Keeping Kern Current: Locating ‘Lost’ Labyrinths in Medieval Manuscripts

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Introduction

First published in 1982, Hermann Kern’s Labyrinthe, the catalogue of labyrinths which has become indispensable to scholars, devoted chapter seven to labyrinths found in manuscripts and noted 80 medieval examples. In 2000 an updated English language version of Kern’s book, Through the Labyrinth, was edited by Jeff Saward and Robert Ferré, in which they included an additional four manuscript labyrinths. Since that time, many other manuscript labyrinths have been identified by scholars and others have been put on-line, either as part of library digital collections or used as illustrations in books or online articles.

Due to our interest in these labyrinths, we have searched out new examples both using the internet and in-person when possible. We now offer the fruit of these labours, the 38 labyrinths below, with the hope that others will be able to use these examples in their work and research. Whenever possible, we have included images of these labyrinths and links where more information about them can be found.

Below we present these 38 manuscript labyrinths, in approximate chronological sequence, along with a table of their essential details. A note on the terminology regarding the labyrinth designs is in order at this point. In Kern’s original table (2000 edition, pages 107-109) he basically uses six categories to cover the majority of the labyrinths – Cretan, Cretan modified, Otfrid, Jericho, Chartres and Chartres modified – plus a few that are correctly described as mazes. We have chosen to retain this basic system to allow direct comparison of the entries that follow with Kern’s original catalogue.

Modern readers might be more familiar with the terms “Classical” instead of “Cretan,” and “Medieval” rather than “Chartres,” but we will leave that translation of terminology to the reader. We have added an occasional comment where Kern’s system falls short of adequate description and have been consistent regarding the use of the term “Chartres-style” for those medieval labyrinths that have the same path arrangement as the labyrinth in Chartres Cathedral, and “modified Chartres” for those that have different path arrangements, likewise for “Cretan” and “modified Cretan.” The number of circuits refers to the concentric paths arranged around the central goal.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Collection</th>
<th>Folio no.</th>
<th>Labyrinth type</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>Lat. 12048, fol. 80</td>
<td>Cretan</td>
<td>780-800 CE</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Lat. 4416, fol. 35</td>
<td>Cretan</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Paris</td>
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<td>unknown</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>Lat. 356, fol. 11v</td>
<td>Cretan</td>
<td>9th-10th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Basel</td>
<td>AN IV 11, fol. 77r</td>
<td>Otfrid-style</td>
<td>11th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Orléans</td>
<td>Ms. 16, fol. 252</td>
<td>Chartres-style</td>
<td>11th-12th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Leiden</td>
<td>BPL 92A, fol.182</td>
<td>Chartres-style</td>
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</tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>Lat. 5371, fol.240v</td>
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<td>12th century</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>London</td>
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<td>modified Chartres</td>
<td>1110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>St. Omer</td>
<td>Ms. 684, fol. 74</td>
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<td>1120-11140</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Cambridge</td>
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<td>1180-1200</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Paris</td>
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<td>Chartres-style</td>
<td>12th-13th century</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Leiden</td>
<td>Ms. 100A, fol. 1</td>
<td>Chartres-style</td>
<td>1150-1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Add. 15603, fol. 142v</td>
<td>unusual</td>
<td>1175-1200</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Chantilly</td>
<td>Ms. 0328, fol. 080v</td>
<td>Chartres-style</td>
<td>13th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
<td>Ms. Gr. 44, p. 674</td>
<td>partial, uncertain</td>
<td>13th century</td>
</tr>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Munich</td>
<td>Clm. 17403, fol. 13</td>
<td>Chartres-style</td>
<td>1241</td>
</tr>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>Ms. 0.2.45, p. 001</td>
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<td>1248-1300</td>
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<td>Paris</td>
<td>Lat. 2809, fol. 153r</td>
<td>modified Chartres</td>
<td>1270-1330</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
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<td>Paris</td>
<td>Ms. Or. Heb. 9, fol. 236v</td>
<td>Cretan</td>
<td>1304</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Rome</td>
<td>Ms. Or. 72, fol. 6v</td>
<td>Cretan</td>
<td>1326</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>Hs. or. 2371, fol. 167v</td>
<td>modified Cretan</td>
<td>1350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>US-BE m 744, fol. 31v</td>
<td>modified Chartres</td>
<td>1375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Hanover, NH</td>
<td>Taj Torah, 290</td>
<td>Jericho</td>
<td>1400-1450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>Greek 2055, fol. 53v</td>
<td>Chartres-style</td>
<td>15th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>FR 17001, fol. 2v</td>
<td>complex</td>
<td>15th century</td>
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<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>LJS 226, note 1, side 2</td>
<td>Chartres-style</td>
<td>1410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Or. Per. 62, fol. 322v</td>
<td>Jericho</td>
<td>1410</td>
</tr>
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<td>34</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>Per. 322, fol. 121r</td>
<td>Jericho</td>
<td>1420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Den Haag</td>
<td>KB 72 A 23, fol. 21v</td>
<td>modified Chartres</td>
<td>1460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Princeton</td>
<td>Ms. 158, fol. 157v</td>
<td>modified Chartres</td>
<td>1471</td>
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<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Heidelberg</td>
<td>Cod. Heid. Or. 118, fol. 197v</td>
<td>Jericho</td>
<td>1475</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>Den Haag</td>
<td>KB 128 C 4, fol. 40r</td>
<td>modified Chartres</td>
<td>1512</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Manuscripts

1 - Paris, France, Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Lat. 12048, fol. 80 (780-800 CE)

This 7-circuit Cretan labyrinth is in the form of an illuminated capital in a Gelasian Sacramentary, the so-called Gellone Sacramentary, a book of Christian liturgy related to the sacraments from the Diocese of Cambrai or Diocese of Meaux in France.

Labyrinth: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b60000317/f167.image
Manuscript: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b60000317

2 - Paris, France, Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Lat. 4416, fol. 35 (801-900)

This 7-circuit Cretan labyrinth has a doorway at the entrance and is found in the Epitome Aegidii of the Lex Romana, a Latin legal treatise, from France.

Labyrinth: http://expositions.bnf.fr/ciel/grand/dedale.htm
General Information on manuscript: http://www.leges.uni-koeln.de/en/mss/codices/paris-bn-lat-4416/

3 - Paris, France, Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Lat. 3840, fol. 1r (801-900)

This labyrinth, identified in the catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, has an unknown pattern and exists in the Collectio Canonum Dionysio-Hadriana, a book of canon law, from Saint-Martin of Spanheim, Mainz, Germany. There is no image of this manuscript currently available online.

Description of the manuscript: https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc61807z

No image currently available
4 - Berlin, Germany, Staatsbibliothek; Ms. theol. Lat. 356, fol. IIv (801-1000)

This 7-circuit Cretan labyrinth was placed on the top of a page in book one of *Homiliae in Ezechielem*, a series of homilies on the Hebrew Testament book of Ezekiel by Pope Gregory I, from Werden in Germany.

4 - Ms. theol. Lat. 356, fol. IIv; courtesy of Staatsbibliothek PK zu Berlin

Labyrinth: https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN797391118&PHYSID=PHYS_0006&DMDID=DMDLOG_0003

5 - Basel, Switzerland, Universitätsbibliothek; AN IV 11, fol. 77r (1001-1100)

This 11-circuit Otfrid-type labyrinth with long, sweeping pathways is in a manuscript relating to the *De coniuratione Catilinae* and *De bello Iugurthino*, the best-known works of Gaius Sallustius Crispus (Salluste), a Roman politician and historian from the first century BCE. From the Carthusian monastery of Chartreuse de Bâle, Basel, Switzerland.

5 - AN IV 11, fol. 77r; courtesy of Universitätsbibliothek Basel

Labyrinth: https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/fr/ubb/AN-IV-0011/77r
Manuscript: https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/fr/list/one/ubb/AN-IV-0011

6 - Orléans, France, Bibliothèque Municipale; Ms. 0016, fol. 252 (1001-1200 for the end matter including the labyrinth, 901-1000 for the manuscript)

This 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth is found at the end in a manuscript of biblical texts from the Hebrew Testament, books of Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Job, Maccabees, and Tobias, from Fleury Abbey, Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, France.

6 - Ms. 0016, fol. 252; courtesy of Bibliothèque Municipale, Orléans

Labyrinth: https://bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/consult/consult.php?mode=ecran&panier=false&reproductionId=8853&VUE_ID=1272788&carouselThere=false&nbVignettes=4x3&page=1&angle=0&zoom=petit&tailleReelle
7 - Leiden, Netherlands, Universiteit Leiden; BPL 92 A, fol. 182 (1101-1200)

This 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth is found in a manuscript of Octaviani Caesaris Augusti Versus in P. Virgili Maronis, a collection of Roman writings which include poetry and grammar by Donatus, Servius Honoratus and Virgil, from Normandy in France.

7 - BPL 92 A, fol. 182; courtesy of Universiteit Leiden

Description of manuscript:

8 - Paris, France, Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Latin 5371, fol. 240v (1101-1200)

This 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth is found in a collection of texts written by the Christian authors Hincmarus Remensis, Eugene of Toledo and the Venerable Bede, from the Abbey of Notre Dame, Mouzon (Ardennes) in France.

8 - Lat. 5371, fol. 240v; courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France

Labyrinth:
https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10721217v/f246.item

9 - London, England, British Library; Cotton MS Tiberius BII, fol. 248v (1110)

This 18-circuit modified Chartres labyrinth with a unique pattern is found in a manuscript on the martyrdom and miracles of St. Edmund (king of East Anglia from about 855 until 869) by Abbo of Fleury, from Ely in England.

9 - Cotton MS Tiberius BII, fol. 248v; courtesy of the British Library

Labyrinth:
http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/illmanus/cottmanuccoll/l/011cottibb00002u00248v00.html
Manuscript:
https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_ii_f086r
10 - St. Omer, France, Bibliothèque Municipale; Ms. 0684, fol. 74 (1120-1140)

This 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth is found in the Consolation of Philosophy by Roman statesman Boethius, from the Abbey of St. Bertin, St. Omer in France.

10 - Ms.684, fol. 74; courtesy of Bibliothèque Municipale, St. Omer

Ms. including labyrinth:
https://bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/iiif/19320/canvas/canvas-1714146/view

11 - Cambridge, England, St. John’s College, University of Cambridge; Ms. H.11, fol. 124v (1180-1200)

This 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth is found in Isidore of Seville’s Etymologies, from Wigmore Priory, Herefordshire, England.

11 - Ms. H.11, fol. 124v; courtesy of St. John’s College, University of Cambridge

Labyrinth:
https://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/library/special_collections/manuscripts/medieval_manuscripts/medman/A/Web%20images/H11f124v.htm
Manuscript: https://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/library/special_collections/manuscripts/medieval_manuscripts/medman/H_11.htm

12 - Paris, France, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal; Ms. 711, fol. C (1101-1300)

This 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth is found in a Miscellany Collection: Pierre Hélie, Quintilian, Cicero, Seneca, Plato, Aulus-Gelle, Cassiodorus, Celsus (Julius), Macrobe, Mela (Pomponius), Petrone, Plautus, Sallust, Sidoine Apollinaire, Suetonius, Terence, Varron, and Boëce, with texts written in Latin and French, from the Abbey of St. Victor, Paris, France.

12 - Ms. 711, fol. C; courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France

Manuscript, with link to page with labyrinth:
https://portail.biblissima.fr/fr/ark:/43093/mdatab59677bce97c11750f03df8e0483fe2674552145
13 - Leiden, Netherlands, Universiteit Leiden; M.s. 100 A, fol. 1 (1150-1200)

This 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth is found in a manuscript of the biblical book of Job, Liber Hiob ex Hieronymi versione cum Genealogia et commentario, which includes Jerome’s genealogy and commentary, from the Netherlands.

13 - Ms. 100 A, fol. 1; courtesy of Universiteit Leiden

Manuscript and labyrinth: https://digitalcollections.universiteitleiden.nl/view/item/1837299#page/1/mode/1up

14 - London, England, British Library; Additional 15603, fol. 142v (1175-1200)

This unusual 5-circuit, 4-quadrant labyrinth is found in a manuscript copy of the Etymologies by Isidore of Seville, from Neuvelle-lès-la-Charité in France.

14 - Additional 15603, fol. 142v; courtesy of the British Library

Manuscript and labyrinth: https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=2482&CollID=27&NStart=15603

15 - Chantilly, France, Musée Condé; Ms. 0328, fol. 80v (1201-1300)

This 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth with a woman’s head at the centre, is found in the Petrus Hispanus Thesaurus Pauperum, a collection of writings, remedies, recipes, prayers and hymns to the Virgin, from Spain.

15 - Ms. 0328, fol. 80v; courtesy of Musée Condé, Chantilly

Manuscript and labyrinth: https://portail.biblissima.fr/fr/ark:/43093/mdataacddd44cf088d4b30ad70500ec23f46af1dc9ebc
16 - Geneva, Switzerland, Bibliothèque de Genève; Ms. Gr. 44, p.674 (1201-1300)

This partial labyrinth of simple, but uncertain design, is found in a manuscript copy Homer’s Iliad, from Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey.

16 - Ms. Gr. 44, p. 674; courtesy of Bibliothèque de Genève

Manuscript and labyrinth: https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/bge/gr0044

17 - Munich, Germany, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek; Clm. 17403, fol. 13 (1241)

This 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth is found on the first page of the Glossarium Salomonis sive Mater verborum. Herbae pictae cum explicatione, a glossary that includes illustrated herbs, from the monastery of Scheyern, Germany.

17 - Clm. 17403, fol. 13; courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek

Labyrinth and manuscript: https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0011/bsb00110824/images/index.html?seite=13&fip=193.174.98.30

18 - Cambridge, England, Trinity College; Ms. 0.2.45, page 001 (1248-1300)

This 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth is found in a bound miscellany of various manuscripts that includes music and writings in Latin, French and Middle English, from Cerne Abbey, England.

18 - Ms. 0.2.45, page 001; courtesy of Trinity College, Cambridge

Manuscript and labyrinth: https://mss-cat.trin.cam.ac.uk/manuscripts/uv/view.php?n=O.2.45&n=O.2.45#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=8&xywh=-51%2C0%2C3840%2C2777
19 - Paris, France, Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Latin 2809, fol. 153r (1270-1330)

This 11-circuit modified Chartres labyrinth (similar to the design of the Sens labyrinth) is found in a manuscript of Gregorius Magnus, Dialogi; Sententiae Patrum, a text that includes Gregory the Great’s Dialogues and Tyrannus Rufus’s treatise on monks and the Holy Fathers, from Narbonne, France.

Labyrinth:
https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105157339/f309.item.r=MS%20LATIN%202809
Manuscript: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b105157339#

20 - Amsterdam, Netherlands, Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Amsterdam University Library; Hs. Ros. 609, fol. 127v (1290)

This 11-circuit modified Chartres labyrinth is placed in the Esslingen Mahzor, a festival prayer book for Yom Kippur and Sukkot, from Germany.

Information on the manuscript:
https://lib.uva.nl/discovery/fulldisplay?vid=31UKB_UAM1_INST:UVA&docid=alma990033567910205131

21 - Cambridge, England, Trinity College; Ms. 0.2.5, fol. 27r (1301-1400)

This 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth is found in a miscellany with canonical, astronomical texts and medical treatises, of unknown provenance.

Labyrinth and manuscript: https://mss-cat.trin.cam.ac.uk/manuscripts/uv/view.php?n=O.2.45&n=O.2.5#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=70&xywh=897%2C2260%2C2521%2C2054
22 - Paris, France, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal; Ms. 8530, fol. 175r (1301-1400)

This 11-circuit, Chartres modified labyrinth (with several errors) is found in an Italian manuscript of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.

22 - Ms. 8530, fol. 175r; courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Labyrinth and manuscript: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b52507439j

23 - Paris, France, Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Ms. Orientaux. Hebreu 9, fol. 236v (1304)

This 7-circuit classical rectangular text labyrinth, with corner embellishments, is found in a Hebrew language manuscript of the Hebrew Bible, from Germany.

23 - Ms. Orientaux. Hebreu 9, fol. 236v; courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France

Labyrinth: https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10548441n/f481.item

24 - Rome, Italy, Biblioteca Angelica; Ms. Or. 72, fol. 6v (1326)

This 11-circuit Cretan labyrinth, depicting Jericho, is in a manuscript of the biblical prophets, opposite the initial folio of the biblical book of Joshua, from Frascati, Italy.

24 - Ms. Or. 72, fol. 6; courtesy of the Ministry for Arts and Culture, Biblioteca Angelica

Labyrinth illustrated: https://www.academia.edu/1965828/The_Jericho_Labyrinth_The_Rise_and_Fall_of_a_Jewish_Visual_Trope
25 - Berlin, Germany, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz;
Hs. Or. 2371, fol. 167v (1350)

This 8-circuit Jericho labyrinth is found in an Iranian manuscript of Muğmal at-tawārīḥ wa-'l-qisas, a compendium of histories and stories.

Labyrinth and manuscript:
https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht/?PPN=PPN744890942&PHYSID=PHYS_0344

26 - Berkeley, California, USA, University Library;
US-BE m 744, fol. 31v (1375)

This 11-circuit modified Chartres labyrinth which includes musical notations set on its paths is found in a manuscript of the Treatises of Arezzo, Guido and Goscalcus, from Italy.

Labyrinth on YouTube:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dO56v7qltNoD
Description of manuscript:
https://www.diamm.ac.uk/sources/845/#/

27 - Hanover, New Hampshire, USA, Rauner Library, Dartmouth College; Ms. 290 (1400-1450)

This 6-circuit Jericho labyrinth is located in a copy of the Taj Torah, from Yemen.

Labyrinth and manuscript:
http://sites.dartmouth.edu/library/author/dz99690/page/3/
This 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth is found in a Greek philosophical miscellany, including works by Aphrodisiensis Alexander, Isidorus Hieromonachus, Ephesius Michael and Michael Psellus.

28 - Greek 2055, fol. 53v; courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France

This complex labyrinth, which resembles a modified octagonal Chartres-style labyrinth, with ‘bastions’ at the four corners, a cross on top and a further section below formed of a diamond and two rectangles, is found in a French compilation by Jean Miélot of literary and historical texts, with translations of Cicero, Jean Boccace, and Jean d’Udine.

29 - FR 17001, fol. 2v; courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France

This complex labyrinth with eight segments in two large groupings (one with five squares and one with a diamond and two rectangles) is found in a French compilation by Jean Miélot of literary and historical texts, with translations of Cicero, Jean Boccace, and Jean d’Udine.

30 - FR 17001, fol. 27r; courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France
31 - Paris, France, Bibliothèque Nationale de France; FR 17001, fol. 88r (1401-1500)

This complex labyrinth with a pattern with nine compartments, eight arranged around a central square, is found in a French compilation by Jean Miélot of literary and historical texts, with translations of Cicero, Jean Boccace, and Jean d’Udine.

Labyrinth and manuscript:
https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/ btv1b10463342b/f183.item

32 - Philadelphia, PA, USA, University of Pennsylvania Library; LJS 226, loose note 1, side 2 (1410)

This 11-circuit Chartres-style labyrinth is located in a manuscript of astrological and astronomical texts, originally from England and Spain.

Labyrinth:
https://openn.library.upenn.edu/Data/0001/ljs226/ data/web/0193_0016_web.jpg

Manuscript: https://openn.library.upenn.edu/ Data/0001/html/ljs226.html

33 - Paris, France, Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Orientaux Persian 62, fol. 322v (1410)

This 9-circuit Jericho labyrinth is found in an Iranian manuscript of Muğmal at-tawārīh wa-l-qisas, a compendium of histories and stories.

Labyrinth and manuscript:
https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10091886t/ f341.item.r=persanlabyrinthe%20labyrinthe
This 8-circuit Jericho labyrinth is found in an Iranian manuscript of *Muǧmal at-tawārīḥ wa-'l-qisas*, a compendium of histories and stories.

**34 - Persian 322, fol. 121r; courtesy of the Chester Beatty Library**

Labyrinth: https://viewer.cbl.ie/viewer/image/Per_322/245/LOG_0007/

This 11-circuit modified Chartres labyrinth, with the Minotaur at the centre, is found in a manuscript copy of Lambert of St. Omer’s medieval encyclopaedia, *Liber Floridus*, from Lille in France and Ninove in Belgium.

**35 - KB 72 A 23, fol. 21v; courtesy of Koninklijke Bibliotheek National**


Manuscript: http://manuscripts.kb.nl/show/manuscript/+72+A+23

This 11-circuit modified Chartres labyrinth is found in Giovanni Marcanova’s *Collectio Antiquitatum* on the monuments and places of ancient Rome, probably from Bologna, Italy.

**36 - Ms. 158, fol. 157v; courtesy of Garrett Library, Princeton University**


Manuscript: https://library.princeton.edu/visual_materials/garrett/garrett_ms_158.final.pdf
37 - Heidelberg, Germany, Universitätsbibliothek; Cod. Heid. Orient 118, fol. 197v (1475)

This 9-circuit Jericho labyrinth is found in an Iranian manuscript of Muğmal at-tawārīḥ wa-l-qisas, a compendium of histories and stories.

37 - Cod. Heid. Orient. 118 fol. 197v; courtesy of Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg

Labyrinth: https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/codheidorient118/0400/image
Manuscript: http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/codheidorient118

38 - Den Haag, Netherlands, Koninklijke Bibliotheek National; KB 128 C 4, fol. 40r (1512)

This 11-circuit modified Chartres labyrinth, with the Minotaur at the centre, is found a manuscript copy of Lambert of St. Omer’s medieval encyclopaedia, Liber Floridus, from Enghien, Belgium.

38 - KB 128 C 4, fol. 40r; courtesy of Koninklijke Bibliotheek National

Labyrinth: https://manuscripts.kb.nl/zoom/BYVANCKB%3Amimi_128c4%3A040r_afb
Manuscript: https://manuscripts.kb.nl/show/manuscript/128+C+4

Conclusion

As libraries across the globe continue to make their manuscript collections available in digital formats other labyrinths will come to light. We have found it useful to recheck digital collections regularly and encourage others who are searching for manuscript labyrinths to do the same. If you become aware of other manuscript labyrinths that are not included here, we would be eager to learn of them, and together continue to study the development and meanings of the labyrinth images used in medieval manuscripts.

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CAERDROIA 50
CAERDROIA 50

The Journal of Mazes & Labyrinths

Contents

Cover: The Walls of Troy, Marfleet, England; from Ackermann’s Repository of Arts, 1815, original engraving in the Labyrinthos Archive

1 Frontis: The tomb of the Marchioness of Waterford, ca. 1891; Photo: Jeff Saward, July 2021

3 Editorial: a note from the editor, Jeff Saward

4 New Discovery of Stone Labyrinths in Western Maharashtra, India: Sachin Bhagwan Patil & P.D. Sabale report important new discoveries from India

11 Keeping Kern Current: Locating ‘Lost’ Labyrinths in Medieval Manuscripts: Jill K.H. Geoffrion & Alain Pierre Louët search the library archives

26 Hedge Mazes in Portugal: A Brief History: Carlos Soreto presents a history of Portuguese mazes and details two particular examples in Oporto

32 The Surroundings of the Rösaring Labyrinth: Heather Robertson describes this important Swedish stone labyrinth and records the work of its official guide, Börje Sandén, who died recently

38 Historic Turf Maze Sites in Wales: Jonathan Mullard looks for possible sites of turf labyrinths now long gone

44 From Jerusalem to Troyborg: The Labyrinth Name Change of the North: Christina Fagerström explores the origins of two popular labyrinth names

51 Simple Alternating Transit Mazes: Richard Myers Shelton studies the structure of classical and Roman labyrinths and records the work of the late Wiktor Daszewski

67 A Mysterious Medieval Maiden: Jill K.H. Geoffrion & Alain Pierre Louët examine an unusual medieval manuscript labyrinth and its surprising inhabitant

69 The Minnie’s Gap Labyrinths: Kirk Astroth reports on two labyrinths from Wyoming, USA

71 Notes & Queries: an inscribed powder horn from the American War of Independence, a labyrinth in a temple in Myanmar, a labyrinth on an 18th century English sampler and the “Modern Labyrinth” ca. 1900

73 Caerdroia: submission details, subscriptions, etc.

74 Labyrinthos: who we are and what we do, etc.

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