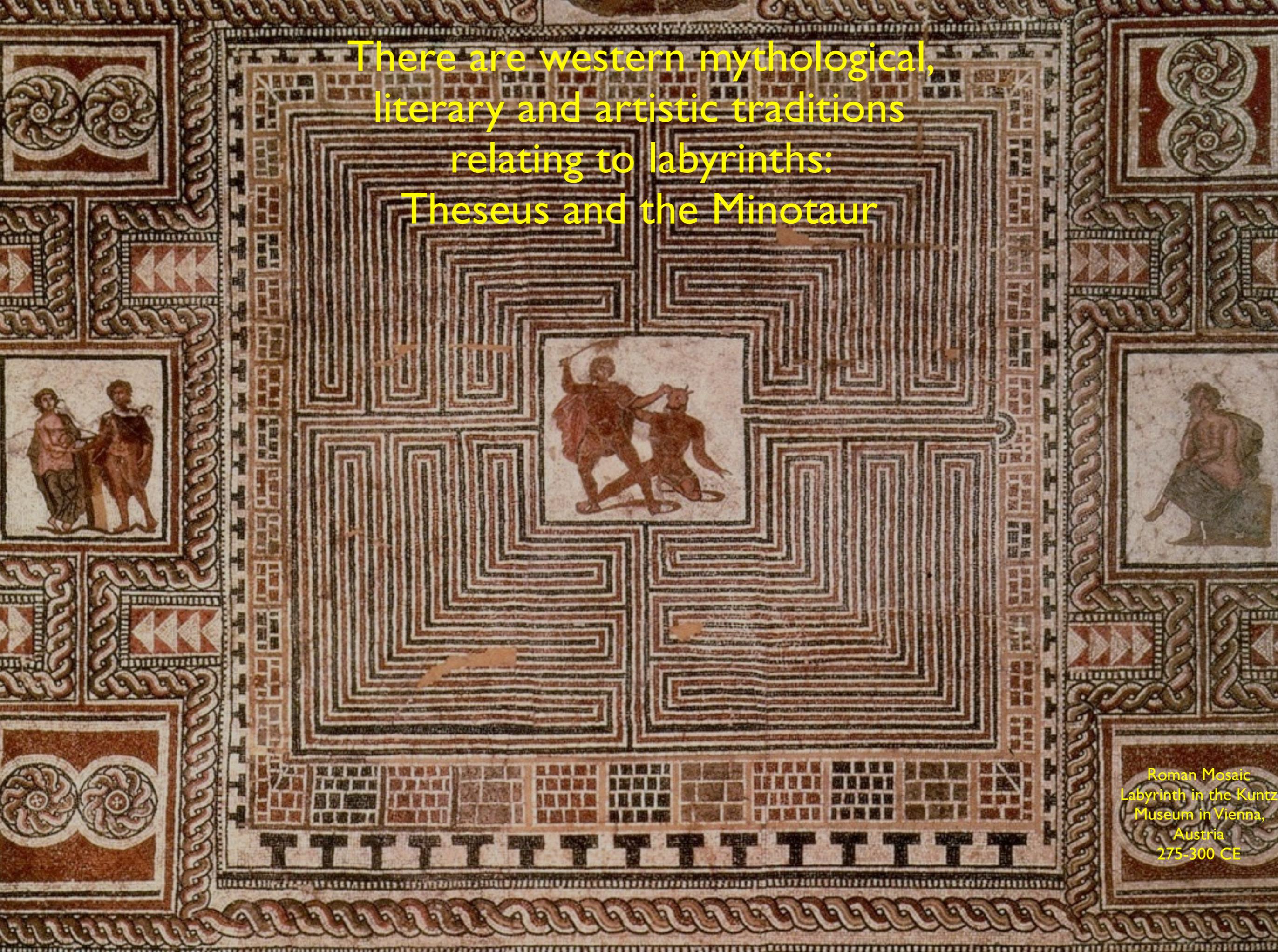
Hopi Creation Myth: The man in the maze

# Oldest known labyrinth in Oceania



Modern Labyrinth Revival: 20th Century

There are western mythological,  
literary and artistic traditions  
relating to labyrinths:  
Theseus and the Minotaur



Roman Mosaic  
Labyrinth in the Kuntz  
Museum in Vienna,  
Austria  
275-300 CE

# Labyrinths in western literature: selected references

Date	Author	Work
	Unknown	Greek Myth of Theseus, minotaur and labyrinth
7th-8th cent. B.C.E.	Homer	Homer, describing the shield of Achilles, remarked that the labyrinth was Ariadne's ceremonial dancing ground. <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minotaur">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minotaur</a>
450-420 B.C.E	Herodotus	Book II of his <i>Histories</i> . He describes a 3,000 room multi-level building with rooms that house dead kings and deceased sacred crocodiles. Located in Faioum Province in Egypt in the 19th century.
384 B.C.E	Plato	<i>Euthydemus</i> , "Then it seemed like falling into a labyrinth: we thought we were at the finish, but our way bent round and we found ourselves as it were back at the beginning, and just as far from that which we were seeking at first." Socrates
43 BCE-17 CE	Ovid	<i>Metamorphoses</i> . VIII, p. 39.
23-79 CE	Pliny	Pliny's Natural History, xxxvi 19,4 Four ancient labyrinths: the Cretan labyrinth, an Egyptian labyrinth, a Lemnian labyrinth, and an Italian labyrinth. [Note Pliny is describing four mazes, not labyrinths as we use the term today.]
340-397 CE	Ambrose	Original sin and deceptive labyrinth of life's journey (metaphor of the maze)
348-405 CE	Prudentius	Unicursal labyrinth as a model for Christian orthodoxy. See Wright, p. 74.
345-420 CE	Jerome	Christ guides the faithful safely along the labyrinthian path of life.
311-396 CE	Gregory	Christ enters from outside, achieved victory, escaped from the prison of death. Catechetic Oration.
524 CE	Boethius	The Consolation of Philosophy, Book 3, Prose 12, verse 96 Word labyrinth used in a metaphorical maze-like sense: "...weaving a labyrinthian argument..."

# Labyrinth patterns on coins of Knossis: 300-70 BCE



From: <http://www.labyrinthos.net/firstlabs.html> Used by permission

The famous labyrinth-decorated coins from Knossos, Crete, date from the last three centuries BCE. Issued by the Hellenic trading colony founded on the site, their designs surely allude to the legendary Labyrinth at Knossos, in which King Minos imprisoned the ferocious Minotaur, but long since destroyed by the time the coins were issued from around 300-70 BCE.

<http://www.labyrinthos.net/firstlabs.html>



From: Matthews. *Labyrinths and Mazes*, page 45  
Reproductions from the British Museum





# European Manuscripts from the Middle Ages

476-1543 CE



10th Century  
St. Germain des Prés –  
Paris  
Manuscript relates to the  
Easter Cycle

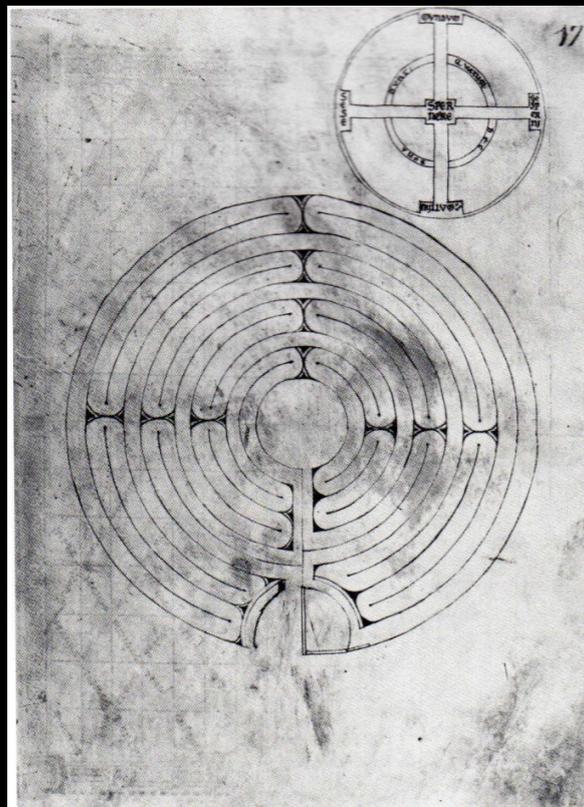
Kern No 181;  
page 112



Lambert  
St. Omer  
Between 1060-1123

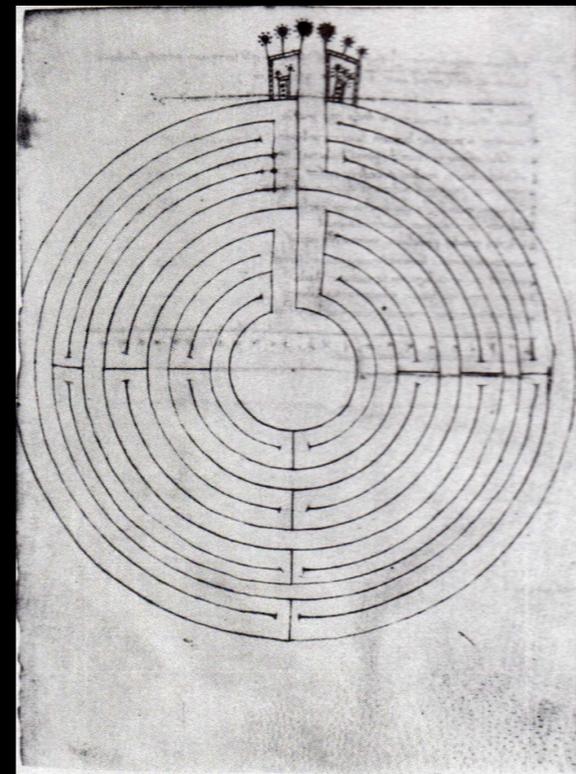
Below: a brief history of  
Theseus and the  
Minotaur

Kern No 191;  
page 116



Isodore de Séville  
1072  
Manuscript explains how  
to calculate the date  
for Easter

Kern No 183;  
pages 112-113



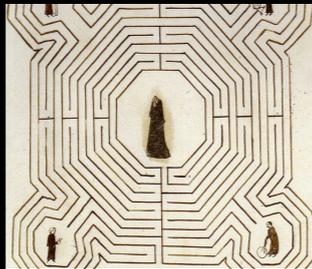
Martianus Capella  
11th century

Manuscript that discusses  
the seven liberal arts

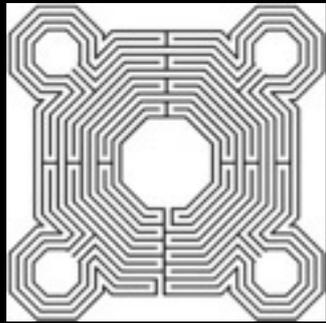
Kern No 187;  
page 115



Sens



Reims



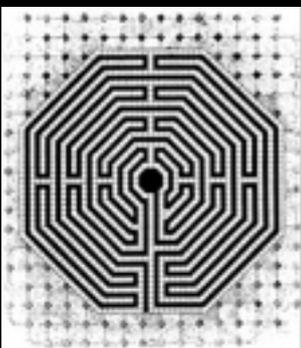
Amiens



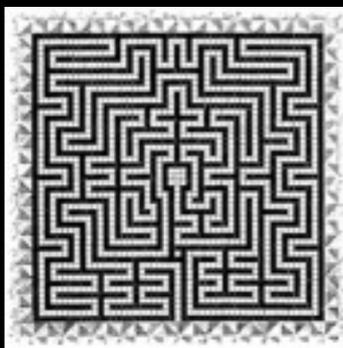
Chartres

Late Medieval Europe  
(12th-15th century CE)  
labyrinths found in churches in  
France and Italy.

St. Quentin



St. Omer





The Current Labyrinth Revival  
began in the late 20th century

There are more than 4,255 labyrinths  
in 77 different countries that are listed  
on the “world-wide labyrinth locator”  
[www.labyrinthlocator.com](http://www.labyrinthlocator.com).

# Summary of Labyrinth History

Date	Type	Place
15,000-18,000 BCE	Meander Pattern	Figurine Ukraine
2,500-2,000 BCE	Labyrinth Petroglyph	Goa, India
15th-12th Cent. BCE	Myth/Story	Theseus & Minotaur
1,600-1,100 BCE	Labyrinth Drawing on Tablet	Pylos, Greece
800-700 BCE	Written Literature includes labyrinth ref.	Homer (Ariadne's Dancing Ground)
700-300 BCE	Coins with labyrinths	Greek
27 BCE-476 CE	Mosaics	Roman Empire/Area Around Mediterranean Sea
900-1500	Manuscript illustrations	European Monasteries
1100-1,600 CE	Pavement/Floor labyrinths in churches	Italy, France, Spain, England: Europe
1980s-Present	Great Variety	World-wide

## Asian Labyrinth History: India

The appearance of a reference to a labyrinthine design in the early Indian epic, the *Mahabharata* [dated 8th or 9th century BCE, first written record 4th century BCE], is surely responsible for the widespread occurrence of labyrinths throughout the Indian sub-continent. The epic relates that at the battle of Kurukshetra, the magician Drona endeavours to ensure victory for the Kaurava army by devising a troop formation, the *Chakra-vyūha* (wheel battle formation), that "the gods themselves could not enter." However, Abhimanyu the son of Arjuna, the only other person who knows the plan of *Chakra-vyūha* and sworn enemy of Drona, joins the fray on the side of the Pandavas. Abhimanyu knows the way in and kills many enemies along the way, to allow the battle to be won, but he never learned the route out of the labyrinth and was killed at the centre by arrows fired from all sides.

Whether the *Chakra-vyūha* and the labyrinth symbol were associated from the earliest origins of this story is uncertain, but they are clearly connected by the late 12th or 13th century CE, when two depictions of the Kurukshetra battle were carved on the carved friezes of the Hoysaleswara and Kedareshwara temples at Halebid in Mysore. Both show an army of warriors arranged in labyrinth form, although the design used in both cases is a modified classical labyrinth with the central section replaced with a spiral - a design variant common in India.

<http://www.labyrinthos.net/centre.htm>

# Asian Labyrinth History: Indian battle formations



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Halebid2.JPG>



Entrance (Rotated Image)

# Asian Labyrinth History: India Cave Art Labyrinths

Several examples of the labyrinth symbol have also been found amongst cave art in the north of India. One example at Tikla, in Madhya Pradesh, has been dated to approximately 250 BCE, although doubt remains as to whether the labyrinth is contemporary with other more dateable figures (Kern, 2000). Two examples recently reported at Pangawan (?) are even more uncertain.

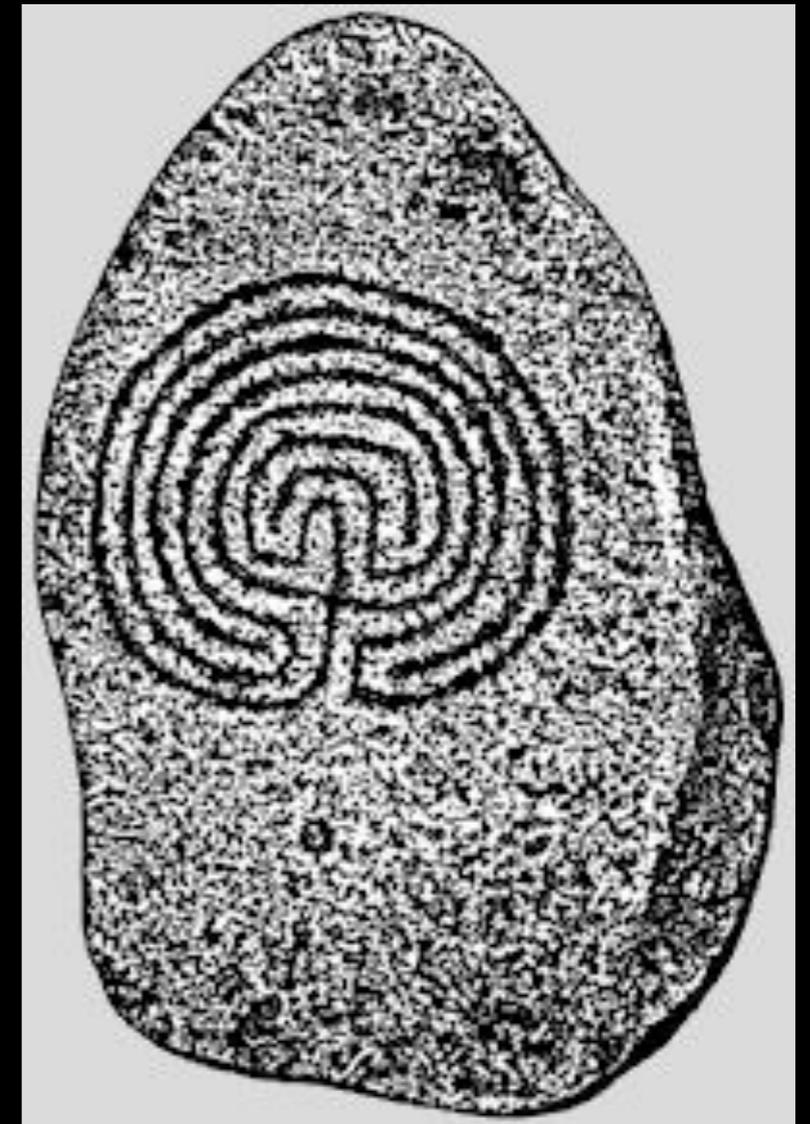


An example carved on the floor of the Ondavalli Temple in Andhra Pradesh, could have been carved at any time since the temple's construction in the 6th or 7th century CE, although it appears alongside other early inscriptions (Hyland, 1993). Like the all of these 'early' labyrinths from the region, is of the 'classical' form.

# Asian Labyrinth History: Indian Labyrinths: Undated-14th Century

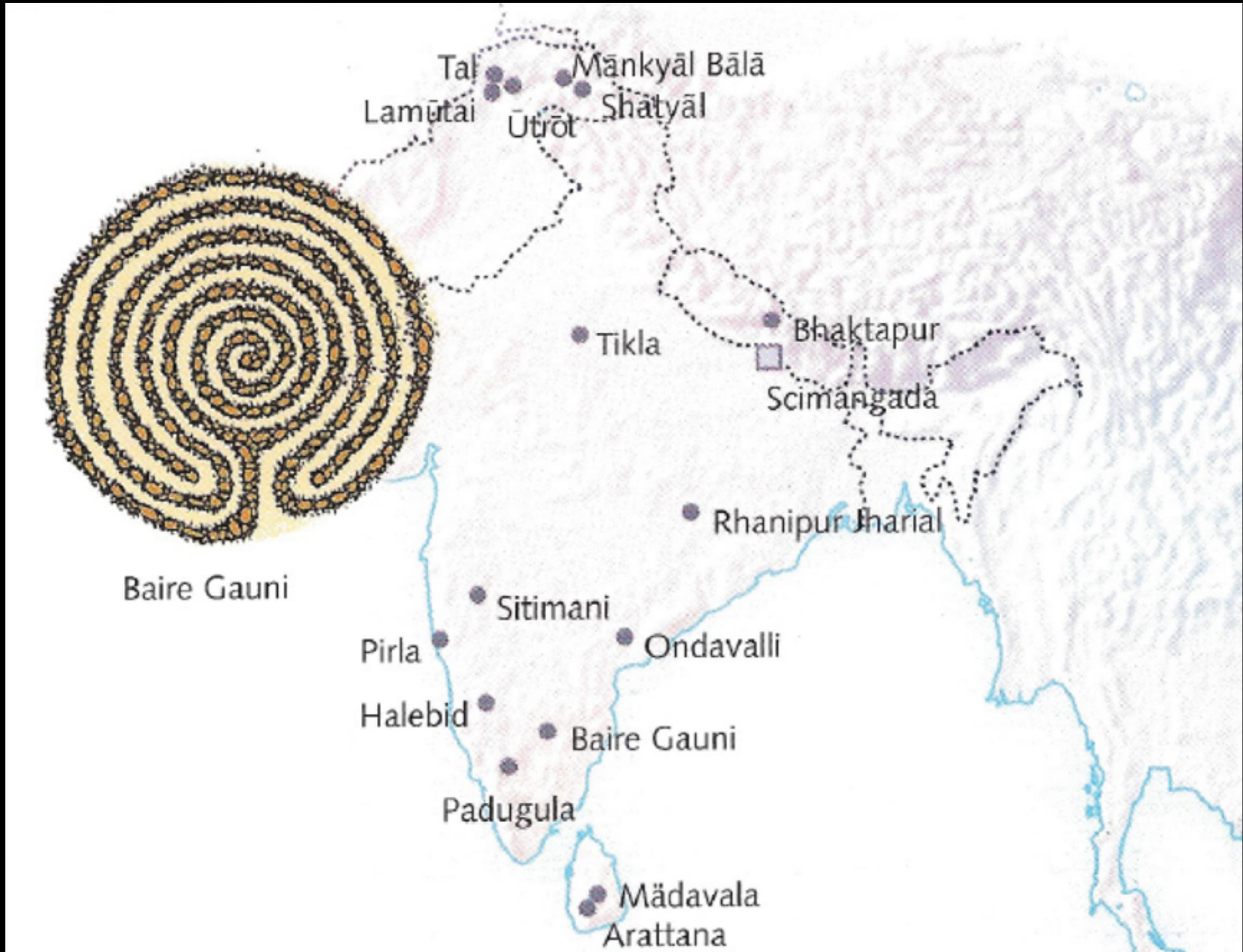
A number of labyrinths, all of the classical design, have recently been documented in the Kota villages of the Nilgaris Mountains in the northwest of Tamil Nadu, in the villages of Gudalur Kokkal (4 examples), Sholur Kokkal (3 examples) and Trichikadi (5 examples). Most of these small labyrinths, 15-25 cm in diameter, appear carved on rocks at communal gathering areas where the men of the village would meet, and often alongside similarly inscribed game boards, known as *Puli Attam* -the Tiger Game (Kürvers, 2006).

Another example in this same area, carved on a dolmen shrine at Padugula (and now missing), has been claimed to be as old as 1000 BCE, but in common with the examples carved in the Kota villages, is probably no earlier than the 14th century CE, when the Kota settled in this area. Clearly, more research and secure dating is required before a tentative history of the earliest labyrinths in India can be written.

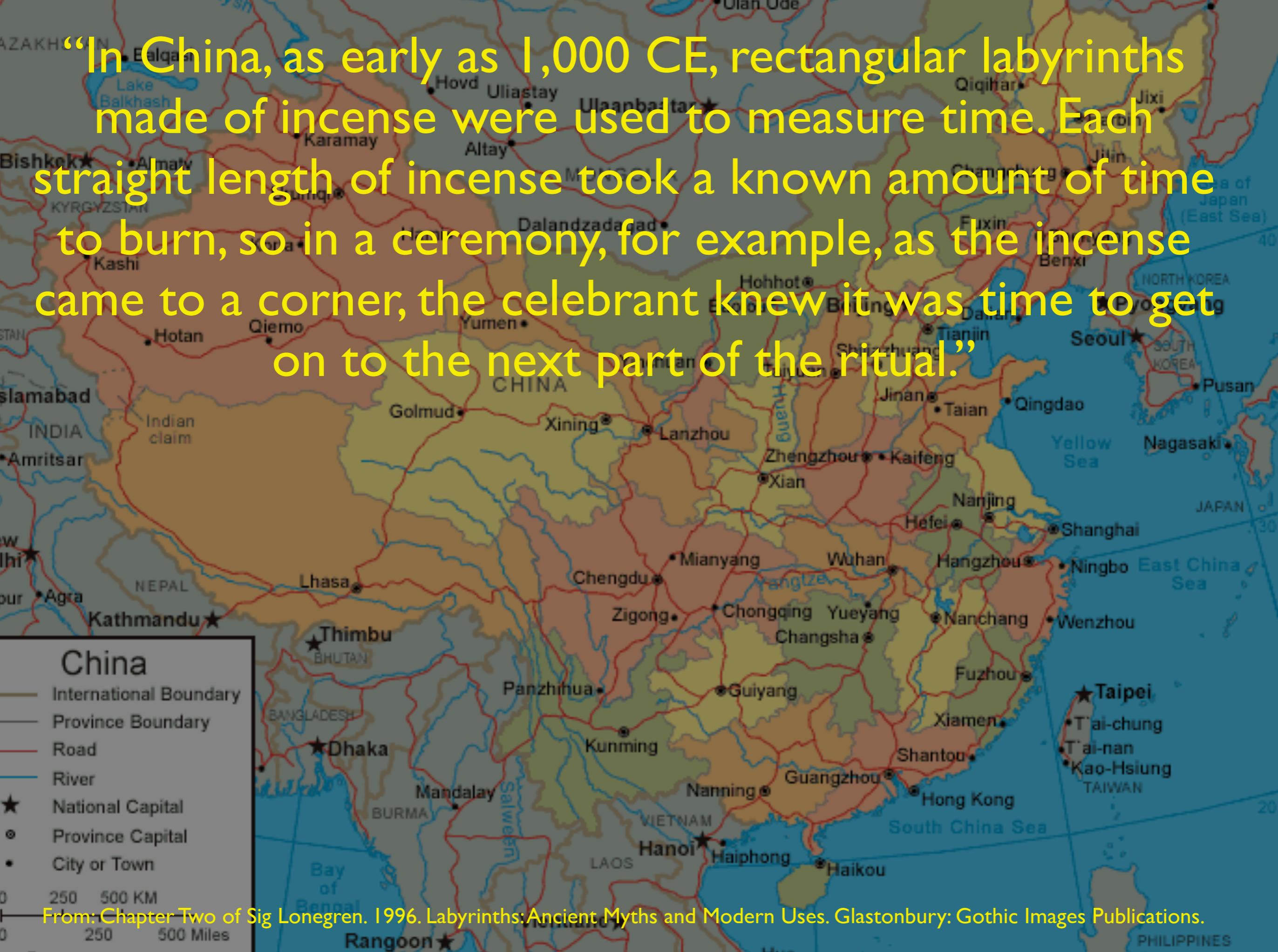


Padugula Image and text used by permission: [www.labyrinthos.net/indialabs.html](http://www.labyrinthos.net/indialabs.html)

# Asian Labyrinth History: Historic Indian Labyrinths



“In China, as early as 1,000 CE, rectangular labyrinths made of incense were used to measure time. Each straight length of incense took a known amount of time to burn, so in a ceremony, for example, as the incense came to a corner, the celebrant knew it was time to get on to the next part of the ritual.”



# Asian Labyrinth History: Pakistan

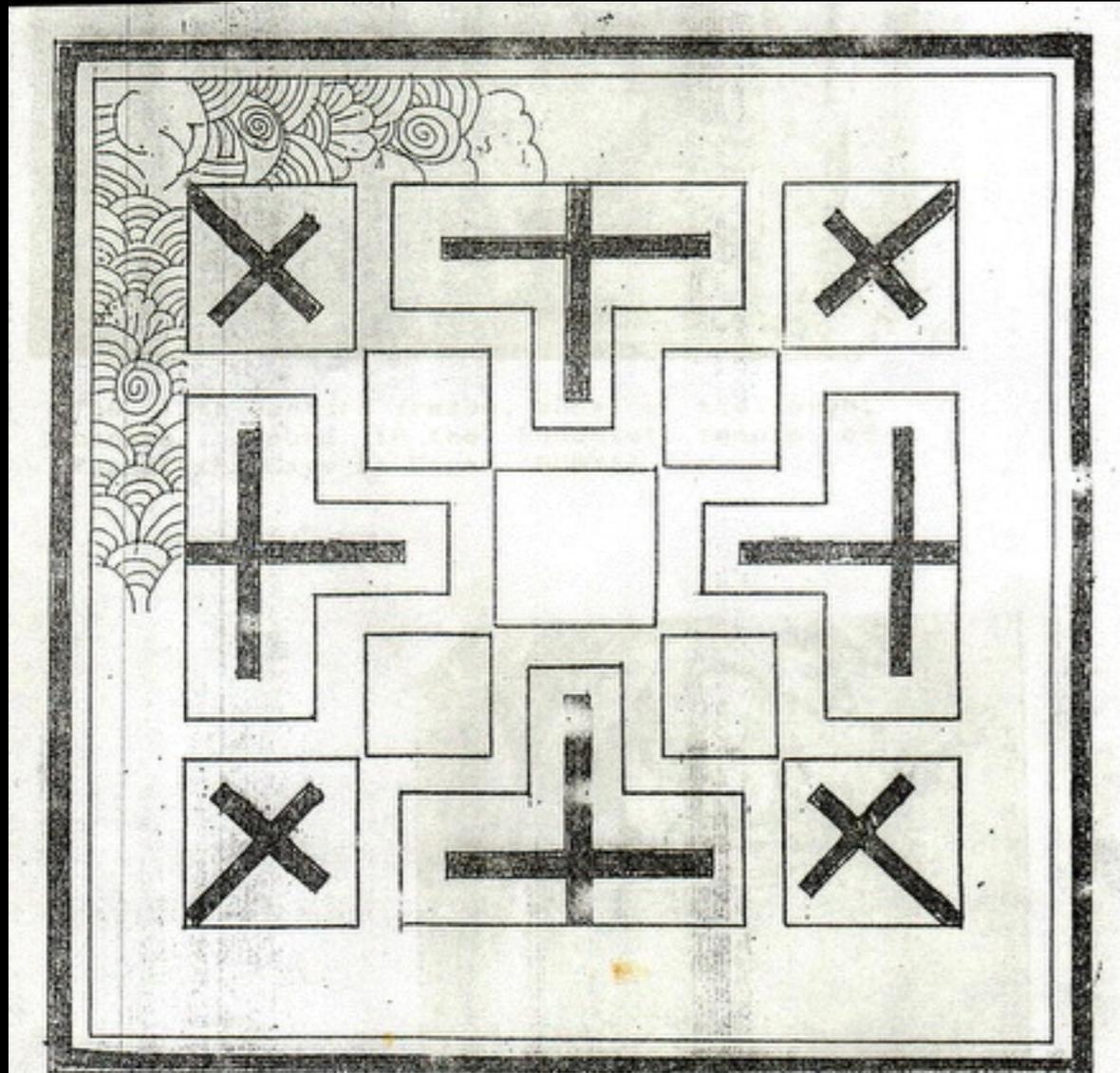
In Pakistan, an early knowledge of the labyrinth is demonstrated by the carving of a labyrinth on a boulder along the banks of the Indus river at Shatyāl. Dated to the first few centuries CE, it is accompanied by numerous other Buddhist figures and symbols at a resting spot on a branch of the great silk route that linked India to Central Asia, followed by pilgrims and traders alike.

Eighteenth and nineteenth century labyrinths are also known in northern Pakistan, where a series of labyrinth carvings, often in the prayer rooms of Islamic mosques have been documented (Scerrato, 1983), usually situated low down on pillars, to enable study while sitting at prayer. Several such labyrinths, carved at the base of pillars in the Mosque of Lamutai, have unfortunately been destroyed in recent years as the old timber mosques in the region are demolished.



*Labyrinth carved on a pillar in the old mosque at Tal, Pakistan*

# Asian Labyrinth History: Myanmar



The 13th century fresco, showing the eight crosses, drawn from the photograph by Miss. Anna Stevenson.

13th Century fresco in Kyansittha in Pagan:  
Meander pattern with crosses reported in thesis  
by Father Cecil Bernard, 1995



Later Nepalese Labyrinths  
<http://www.labyrinthos.net/indialabs.html>

Note the similarities to swastika-meander labyrinths found in India and Nepal  
from the early 1600s. Jeff Saward, Labyrinth historian.

# Asian Labyrinth History: Myanmar

## Bhuddhist Story

“A Wingaba, or maze, is set up in the open space before the Sawbwa’s palace. Perhaps I should explain that the Buddha in his incarnation as King Wethandaya was driven out, and forced to wander in a forest on the Wingaba Hill (in the Shan State).

The wingaba now set up is a maze of hurdles, with a shrine in the middle. People who reach the shrine make an offering there. But many little women wander about in the maze lost, calling for help, until they are quite tired and tearful.

For three nights the festival is held round the Wingaba.”

Colin M. Enriquez. *A Burmese loneliness; a tale of travel in Burma, the Southern Shan States and Keng Tung*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Company. 1918. (Entry #20-21).

See [http://www.archive.org/stream/burmeselonelines00enriiala/burmeselonelines00enriiala\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/burmeselonelines00enriiala/burmeselonelines00enriiala_djvu.txt)

# Myanmar Labyrinth History: mazes in the 1950s

“The Shan, and other Burmese, still construct labyrinths of wood and branches of bamboo, that they walk at night by the light of torches, lanterns, or candles during the major festivals.” (page 87: translation JKHGeoffrion)

Paul Lévy, a French scholar of religion (Buddhism), who spent most of his life working in Vietnam, published articles on Buddhist “labyrinths” which were actually mazes.

Levy, Paul. 1959. "Religions de l'Asie du Sud-Est." École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses (Annuaire 1960-1961):86-87.

Levy, Paul. 2003. Buddhism:A Mystery Religion? Textbook Publishers.

# Kayin Wingaba Monastery: Insein Township



The Kayin New Year falls on the 1st Waxing Day of Pyatho. The largest Kayin New Year Ceremony is celebrated at the Maha Say Wingaba Ahlein Nga Sint Pagoda compound, in Insein township where majority of Kayin population reside in Myanmar.



On the eve of Kayin New Year, Myanmar people will held

Cultural show, Done Dance, Bamboo Dance and traditional music and songs. National Flag will be hoisted on the dawn of New Year Day.

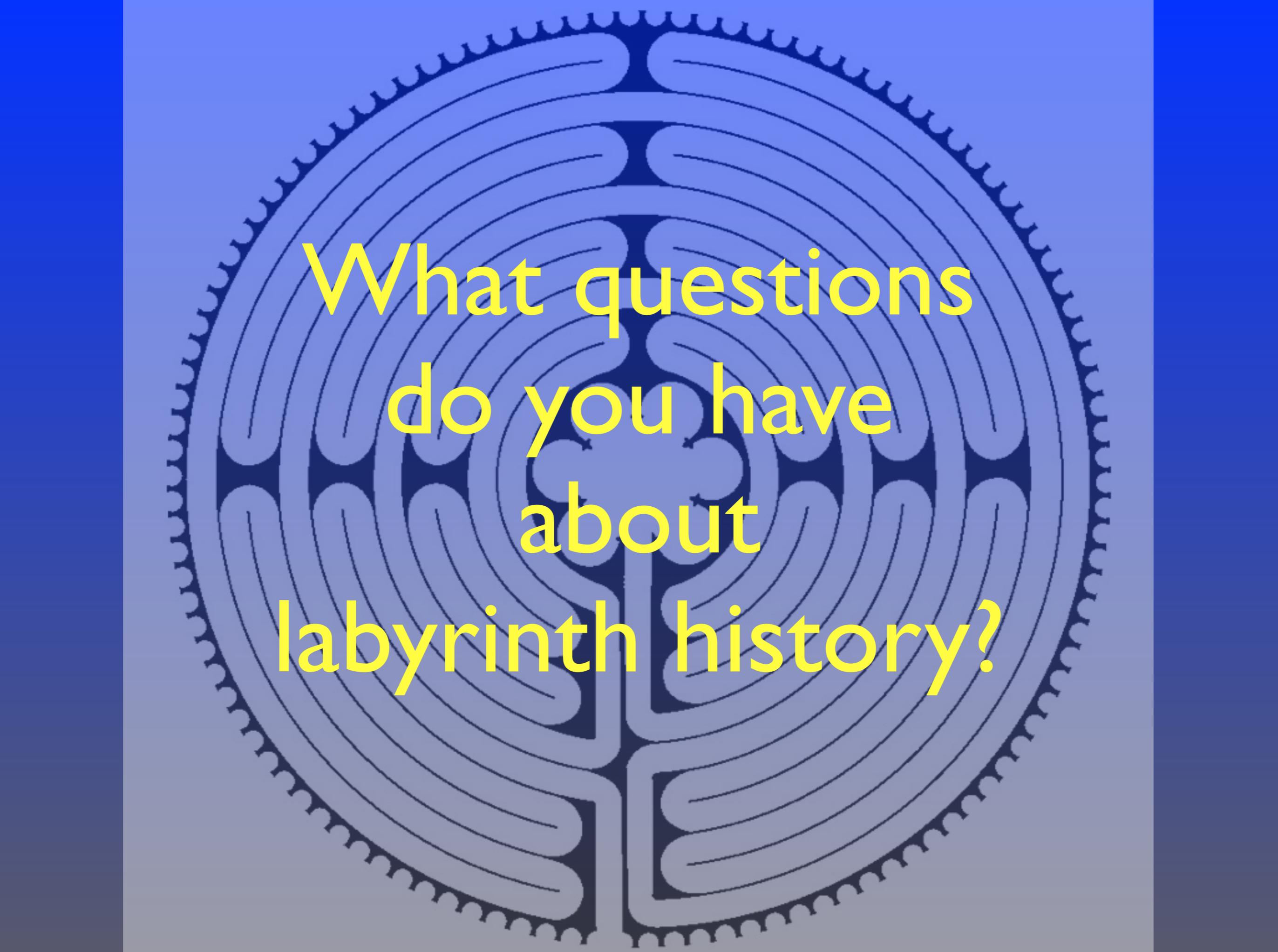
Traditional costume was worn by most of the celebrants at the events. Many young and old Kayins wear their traditional colourful dresses and go around the Myanmar city, visit relatives and enjoy the festival.

# Kayin Wingaba Monastery: Insein Township



2012: The nuns in the quiet room (with the treasure of the monastery) told us that the wingaba is a good place to pray.

They said that it is also good for your health because walking it involves exercise.



What questions  
do you have  
about  
labyrinth history?



## Franciscan Benediction

May God bless you with discomfort  
At easy answers, half-truths,  
and superficial relationships  
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger  
At injustice, oppression,  
and exploitation of people,  
So that you may work for justice,  
freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears  
To shed for those who suffer pain,  
rejection, hunger, and war,  
So that you may reach out your hand  
to comfort them and  
To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness  
To believe that you can make a difference  
in the world,  
So that you can do what others claim  
cannot be done  
To bring justice and kindness  
to all our children and the poor.

Amen.

Ministry website [www.fhlglobal.org](http://www.fhlglobal.org)

Labyrinth resources by jill [www.jillgeoffrion.com](http://www.jillgeoffrion.com)

Journey blog by jill [jillgeoffrion.wordpress.com](http://jillgeoffrion.wordpress.com)



ministry website [www.fhlglobal.org](http://www.fhlglobal.org)  
journey blog by jill [jillgeoffrion.wordpress.com](http://jillgeoffrion.wordpress.com)  
spiritual articles by tim [www.spirit-ledleader.org](http://www.spirit-ledleader.org)  
labyrinth resources by jill [www.jillgeoffrion.com](http://www.jillgeoffrion.com)



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