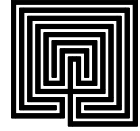


The Labyrinth of Chartres: Echoes of Pilgrimage Through Time



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Pilgrimage, the act of leaving home to travel toward a destination where the sacred may be encountered in ways that transform the self, is practiced across major and minor religious traditions alike. Such journeys commonly include a return and, with it, an ethical obligation: the pilgrim brings back what has been received for the strengthening of the community. Although sites and tradition-specific aims vary widely, pilgrimage often begins from a shared human intuition: an awareness of insufficiency, a desire for divine assistance, and a willingness to be transformed.

The thirteenth century builders of Chartres Cathedral, like those who had erected earlier churches on the same site, worked within a long-established culture of pilgrimage that they inherited, expressed, and intensified. Medieval Latin Christianity was deeply shaped by Hebrew and Christian scriptural visions of sacred journeying, in which movement through space was inseparable from moral, interior, existential, and communal transformation. This article explores how the labyrinth inlaid in the cathedral's floor may have functioned simultaneously as a design element, a performative space, and a spatial theology of pilgrimage.

Biblical Roots: From Wandering to Arrival

In the Hebrew Scriptures, pilgrimage emerges before it becomes geographically fixed. The people of God first appear as wanderers, leaving a land of bondage: Exodus recounts a prolonged, divinely guided journey through the wilderness toward the promised land. Only later does pilgrimage become spatially concentrated around a particular locus of divine presence – Jerusalem and the Temple.

Early references to pilgrimage festivals appear in Exodus 34:22–23, where ritual “appearings” before God are commanded without yet naming a specific place. Deuteronomy 16:1–17 articulates these practices more explicitly and connects them to an eventual sacred centre: “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths.” With the construction of the Temple, pilgrimage becomes a matter of coordinated movement toward Jerusalem – communal, calendrical, and embodied.

Psalms 120–134, the Songs of Ascents, describe the emotional and communal experience of going up to Jerusalem, including anticipation, fatigue, joy, solidarity, and worship. Although Jerusalem stands at the centre of the scriptural tradition of pilgrimage, the biblical witness also expands pilgrimage beyond geography. Texts such as Psalm 84:5–7 (“Happy are those whose hearts are set on pilgrimage”), Psalm 23 (a life journey rendered as a pastoral poem), Psalm 139:7–10, 23–24 (the wanderer searched and guided by God), Proverbs 4:10–19 (two divergent “paths”), and Job 23 (the search for a hidden God) all treat the “way” as both an inner and ethical trajectory as well as a route across the land.

Christian Reframing: Life as Pilgrimage, Christ as Companion

Christian Scripture extends these themes by portraying Jesus as itinerant, first fleeing to Egypt for safety (Matt. 2:13-23), later moving with his disciples through villages and cities, across social and religious boundaries, and into places marked by conflict, exclusion, and need, while also presenting Christian existence as a form of sojourning. The post-resurrection account of the travellers on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) is paradigmatic: two travellers discover that Christ accompanies them amid ordinary movement, and that recognition becomes transformative. “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). The passage imagines pilgrimage not merely as travel to a holy site, but as an ongoing possibility of encounter that reshapes perception, interpretation, and desire.

New Testament writers likewise describe Christians as resident aliens, “strangers and pilgrims” in the world (1 Peter 2:11; *paroikous kai parepidēmous*). Hebrews 11, moreover, presents figures from the Hebrew Scriptures, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses, among others, as confessing themselves to be “strangers and foreigners on the earth” and as seeking a truer homeland (Heb. 11:13-16, 39). In this sense, pilgrimage becomes not simply an occasional practice, but an overarching orientation: movement toward God marked by faith, longing, suffering, and obedience.

From Orientation to Institution: Early Christian Holy Land Pilgrimage

By the late first or early second century, the *Letter to Diognetus* (5.1-5) articulates Christian identity in strikingly pilgrim terms: Christians “dwell in their own countries, but as foreigners.... Every foreign land is to them a homeland, and every homeland a foreign land.” Here pilgrimage is less an itinerary than a spiritual anthropology: the pilgrim is one whose deepest belonging lies elsewhere and who therefore moves through the world differently.

The early church wove together these scriptural currents, Israel’s sacred journeying, Jesus’s itinerancy, and the Christian life as sojourning, and gave them concrete expression in travel to places associated with Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. The fourth century provides some of the earliest clearly documented evidence of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Empress Helena travelled to Palestine and Jerusalem around 326-328, helping to catalyse imperial attention to holy places. Shortly thereafter, an anonymous traveller from Bordeaux produced the earliest surviving Christian pilgrimage itinerary to the Holy Land (333-334). A half century later, Egeria (ca. 382-384) composed a remarkably detailed account of liturgy and sacred sites in and around Jerusalem, demonstrating how place, prayer, and ecclesial ritual had become braided together in the pilgrim experience.

Pilgrimage naturally included devotional travel from one’s home to a sacred site and back. In Jerusalem, a related practice of local, topographical devotion emerged by about 330-335, as pilgrims began to walk routes associated with Christ’s Passion. Over time, this practice coalesced around what became known as the *Via Dolorosa*, the “Way of Sorrows.” Pilgrims traced what was understood to be Christ’s path to the Crucifixion, enacting a walking devotion grounded in sacred geography.

Medieval Expansion: Relics, Intercession, Penance

Over subsequent centuries, pilgrimage expanded and diversified beyond journeys to and within the Holy Land. Devotion to the relics and tombs of saints, believed to mediate healing and intercession, drew pilgrims to Rome (St. Peter), Santiago de Compostela (St. James), Jerusalem (where Christ had lived, died, and risen), and a wide constellation of regional shrines. Alongside intercessory pilgrimage, penitential pilgrimage also developed as a discipline of conversion and reconciliation, undertaken to seek forgiveness, fulfil vows, or perform acts of reparative devotion. By the high Middle Ages, pilgrimage served a wide range of purposes, including healing, thanksgiving, penance, devotion, vow fulfilment, and, at times, curiosity.

Toward Chartres: A Multifaceted Pilgrimage Landscape

It is within this complex Christian inheritance that Chartres must be situated. Medieval pilgrimage at Chartres was not a single, uniform practice, but an ecosystem of related practices: pilgrimage to Chartres Cathedral, pilgrimage from Chartres Cathedral, and forms of pilgrimage enacted within the cathedral itself through procession, prayer, ritual movement, and sustained attention to images. What follows examines these dimensions and considers what the cathedral's pilgrimage imagery suggests about how sacred journeying was imagined, represented, and performed at Chartres. Against this background, we will consider how the labyrinth, introduced into the cathedral around 1220, may have been shaped by Chartres's pilgrimage culture and may, in turn, have helped shape it, across liturgical, cultic, and popular forms as these changed and developed over the centuries.

Pilgrimage to Chartres

Pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Chartres was already significant by the eleventh century and the institutional and architectural "scaffolding" that sustained it is clearest in the rebuilding program launched after a catastrophic fire of 1020. In response, Bishop Fulbert and his successors created an immense U-shaped crypt (1020–1024), more than 220 meters/722 feet long. This lower-level environment, capable of receiving large numbers of pilgrims, was created for circulation, staged devotion, and liturgical use. It directed pilgrims in a symbolic movement from darkness (north) to light (south), followed by an ascent to the luminous upper church.

Many pilgrims were reportedly drawn to Chartres by the cathedral's principal Marian relic, conventionally identified as the *Sancta Camisia*, or the tunic of the Virgin Mary. The reliquary that housed it was kept in the upper cathedral. Pilgrims from the region were also drawn by devotion and desired assistance from local saints such as Saint Cloud (boils, abscesses and other skin problems) and St. Roch (plague and pestilence).

The crypt below the sanctuary functioned as more than a structural foundation; it also served as an important devotional and logistical space for pilgrims. Focal points of pilgrimage devotion included the revered statue of *Notre-Dame-sous-Terre* and the Gallo-Roman Well of the Strong Saints (*Puits des saints forts*), believed to possess miraculous properties because of the legendary martyrs said to have been drowned there. There was even a hospital in the northern gallery where sick pilgrims could recover near the healing waters of the well, to which they were moved during the day.

Pilgrim crowds at Chartres were reportedly thickest on the four principal Marian feasts: the Purification of the Virgin, the Annunciation, the Assumption, and the Nativity of Mary when the city's fairs also drew merchants and travellers. These feast-day convergences braided together liturgy in the crypt and upper Romanesque cathedral, the devotional aims of pilgrimage, and the economic rhythms of a major regional gathering.

Marian devotion remained Chartres's principal pilgrimage magnet after the fire of 1194 and during the rapid rebuilding campaign that produced the Gothic cathedral in the early thirteenth century. Many pilgrims arrived with urgent, embodied petitions addressed to the Virgin Mary, a devotional impulse reflected in the cathedral's stained glass. Several windows depict figures kneeling before images of the Virgin and Child, such as pilgrims praying to the Virgin (9/38) and the donor Marguerite from nearby Lèves kneeling before a statue of Mary and Jesus (26/16).¹

Another example (illustrated right) is found in the north rose high above the nave, a man and a woman kneel before a statue of the Virgin and her son (157/129c); they are often interpreted as pilgrims, perhaps travellers from Tours.²



Royal visitors sometimes framed their pilgrimages in explicitly dynastic terms. Louis VIII, for example, came to Chartres to seek the Virgin's aid for the continuation of the Capetian succession (Bugslag, 160). Pilgrims seeking protection for dangerous travel, including those preparing for military campaigns, practiced forms of contact devotion by touching cloth (and, in some accounts, replica garments) to the reliquary of the *Sancta Camisia*, thereby creating portable blessings that could later be worn for protection.

The compilation commonly known as the *Miracles de Notre-Dame de Chartres*, associated with Jean le Marchant and produced at the request of Bishop Matthieu des Champs (episcopacy 1247–1259), provides accounts of Marian interventions linked to Chartres. Such miracle literature actively shaped pilgrimage practice by describing what pilgrims might hope for and by specifying the Virgin's efficacy at Chartres, thereby intensifying the desire to visit the cathedral in person.

Pilgrimage from Chartres

Modern scholars emphasize the growing importance of local pilgrimage, particularly in the later Middle Ages. Chartres, however, was never simply a regional shrine. It also functioned as a nodal stop on longer pilgrimage itineraries, attracting, and at times redirecting, travellers moving west along the *Via Turonensis* on their way to the relics of St. Martin at Tours (approximately 140 km/87 miles away) or, much farther on, to the shrine of St. James at Santiago de Compostela (roughly 1,400 km/870 miles away). Compelling visual evidence for this pattern will be discussed below.

Other pilgrims headed east from Chartres.³ In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, journeys to Jerusalem, including armed *peregrination*, sometimes began at Chartres or passed through it. In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council called for a new crusade to recover the Holy Land (Canon 71, *Ad liberandam*), confirming plenary indulgences – the remission of the entire temporal punishment due for sins already absolved – for those who personally took the cross. The aristocratic networks surrounding Chartres remained active participants in thirteenth-century crusading ventures, and the city participated in broader northern French recruitment patterns for these penitential pilgrimages to Jerusalem.⁴

For medieval Christians, Jerusalem was widely regarded as the centre of the world, a conviction given visual form in *mappae mundi* from the 8th through the 14th centuries,⁵ where the city often appears at the symbolic centre of the map. It was understood as the place where God's saving work transformed human history through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jerusalem therefore commanded the medieval imagination, both for those able to journey there and for those who could contemplate it only from afar. This centrality also found expression in ecclesiastical architecture and theological reflection, where the historical city was inseparably linked to the Heavenly Jerusalem of Revelation 21:1–22:5, the radiant city of God to be revealed at the end of time, so that earthly Jerusalem functioned both as a sacred site of salvation history and as a sign of God's ultimate redemptive fulfilment.

Pilgrimage at Chartres

In *Chartres Cathedral: Image of the Heavenly Jerusalem* (1993), Anne Prache argues that Chartres Cathedral was conceived as a theological and visual representation of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Rather than treating the building merely as an architectural monument, she interprets it as a symbolic and liturgical microcosm of divine order. In her reading, the cathedral's architecture, sculpture, stained glass, and spatial organization together articulate a coherent eschatological vision, an earthly anticipation of the celestial city described in the Book of Revelation.

From this perspective, worshippers and pilgrims who came to Chartres did more than visit a Marian shrine; they entered a space intentionally structured to evoke the glory of the New Jerusalem. The cathedral thus offered a foretaste of the heavenly city, allowing the faithful to encounter – in architectural, visual, and liturgical form – the promise of the world to come. In this way, the spiritual significance traditionally associated with Jerusalem became accessible beyond the geographical limits of the historical city.

Between the devastating fire of 1194 and the effective completion of the Gothic rebuilding around 1220, Chartres Cathedral was not merely a construction site but also remained an active pilgrimage destination. Pilgrimage practices during this period centred on Marian devotion, the veneration of relics, participation in liturgy and processions, and acts of penance.⁶ Pilgrims came seeking healing, protection, forgiveness, and divine favour.

As pilgrims in biblical times journeyed to Jerusalem to draw near to God in the Temple, those arriving at Chartres moved through the cathedral from the western portals across the nave toward the choir and high altar. This progression through sacred space could itself be experienced as a symbolic movement toward divine presence, echoing the spiritual logic of pilgrimage.

A central focus of devotion at Chartres was the *Sancta Camisia*, believed in the Middle Ages to be the tunic worn by the Virgin Mary at the Nativity. Chartres, described as “Mary’s Home” or “Mary’s Chamber” (Jean Le Marchant, *Miracles de Notre-Dame de Chartres*), was therefore regarded as a place where her intercession was particularly powerful. On major Marian feast days, pilgrims joined processions in which the relic was displayed within the cathedral and sometimes carried through the town. Throughout the year, visitors made votive offerings in gratitude for answered prayers or protection, donated funds supporting the construction and maintenance of the cathedral and participated in liturgies celebrated in Mary’s honour. Pilgrims thus encountered a richly layered devotional environment in which relics, liturgy, sculpture, and stained-glass narratives shaped expectation and invited prayer. At the same time, Chartres’s urban setting provided lodging, food, trade goods, and devotional objects for travellers. Pilgrimage therefore unfolded within an integrated social and economic landscape that combined theology, ritual, architecture, civic life, and eschatological hope.

The cathedral’s visual program further reinforced the experience of pilgrimage. Sculptures and stained glass populated the building with what Hebrews calls the “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1), surrounding visitors with figures whose lives exemplified perseverance in faith. In this way, pilgrims entering the cathedral encountered a visual community of biblical and saintly travellers whose stories echoed their own spiritual journey.

Among these figures were biblical patriarchs associated with sacred journeying, including Moses (East Choir Window 119/102), Abraham (North Porch sculpture and North Clerestory windows 158/131a and 159/131b), Joseph (Narrative Window, North Nave 61/41), and David (Tree of Jesse window, West 1/49; East Choir window 103/122a; and North Rose Lancet C 145/121). Through such images the cathedral visually linked the experience of medieval pilgrims to the scriptural history of God’s people.

Scenes from the life of Jesus at Chartres likewise emphasized pilgrimage to Jerusalem. These include the Presentation at the Temple (Luke 2:22–40) and the Passover pilgrimage made by the Holy Family during Jesus’s youth (Luke 2:41–52). Two extended twelfth-century image cycles, the sculptural capital frieze of the western portal (c. 1145–1155) and the south window on the west wall (c. 1145; 3/51) depict events surrounding Jesus’s final pilgrimage and entry into Jerusalem for Passover.

Christ appears prominently throughout the cathedral’s imagery as the enthroned Lord who completed the journey from heaven to earth and back again through resurrection and ascension. Jesus also appears explicitly as a pilgrim, carrying a pilgrim’s staff in both the western frieze sculpture and the top-left scene of the south lancet window on the west wall (3/51, illustrated right).



Mary, the patron saint of Notre-Dame de Chartres, was likewise portrayed as a traveller whose journeys resonated with those who came to her shrine. Medieval preaching, liturgy, and art often presented Mary's life as exemplary for the Christian understanding of *peregrinatio* – life as a guided journey toward God. At Chartres, pilgrims could see scenes depicting Mary's journeys: the Visitation to Elizabeth (Luke 1:39–56), her travel to Bethlehem for the birth of Christ (Luke 2:1–20), and the Flight into and return from Egypt with Joseph and the infant Jesus.⁷

Pilgrims would easily have recognized St. James the Greater, whose shrine at Santiago de Compostela may have been their own destination. At Chartres he appears as a pilgrim to his own shrine, identifiable by the cockle shells on his clothing, in the twelfth-century fresco in the crypt, in the south nave clerestory windows (68/140b and 74/136b, illustrated opposite top), and in the south porch jamb sculpture, where shells hang from the strap of his pilgrim's pouch.

Images of contemporary pilgrims to Compostela were also present. In addition to images of pilgrims above the labyrinth that will be introduced later, a northern choir clerestory window visible to the laity from the south transept depicts male and female figures adorned with pilgrim shells (illustrated opposite below), possibly representing travellers journeying to Santiago and returning from it (133/113a).

The invocation of saints through their relics formed another essential dimension of medieval pilgrimage. Pilgrims often sought the intercession of saints whose relics were preserved in particular places. Local visitors in Chartres would have been especially attentive to saints associated with the region, including St. Savinian (43/17),⁸ St. Laumer (South Porch sculpture; 66/142a), St. Lubin (63/45), St. Solenne (138c/73), St. Piat (14th century chapel), and Thomas Becket (25/18), who had spent years in exile in Chartres between 1164 and 1170. As Claudine Lautier has shown (*Les Vitraux de la Cathédrale de Chartres. Reliques et Images*), the visual narratives of these saints throughout the cathedral enabled pilgrims to encounter their stories and contemplate their intercession. One striking example is the twelfth century fresco in the crypt which depicted six saints associated with pilgrimage destinations: St. Clement (Rome), St. Peter (Rome), St. James (Compostela), St. Martin (Tours), St. Nicolas (Bari) and St. Gilles (Saint-Gilles-du-Gard).



Pilgrimage at Chartres likely carried different meanings for different groups. For the cathedral clergy, whose responsibilities included safeguarding relics and maintaining liturgical order, the management of pilgrimage was often a matter of regulation rather than promotion. As James Bugslag observes, the cathedral chapter appears “not so much to encourage pilgrimage as to control it,” and there is limited evidence that the clergy actively promoted pilgrimage after the emergence of the thirteenth-century miracle collections, the earliest of which likely served fundraising needs for construction (*Pilgrimage to Chartres: The Visual Evidence*, 181). This distinction helps clarify differences between clerical and lay perspectives on sacred movement, as well as between elite and popular forms of devotion.

Both pilgrimage and procession assume that sacred encounter occurs through movement rather than stillness, yet they differ in structure and meaning. Pilgrimage involves sustained displacement across space and status, while procession represents regulated ritual movement governed by liturgical hierarchy and prescribed routes. At Chartres the clergy frequently incorporated the energies of pilgrimage into liturgical choreography, leading processions through the cathedral – and sometimes through the town – during major feasts and rites.

In medieval ceremonial practice, as is still true, the ideal Mass itself had a stational character, structured by processional movement between significant places within the church: doorways, choir, altar, and shrine. Such movement rendered the Church’s order visible and embodied.⁹

Chartres’s liturgical topography sharpened this logic. During Holy Week, the cathedral and surrounding town symbolically represented Jerusalem and its sacred landscape. Processions therefore did more than move through local space; they re-presented salvation history through the cathedral and the urban landscape alike. The cathedral’s eastward orientation further reinforced this symbolism: movement toward the altar aligned the worshipping body with the rising light of Christ and with the eschatological promise of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

The same symbolic logic appears in the thirteenth-century *Ordinaire Chartrain*, which required processions to move in a consistent solar direction, with the sun. Accordingly, the processional route in the crypt began in the north and concluded in the south.¹⁰ Through such practices the clergy did not simply host pilgrims but directed and structured their movement, channelling devotional energies into disciplined liturgical pathways.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that pilgrimage at Chartres cannot be reduced to a single practice or constituency. It was simultaneously a Marian cult centre organized around a powerful relic, an urban economy of hospitality and exchange, and – following Prache’s interpretation – an architectural and ritual environment offering worshippers and pilgrims an encounter with Jerusalem’s meaning beyond Jerusalem itself. Salvation history and eschatological hope were rendered visible in stone, glass, and movement. Surrounded by biblical travellers, saintly intercessors, and identifiable pilgrims, visitors encountered a visual theology of *peregrinatio*, while the clergy’s liturgical discipline simultaneously welcomed, structured, and at times constrained the devotional energies that drew crowds to Notre-Dame de Chartres. The next section turns from these broader structures to a more focused visual field: the cluster of pilgrim imagery near the labyrinth in the nave.

The Labyrinth in Context: Pilgrimage, Movement, and Interpretation

No surviving early thirteenth-century documentation explains the purposes, theology, or practices that informed the decision to inlay a labyrinth of approximately 42 feet (12.9 meters) in diameter across the nave pavement of Chartres Cathedral (see Jeff Saward, *The Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth: Frequently Asked Questions*). In the absence of such evidence, modern interpretations must proceed with methodological restraint. Nevertheless, many twenty-first-century writers have asserted, and then repeated as if it were established fact, that the Chartres labyrinth functioned as a “substitute pilgrimage” for those unable to travel to Jerusalem. Although rhetorically appealing, this claim rests on no identifiable documentation,¹¹ either contemporary with the labyrinth’s installation in the thirteenth century or securely grounded in later medieval testimony. Based on the historical material reviewed by scholars, the available evidence in no ways supports the idea of Jerusalem substitution as an interpretive key.

The centre of inquiry should shift from speculative origin stories to careful analysis of the labyrinth in situ. If connection of the labyrinth with pilgrimage practice can be responsibly proposed, it is most likely to emerge from the convergence of material context, iconographic proximity, and liturgical habit, from what the labyrinth did within the building and from what the cathedral’s broader devotional system made plausible. The sheer scale of the pavement design, the most visually dominant decorative element in the Gothic nave, suggests that it may have intersected in some way with patterns of devotional movement undertaken by clergy and laity alike, including those visiting as pilgrims.

The labyrinth’s relation to procession, prayer, penitential movement, and the experience of pilgrims at Chartres remains an open question. In the absence of direct written testimony, the most promising lines of inquiry lie in the cathedral’s spatial organization, liturgical choreography, and surrounding visual program.

Clerical Interests and the Shaping of Sacred Space at Thirteenth Century Chartres

Any interpretation of the labyrinth must begin with the question of agency: who possessed the authority to introduce such a large-scale new element into the cathedral’s nave? At Chartres, as at other cathedrals, the bishop, Renaud de Mousson (1182–1217), authorized, promoted, and legitimated the rebuilding project in its broadest sense. The shaping of interior space also depended on the cathedral clergy, above all through the chapter’s corporate leadership and resources. Their central role is legible in the building itself, since the thirteenth-century plan accommodated an immense choir in which the seventy-two canons gathered for the Divine Office, a reminder that the cathedral functioned above all as the chapter’s liturgical instrument.

Although the twelfth-century School of Chartres was no longer at its height during the principal Gothic rebuilding campaign after 1194, elements of its intellectual legacy likely remained active within the clerical culture that shaped the cathedral’s articulation of space, image, and devotion. Its broadly Neoplatonic orientation, especially its emphasis on creation as ordered and intelligible, on *ratio* and proportion as reflections of cosmic truth, and on layered interpretation, literal, moral, allegorical, and anagogical, would have provided an interpretive framework for understanding symbolic form within the cathedral. By the thirteenth century, this legacy would also have encountered increasingly Aristotelian modes of thought, producing a more complex intellectual environment in which geometry,

matter, image, and sacred meaning could be understood as mutually informing rather than merely decorative. In that light, the monumental walkable labyrinth inlaid in the nave pavement may be read, cautiously, as participating in a clerical pedagogy of ordered movement and meaning within a space governed by episcopal authority and capitular liturgy. As Guillaume Durand would later associate the church floor with the foundational plane of Christian faith (*Rationale divinorum officiorum* 1.1.28, 1285-1291), so too the pavement could bear theological significance as well as practical use.

Pilgrims and Ritual Movement at Chartres

Although no documentation survives explaining the original purpose of the labyrinth at Chartres, its placement, scale, and physical form strongly suggest that it was intended to be experienced by those who entered the cathedral, pilgrims among them. Set just inside the western entrances, it would have been immediately visible to anyone passing through the three west portals, all of which open directly toward the nave where it lies. Positioned between the threshold of entry and the choir where the clergy prayed the Divine Office and celebrated Mass – and symbolically between the darkness of the west and the light of the east – the labyrinth occupied a transitional zone within the church, a location well suited to movement, reflection, and spiritual reorientation.

The labyrinth's scale likewise suggests intentional use rather than mere display. As Jeff Saward observes [Saward, 2003, 96], the Chartres labyrinth was executed at a size that positively invites walking: spanning nearly the full width of the nave, it is difficult to imagine that so monumental a pavement design was intended only to be viewed rather than also traversed. John James states the point even more emphatically, describing it as “the greatest single decorative element in the entire cathedral, larger than any rose window or sculptural ensemble and deliberately set deep within the paving so that people’s feet would pass across it.” [*Walking on the Past*, 5]. In his view, “there is nothing fortuitous in Chartres,” where every element participates in a meaningful whole. Taken together, such observations make it difficult to regard the labyrinth as mere ornament. It does not seem unreasonable to understand it as a feature designed for bodily engagement and integrated into the devotional and ceremonial life of the nave.

The thirteenth-century labyrinth should therefore be considered within the cathedral's broader culture of regulated ritual movement, including processions, directional norms, and the spatial dramaturgy of liturgical practice. Pilgrims and other lay visitors moving through the nave did so within a space also structured by public and seasonal liturgies, many of which unfolded on or near the pavement area occupied by the labyrinth in the third and fourth bays. Although direct documentary corroboration has not yet been identified, further study of ordinaries, customary statutes, processional, and musical sources may still illuminate how movement through this part of the nave was choreographed.

No known medieval source describes a specific liturgy attached to the labyrinth at Chartres.¹² Its orientation and circulation, however, are consistent with the liturgical habits and processional norms that governed movement within the cathedral. Both entry into the labyrinth and the final approach to its centre occur from the west, so that the walker's two decisive moments – crossing the threshold and reaching the centre – are marked by eastward movement. This directional logic accords with the cathedral's broader architectural orientation toward the east and toward light, a direction commonly associated with resurrection theology and with medieval pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

The pattern of the labyrinth's turns is also suggestive. The path begins with a turn toward the north and concludes with a final turn from the south before entry into the centre. This sequence is compatible with the thirteenth-century *Ordinaire Chartrain*, which required cathedral processions to move in a solar direction. As noted earlier, the same directional principle governed pilgrim circulation in the lower church. Even in the absence of explicit evidence for a labyrinth rite, the labyrinth's placement and directional logic can therefore be understood within the cathedral's wider culture of ritualized movement.

Pilgrimage Themes in the Glazing Near the Labyrinth

In the thirteenth-century cathedral at Chartres, as in other churches of the Latin West, the nave functioned primarily as the laity's space. It served as the cathedral's public hall: the place where lay worshippers attended Mass, heard preaching, and occasionally gathered for civic or ecclesiastical assemblies. At Chartres in particular, the nave also received and regulated the crowds of pilgrims drawn by Marian devotion, relic veneration, and major feast days. During such occasions the nave became not only a site of liturgical participation but also a zone of circulation, gathering, waiting, prayer, and resting as pilgrims and other worshippers moved through the cathedral according to both devotional impulse and ceremonial order. From this space, lay participants engaged the liturgy through sight, sound, gesture, and movement.

The absence of explicit medieval texts linking the Chartres labyrinth to pilgrimage practice does not demonstrate that no such relationship existed. It may instead reflect both the limits of the surviving record and the selectivity of what the clergy chose to preserve. Cathedral archives and liturgical books typically document what was formally regulated or administratively managed – statutes, ordinaries, processions, and similar sources. By contrast, many forms of lay devotion, especially those expressed through bodily movement or visual engagement, rarely entered the written archive.

Nor should the imagery surrounding the labyrinth be reduced to a single meaning. As in medieval visual and textual culture more broadly, the windows around the labyrinth likely operated simultaneously on several levels – literal, allegorical, moral, and devotional. The pilgrimage associations considered here therefore represent only one interpretive strand within a more complex symbolic field. Even so, closer examination of the stained glass surrounding the labyrinth strengthens the possibility that pilgrimage themes formed part of the visual environment experienced in the area of the nave that included the labyrinth.

One particularly significant example is the Good Samaritan window in the south aisle, visible from the threshold of the labyrinth in the third bay of the nave (6/44). In the lower half of the window, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) receives a strikingly distinctive treatment. At Chartres, the traveller leaving Jerusalem is explicitly identified in Latin as a pilgrim (*peregrinus* or *peregrinusa*) in scenes 5 (illustrated right) and 7, even though the biblical text itself describes the figure only generically as ἄνθρωπος (*anthrōpos*), “a person” or “human being.”¹³ The window thus reframes the scriptural narrative in language directly resonant with pilgrimage.



Forms associated with the labyrinth may also find visual echoes within this same window. Two examples are suggestive. In the lower right register, the shoemakers' guild presents its donor panel adorned with stylized six-petaled flowers (scene 3, illustrated below), a motif uncommon in other thirteenth-century windows at Chartres. The shape recalls the six-petaled form marking the labyrinth's centre (inset opposite).¹⁴ Likewise, the battlements of the city from which the pilgrim departs visually resemble what French scholars describe as the labyrinth's *dents*, the tooth-like projections that frame its outer edge. These correspondences cannot prove intentional design relationships, but they do suggest that nearby glass could visually reinforce patterns and motifs activated by the labyrinth itself.



Taken together, the imagery and themes of the surrounding windows indicate that the area around the labyrinth was saturated with associations related to pilgrimage and travel. As noted earlier, imagery linked to Jerusalem and Santiago de Compostela appears near the labyrinth not only in the stained glass of the west wall but also in the lower aisles and clerestory windows of the third and fourth bays of the nave.¹⁵

A related line of inquiry concerns the possibility that theological ideas closely associated with pilgrimage experience were embedded within the symbolic field surrounding the labyrinth itself, including near the threshold stone marking both its entrance and exit. In the second bay of the nave, on both the north and south sides, images of Christ with the Alpha and Omega – the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet – are prominently visible (on the sides of Christ's head: 70/140c and in the book held by Christ: 63/45; cf. Rev. 1:8, 21:6, 22:13, illustrated below). Positioned in the bay adjacent to the labyrinth's threshold, where linear movement gives way to circular pattern, these images may have framed the space with a meditation on beginning and end, departure and return.



In this context the Alpha and Omega imagery may have done more than identify Christ doctrinally. It could also have shaped the pilgrim's experience of the labyrinth by recalling the larger temporal and spiritual arc within which medieval pilgrimage unfolded: departure from home, the journey toward a sacred destination, and the eventual return. The threshold stone thus introduces the structure of pilgrimage itself. Entering the labyrinth, the walker sets out along a path whose centre – marked by a flower-like form – evokes a sacred goal. Leaving it, the same threshold becomes the final point of return. Read in this way, the

labyrinth could figure the Christian life as a journey from origin to fulfilment, from earthly passage toward divine encounter, and from the uncertainties of travel toward ultimate arrival.

The analysis that follows focuses on two motifs particularly visible in the imagery surrounding the labyrinth: reversal and feet. These themes represent only two among several interpretive strands that may have shaped medieval viewers' experience of this space. The methodological aim is not to explain the archival silence surrounding the labyrinth by projecting later pilgrimage legends backward onto it. Rather, the task is to test whether historically plausible connections emerge from the labyrinth's geometry, scale, placement, and organization of movement together with its spatial, visual, and devotional context. The argument advanced here is therefore probabilistic rather than demonstrative. Its goal is not certainty but a historically grounded account of what a pilgrim might reasonably have been invited to see, do, and understand within the labyrinth zone.

One such theme is reversal. The labyrinth's path is structured by thirty-two turns, including twenty-eight full reversals of direction. This motif finds parallels in nearby windows. North of the labyrinth, in the aisle of the third bay, the St. Eustace window (62/43) recounts the life of a saint renowned for fidelity amid severe trials. The narrative unfolds through repeated reversals of fortune – gain, loss, restoration, and renewed loss. Such patterns would likely have resonated in a culture of pilgrimage, where travel exposed pilgrims to danger, deprivation, and uncertainty while also opening the possibility of unexpected aid and grace. The window's donors, furriers and drapers, further anchor this narrative in the material realities of travel, since pilgrims depended on durable, warm clothing and on repair or replacement as distance, weather, and wear took their toll.

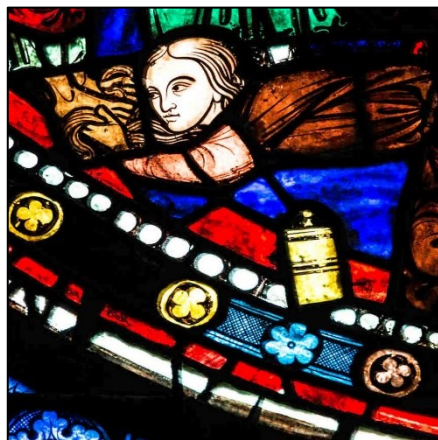
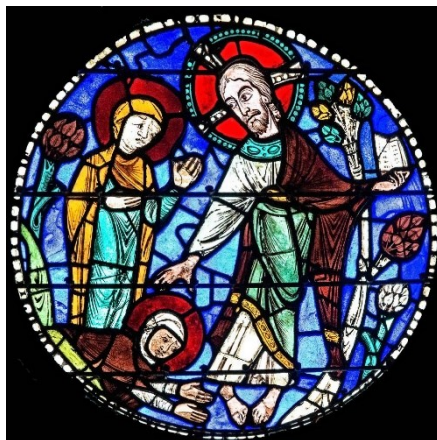
A similar narrative logic appears in the Joseph window (61/41) in the fourth bay of the north aisle. The window traces Joseph's dramatic reversals – a cycling from favour to betrayal and suffering, and finally to reconciliation and restoration. Joseph's declaration, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good" (Gen. 50:20, NRSV), expresses a theological claim that could sustain pilgrims amid the vulnerability and unpredictability of the road. The window's donors, moneychangers, would also have mattered directly to travellers, since Chartres received visitors moving through a world of multiple regional currencies, making exchange services practically important in and around the cathedral precinct.

The Death and Assumption of the Virgin window (7/42), also beside the labyrinth, intensifies this pattern of reversal while emphasizing Marian intercession. In the Assumption scene (20), Mary passes from death into heavenly life. This threshold crossing echoes the labyrinth's own location within the nave, situated between the symbolic realms of earth and heaven. For pilgrims seeking the Virgin's aid, this convergence of Marian imagery and narrative reversal would have deepened the devotional resonance of the labyrinth zone.¹⁶

Craig Wright has identified reversal as a central symbolic theme in the Chartres labyrinth itself, expressed both in its winding course and in analogies with retrograde structures in medieval music. He argues that labyrinths of the Chartres and Reims–Sens type signify "the process of a miraculous reversal," echoing the descent and ascent (*descensus* and *ascensus*)

of Christ (67-69 and 106-107). This interpretation is particularly suggestive when considered alongside pilgrimage. For medieval travellers, the road rarely followed a straight line; it involved detours, setbacks, and returns as well as arrival. The labyrinth gave that experience visible and bodily form, transforming reversal itself into part of the meaning of sacred progress.

A second motif visible in the glazing near the labyrinth is the striking emphasis on feet and shoes. Because pilgrimage is fundamentally a practice of walking, this prominence may be more than incidental. Several Magdalene scenes visible from the labyrinth emphasize bodily orientation toward Christ's feet.¹⁷ In one scene above the labyrinth in the south clerestory of the third bay, Mary Magdalene appears barefoot – a detail associated with penitence and humility in medieval visual culture but also suggestive of pilgrimage's embodied discipline. In another scene she reaches toward Christ's bare feet (below left), even though the Gospel text (John 20:16–17) does not mention them explicitly. A related scene at the base of the Magdalene window (5/46, below right) depicts Mary anointing Jesus' feet.



In the Middle Ages, travel, especially penitential or devotional travel, made the condition of the feet both a practical concern and a powerful symbol. The two south nave windows adjoining the labyrinth sharpen this emphasis. Their lowest registers depict members of the shoemakers' guild (illustrated below), framing the labyrinth zone with imagery of the craft most directly responsible for protecting the traveller's feet.



Additional imagery reinforces these associations. Above the labyrinth, a clerestory lancet of St. James the Greater, patron saint of pilgrims, is paired with donor imagery from the Gaufridus family (74/136b, illustrated below). The family members appear as pilgrims marked by the cockle shell, symbol of pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. One figure bears a banner displaying a sock or boot-shaped emblem possibly associated with the shoemakers' guild. Read in that light, the youngest son's downward gesture becomes especially suggestive, directing attention perhaps toward his boot or stockings, or the labyrinth, or both. Such imagery would have resonated strongly with medieval travellers whose journeys depended on durable footwear and on the practical economies supporting long-distance travel.



Another scene deepens these associations. In the twelfth-century west window (2/50, scene 4, illustrated right), the Washing of Peter's Feet presents Christ performing an act of humility and care in explicitly bodily terms. Although this scene predates the labyrinth's installation by many decades, its proximity could have taken on new resonance once the walkable pavement design was added nearby. In a culture where pilgrims would endure fatigue, hardship, and the vulnerability of travel, the washing of feet linked the physical realities of the road with a theological ethic of service and hospitality.



Finally, another image – visible when standing at the labyrinth’s threshold and looking east – introduces yet another layer of meaning. In the Moses and Isaiah window above the high altar (119/102, illustrated right), Moses removes his sandals before the burning bush in obedience to God’s command: “Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exod. 3:5). Read alongside the cluster of foot-focused imagery near the labyrinth, this scene provides a powerful interpretive key. Feet and shoes become a visual language for marking the moment when ordinary ground can become sacred space.

Taken together, these visual cues do not demonstrate that the labyrinth functioned as a formal pilgrimage station. They do, however, make it difficult to regard the surrounding imagery as neutral. For medieval visitors arriving as travellers – pilgrims among them – the clustering of saints, donors, narratives, and symbolic motifs could have encouraged an embodied reading of the labyrinth zone as a place where the hardships and meanings of the road were interpreted through the body’s most vulnerable point of contact with the earth: the feet.



More broadly, imagery at Chartres participated in an intricate dialogue among liturgy, theology, and embodied devotional practice. Meaning did not reside in any single image but emerged through the interaction of visual form, ritual action, scriptural reference, movement through the cathedral, and personal acts of devotion. Future study of the labyrinth should therefore attend closely to the visual environment surrounding it and to the ways that imagery may have addressed pilgrims while also serving other devotional and theological functions within the cathedral.

The Chartres Labyrinth and Pilgrimage Through the Centuries

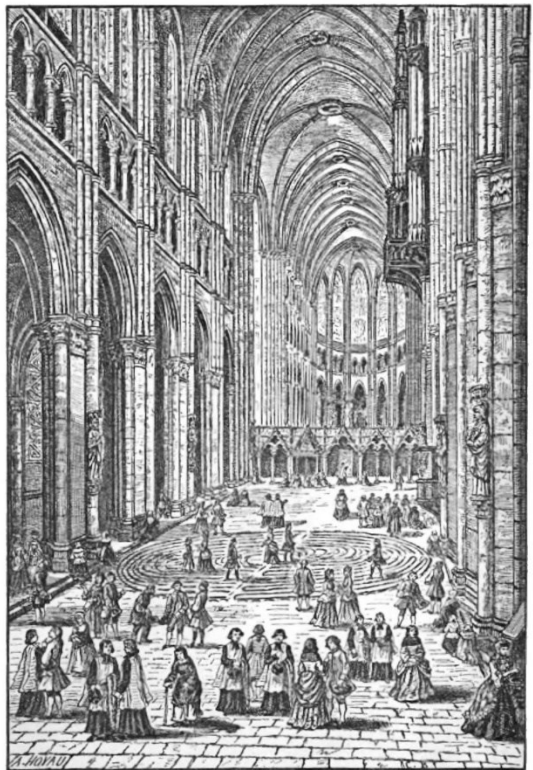
Pilgrimage practice evolved substantially across the centuries, and it is reasonable to assume that the meanings attributed to the Chartres labyrinth – and the ways it was used – changed as well. Whatever the labyrinth may have signified in the early thirteenth century, its interpretation did not remain fixed. Later evidence suggests a succession of devotional, ceremonial, antiquarian, and modern spiritual readings.

Around the year 1300, altars were installed against the nave piers of Chartres Cathedral. As a result, Mass was celebrated in close proximity to the labyrinth on a regular – most likely daily – basis until 1601.¹⁸ From the later Middle Ages onward, the labyrinth therefore remained embedded within the liturgical life of the nave, even if direct evidence for its original purpose or popular use remains elusive.

Comparable pavement labyrinths at Auxerre and Sens cathedrals appear in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century records associated with Easter dances performed by clergy. On this basis, some scholars have proposed that Chartres may once have known similar practices, although no surviving documentation confirms such ceremonies there (Jeff Saward, *The Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth*, FAQs, 5–6). What can be said with confidence is that the Chartres labyrinth continued to occupy an actively used liturgical space, since the nave remained the setting for major celebrations and large pilgrim gatherings throughout the later Middle Ages.

By the mid-seventeenth century, however, the labyrinth's original significance was no longer evident to at least some members of the cathedral clergy. In 1654 the priest Souchet described the labyrinth as an *amuse-fol*, a pointless diversion lacking any recognized Christian function (*Histoire du diocèse et de la ville de Chartres*). Contemporary laypeople may have held different views. A drawing made by Charles Challine in 1640 overlays the labyrinth's path with Psalm 51, suggesting a possible penitential or meditative reading, although a precise devotional practice cannot be documented or reconstructed with certainty (Saward, *Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth*, FAQs; see also Louet and Geoffrion, "Revisiting the Chartres Labyrinth: A Journey Through Time").

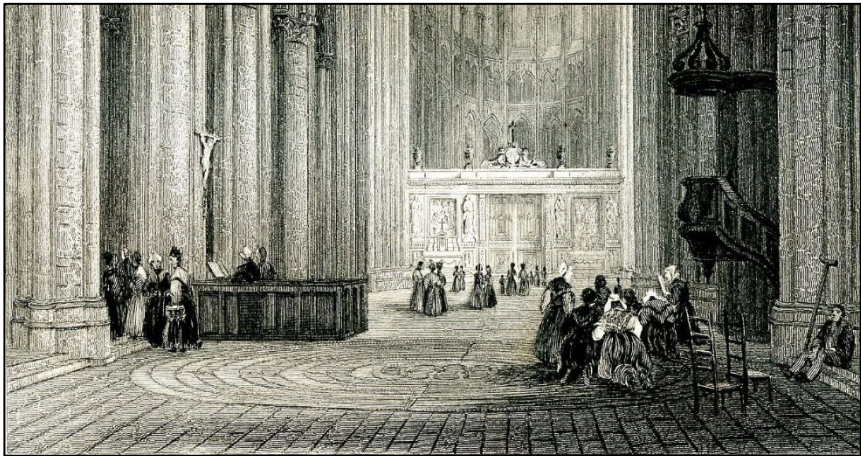
Another glimpse of early modern engagement appears in a 1696 engraving of the cathedral nave, where elegantly dressed lay men and women move across and along different portions of the labyrinth's path while clerics in liturgical dress stand elsewhere in the nave. The image presents the labyrinth not as an isolated or purely symbolic design, but as a visible feature of the cathedral's inhabited interior, one encountered amid the overlapping activities of clergy, visitors, and worshippers. It suggests that by this period the labyrinth could support several modes of engagement, liturgical, social, devotional, and curious, without any single interpretation necessarily governing its use or reception.



The nave of Chartres Cathedral as depicted on the frontispiece of Bulteau's Monographie de la cathédrale de Chartres (vol. 3, published 1892/1901), based on an earlier depiction from 1696

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, devotional uses of labyrinths at other French cathedrals are better documented than at Chartres. Saward, citing Wright, notes that at Reims, Arras, and Sens some worshippers reportedly traversed labyrinths on their knees while reciting prayers. He also cautions, however, that evidence for the exact form and antiquity of these practices is “surprisingly scant,” amounting to “little more than the imaginative speculation of nineteenth-century antiquarians” (Saward, *FAQs*, 6).

Evidence from the nineteenth century confirms that the Chartres labyrinth remained visible and accessible, though it does not demonstrate that its medieval meanings were still understood. Bulteau’s *Manuel du pèlerin à Notre-Dame de Chartres* (1855), an important witness to modern pilgrimage at the cathedral, makes no reference to the labyrinth. A contemporary visual source likewise suggests a different kind of engagement. In an image drawn by architect W.G. Colman, and engraved by Benjamin Winkles for *French Cathedrals* (London: Charles Tilt, 1837), a group of women appear kneeling and standing on the labyrinth. Their devotion seems stationary, however, and perhaps unrelated to the labyrinth’s path, which is inaccurately rendered and does not span the full width of the nave.



Detail from the plate in Winkles' French Cathedrals, published 1837

More broadly, nineteenth-century writers helped popularize the designation *Chemin de Jérusalem* (“Road to Jerusalem”) for the Chartres labyrinth, a label that reflects modern devotional imagination rather than earlier historical documentation. As Penelope Reed Doob has shown, the association between labyrinths and symbolic pilgrimage to Jerusalem is largely a post-Renaissance interpretive development, rather than a demonstrably medieval tradition.¹⁹

At the level of the cathedral itself, pilgrimage to Chartres revived strongly in the modern period. Cathedral publications report that more than 80,000 individual pilgrims arrive each year to entrust intentions to the Virgin Mary, while organized pilgrimage groups regularly celebrate liturgies in the nave. Within this contemporary setting the labyrinth has acquired a new official interpretation. The cathedral now presents it as a “path of life” that “invites you to take a ‘pilgrimage.’” Chairs are removed and the labyrinth is opened for walking on

Fridays from Lent until approximately All Saints' Day. The official explanation frames the walk as a meditative journey toward Christ and toward the altar ("*The Labyrinth*," *Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Chartres*; "Labyrinth: reopening March 7, 2025").

Visitors from many countries and religious backgrounds now participate in this practice. In 2025 approximately 12,000 people walked the labyrinth during these Friday openings. In the twenty-first century, the Chartres labyrinth therefore functions simultaneously as a heritage object, a devotional path, and a destination for visitors drawn by historical curiosity, spiritual reflection, or personal pilgrimage.

Conclusion: The Labyrinth Within Chartres's Pilgrimage Ecology

Seen across the centuries, the Chartres labyrinth has not possessed a single stable meaning. Its history is instead one of adaptation and reinterpretation. Yet this historical mutability does not weaken the case for a medieval resonance with pilgrimage practice. Although no surviving medieval text explicitly identifies the labyrinth as a device for pilgrims, it was installed within a cathedral whose nave functioned as a major space of lay devotion, liturgical movement, and pilgrim circulation.

Its placement between the western portals and the altar, its monumental yet walkable form, and the surrounding concentration of imagery associated with travel, reversal, feet, sacred destinations, and return all support the view that the labyrinth participated in the cathedral's wider culture of pilgrimage. This does not imply that the labyrinth had a single fixed function, nor does it support the uncritical repetition of later claims about Jerusalem substitution. It does suggest, however, that the labyrinth should be understood not as incidental ornament but as an activated feature of the nave, one whose significance emerged through movement and through the dense symbolic environment in which it was embedded.

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Notes

Photos of stained glass in Chartres Cathedral illustrating this article are all © JKH Geoffrion

1. Records show that a statue of Mary and the Christ child made of vermeil, or gilded silver, was placed at the altar from 1220. See: Houvet, *Monograph of the Cathedral of Chartres*, June 1984, pp. 16–20 which also includes a description of Marian statuary throughout the centuries.
2. Jane Welch Williams argues that the kneeling figures in Chartres's trade windows need not be read primarily as donors; they may instead represent pilgrims who pause in reverence before the holy figure shown above. (*Bread, Wine & Money: The Windows of the Trades at Chartres Cathedral*, 82.) Interpreting the pair as pilgrims strengthens the claim that the glazing program sought to present the Virgin's cult at Chartres as efficacious for those who came to pray, while also inviting viewers to participate in the same devotional posture and practice.
3. The most important evidence comes from Fulcher of Chartres (1059-1157), a cleric who participated in the First Crusade and later served in the Kingdom of Jerusalem. See: J. Doherty, *Fulcher of Chartres and Armed Pilgrims, 1104–27* (2022) https://app.scholarai.io/paper?paper_id=DOI:10.1484/M.OUTREMER

4. E. J. Mylod, *Latin Christian Pilgrimage in the Holy Land, 1187–1291* (2013) https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/5880/1/elizabeth_mylod_thesis_september_2013_institute_for_medieval_studies.pdf
J. Bird, *Preaching and Crusading Memory* (2016) <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315543253-11/preaching-crusading-memory-jessalynn-bird>
5. Beatus mappa mundi (8th-century Ms. is not extant, but the Jerusalem-centred design is preserved across later copies.); New York, Morgan Library & Museum MS M.644 (10th century); Girona, Cathedral/Museu de la Catedral, MS 7 (c. 975); Paris, BNF MS lat. 8878 (11th century), etc.
6. See “Les pèlerinages expiatoires et judiciaires au Moyen Âge” in *La faute, la répression et le pardon*, Éd. du CTHS, Paris, 1984, pp. 418–420). Chartres was not a major penitentiary pilgrimage site but because the Gothic rebuilding coincided with the decades following the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), when indulgence practices and penitential structures were more clearly regulated, pilgrimage to Chartres still carried recognized spiritual benefits.
7. For more information and photographic close-ups of many Marian images see Jill Kimberly Hartwell Geoffrion. 2017. *Visions of Mary: art, devotion, and beauty at Chartres Cathedral*. Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press.
8. There are often multiple images of each saint. See Pittsburgh site for further information.
9. While contemporary Christian practice often involves sitting, throughout most of Christian history worshippers stood and liturgy incorporated movement as a fundamental element.
10. “...on constate que le parcours se faisait, suivant l’usage encore en vigueur, dans la sens de la marche du soleil ou des aiguilles d’une montre.” *Ordinaire Chartrain du XIII^e siècle* (publié d’après le manuscrit original par le chanoine Yves Delaporte). Chartres: Société Archéologique d’Eure-et-Loir, 1953, 39.
11. This was noted first by Penelope Reed Doob. “In the absence of the tiniest shred of evidence” (1990, p.121) Doob called the theory intarsia labyrinths being used for substitute pilgrimages as a “tenacious fantasy [with] meagre roots in reality” (119).
12. The oldest example of a labyrinth linked with Christian medieval liturgy is a decorative illustration placed in the first letter O of a reading for the Holy Saturday of Pentecost in the Gelasian Sacramentary, a book of Christian liturgy related to the sacraments: Paris, BNF Lat. 12048, fol. 80, ca.780-800.
13. The only other medieval depiction of the traveller as an identified pilgrim is found at Sens Cathedral.
14. The six petaled flower shape is also mirrored on the other side of the labyrinth in the north clerestory window of bay 4 where Mary holds the gifts of the Spirit emanating from Christ (166/135c: Isaiah 11:1-3).
15. The twelfth century lancets in the west are the only windows that would have existed before the labyrinth was conceived. In the central and south lancets placed around 1145, themes of Jesus’s pilgrimages to Jerusalem appear several times as already discussed.
16. The clerestory image above the labyrinth (Bay 3 on the south side (71/138b) of Mary breastfeeding the Christ Child may also have reinforced confidence in the Virgin’s protective and intercessory aid. At Chartres an eleventh century miracle in which Mary healed Bishop Fulbert from St. Anthony Fire with her milk was reported to have left drops of milk which Fulbert collected. Later, they were reported to have been transferred to a crystal vial that was labelled “Milk of the Blessed Mary” (*De lacte beatae Mariae*). It was placed at the foot

of a statue called Notre-Dame La Blanche, which rested against a pillar on the north side of the rood screen outside the choir. This “milk of Mary” was held in great esteem at Chartres and thought to have had healing powers. The relic was still well known in the later Middle Ages and would have been visible to pilgrims. (It was still listed in the 1682 inventory, though it has since disappeared.)

17. West Lancet; Bay 3 clerestory above the labyrinth (72/38b lower register), and in the Magdalene Window (5/46; scene 12).
18. Altars next to the labyrinth were dedicated Mary Magdalene, St. Catherine; Fiacre and St. Amateur; and Thibaut. For more information see Lautier, *Les Vitraux de la Cathédrale de Chartres. Reliques et Images*.
19. See Natasha Brandstatter. 2008. “Dancing Through Time: The Evolution of the Labyrinth into a Symbol for Pilgrimage.” *Caerdroia* 37: 18–30.

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Editor & Publisher: Jeff Saward – Associate Editor: Kimberly Lowelle Saward, Ph.D.
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Why This Matters

This workflow is entirely based on free, open-source tools (COLMAP, Open3D, FFmpeg) and can run on cloud platforms like Google Colab - requiring no specialized software licenses or high-end workstations. The methodology is applicable to any outdoor heritage structure accessible by drone, providing an accessible approach to documentation that complements traditional archaeological methods.

Full technical documentation and code:

github.com/libishm1/Colmap_Photogrammetry_Drone_video

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Submissions to Caerdroia



Caerdroia is always pleased to receive material for publication. Readers are urged to submit papers, shorter articles, notes, information, photographs – indeed, anything labyrinthine – for possible publication in future editions of Caerdroia. Articles and notes should preferably be sent as e-mail attachments in Microsoft Word .doc or .docx format.

Illustrations and photographs are preferred in .jpg or .tif format at 300 dpi resolution please, but please keep illustrations separate from text, and send as separate files, with position in text clearly marked. A preferred style guide for authors is available on the Caerdroia Submissions page on our website: www.labyrinthos.net/submissions.html

Because Caerdroia is a specialised journal for enthusiasts, no payment can be made for submissions, but any permission or reproduction fees incurred will be covered, and all significant contributors will receive a digital PDF of the edition in which their work is published. Deadline for inclusion in Caerdroia 56: May 2027 please, for scheduled publication in the summer of 2027.

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