

The
Chartres Cathedral
Labyrinth:
Context Matters

Veriditas Pilgrimage, June 2024
Rev. Jill Kimberly Hartwell Geoffrion, Ph.D.,DD

Pilgrimage Ritual

With our heads bowed,
we remember that humility
is vital on the pilgrim path.

We extend our hands
and with our imagination,
place within them
something we have been holding onto,
but are ready to release.
We turn them over and do so.

When our hands are empty,
we turn them over,
signaling that we are ready to receive
whatever will be given today.

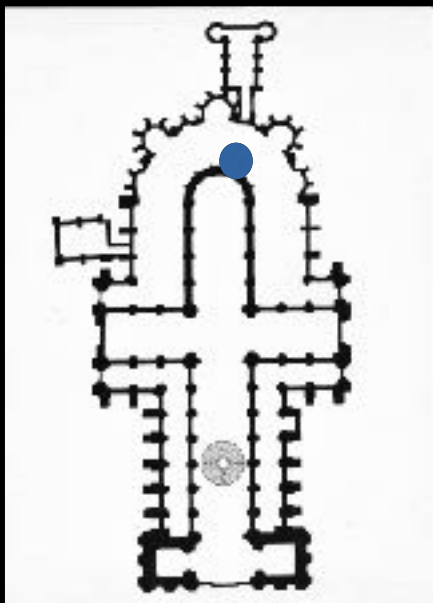
We place our hands over our hearts and
say,
“May the path lead us Home.”

*Adapted from a pilgrim ritual created
by Cielle Tewksbury+*



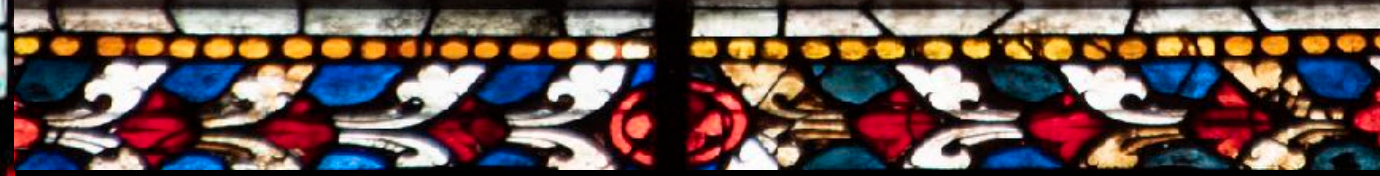
God said to Moses,
“Remove the sandals from your feet.
for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

Exodus 3:5





G'AVERTIOVS



Today's Explorations of the Chartres Labyrinth in Context

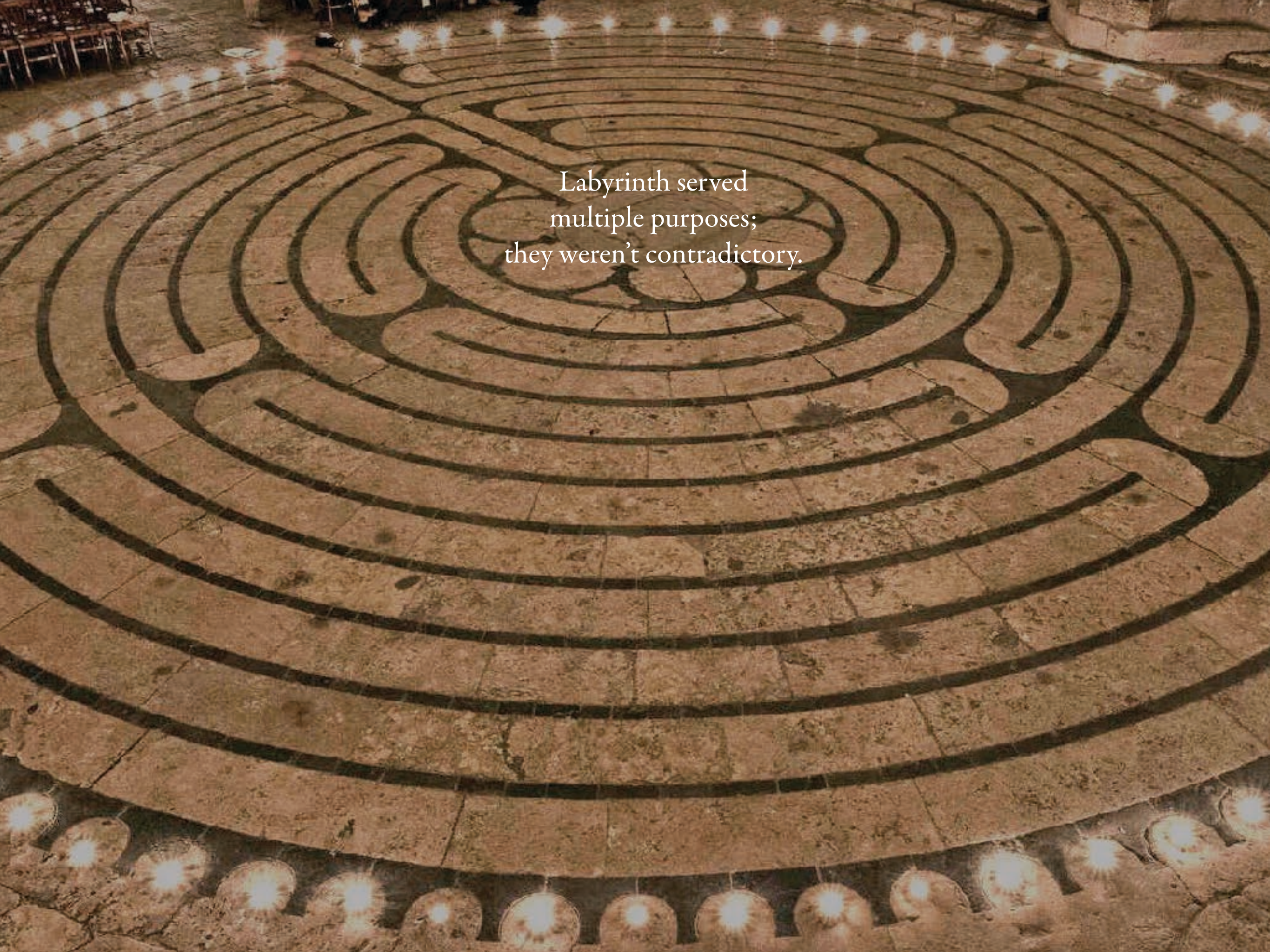
Where did this labyrinth pattern «come from»?

Why would it be installed in the floor of this thirteenth century cathedral in France?


What are some of the many ways it is in dialogue with the rest of the cathedral?

What meanings and functions has it held over the centuries?

What questions would it be helpful to ask and consider?



Labyrinth served
multiple purposes;
they weren't contradictory.

The image shows the interior of Chartres Cathedral, focusing on the large circular labyrinth pavement in the nave. The labyrinth is a complex pattern of concentric circles and paths, drawn in dark lines on the light-colored stone floor. The cathedral's architecture is visible, with tall, slender columns and high, arched windows. Some windows are filled with colorful stained glass. A few people are scattered throughout the space, some standing and some sitting on wooden chairs. On the right side, there is a large, dark, ornate structure, possibly a pulpit or altar, partially obscured by scaffolding. The lighting is soft and even, highlighting the intricate details of the labyrinth and the surrounding architecture.

The labyrinth at Chartres...
likely established, through contexts of visual analogies,
associations, and uses, a constellation of meanings...

Medieval Interpretation: Not one definitive interpretation but many layers of symbolic pointers to larger truth(s)

Using the fourfold sense of medieval interpretation and applying them to the labyrinth in Chartres.

1. Literal (*sensus litteralis*): The Chartres labyrinth is a physical path made of limestone and marble-like stone. It has a unicursal design, i.e. it has only one path that winds its way between the threshold and center (both ways).
2. Allegorical [symbolic representation] (*sensus allegorical*): The labyrinth's winding path represents the challenges (i.e. twists and turns) that are a part of the spiritual journey through this life. Reaching the center could symbolize arriving at a place of deep spiritual connection.
3. Moral [involving right and wrong] (*sensus moralis*): The labyrinth, on a moral level encourages perseverance, faith, and trust. The turns in the labyrinth could represent the need to move through and beyond seeming detours.
4. Anagogical [spiritual or mystical interpretation] (*sensus anagogicus*): The labyrinth could represent the soul's journey toward heaven. The center might represent union with the Divine. The path could serve as a process of spiritual preparation needed to prepare for this state.

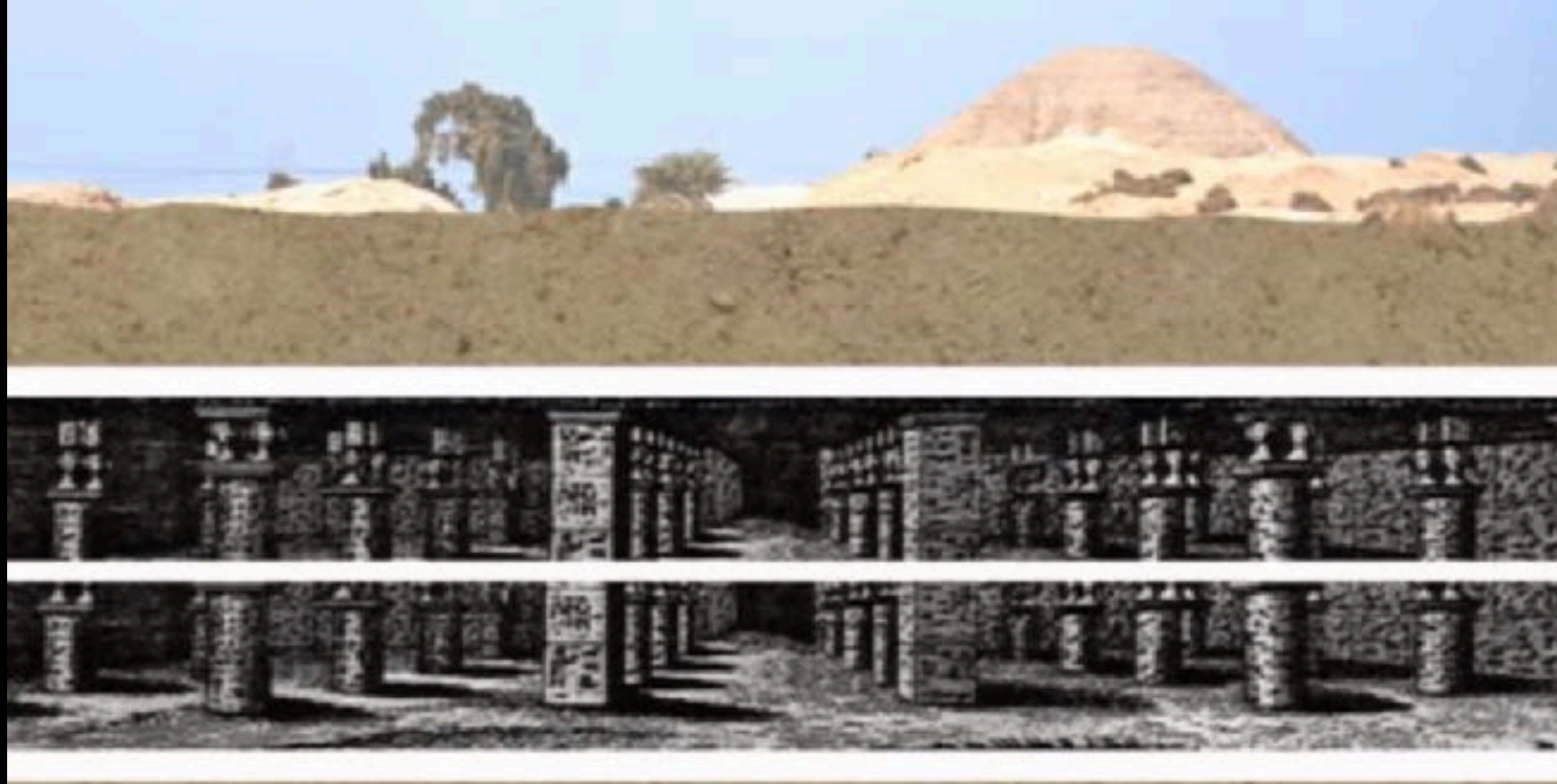
There was also a historical sense involving the myth of the labyrinth involving Theseus and the Minotaur. This myth was applied to the Christian story of Jesus's [Theseus-figure] overcoming of the Devil/Death (Minotaur).

Surely there other levels of meaning as well.

Labyrinth History (abbreviated) before 1200: Dates and Materials

Date	Type	Place
15,000-18,000 BCE	Meander Pattern	Oldest: Figurine Ukraine
2,000 BCE	Petroglyphs Hawara Tomb	Northern Spain, India Egypt
1200 BCE	Clay table drawing	Pylos, Greece
8th cent. BCE	Labyrinth Myth with Ariadne & Minotaur	Greek
6th Cent. BCE	Written literature Theseus & Minotaur	Now lost works of Pherekydes
320 BCE- 1rst cent. CE	Coins with labyrinths	Greek
165 BCE- 5th cent. CE	Mosaics, many for floors	Roman Empire/Area Around Mediteranean Sea
701 CE and later	Manuscript illustrations	European Monasteries
1100 and later	Church labyrinths, visual and walkable	Europe, especially Italy, & France

I would like to express gratitude to Jeff Saward for help with this table.



Ancient Egypt: The Labyrinth of Hawara with its 3,000 subterranean rooms symbolized the perilous journey after death to reach the underworld.



Prehistoric Rock Art



Goa, India



Marin, Spain

Ritual dances
Symbolic journeys (after death?)
Representations of the cosmos
Defensive structures

Greek and Cretan Myths: Theseus and the Minotaur



Risk and Reward
(Death/Life)





The longest possible path in the smallest area symbolized life's unfolding for those in the Greco-Roman world.
Often placed at the threshold of buildings (apotropaic function).

*Pont Chevron, France Roman mosaic labyrinth
Second century, CE*

Medieval symbolism of the labyrinth in theological and literary texts was both positive and negative.

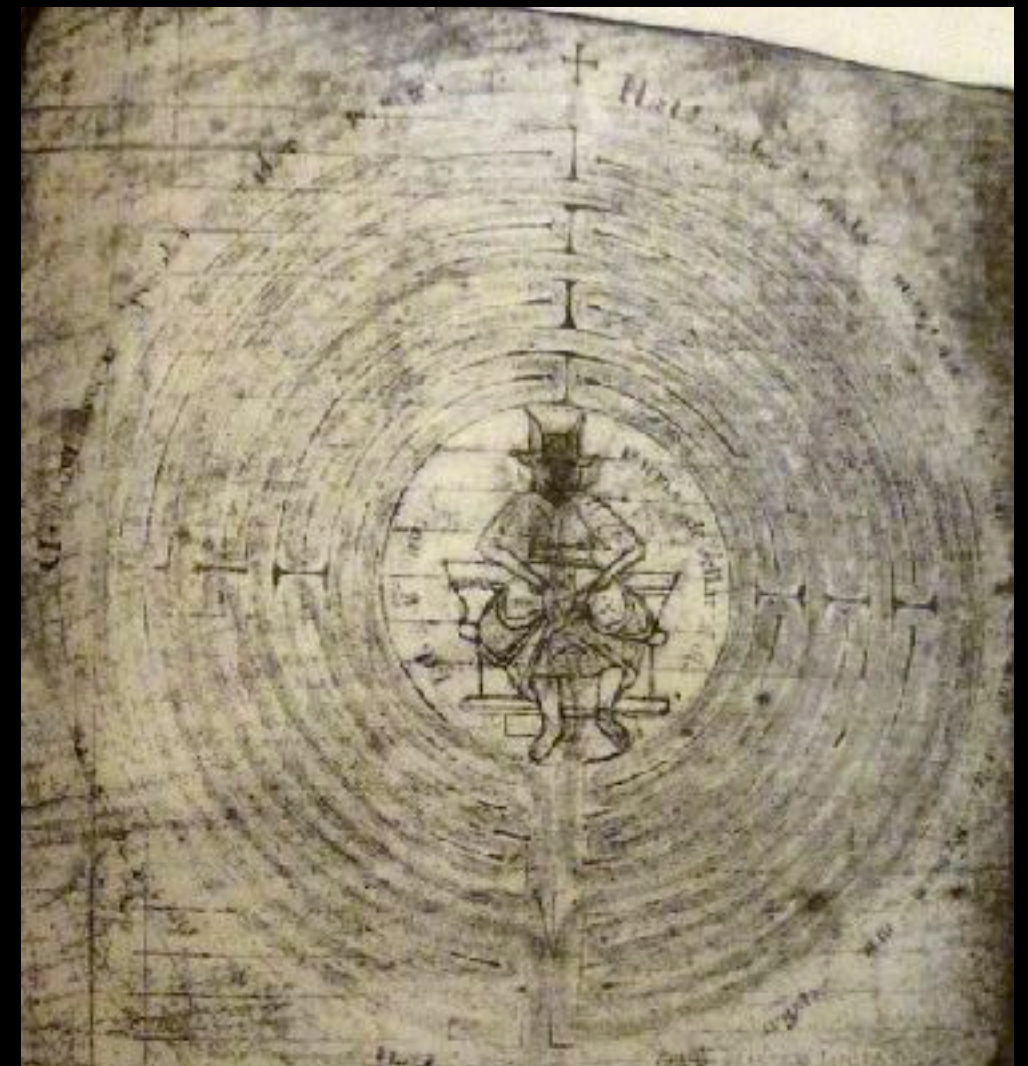
A Microcosm of the (ordered) Cosmos

Death and Rebirth

Complexities of human thought

Danger and temptation

Representation of Cities



For further study, see: *The Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages* by Penelope Reed Doob.

901-1000

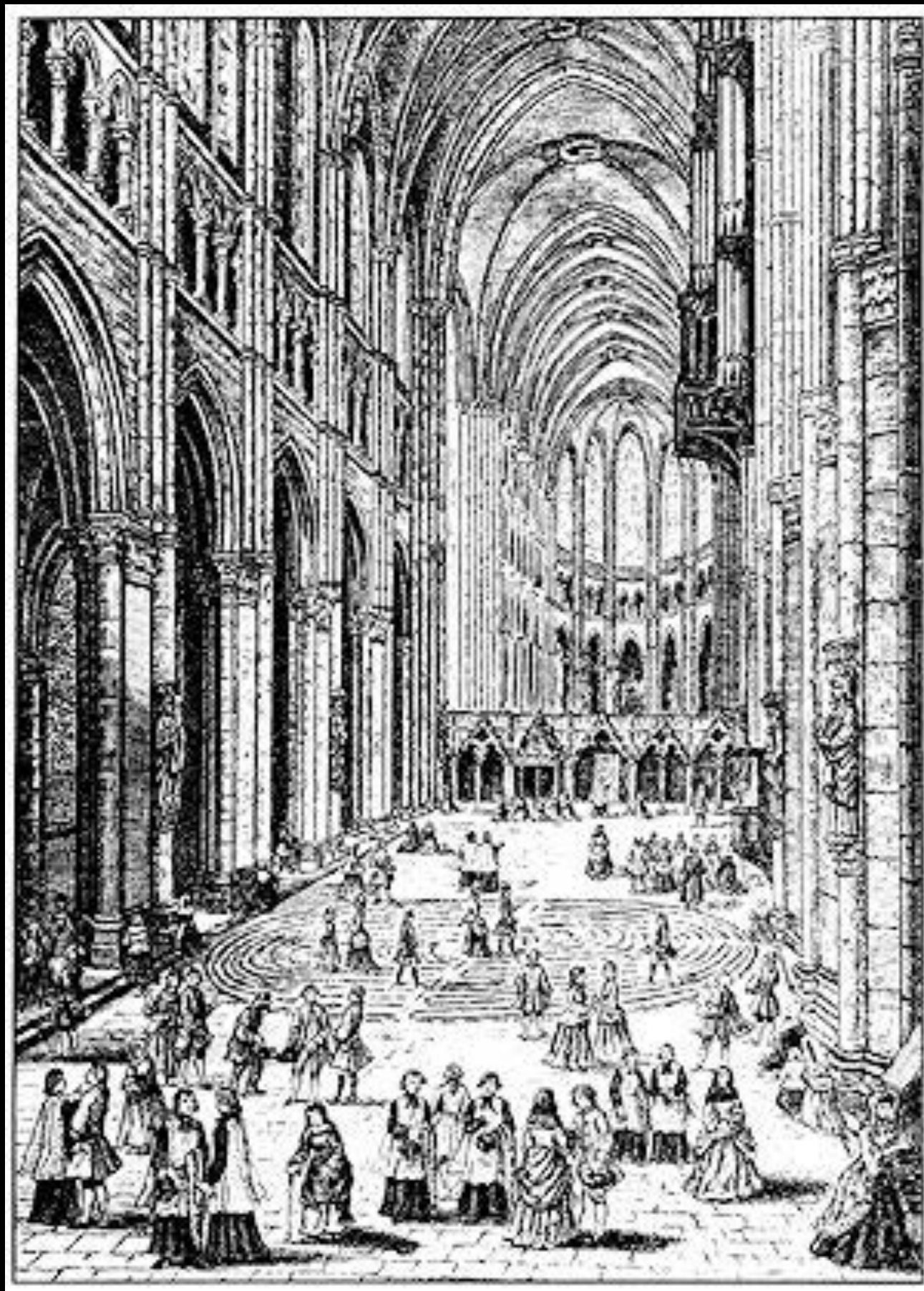


M. Germain des Près

lat. 13013

Mon. 289. S. Germain. N. 989.

*Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France
 13013, fol. 1r. Provenance : St. Germain des
 Près, France. Computational. Kern #181.
 Miscellany (including calendars, Easter cycles, etc.)*



*Engraving Original 1696
Published after retouching by
Bulteau 1887-192*

“The labyrinth is one of the oldest of symbols; it depicts the way to the unknown center, the mystery of death and rebirth, the risk of the search, the danger of losing the way, the quest, the finding, and the ability to return.

If we follow the path of the labyrinth from the floor of Chartres Cathedral we can observe that in the course of its evolution it not only connects the periphery with the center...but actually fills out and covers the total plane surface of the circle; in striving for the center the path integrates the total circle, the total field."

*Edward C. Whitmonth. 'Therapy' in The Symbolic Quest
(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) 1969, 306-307.*

What do you see when you look at this labyrinth?

What feelings does it evoke in you?



What else does it make you think of?

What does it symbolize for you?

*Auteur(s)
Hermanowicz
Mariusz, Malnoury
Robert
(c) Région Centre-Val
de Loire*



Where did the
Chartres Cathedral
labyrinth “come from?”



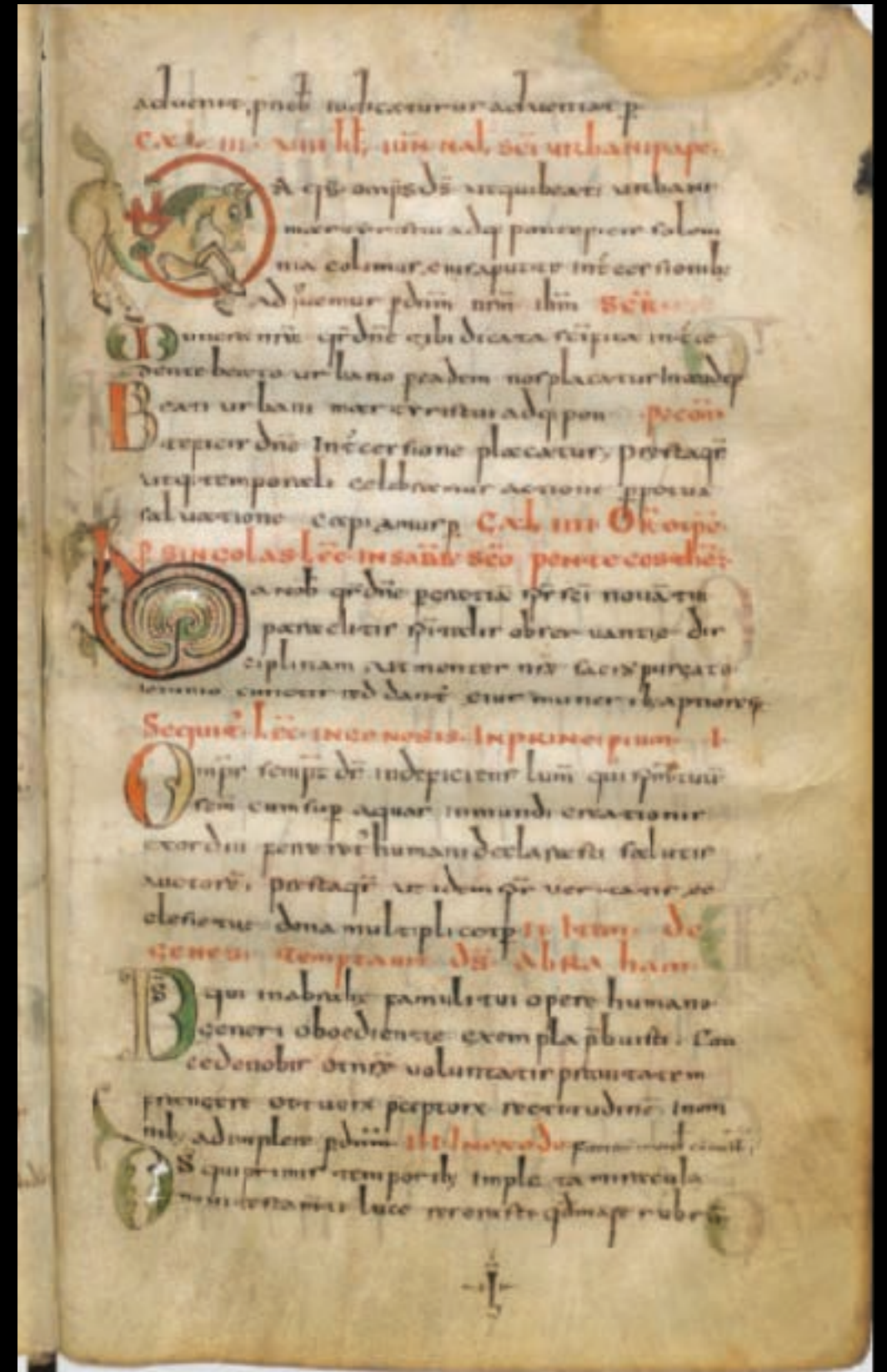
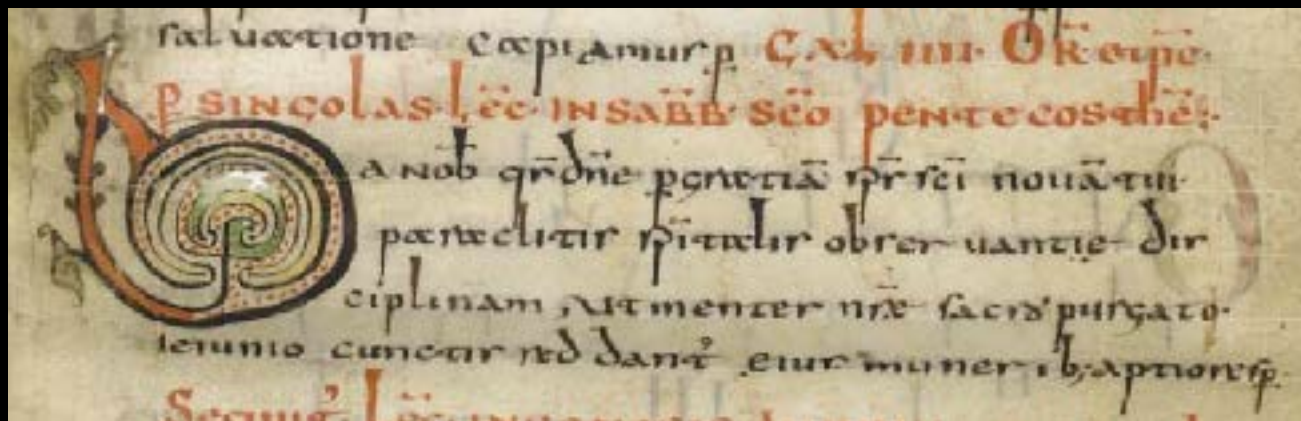
Image © Alain Kilar
<https://www.alainkilar.ch/>



Roman mosaic labyrinth now at the Kuntz Museum in Vienna, Austria 275-300 CE

Earliest known labyrinth in a manuscript: 701-800

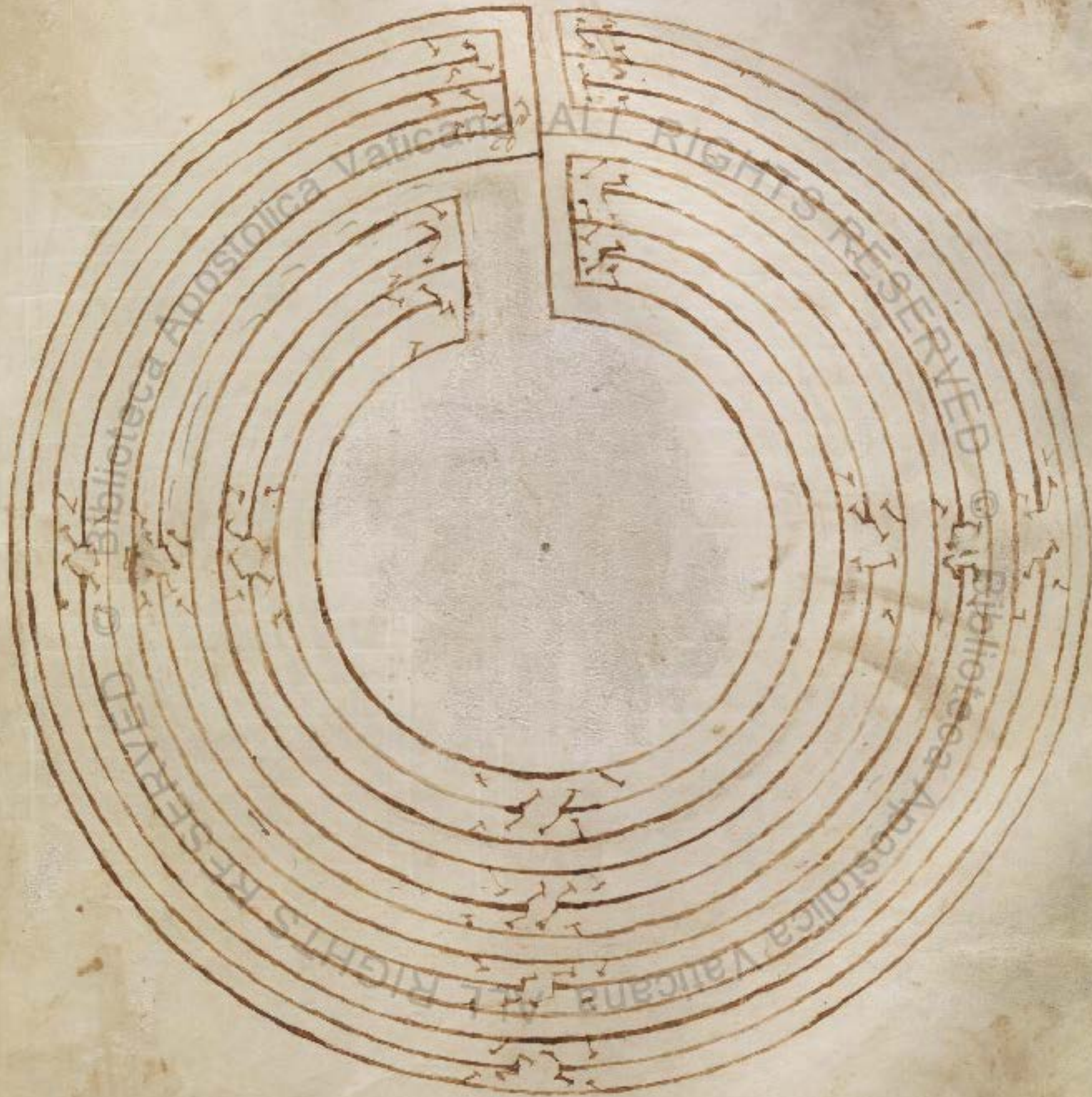
This 7-circuit Cretan labyrinth is in the form of an illuminated capital in a Gelasian Sacramentary, a book of Christian liturgy related to the sacraments.



790-875



*Vienna Codex 2687, fol. 1r.
Provenance : Weissenburg Monastery in Alsace.
Kern #176
Paraphrase of the Gospels in Old High German.*



*Apostolica Vatican Latin 4929,
fol. 78r. Provenance: Abbaye
Saint-Germain à Auxerre,
France.
860-862*

901-1000



M. Germain de Paris

lat. 13013

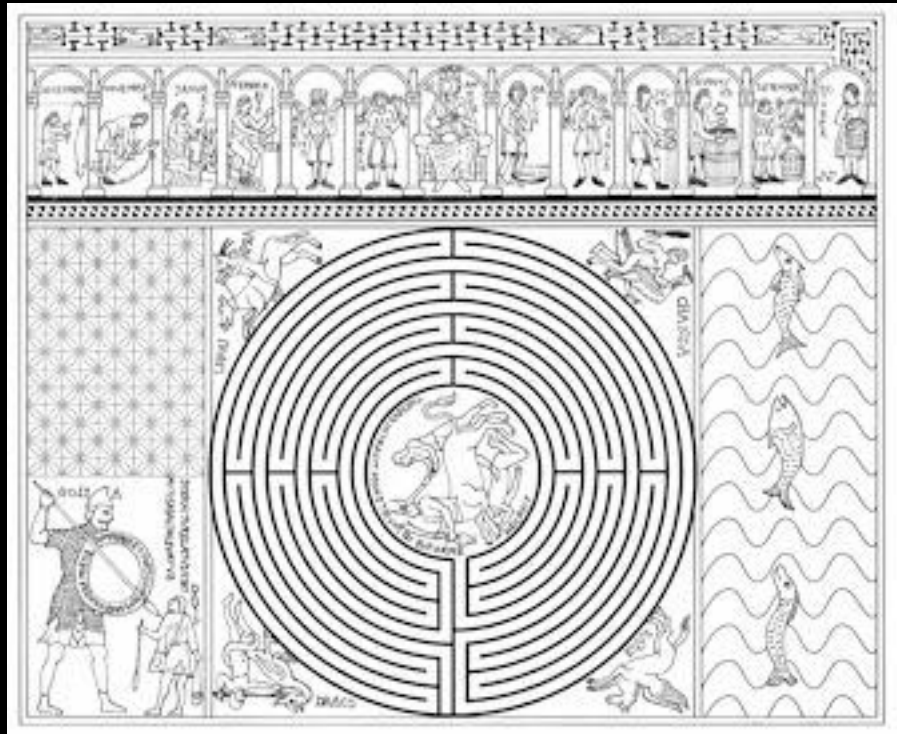
Mon. 289. S. Germain. N. 989.

*Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France
 13013, fol. 1r. Provenance : St. Germain des
 Prés, France. Computational. Kern #181.
 Miscellany (including calendars, Easter cycles, etc.)*



Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France,
Lat. 4416, fol. 35r.
801-900

Italian church labyrinths from 1101-1200



Pavia 1100

Piacenza 1107 : "similar in scope"

Decorative mosaic pavement



Rome (St. Maria Aquiro) 1189

1.5 meters/approx. 5 feet



Pontremoli 12th cent.

Approx. 32" x 21.5"

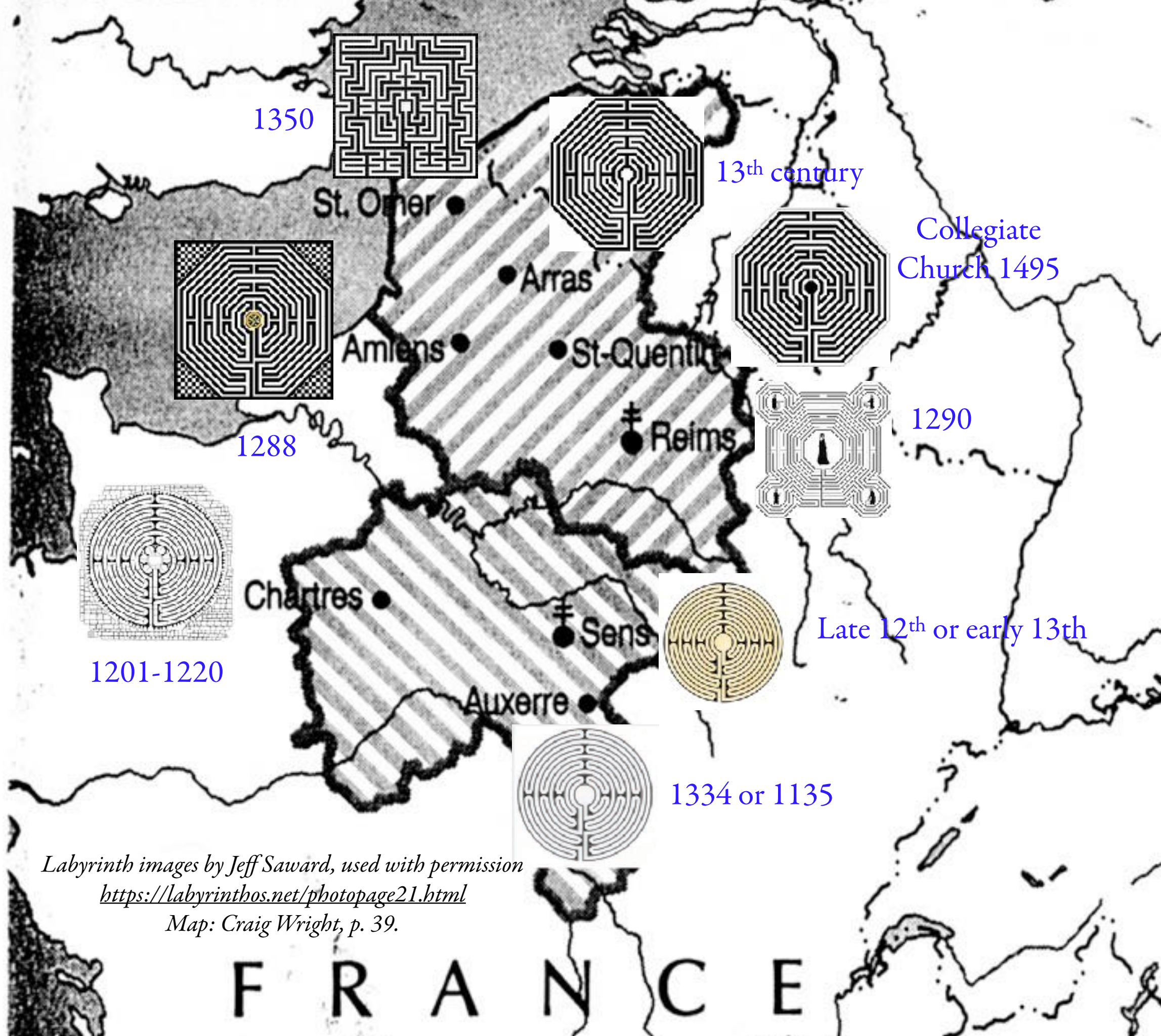
Lucca, Italy
(outside cathedral)

Late 12th

Diameter 1' 7 1/2"



Images: Pavia, Rome, Lucca ©Jeff Seward,
<https://labyrinthos.net/photopage21.html>



Poitiers









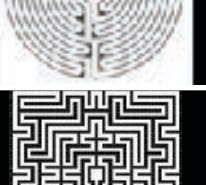
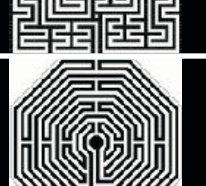

unknown date

Labyrinth images by Jeff Saward, used with permission

<https://labyrinthos.net/photopage21.html>

Map: Craig Wright, p. 39.

French Ecclesiastic Labyrinths in the Middle Ages

Unknown	Poitiers Cathedral graffiti; may have been a labyrinth in nave	graffiti still present	
Late 12th-early 13th	Sens Cathedral nave, finished 1180	1768	
1201-20	Chartres, Cathedral		
1288	Amiens Cathedral (reinstalled 1894-96)	1827-9	
1290	Reims Cathedral	1779	
13th cent.	Arras Cathedral	1793	
1334/5	Auxerre Cathedral of St. Stephen	1690	
Late 14th	St. Bertin, St. Omer Cathedral	1789	
1495	St. Quentin, Collegiale Church		

When was the Chartres labyrinth installed?

We have no definitive documentation that answers this question.

Nobody actually knows when the labyrinth was constructed, because no surviving documents record that information, although various writers have published dates of **1200, 1220 and 1235**, even as late as **1240**, all given as if they were provable installation dates.



The architectural detective work of John James (James, 1990) suggests that the labyrinth must have been laid early in the first decade of the 13th century (c.**1201-1205** is a commonly quoted figure), as its position is so integral to the geometric layout of the cathedral, but this argument has a hint of circularity.

Craig Wright (Wright, 2001) places its construction around **1215-1221**, when the construction of the nave was essentially complete and the masons moved on to finish other parts of the cathedral structure. As the masons would surely not have invested considerable time and expense in installing the labyrinth while there was still the possibility of damage by falling masonry, from work on the roof above, this would seem a sensible dating. Besides, until the construction scaffolding surrounding the pillars in the nave was removed, it would have been very difficult to install the labyrinth, the outer circuits of which run very close to the base of the pillars on either side.

“We do not know the names of those who worked on this masterpiece (Chartres Cathedral): Medieval art was always a collective enterprise, and an anonymous one.

It rested on a profound sense of faith, on the belief that there was nothing more important than the construction of a church.”



C. e. J.-P. Deremble, (2004).

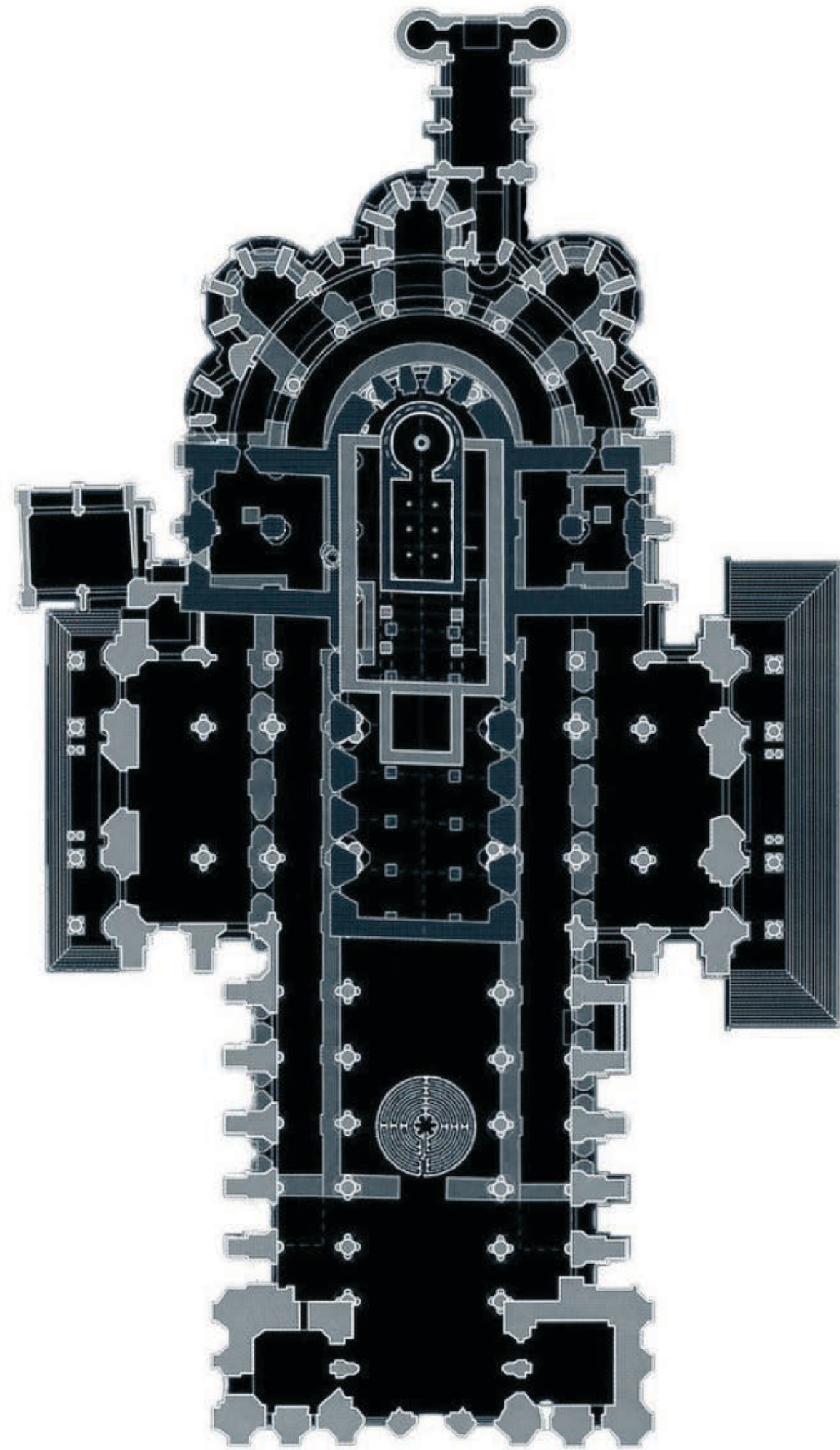
*Voyage au Moyen Âge à Travers les
Vitreaux de Chartres. Moisenay,
France, Éditions Gaud. 6.
Translation JKH Geoffrion*

In the Gothic Cathedral built from 1194-1220
the placement of the labyrinth
falls at the threshold of
the Romanesque cathedral
built by Fulbert in 1020.

It is located in a
place of transition
from the old to the new.

It is also a symbol of
entrance.

*Diagram from Gordon Strachan,
Chartres: Sacred Geometry, Sacred Space. 2003
Labyrinth added by Jill K H Geoffrion*



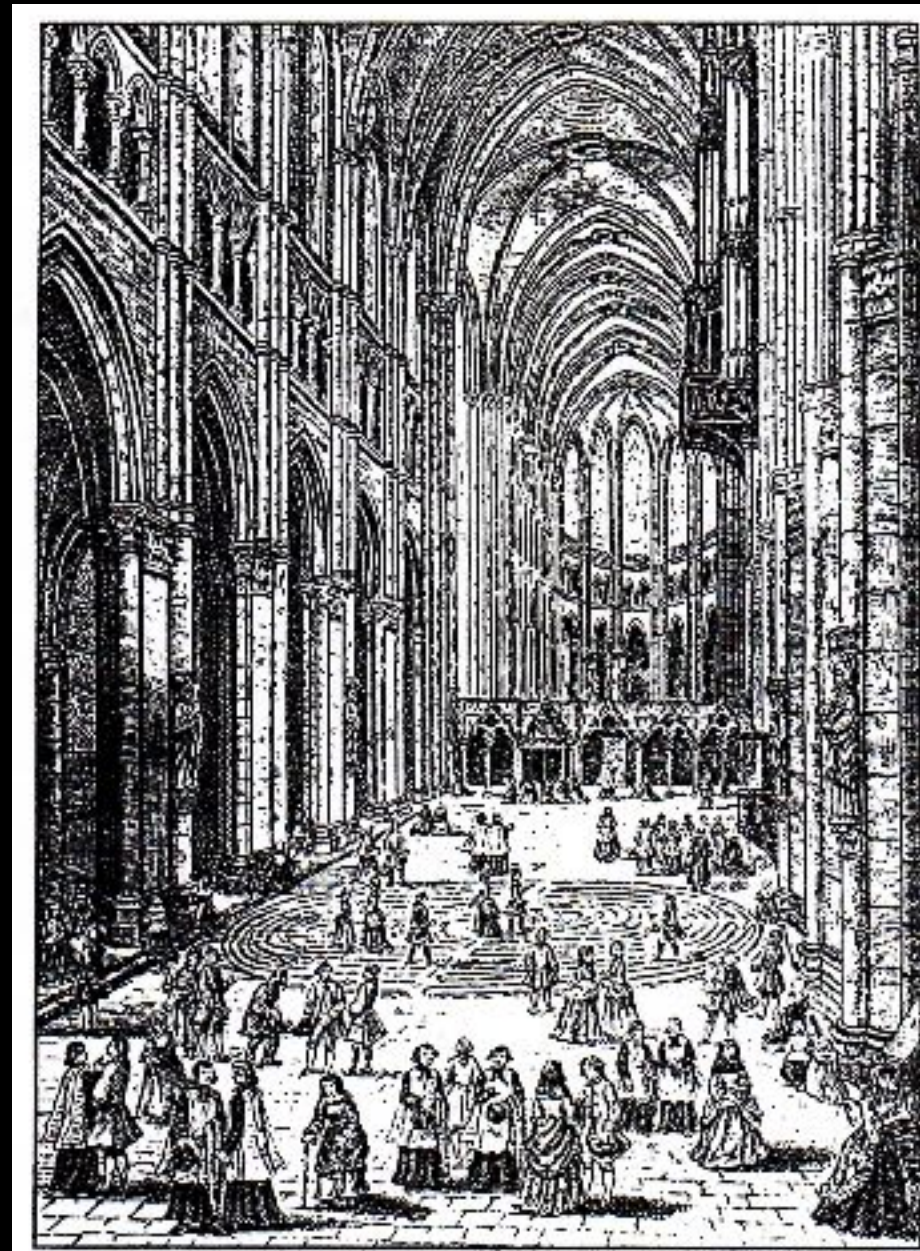
Medieval French cathedral labyrinths had their entrances in the west, close to the entrance of the laity.



Amiens

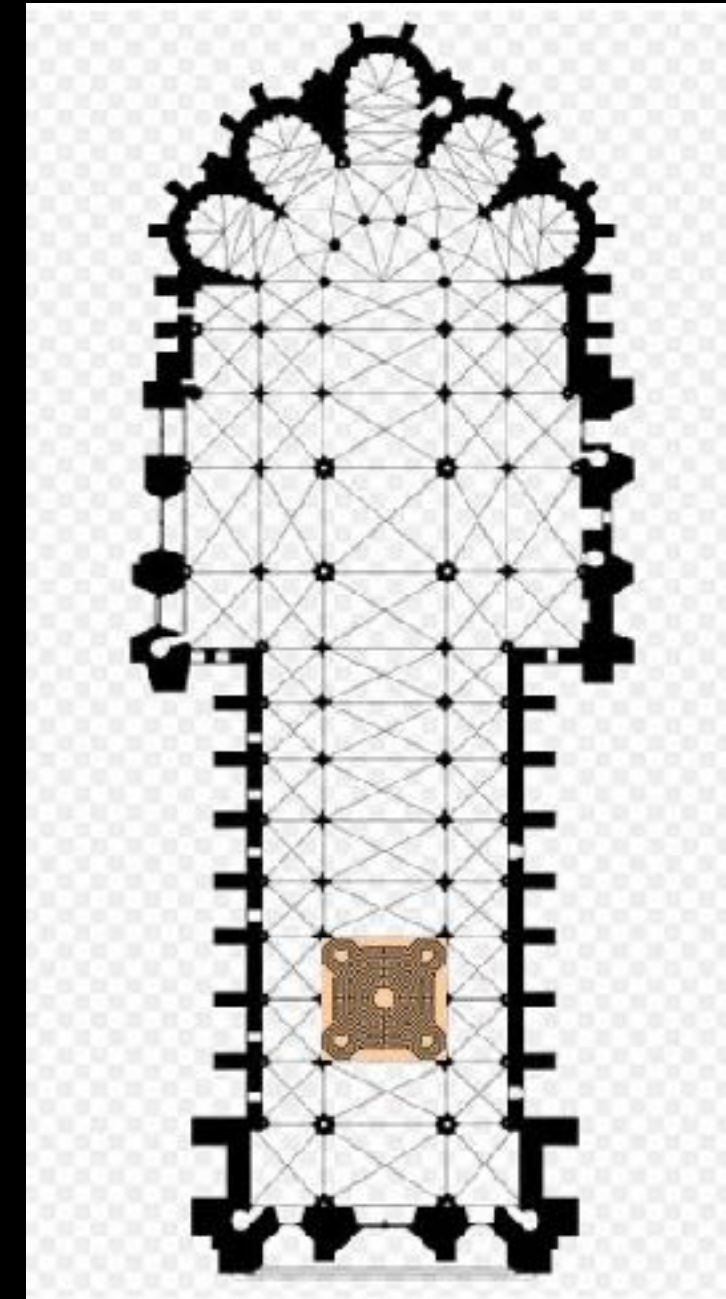


St. Quentin



The frontispiece of *Mémoires de la cathédrale de Chartres (1887-1892)* by Abbé Marcel Joseph Bataillon.

Chartres



Reims

L'accès s'effectuait invariablement à l'ouest, c'est-à-dire tourné vers l'entrée des fidèles.

Erlande-Brandenburg, Alain. 1999. "Un Fil d'Ariane pour le labyrinthe de Chartres." Colloque Européen, Chartres, France, 3 et 4 Juillet, 36.



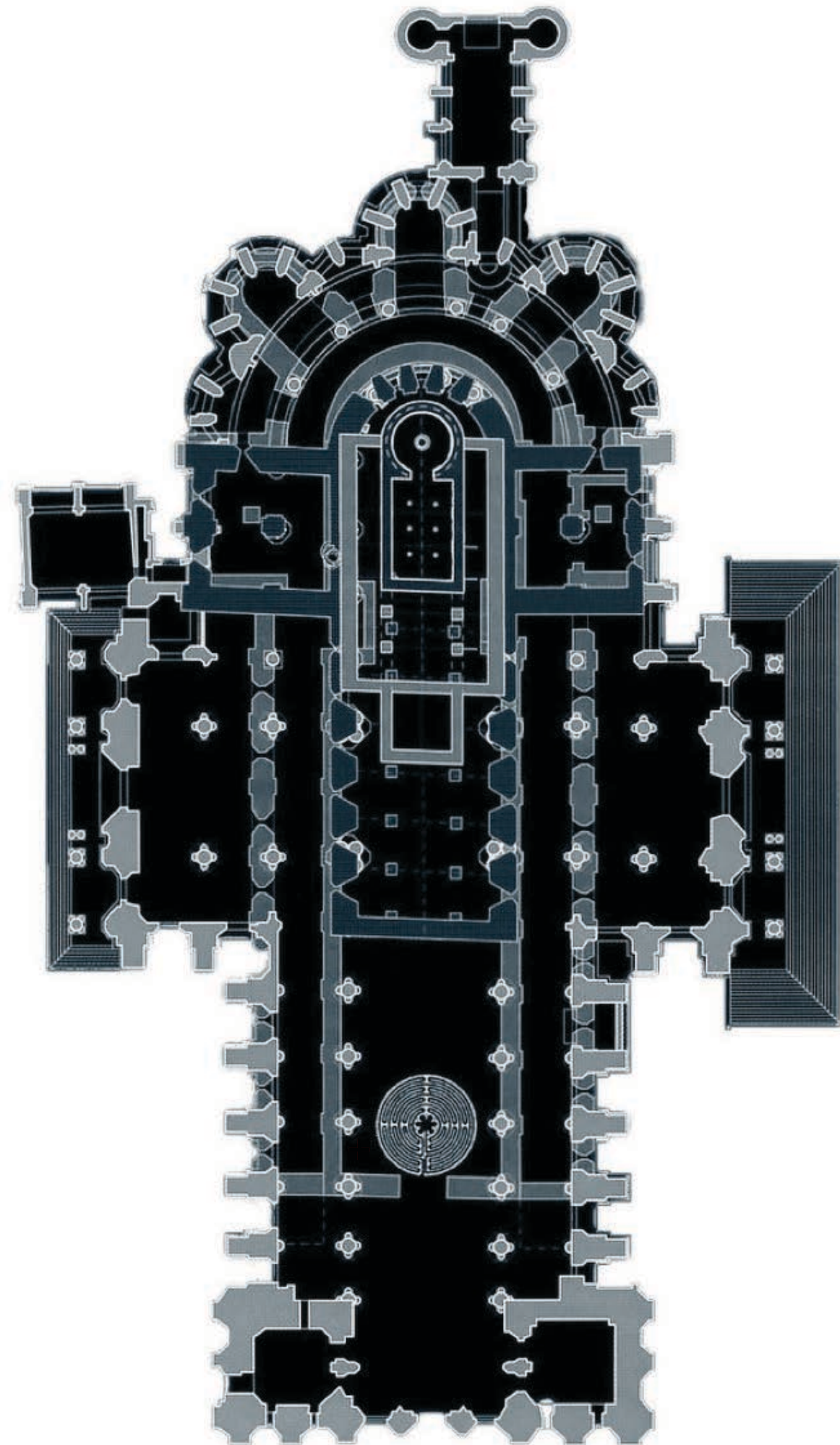
As one moves from the doors in the west (exterior) towards the altar in the east (interior), there is a symbolic movement from the darkness towards the light. The labyrinth is placed between the two. It is a transitional space, a passage.

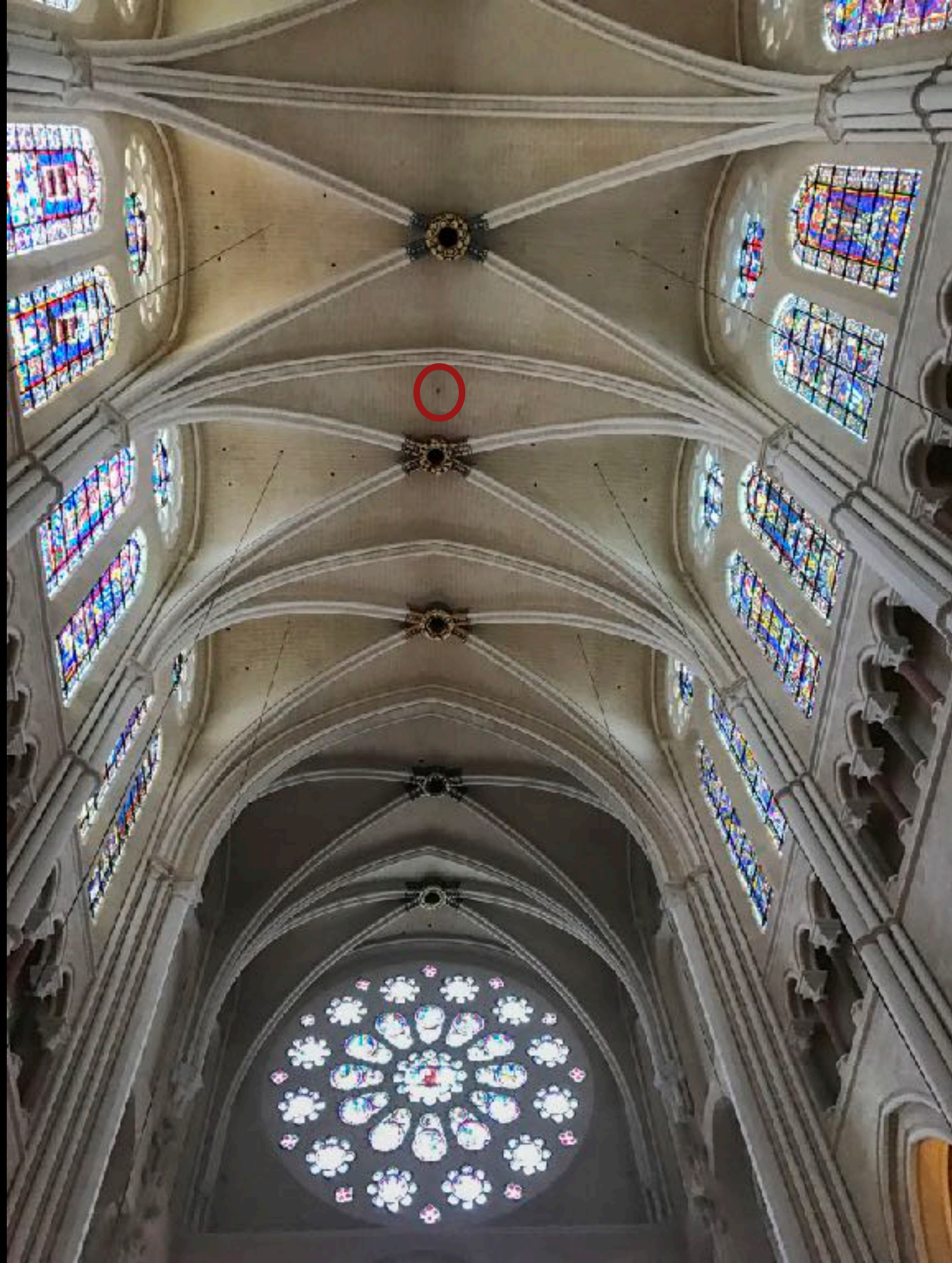


painted cross during discovered during recent restorations

Just beyond the threshold of the labyrinth
a red cross was painted on the vault.

*Diagram from Gordon Strachan,
Chartres: Sacred Geometry, Sacred Space. 2003
altered by Jill to correct labyrinth size & placement.*





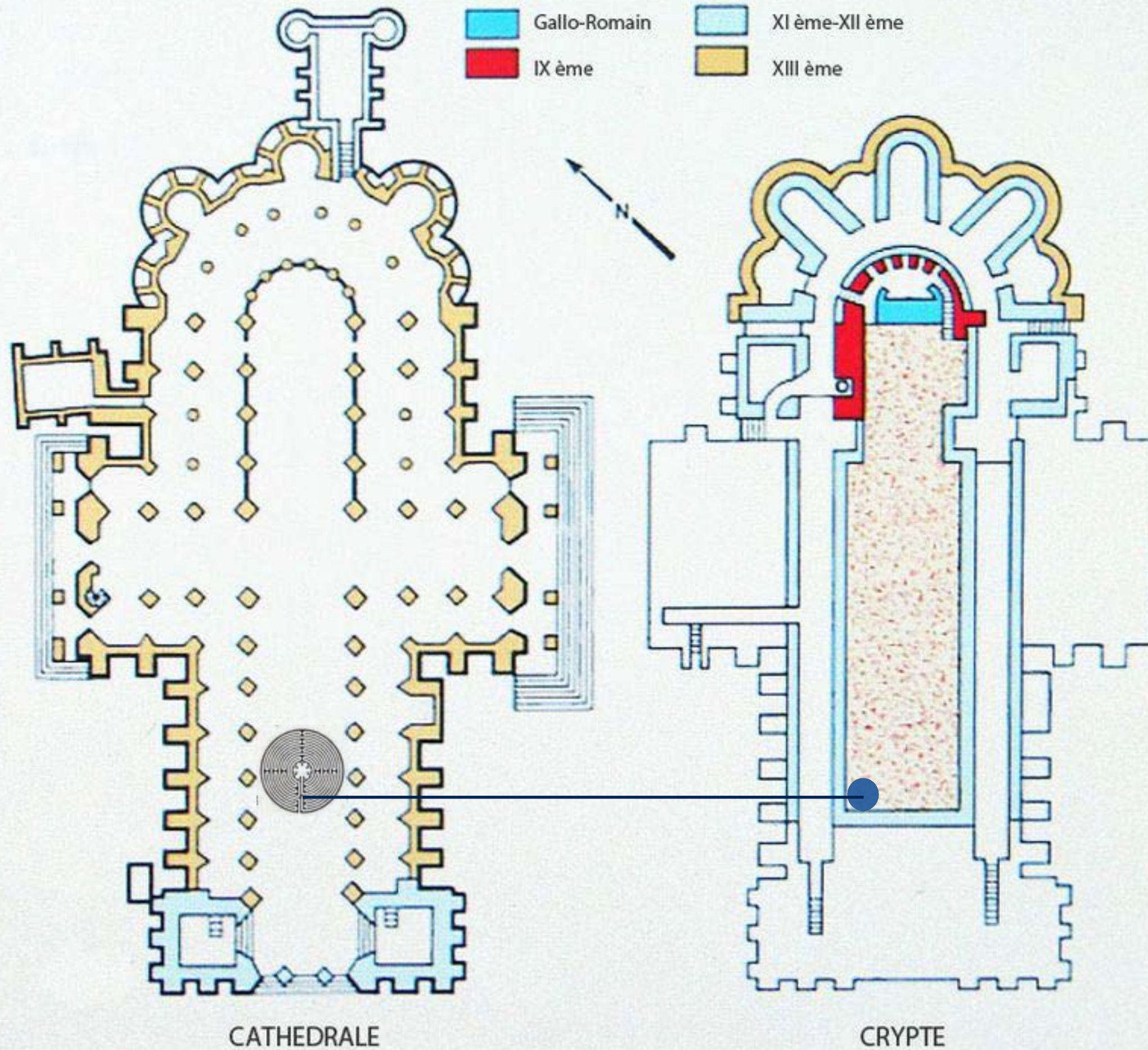
...the small red cross...corresponded with stone on which there are traces of a ring that is in the middle of the nave. This stone covered a hiding place for relics.



*Lefèvre-Pontalis, Eugene. 1901. "Facades Successives de la Cathédrale de Chartres au XIe et au XIIe siècle."
Société Archéologique d'Eure-et-Loir, Mémoires 1904 (Tome XIII): 3.*



CHARTRES





The nave:
the laity's part of the cathedral

“The root of our word ‘nave’ is the same as navy, with its overtones of the ark, and of protection from the boundless fears of the deep.

The nave was reserved for the people, and on the other side of the crossing the choir was preserved for the clergy.”

*John James. The Master Masons of Chartres.
(NY: West Grinstead Publishing, 1982) 86.*

Image: view of the Chartres vaults from the labyrinth



From the middle ages until 1763 there was a rood screen (given by St. Louis) that completely separated the choir (for the clergy) and the nave (for the laity). It was replaced by wrought iron gates.

The choir was the clergy's portion of the church, a sacred precinct in which hope of an everlasting communion with Christ was dispensed at the high altar.

The nave, by contrast, belonged to the people and was of this world. Work-crews shaped up in its side aisles, goods were bought and sold there, and at vigils of high feasts a flood of pilgrims slept on the floor [Bulteau, Branner].

Craig Wright. 2001. The Maze and the Warrior. Symbols in Architecture, Theology, and Music. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 45.

Image drawn by W. G. Colman, architect, and engraved by Benjamin Winkles for Winkles' 'French Cathedrals', published in 1837 by Charles Tilt, London.

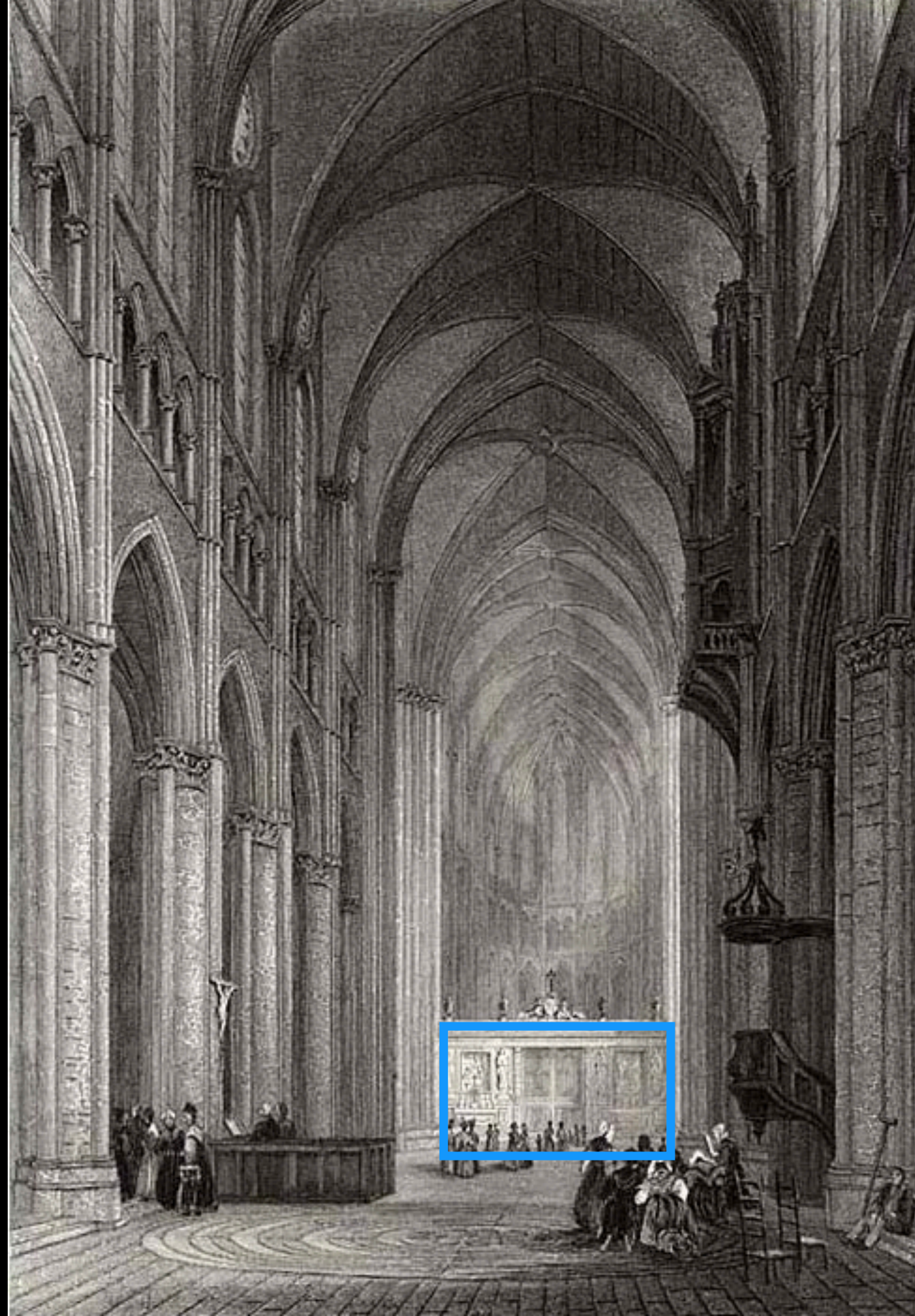
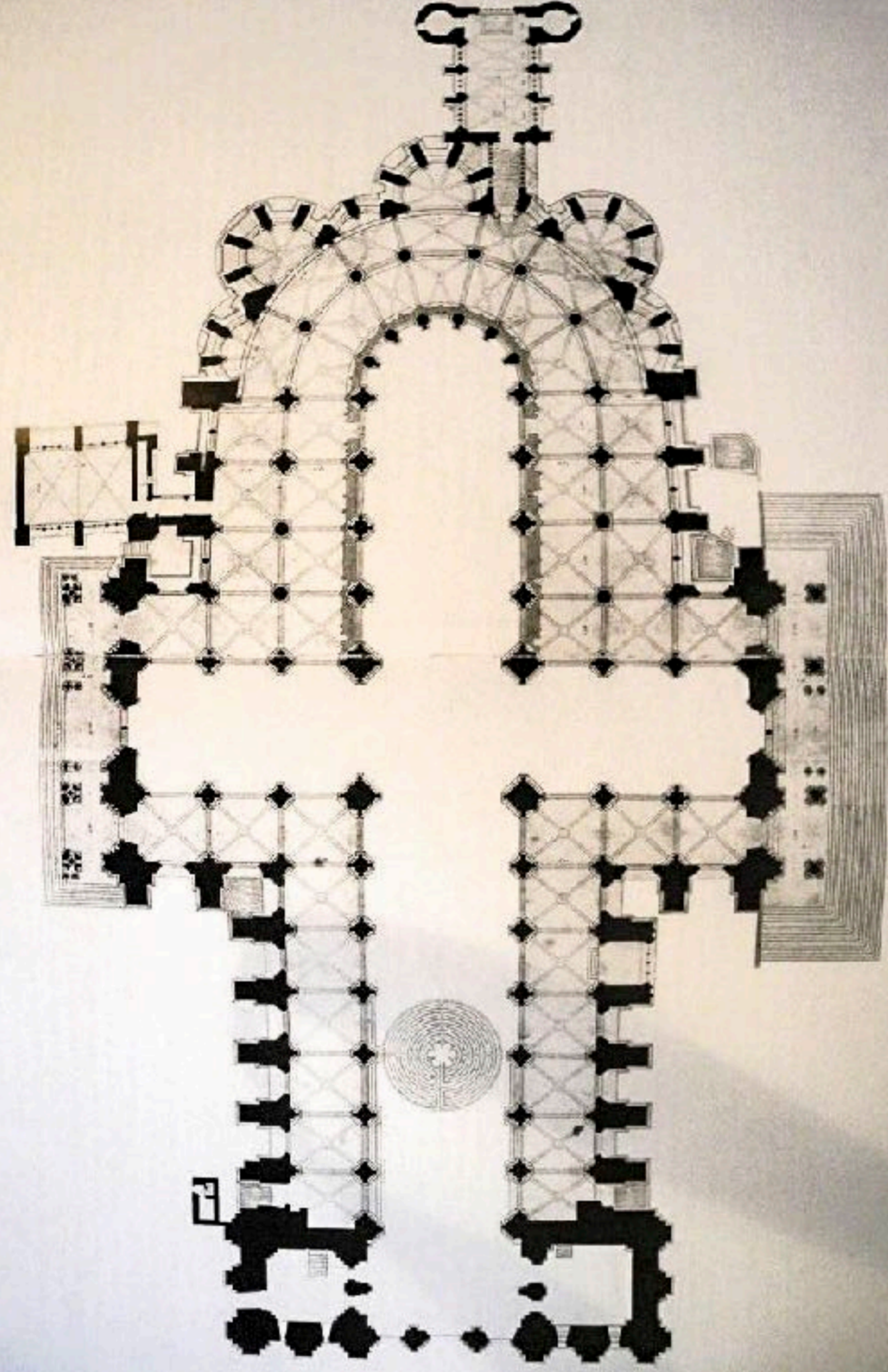
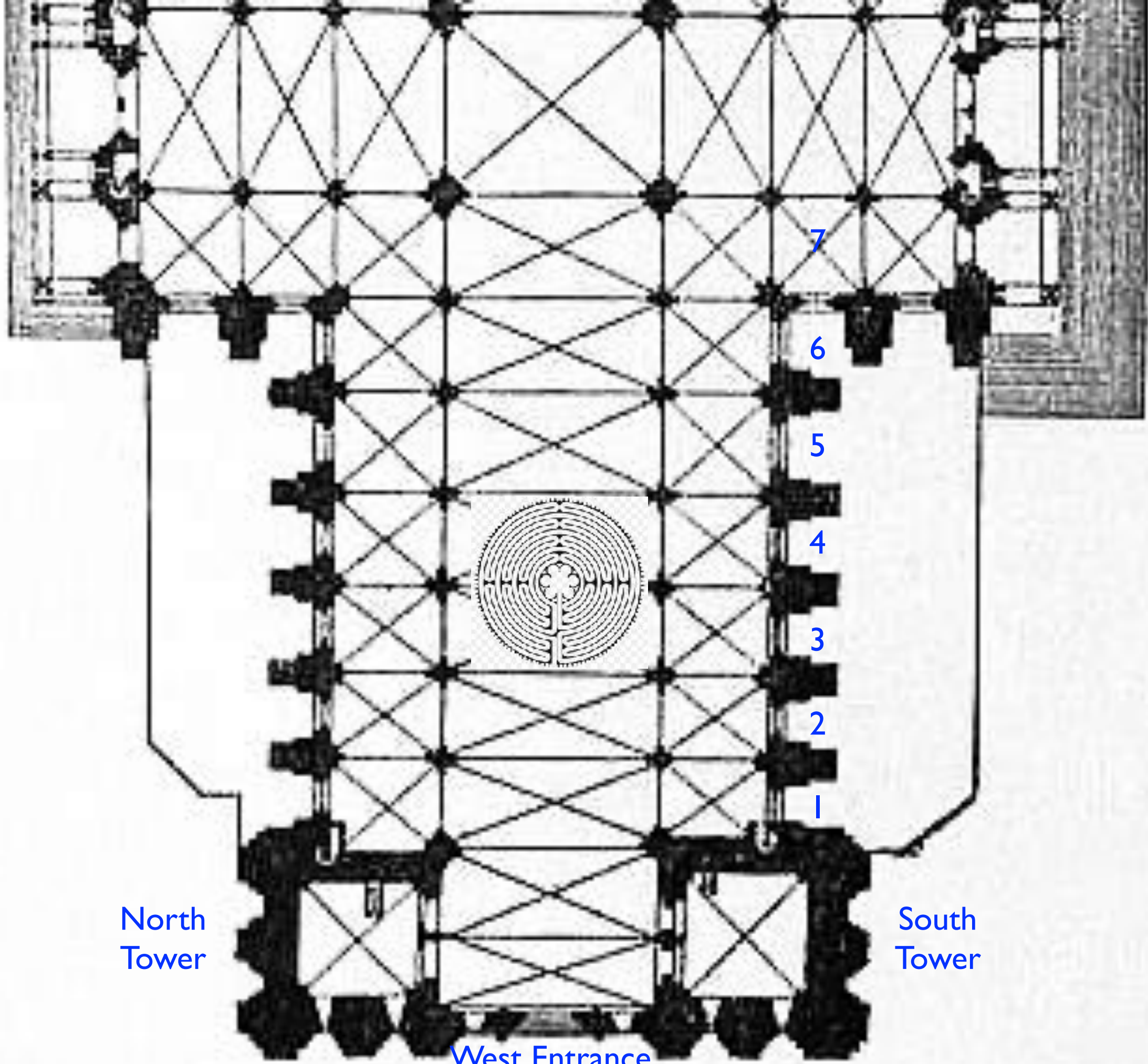


Image by W. G. Colman, architect, and engraved by Benjamin Winkles





North
Tower

South
Tower

West Entrance

7

6

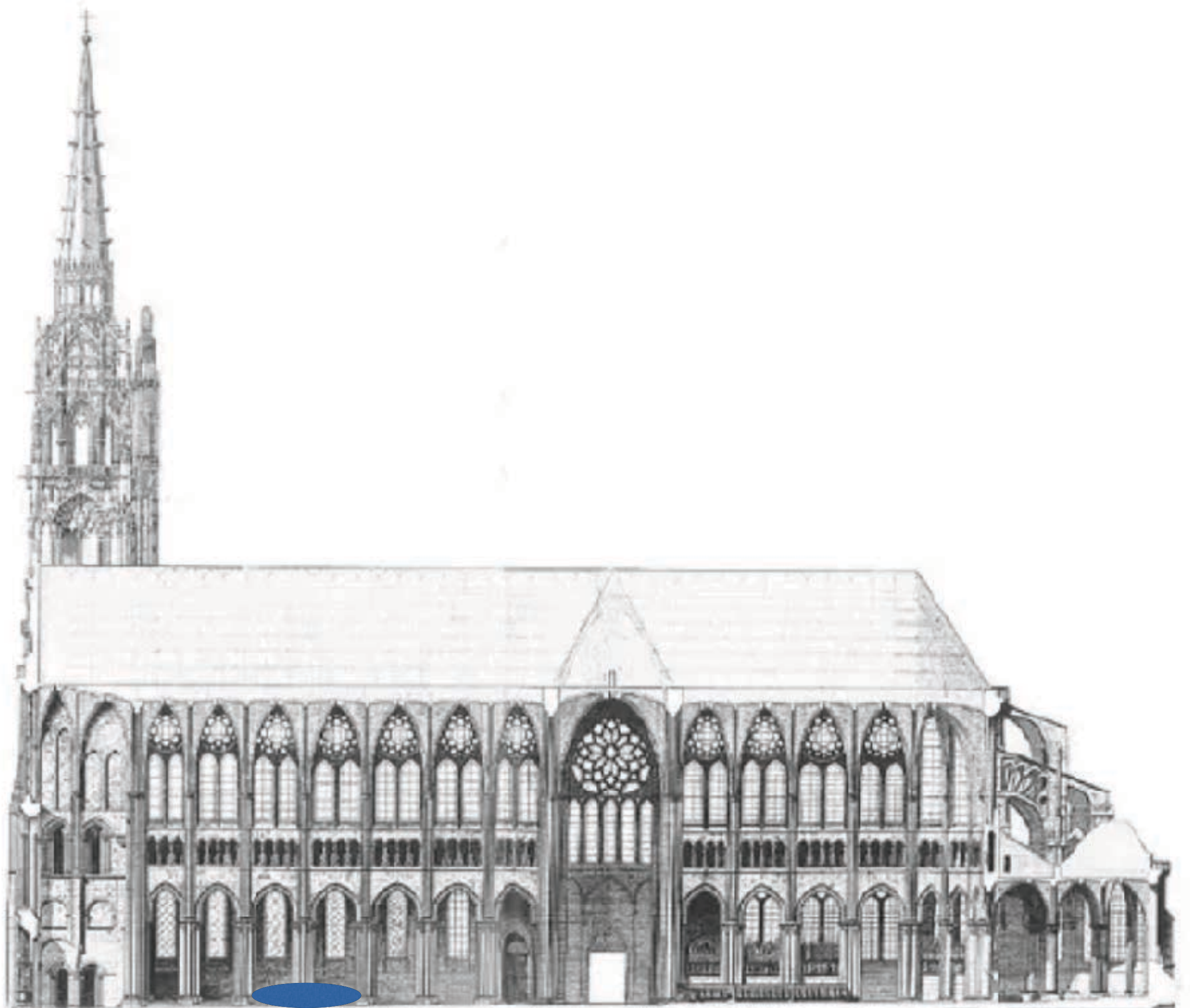
5

4

3

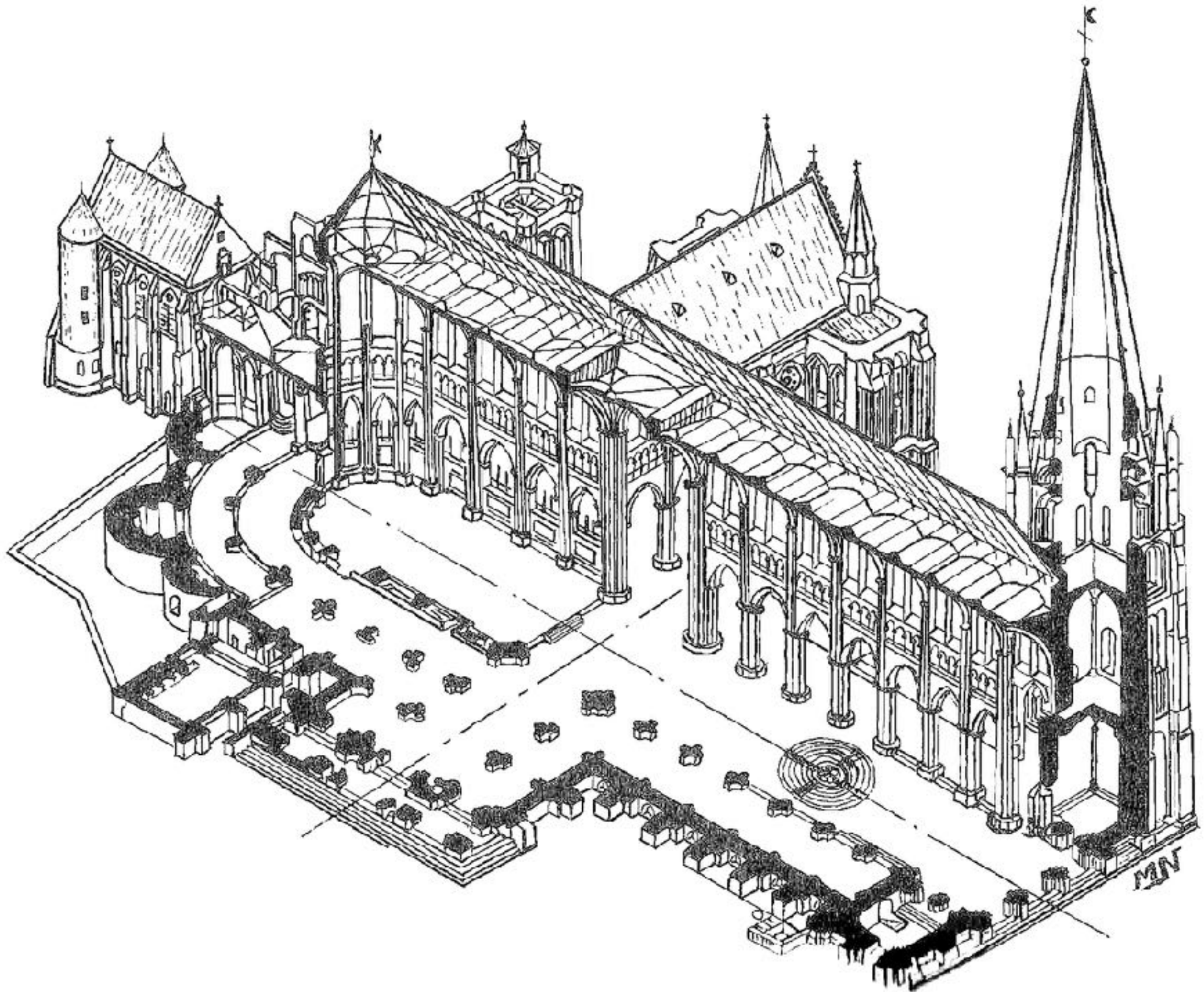
2

1





(marked from the south side)





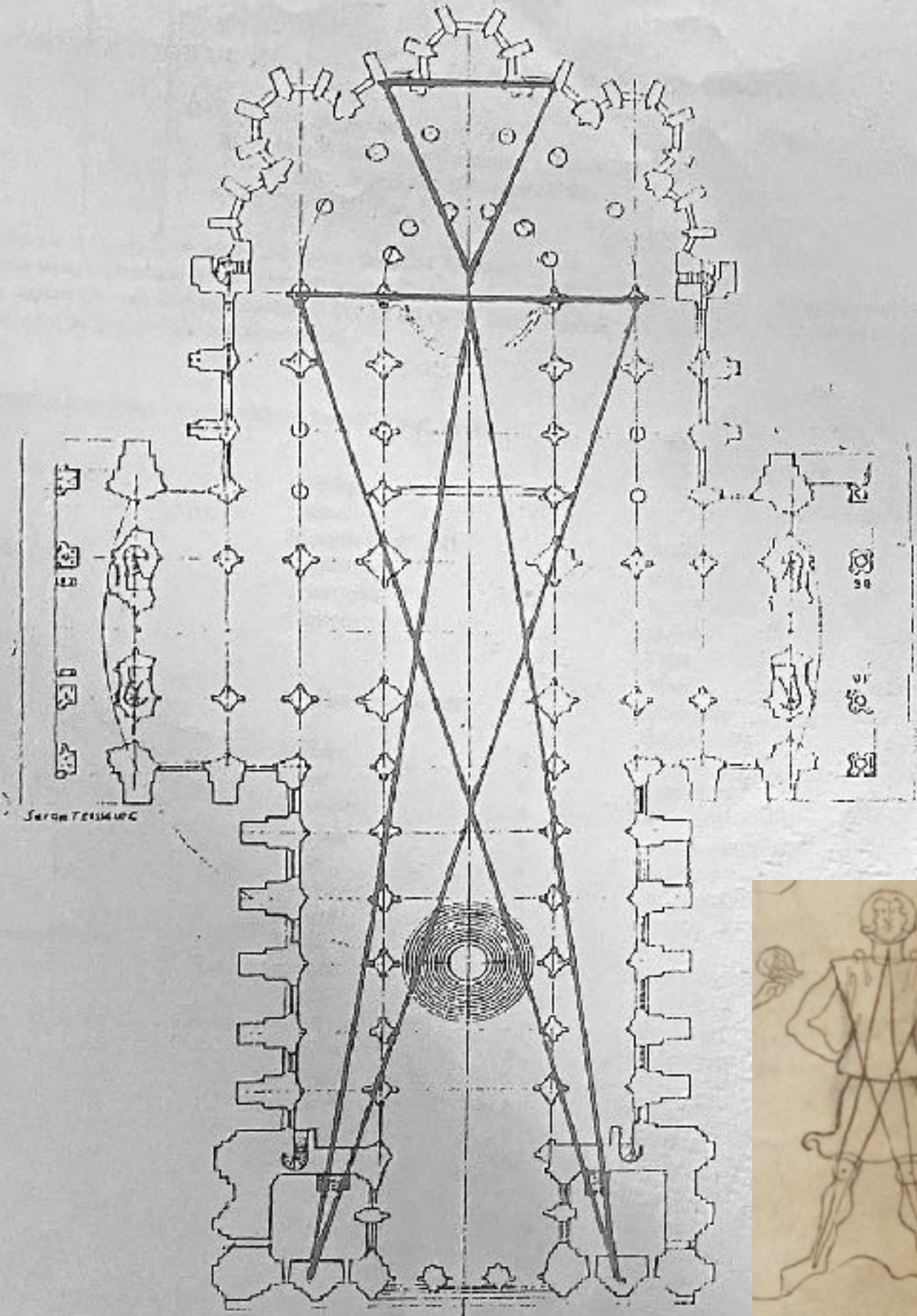


Fig: La structure de l'homme dans la composition du plan de la Cathédrale, selon un croquis de Villard de Honnecourt.



Sketchbook (250 drawings)
 Villard de Honnecourt
 1230
 Paris, BNF, Fr 19093
 Labyrinth: folio 7v



Placement of the labyrinth in the nave: Bays 3 & 4 of 7



3=Sacred,
spirit

4=Matter,
ground

7: The meeting of
heaven and earth

“...we note that the center of the labyrinth faces the axis of the piers that divide the seven bays of the nave--a number with an aura of prestige--in the harmonic of 3 + 4. Three, symbolic of the spirit, and four, that of matter...It is evident that one and the other, spirit and matter, are indispensable in achieving such architecture.”

Jean Villette, The Enigma of the Labyrinth, 33.

Heaven

Floor to the roof vault: 120 feet (37 meters)

Vault

Triforium to the vault: 60 feet

Triforium

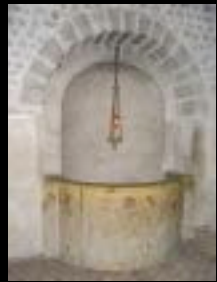
Floor to the Triforium: 60 feet

Floor of Cathedral (the labyrinth rests here)

Well in the Crypt

Top of well to the water: 120 feet (37 meters)

Earth

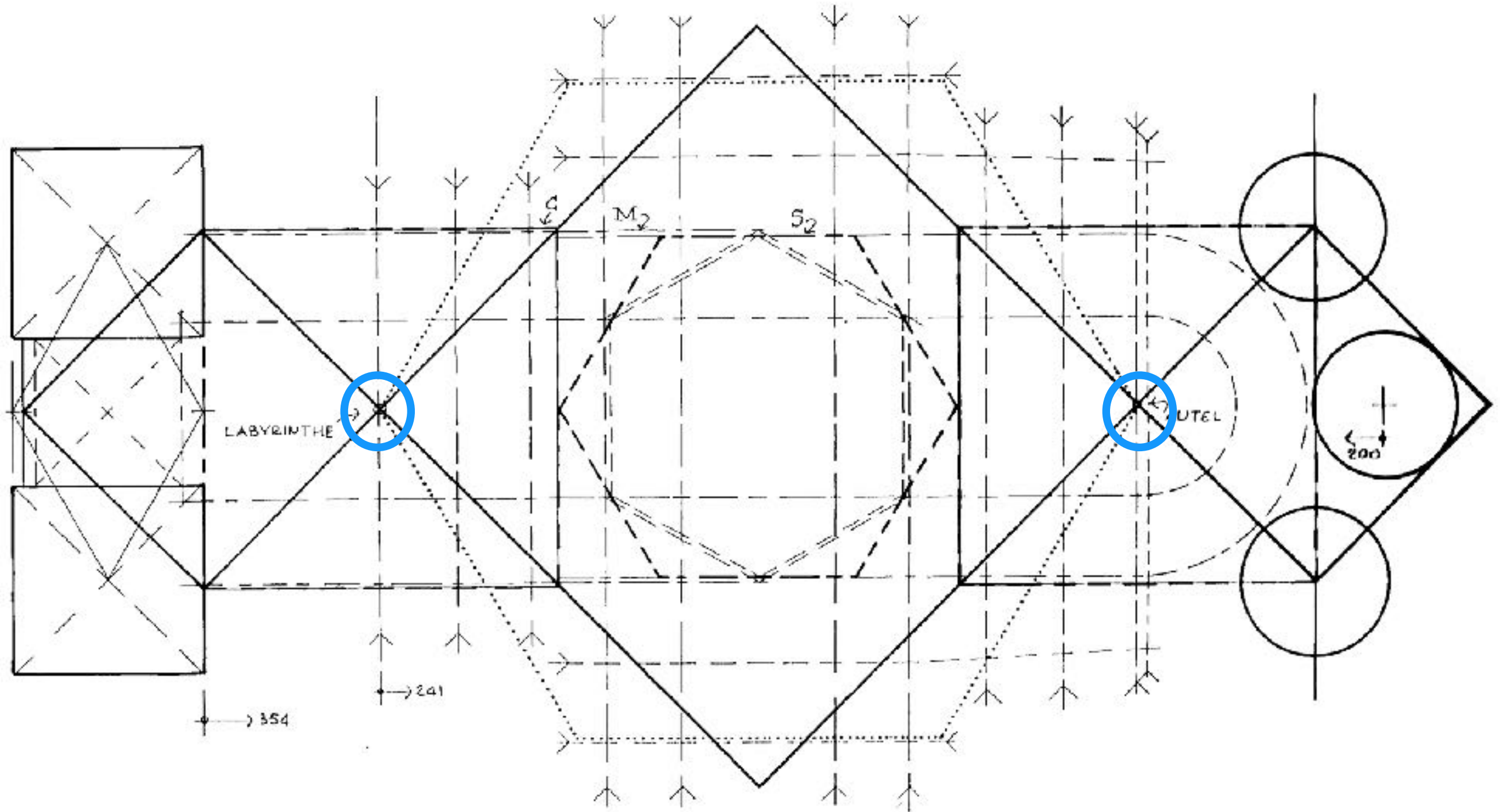


Since the labyrinth certainly served more than one purpose, it may be that before the stone labyrinth, similar labyrinth drawings on the floor may have been used in the construction of the building.

It was a common medieval practice to use one architectural element to find the correct dimensions for others.

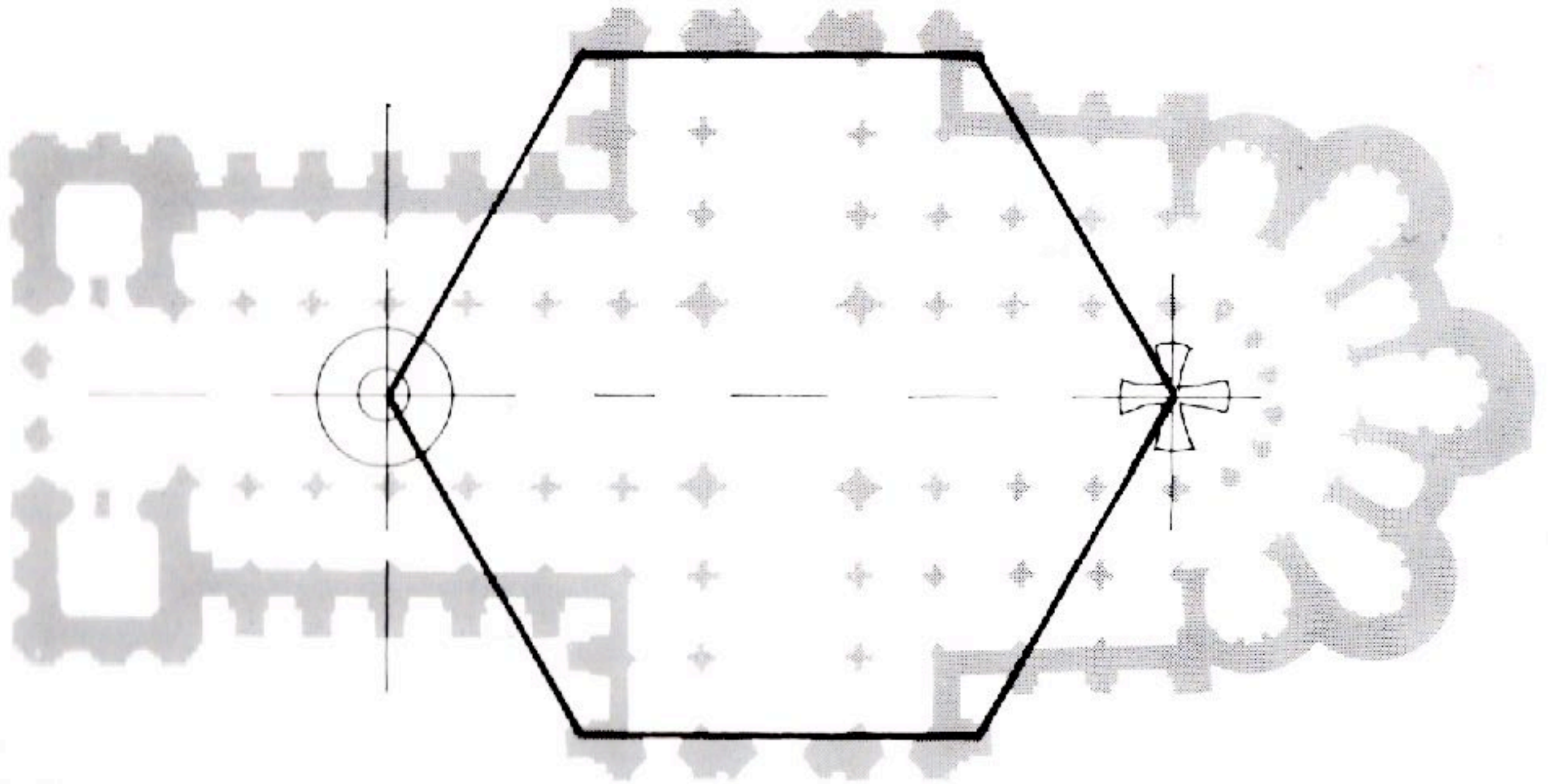


The Creation Schema Behind the Chartres Cathedral



Notice the importance of the placement of the labyrinth and the main altar of the medieval building.

The placement of the altar and the labyrinth in Chartres Cathedral



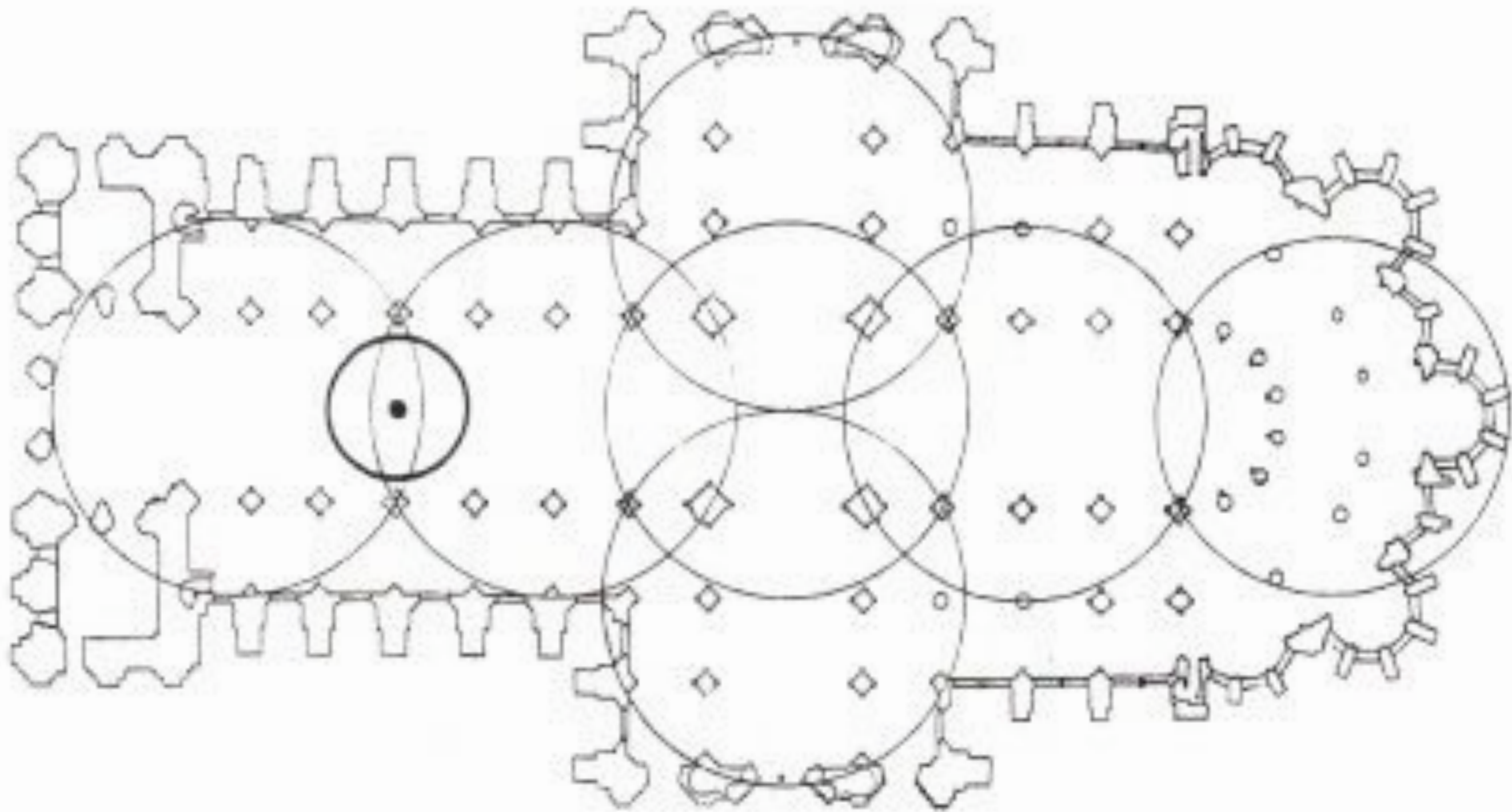


Diagram by Jean Villette

John & Odette Ketley-LaPorte. 1997. Chartres : Le Labyrinthe Déchiffré: Éditions Jean-Michel Garnier, see pp. 62-64.

There is no original documentation about what the Chartres labyrinth was called in the medieval period.

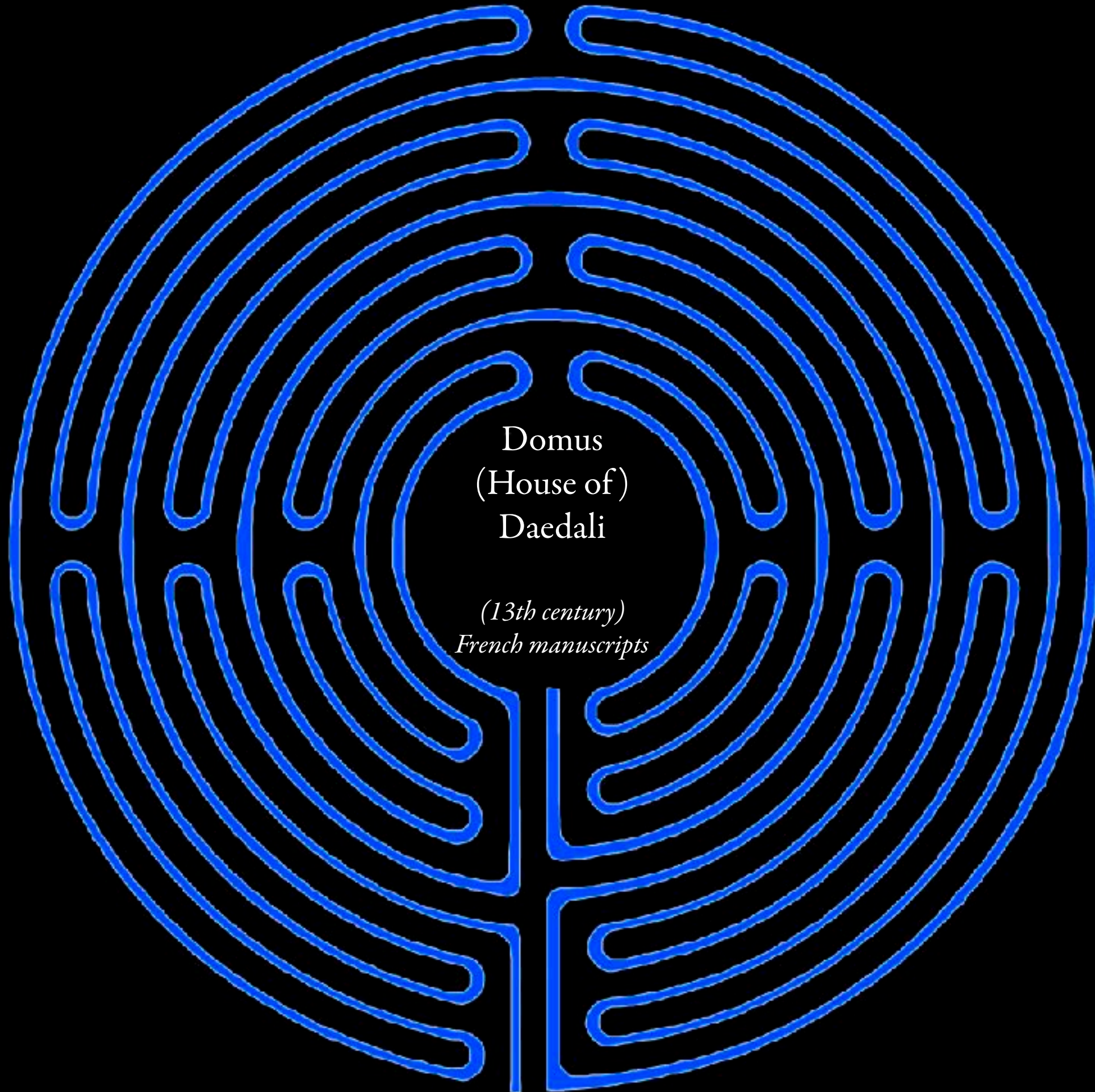




Deadaleme

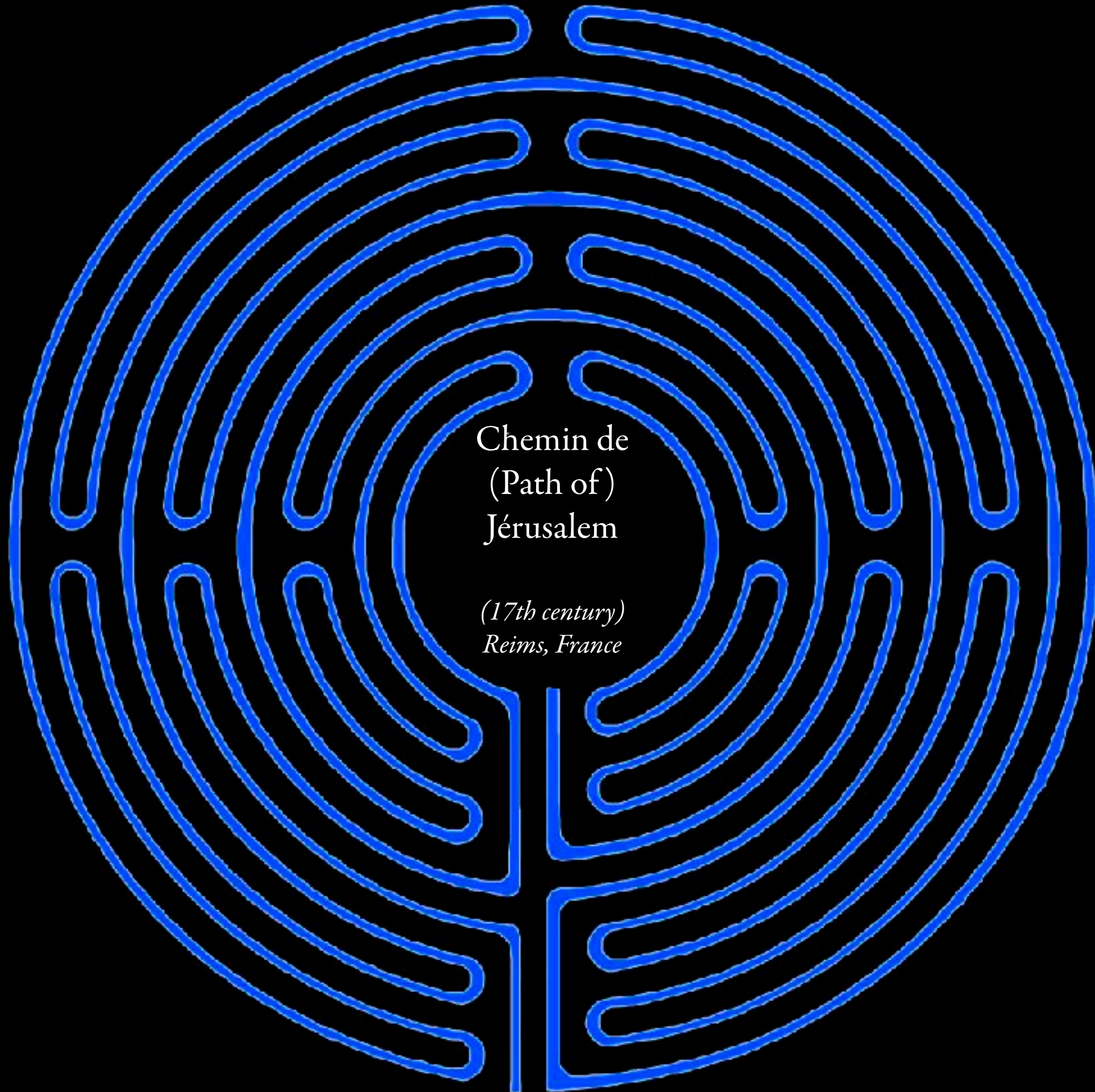
(7th century)

Isidore of Seville



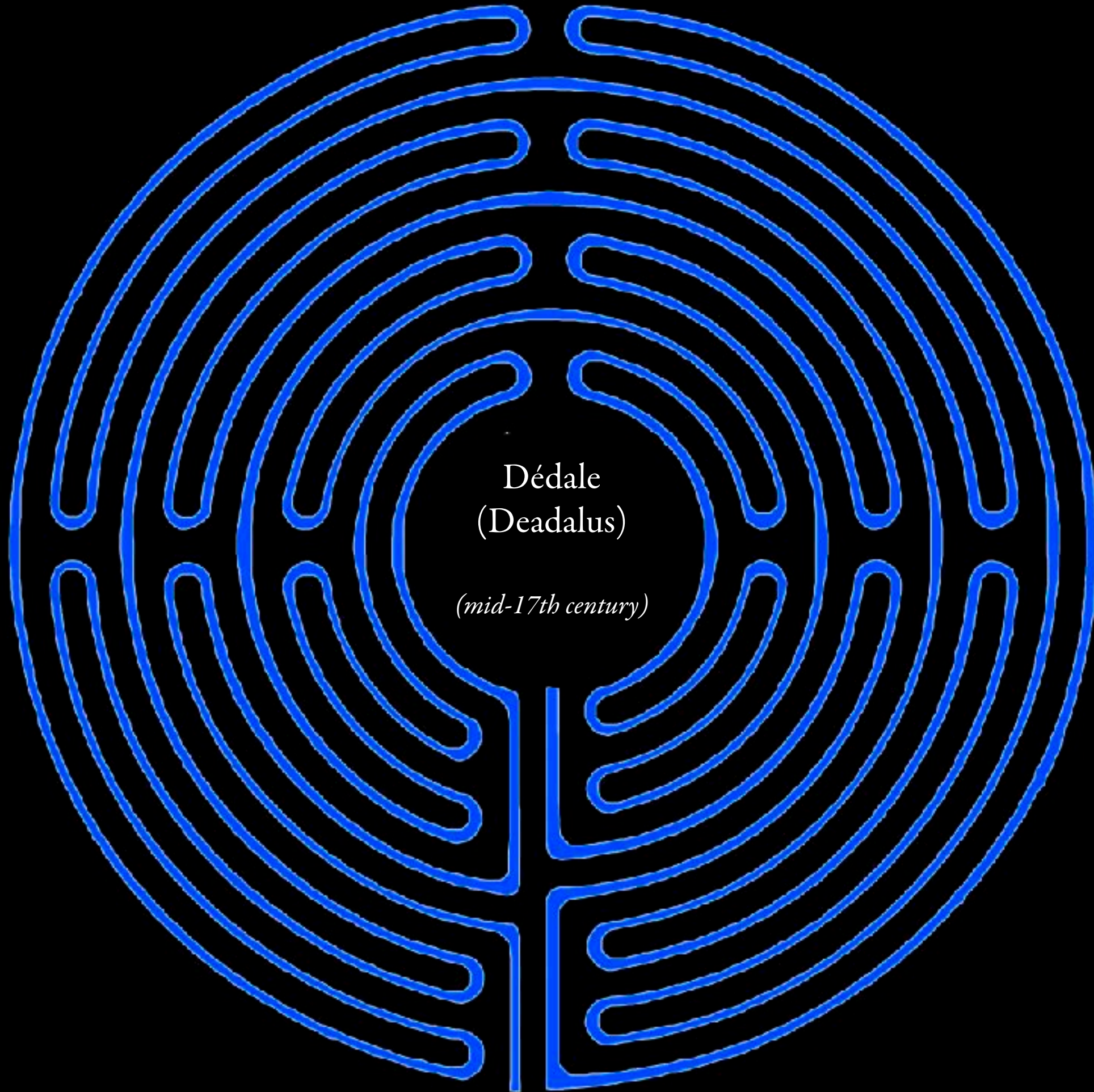
Domus
(House of)
Daedali

(13th century)
French manuscripts



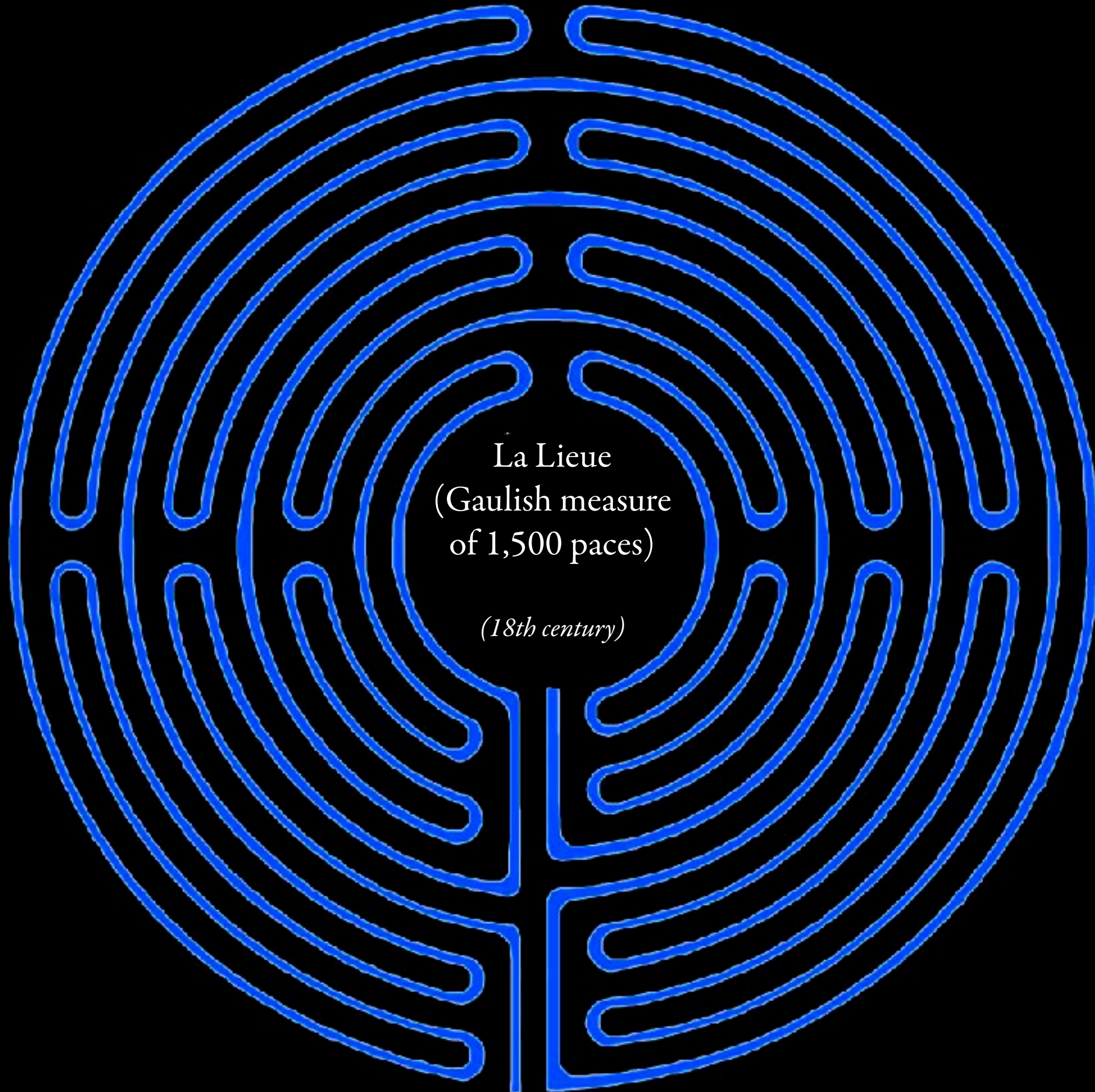
Chemin de
(Path of)
Jérusalem

(17th century)
Reims, France



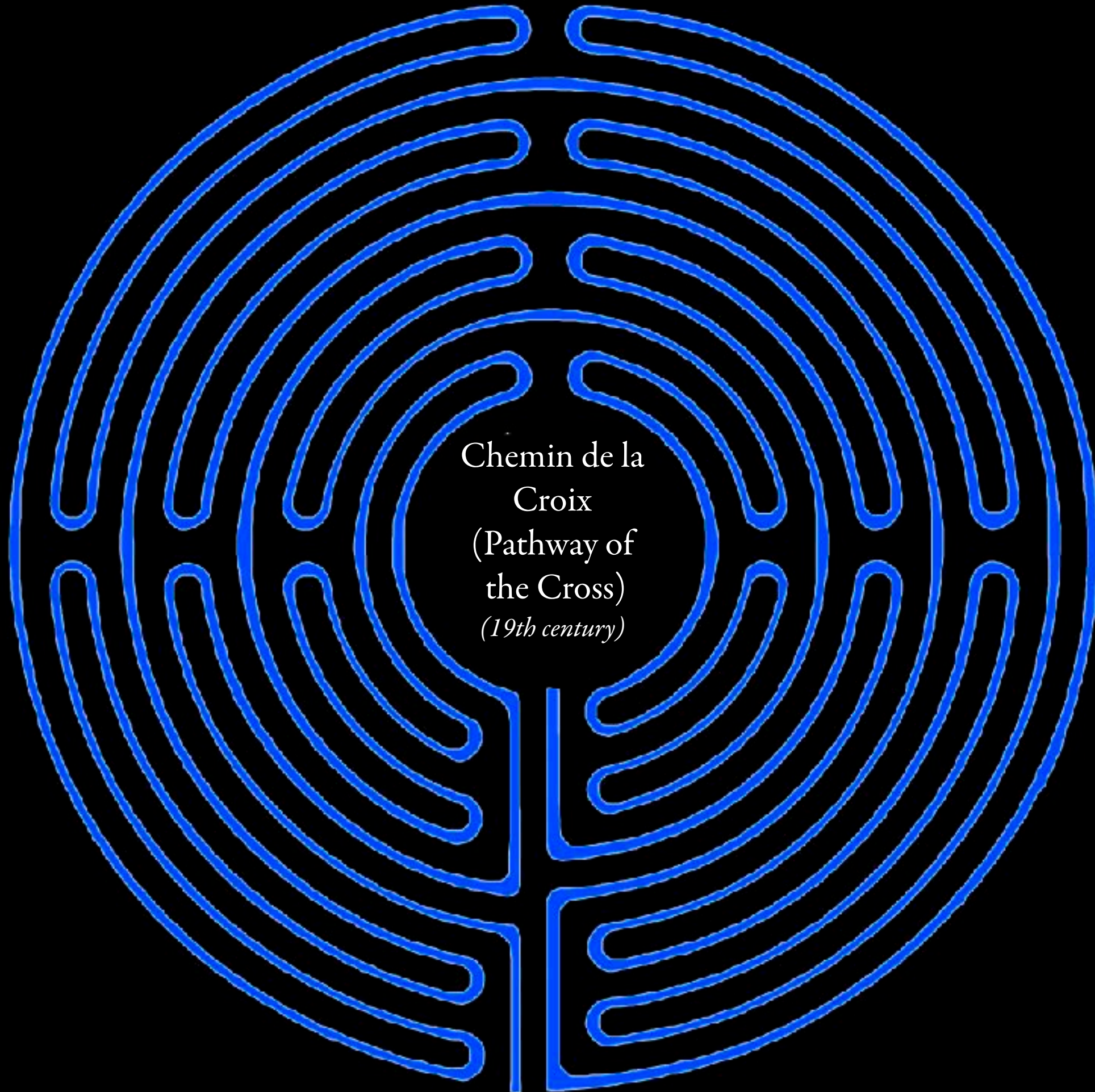
Dédale
(Deadalus)

(mid-17th century)

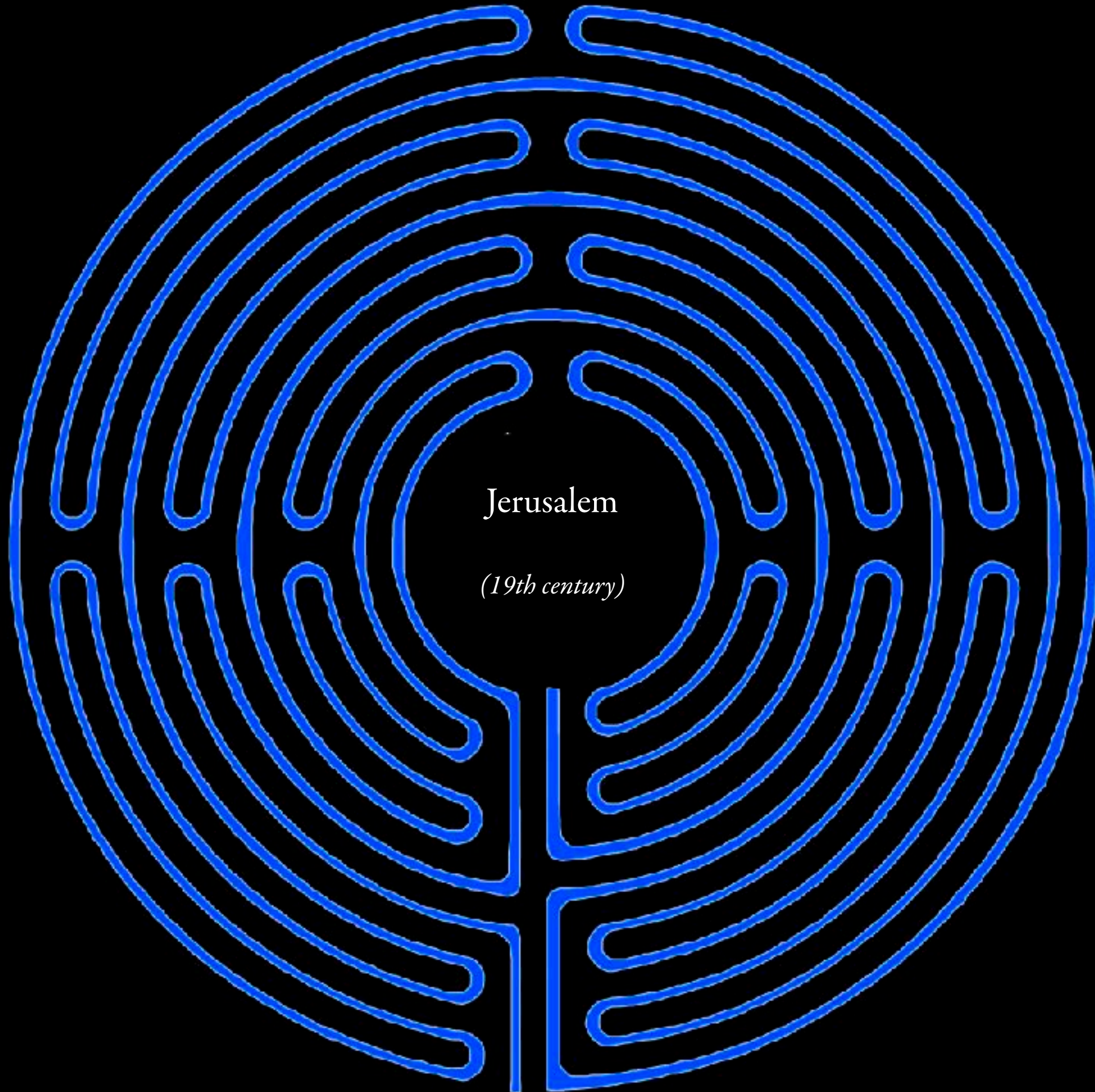


La Lieue
(Gaulish measure
of 1,500 paces)

(18th century)

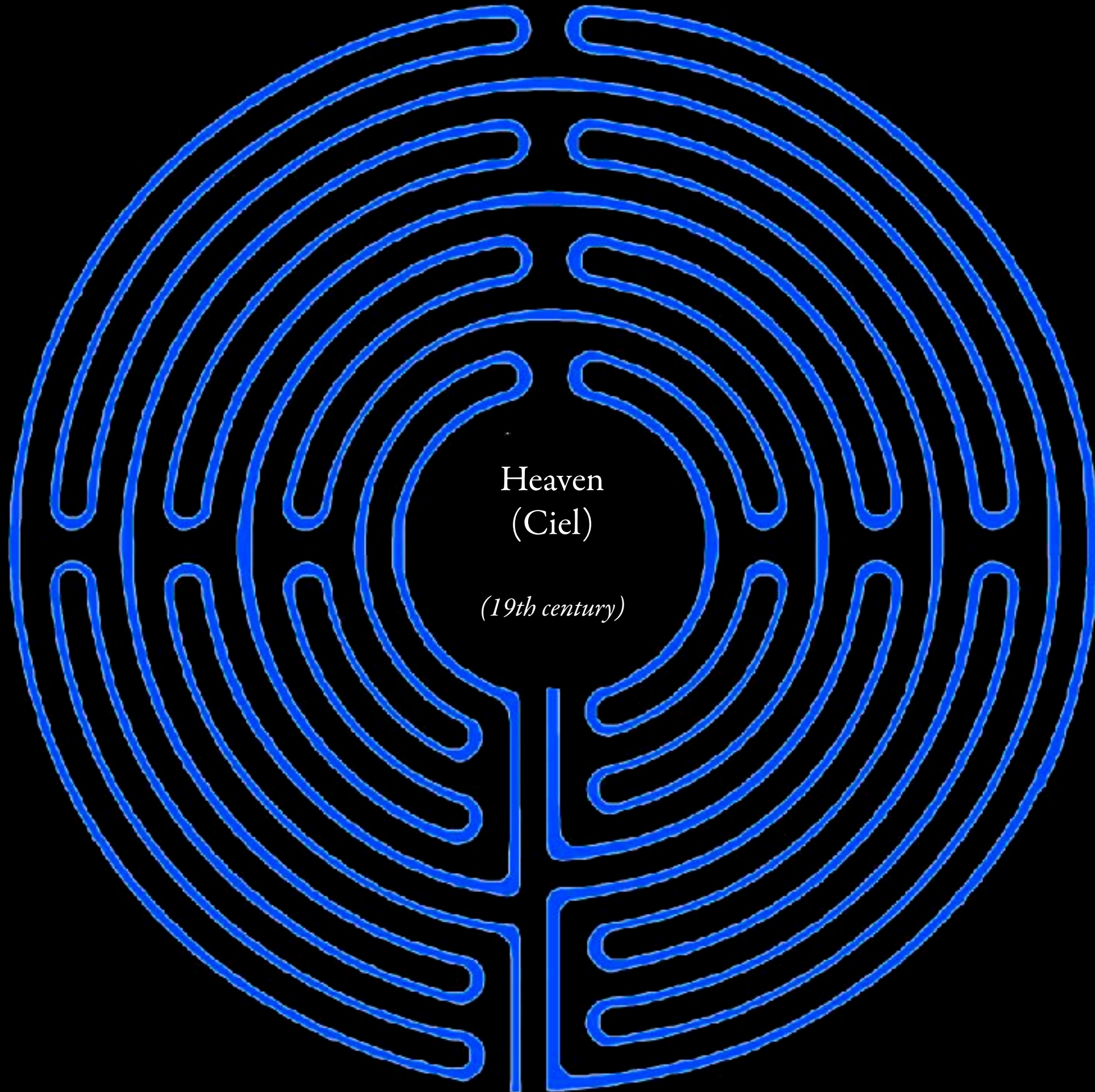


Chemin de la
Croix
(Pathway of
the Cross)
(19th century)



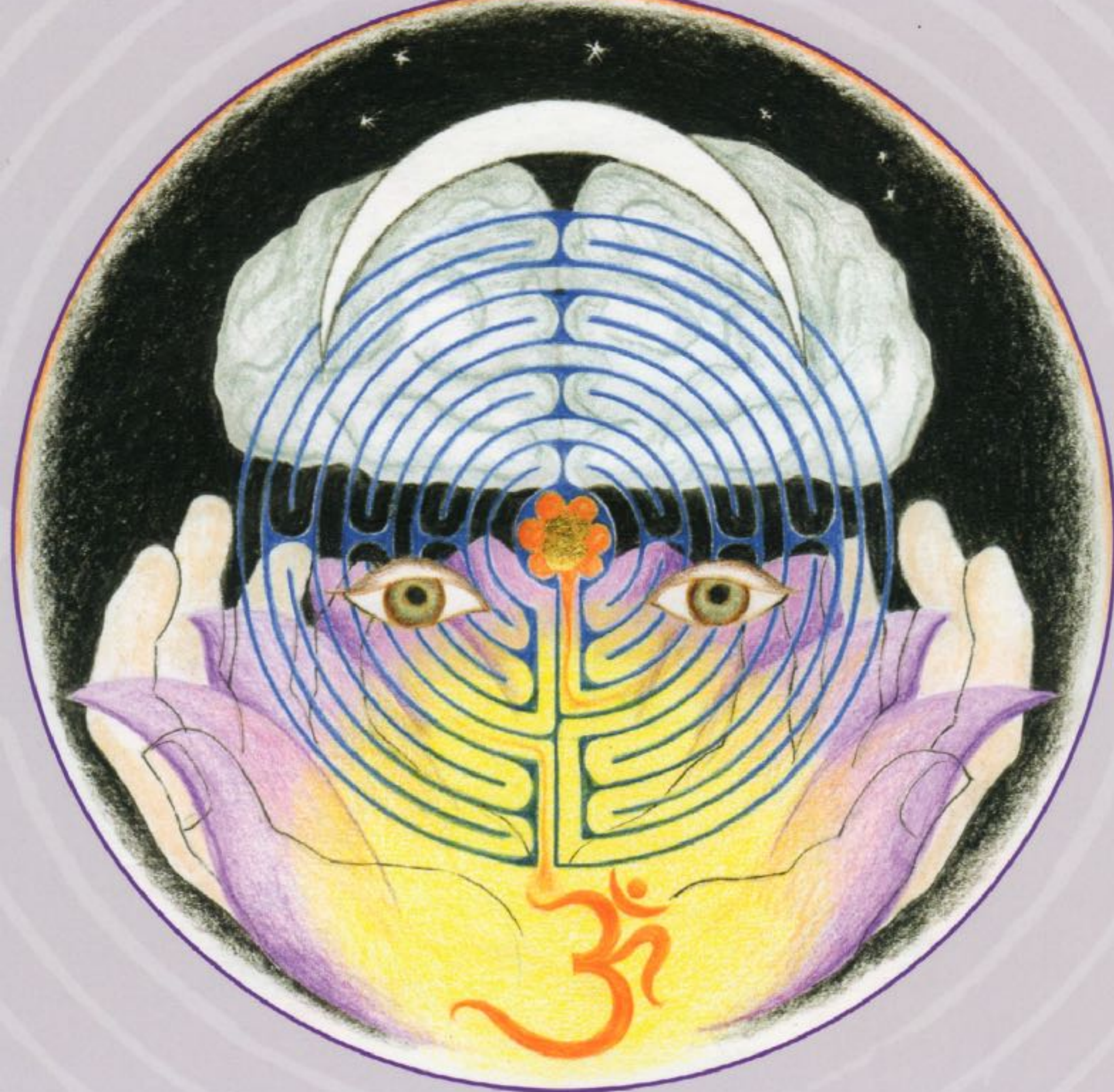
Jerusalem

(19th century)



Heaven
(Ciel)

(19th century)



Explore:

If you didn't call it the labyrinth, what would you call this design?

*Image found
online:
Rest in the
now.*

Description of the labyrinth in the Chartres Cathedral

What are the features of this labyrinth that are significant and sometimes unique?

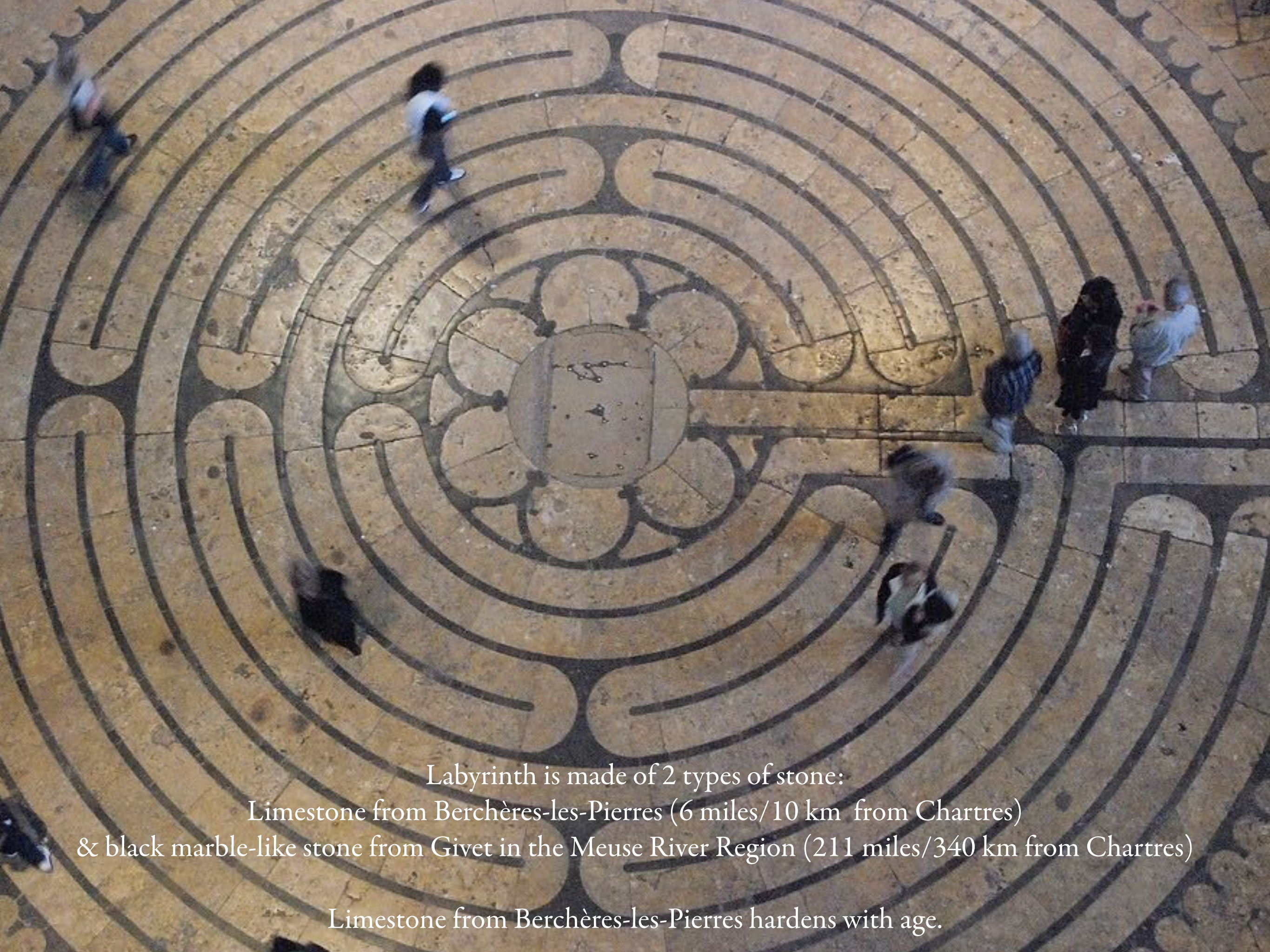


The Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth

- Largest medieval church labyrinth that was ever installed. Its diameter is approximately 42 feet/12.9 meters. The labyrinth spans the entire nave of the cathedral.
- Pathway is approximately 861 feet/262 meters long. It is unicursal, moving through 4 quadrants in a symmetrical fashion. The pathway averages 13 1/4 (34 cm) inches with a 3 inch (7.5 cm) “wall” separating each path. (Saward)
- The center is flowered shaped. Its diameter is 9 feet/2.74 meters, approximately 1/4 the diameter of the whole labyrinth. It has six petals.
- It is the oldest pavement labyrinth that is still intact.



Stained glass window by Lorin: Chartres Cathedral and labyrinth (reversed pathway)



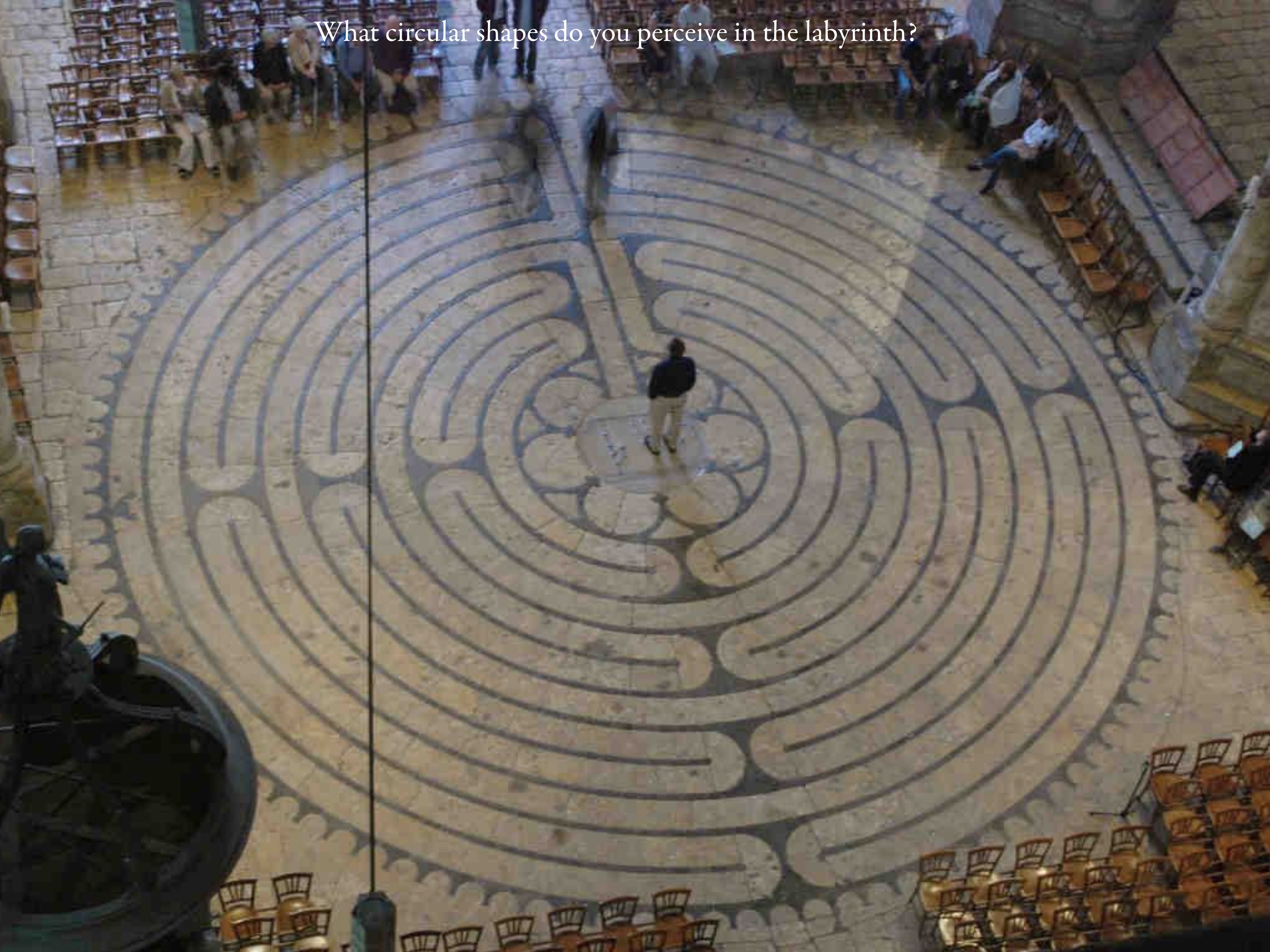
Labyrinth is made of 2 types of stone:
Limestone from Berchères-les-Pierres (6 miles/10 km from Chartres)
& black marble-like stone from Givet in the Meuse River Region (211 miles/340 km from Chartres)

Limestone from Berchères-les-Pierres hardens with age.



Circular nature
of the Chartres
labyrinth

What circular shapes do you perceive in the labyrinth?





Circular shapes around the
outside of the labyrinth: 112



Half-circle (approximate) turns: 28



Center Center Circle: 1

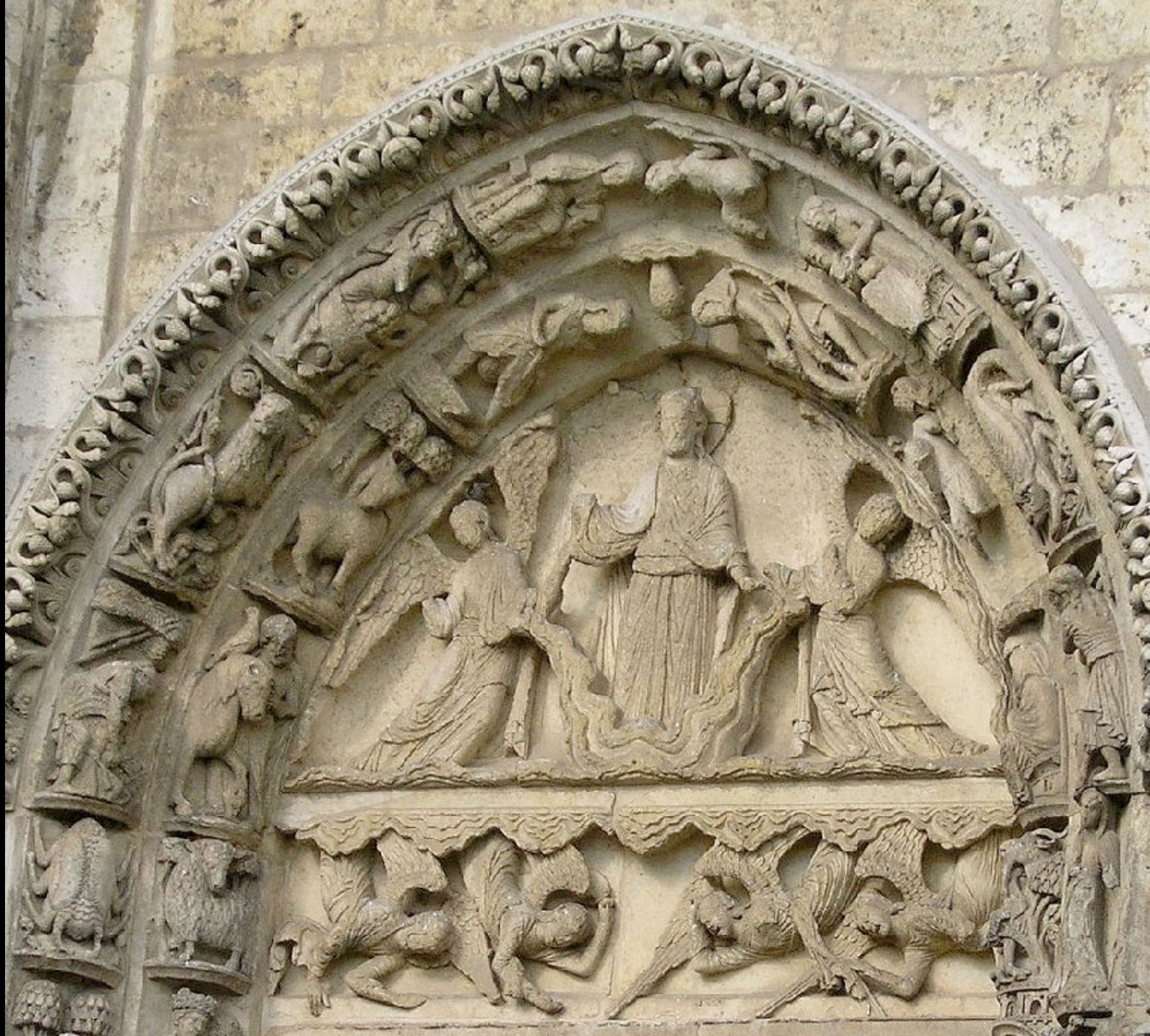


Circles/Circuits & Center
Circle: 12



Center Petals: 6

The cyclic nature of the celestial bodies in the heavens (and in nature).





Images of Jesus
holding the circular globe
of the world:
depicted as OT maps

Symbol of perfection
and the everlasting
nature of the divine
realm (Eternity).
God's infinite and
eternal nature.

No beginning
and no end:
wholeness,
completeness,
and unity of all
things.

*Top of the central Apostles Window
(in the East, lower level)*



Haloes
representing
divine light.



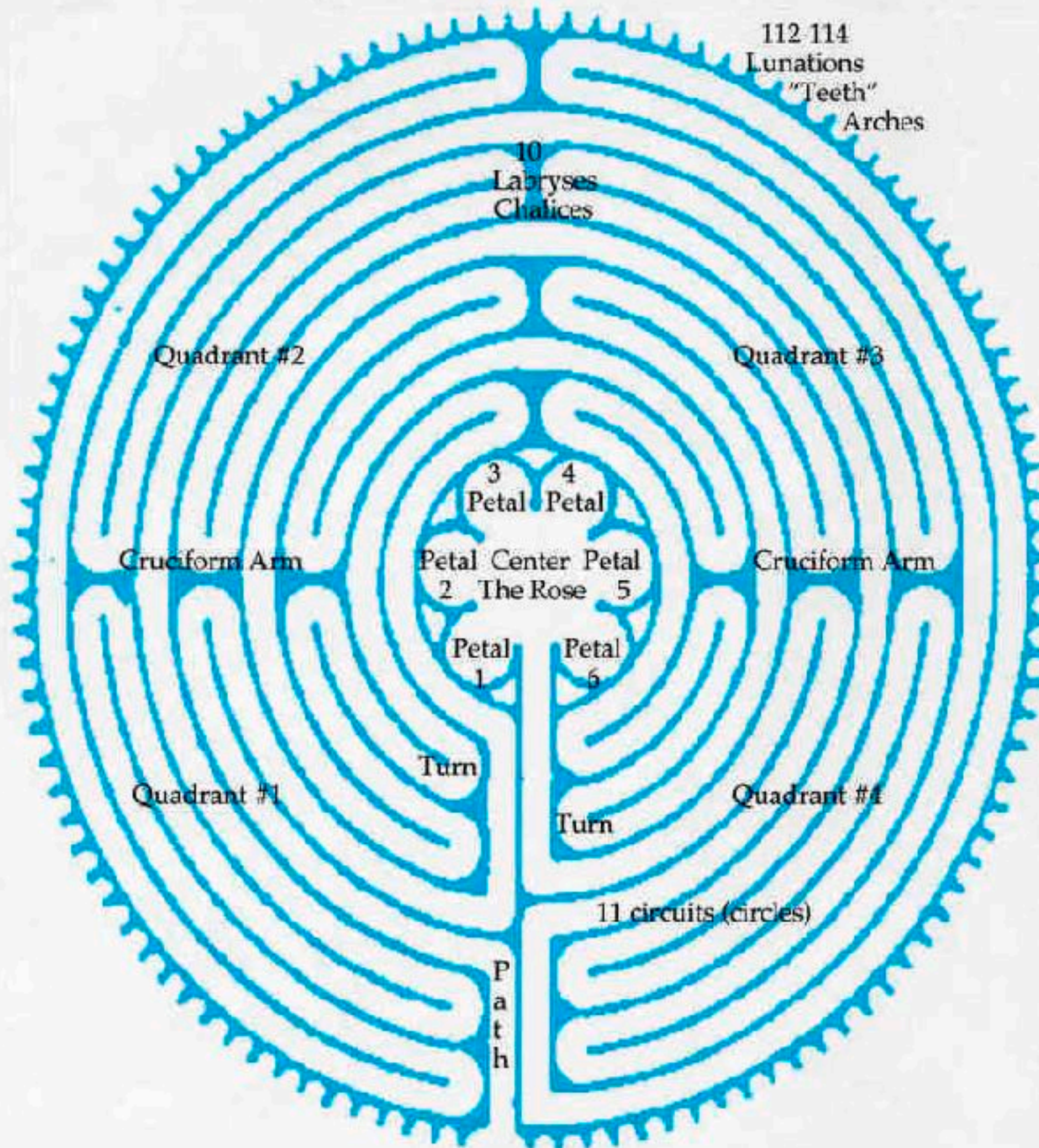
Eucharistic Host (body of Christ, emphasizing its completeness and life-giving nature)



Eternity, infinity, omnipresence,
all-encompassing nature
(and power) of God.
Symbol of sun/
the risen Son.



Chartres Labyrinth Labeled with Commonly Used Terms

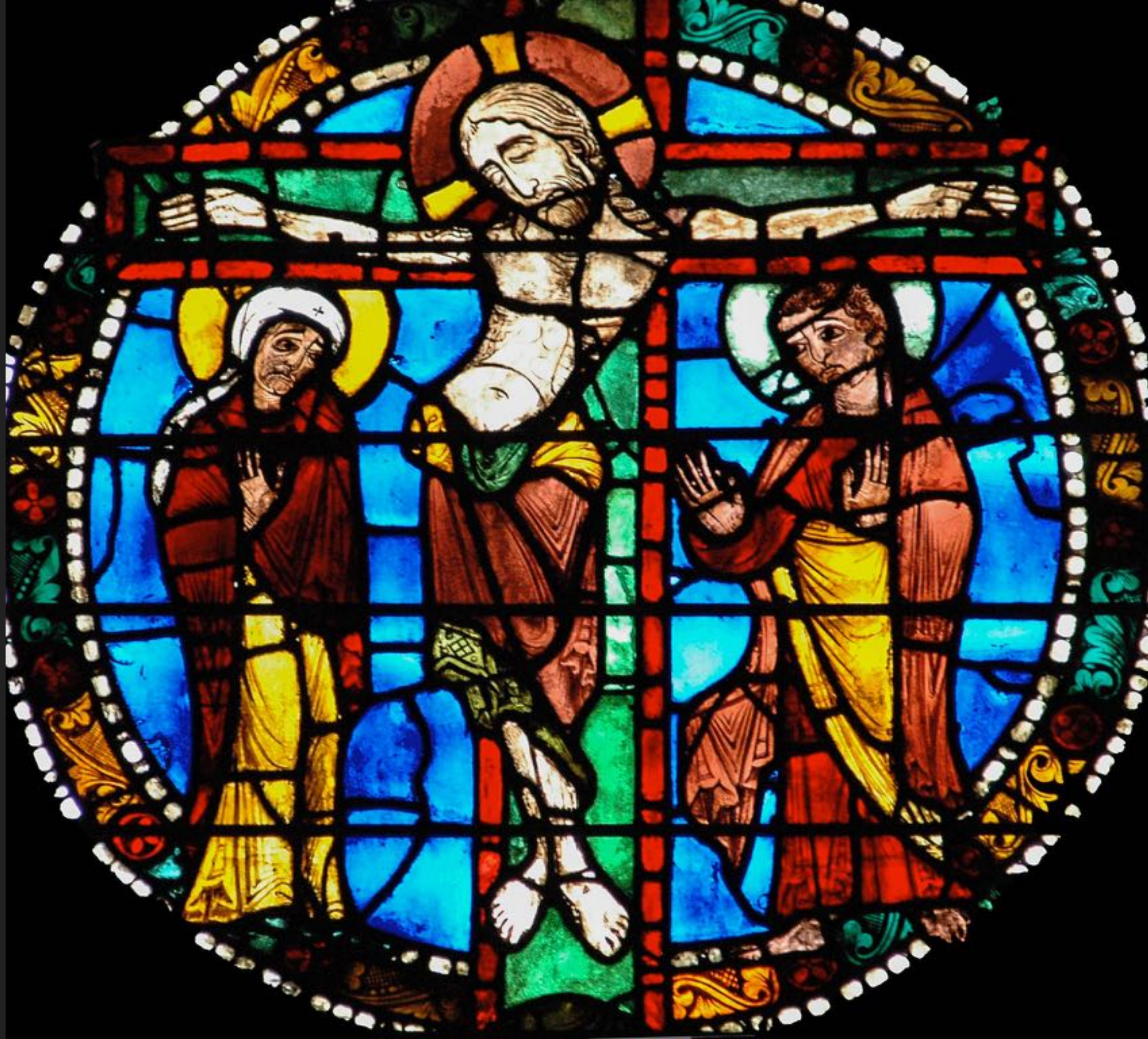


Entrance/Exit
Threshold
Mouth

Note: in some cases, multiple terms are used.

A 4-armed
cross is
embedded in
the symbol
of this
labyrinth.





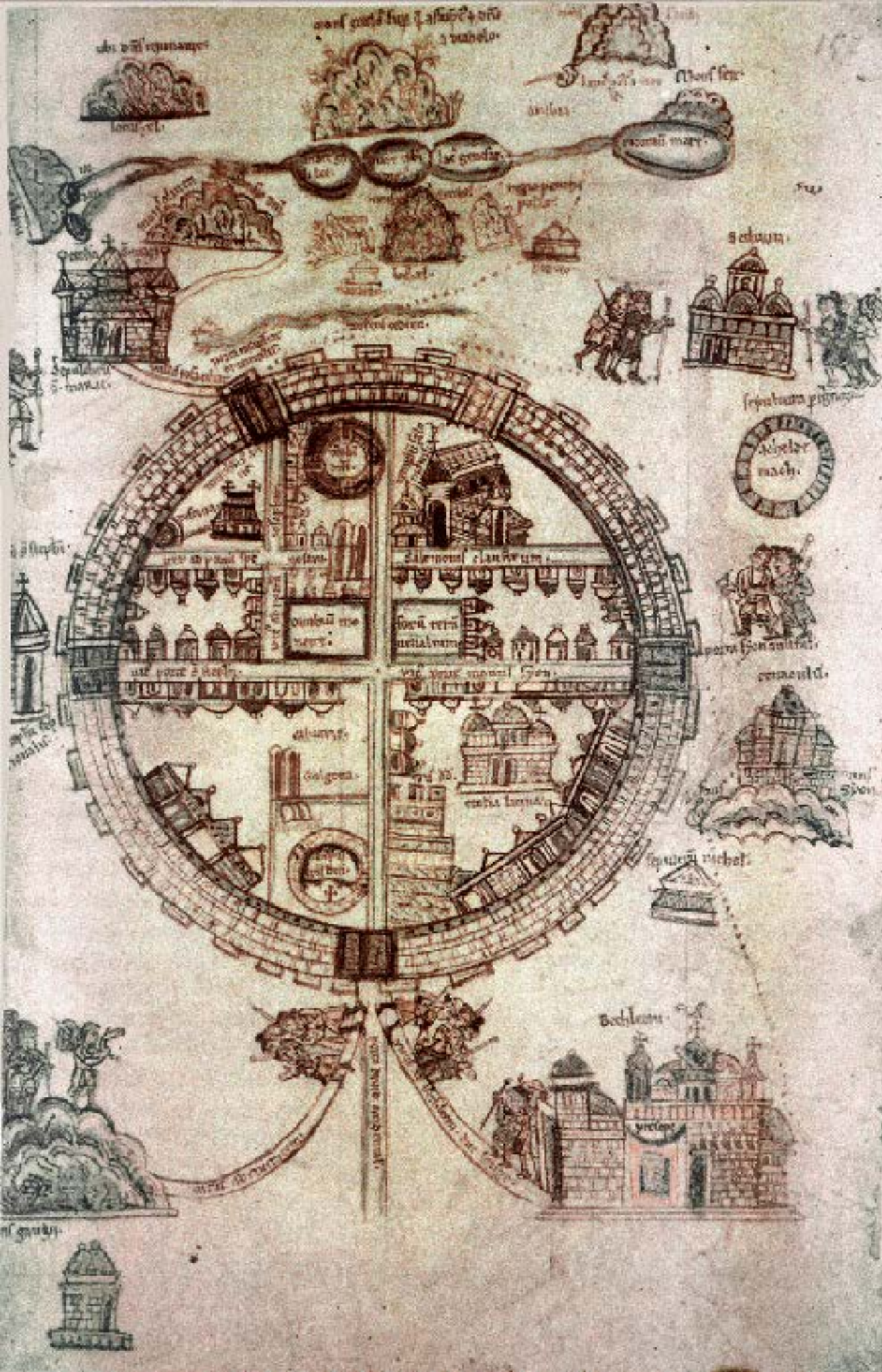
Historically, Roman towns were built up off of... two main roads, and this theme would have been carried over into Jerusalem when Constantine the Great began remodeling the city in the fourth century.

As was discussed in the section dealing with Labyrinthine Evolution, a French monk in the 900s developed the Chartres-type labyrinth by dividing his subject into quarters, and whether intentional or not, the labyrinth can now be seen as a depiction of an idealized Jerusalem.

https://www.luc.edu/medieval/labyrinths/imaginary_pilgrimage.shtml

*Map of Jerusalem, Brussels,
Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, MS
9823-9834, f. 157r. 13th century*

Notice the crenellations around the city









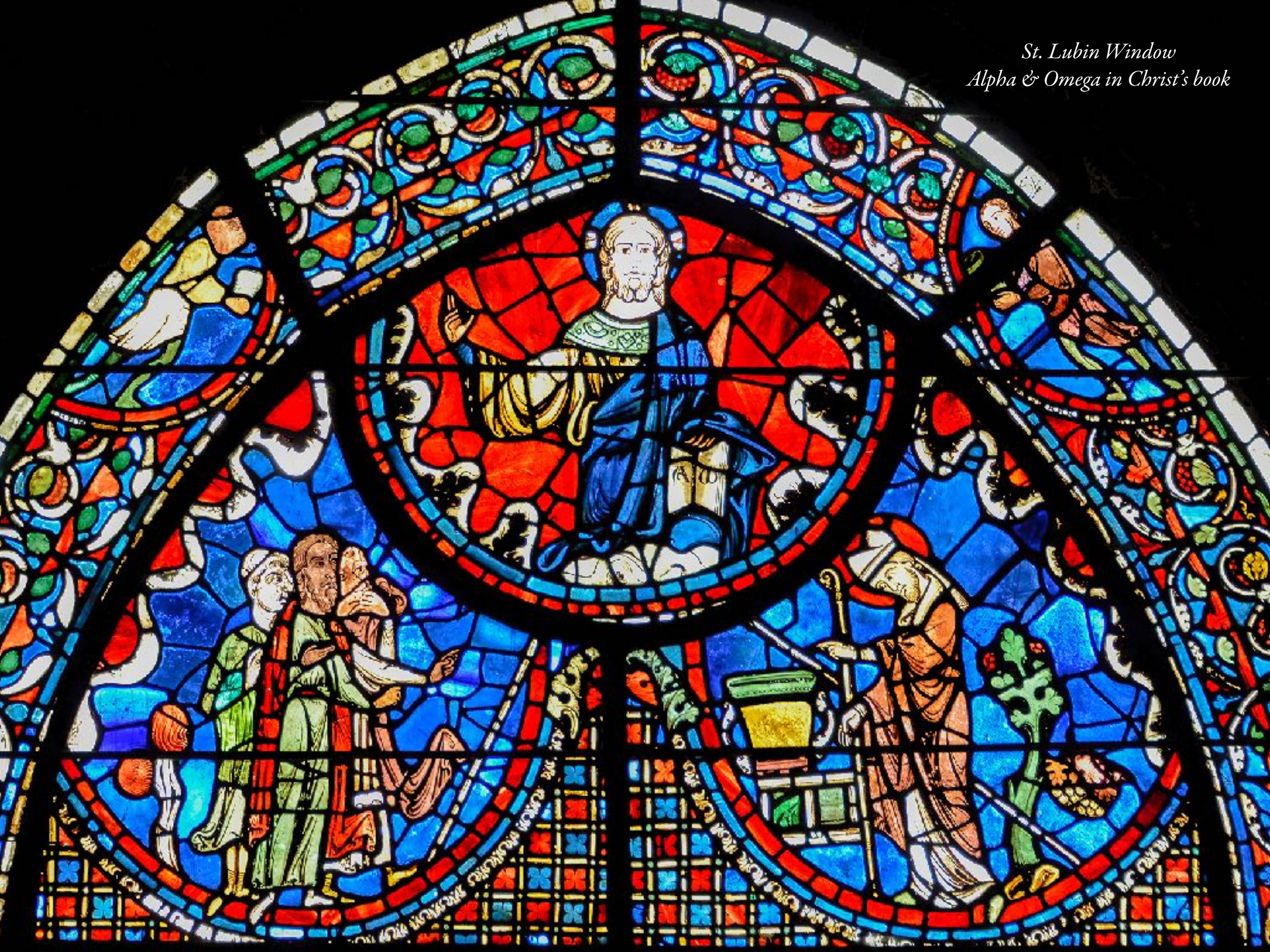
A top-down view of a person's foot wearing a black sandal, standing on a weathered, reddish-brown stone floor. The stone is cracked and textured, with some darker patches. The lighting is somewhat dim, creating a somber atmosphere.

“These are the words of the first and the last,
who was dead and came to life...”

(Isaiah 48:12; Revelation 1:17; Revelation 21:6a)



*St. Lubin Window
Alpha & Omega in Christ's book*



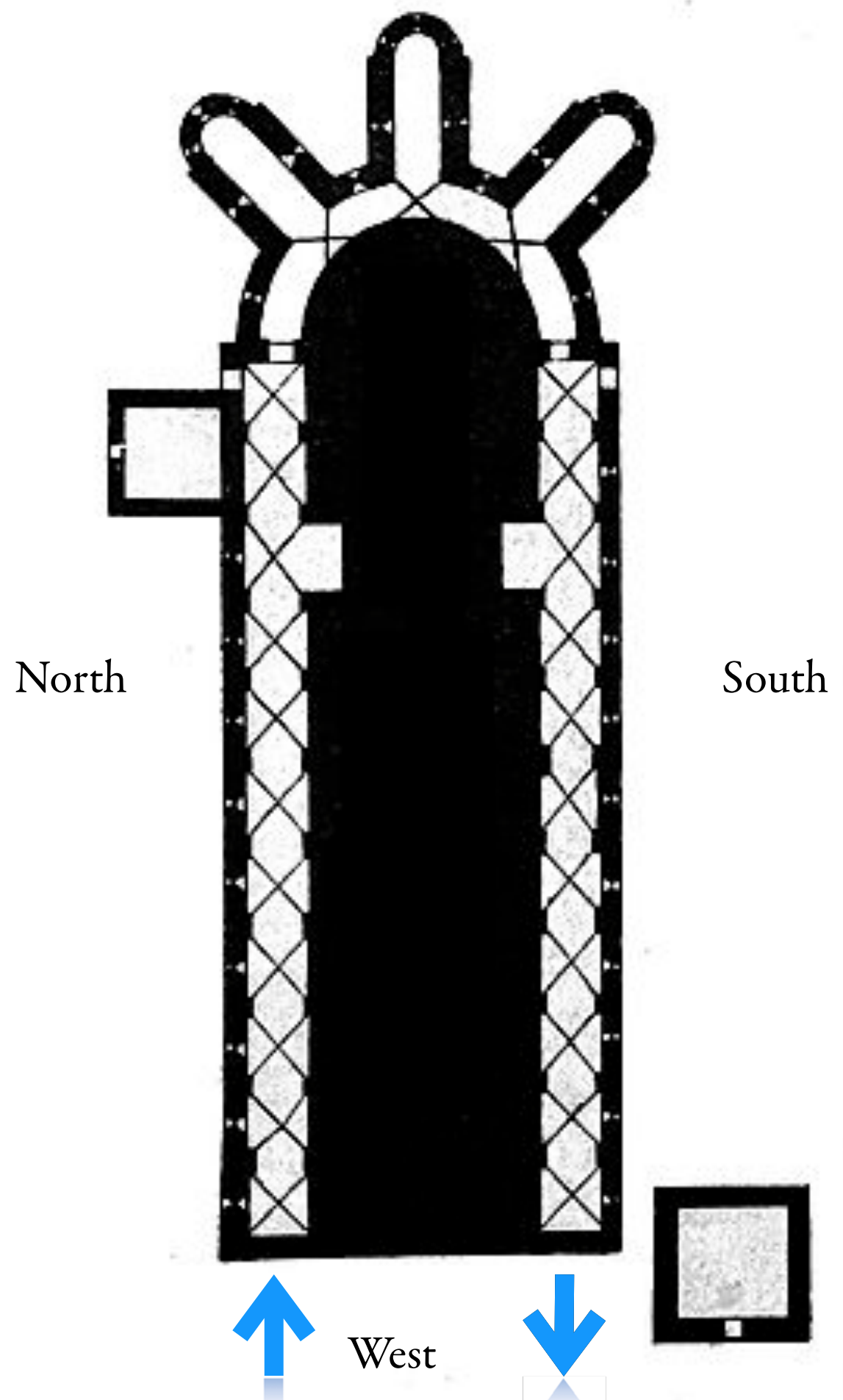


The pathway

Averages 13 1/4 (34 cm) inches with a 3 inch (7.5 cm) “wall” separating each path.

It is approximately 262.4 meters (860.9 feet) from the threshold to the center.

Pilgrimages in Fulbert's Crypt, 1020
East

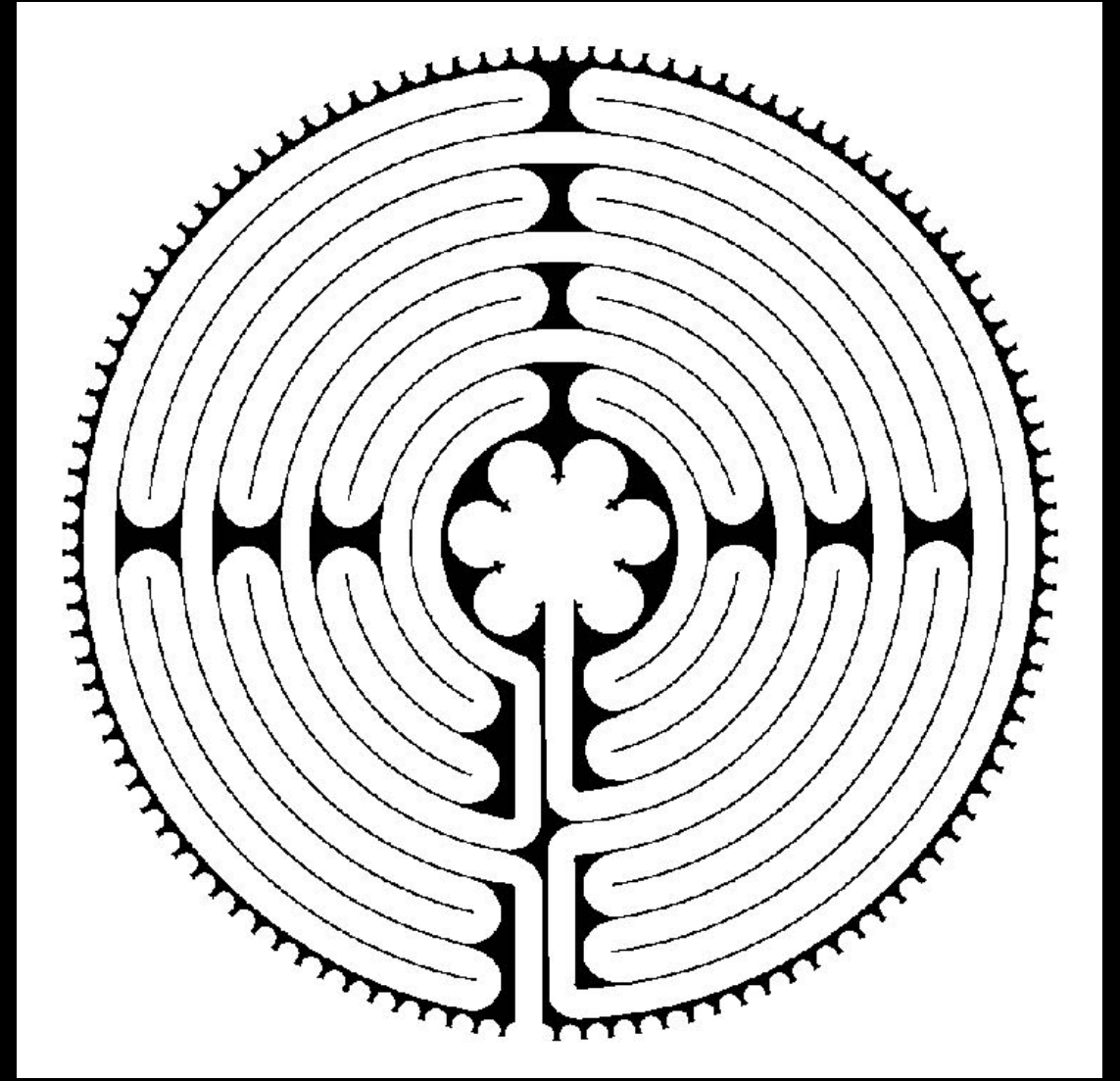
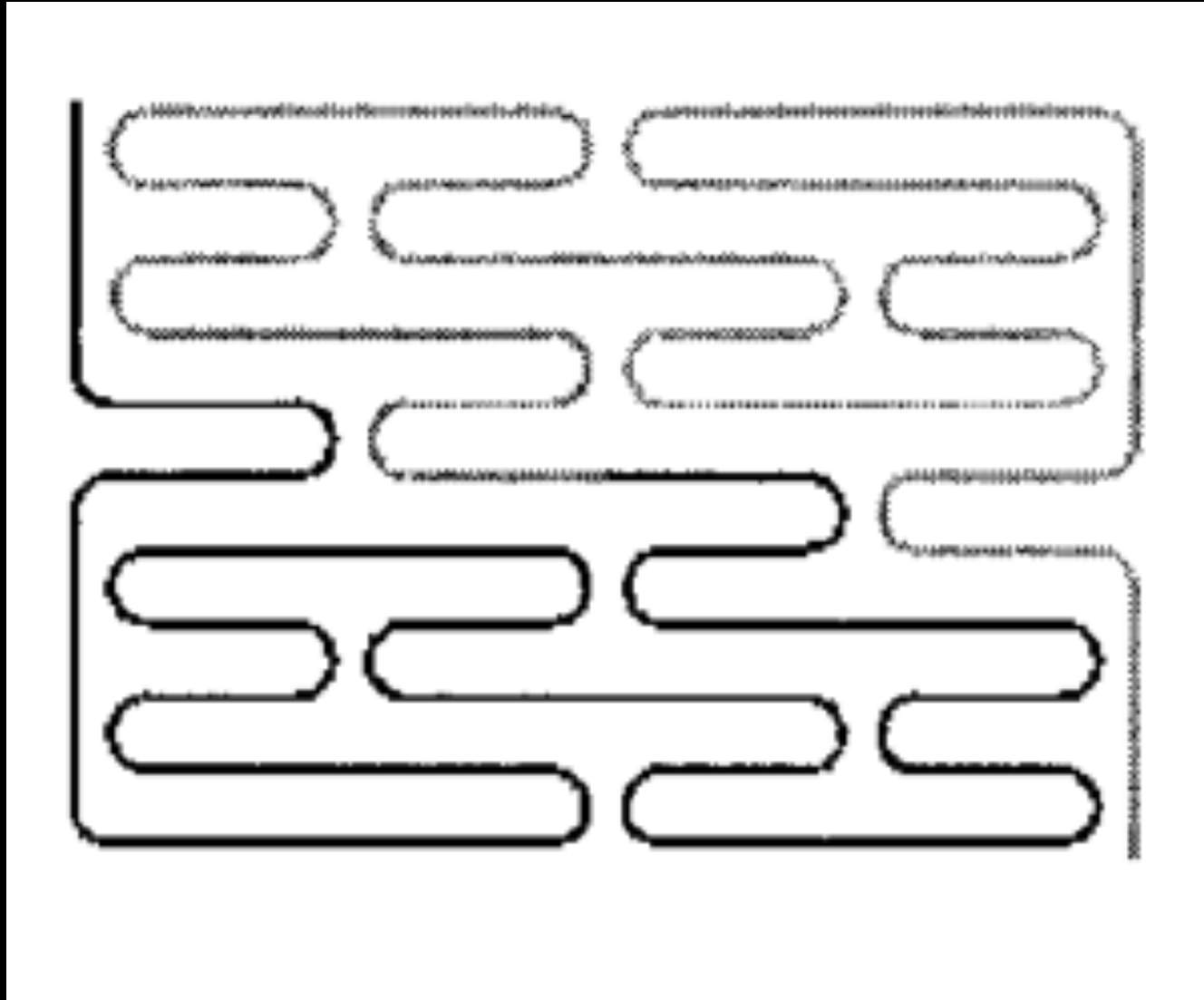


Like the pilgrims who came to Fulbert's crypt that lies below the labyrinth, those who enter the labyrinth move first from north . At the end of the pathway before the center, pilgrims move to south.



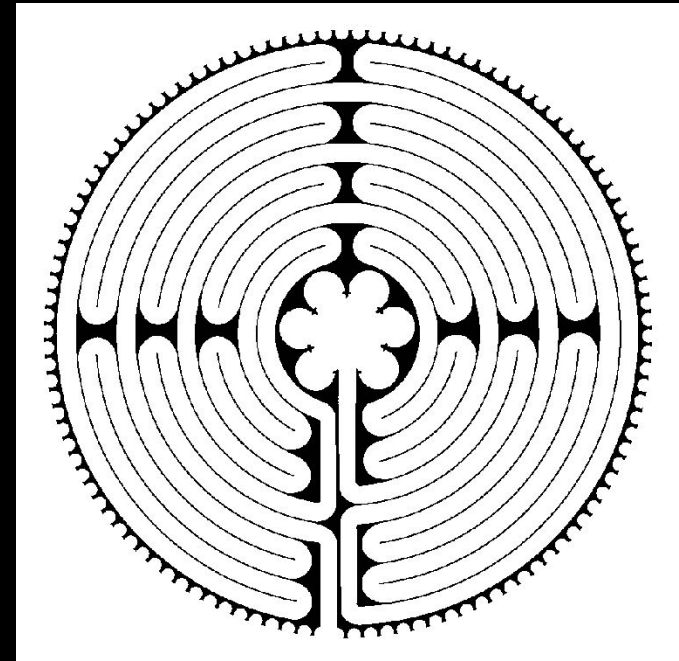
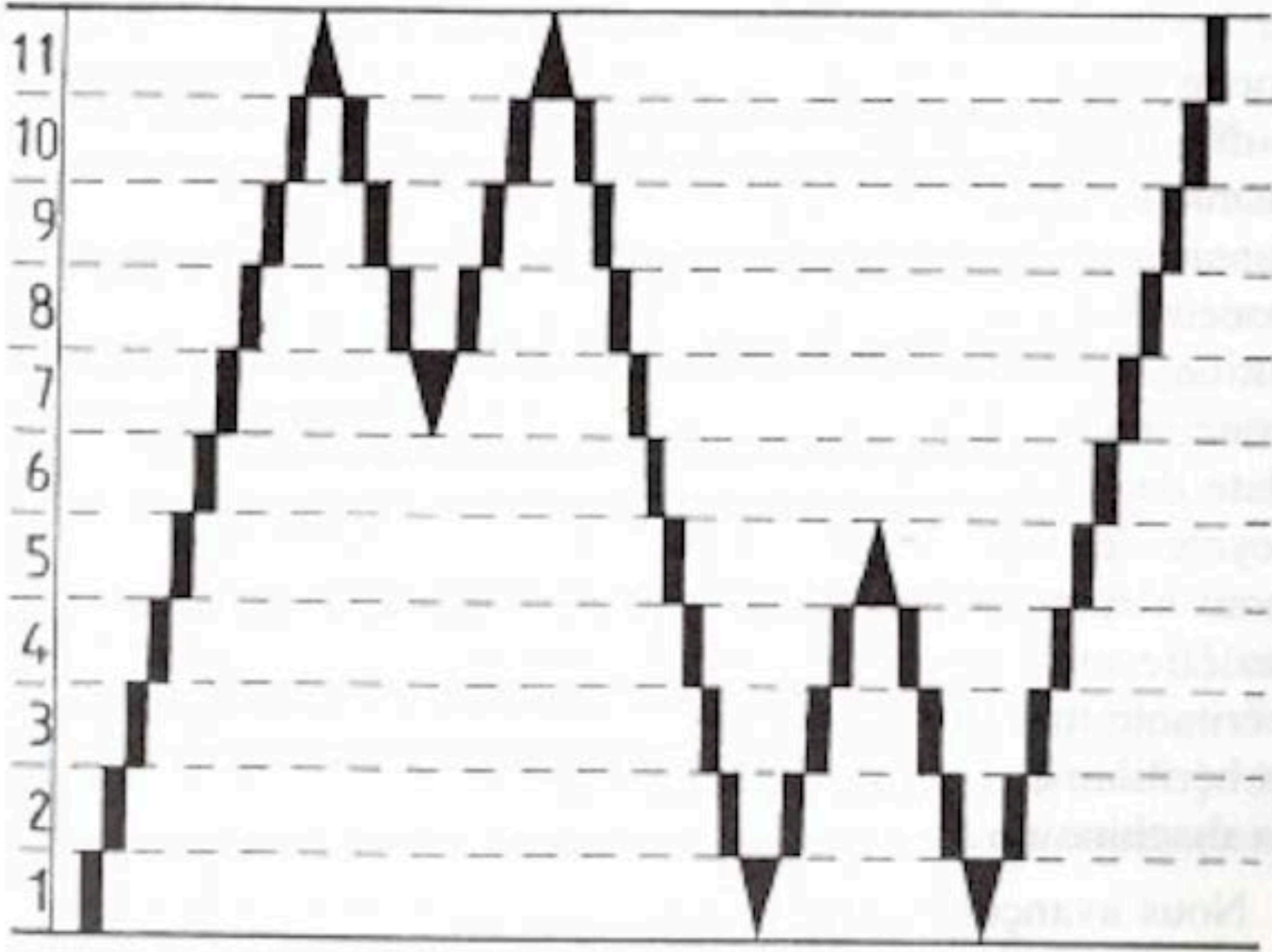
The labyrinth at Chartres...has a symmetry from side to side, and from the outside to the centre.

John James, *The Mystery of the Great Labyrinth at Chartres*, 1.



Ariadne's Thread
of the Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth

Andreas Frei. The Cascading Serpentine. Caerdroia 35: 2005, 19.



John & Odette Ketley-LaPorte. 1997. Chartres : Le Labyrinthe Déchiffré: Éditions Jean-Michel Garnier, 157.

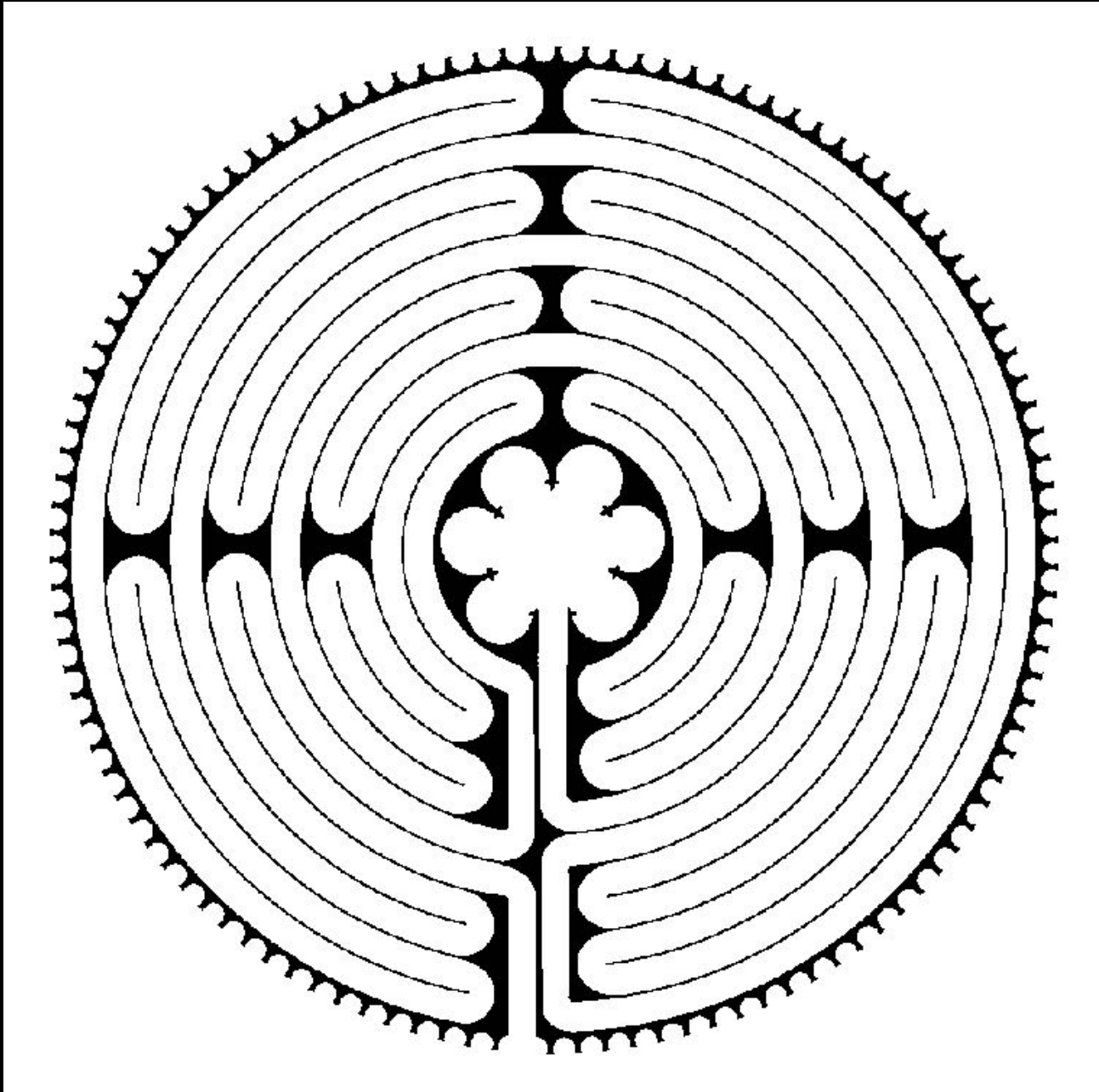
On peut présenter schématiquement l'ordre dans lequel doivent être franchis ou parcourus les onze anneaux qui forment la « piste » labyrinthique. On obtient ainsi une sorte de double monogramme marial.

Rhythm pattern of Chartres labyrinth

Rhythm Pattern For Chartres Labyrinth



Figure 6 - Musical notation describing the rhythmic pattern of the Chartres Labyrinth as described within the text. Whole notes were used for the second two and last two bars. Visualize that the rhythm is being executed using a trumpet playing a single tone. Alternately for a drum beat the whole notes would be replaced by single quarter notes. I have also added a rest to the first bar since this represents the beginning and point of departure from the labyrinth (all Pilgrims need rest at the start of a journey and before their return trip <G>).



The Song of the Labyrinth. William Steve Burkle

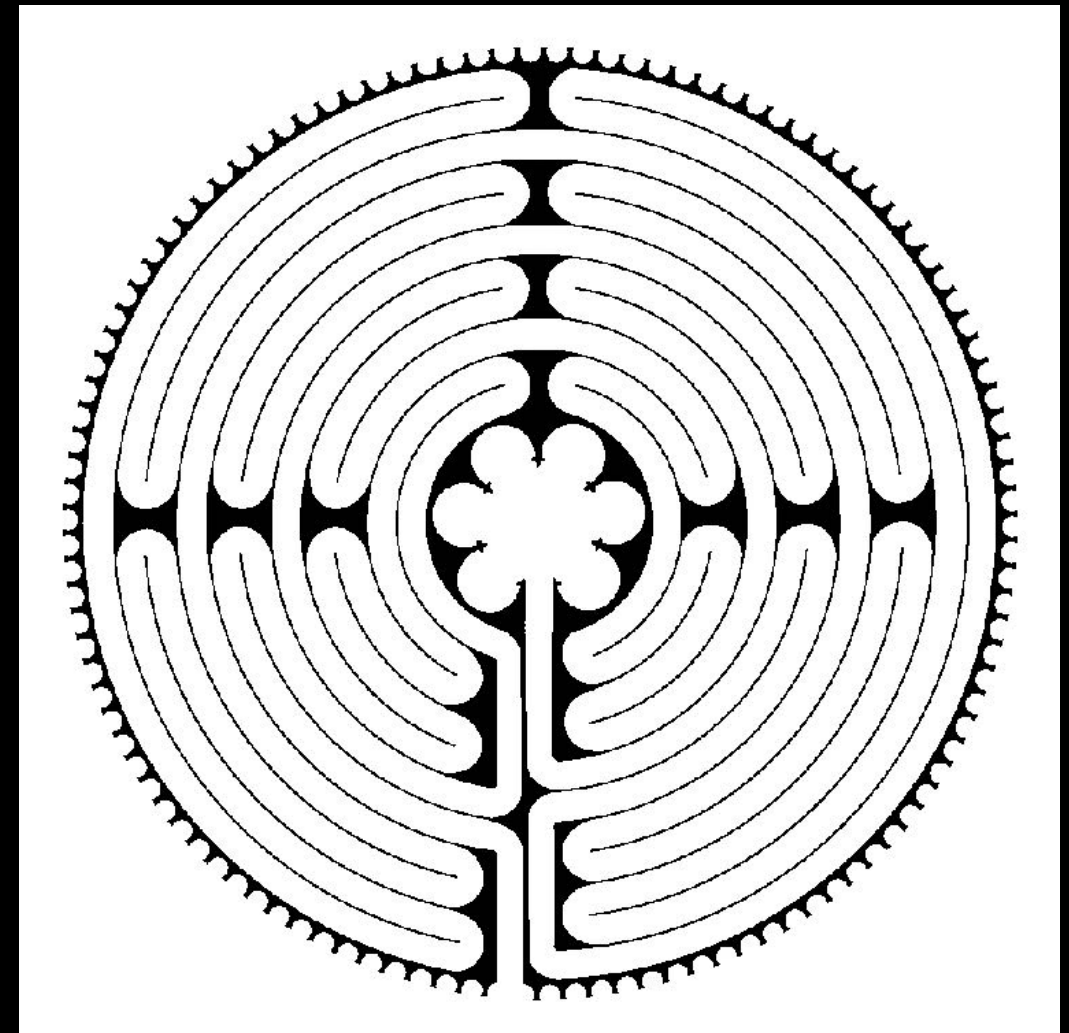
http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/labyrinth_chartres.html

Musical patterns of Chartres labyrinth

III. CHARTRES in 4/4
4/4 Meter

A musical score for 'III. CHARTRES in 4/4' in 4/4 meter. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a common time signature. The melody is written in a simple, rhythmic style with quarter and eighth notes. The second staff continues the melody with some phrasing slurs. The third and fourth staves complete the piece, ending with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

<http://www.crystalinks.com/labyrinths.html>



Publisher:
Alpha Studies

Labyrinth

I. CHARTRES

A musical score for 'I. CHARTRES' published by Alpha Studies. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a common time signature. The melody is written in a simple, rhythmic style with quarter and eighth notes. The second staff continues the melody, ending with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

How many stones
in the pathway?



Stone by stone plan of the Chartres labyrinth, by Jeff Saward

The number of stones that form the path of the labyrinth provides a final numerical puzzle. Often quoted as exactly 270 or 272, and considered by many as symbolic of the number of days of human gestation, the exact number is in fact difficult to determine. Several of the original stones have clearly broken since they were originally laid in place and now appear to be two slabs instead of one. Those with ragged, interlocking cracks are easy to spot; others with clean breaks are more difficult. There are also a few short slabs that look suspiciously like 'patches' inserted to replace damaged portions of pathway. Depending on how you count, it is possible to arrive at a number anywhere between around 268 and 274. Either way, the use of the word 'exactly' in discussion of this, or practically any other aspect of the Chartres labyrinth, should be treated with caution, as labyrinths tend not to conform to exactitudes.

The pathway and the dividers







Turns

28

180

degrees

turns



6

90

degrees

turns



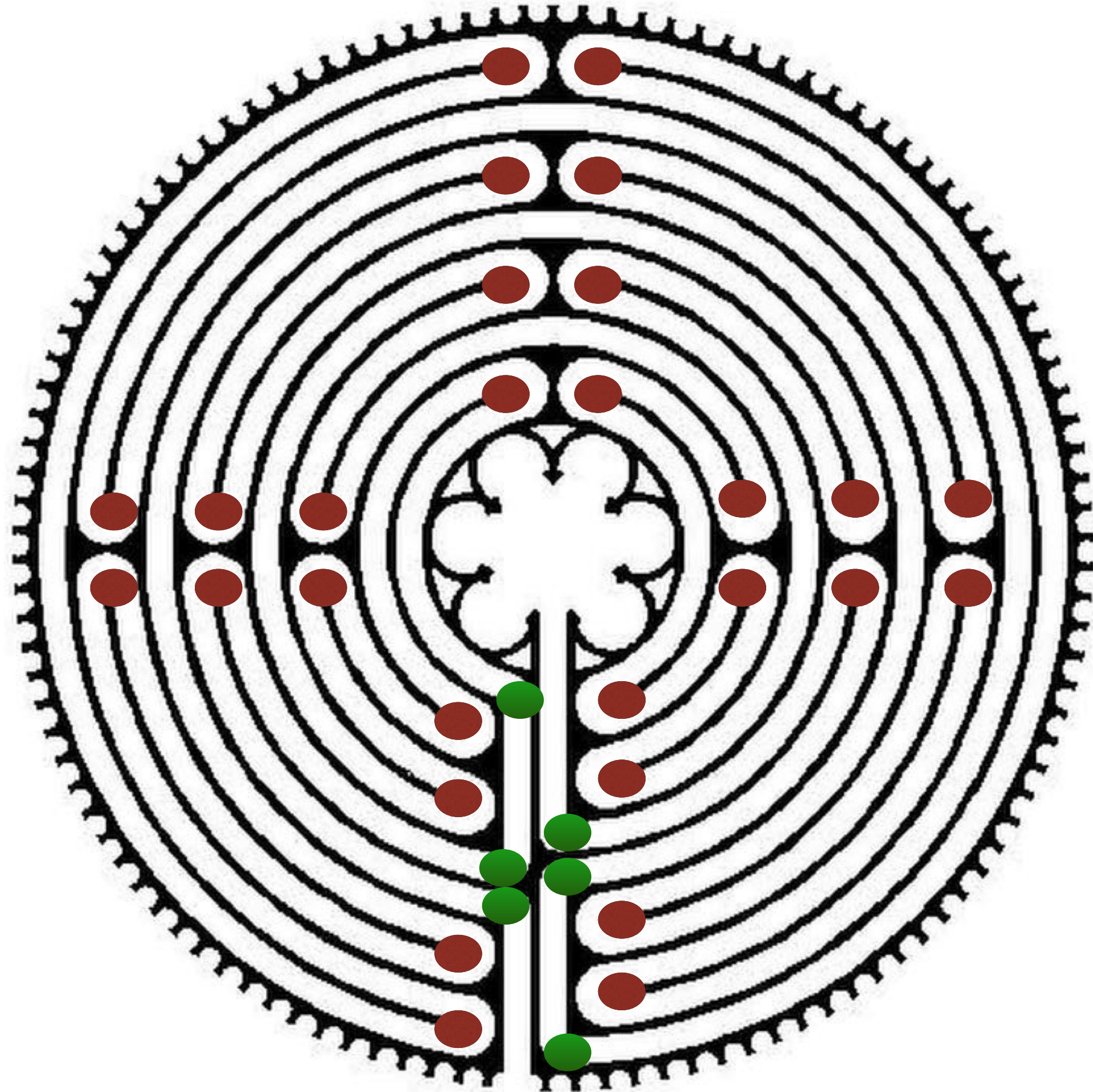
+



=

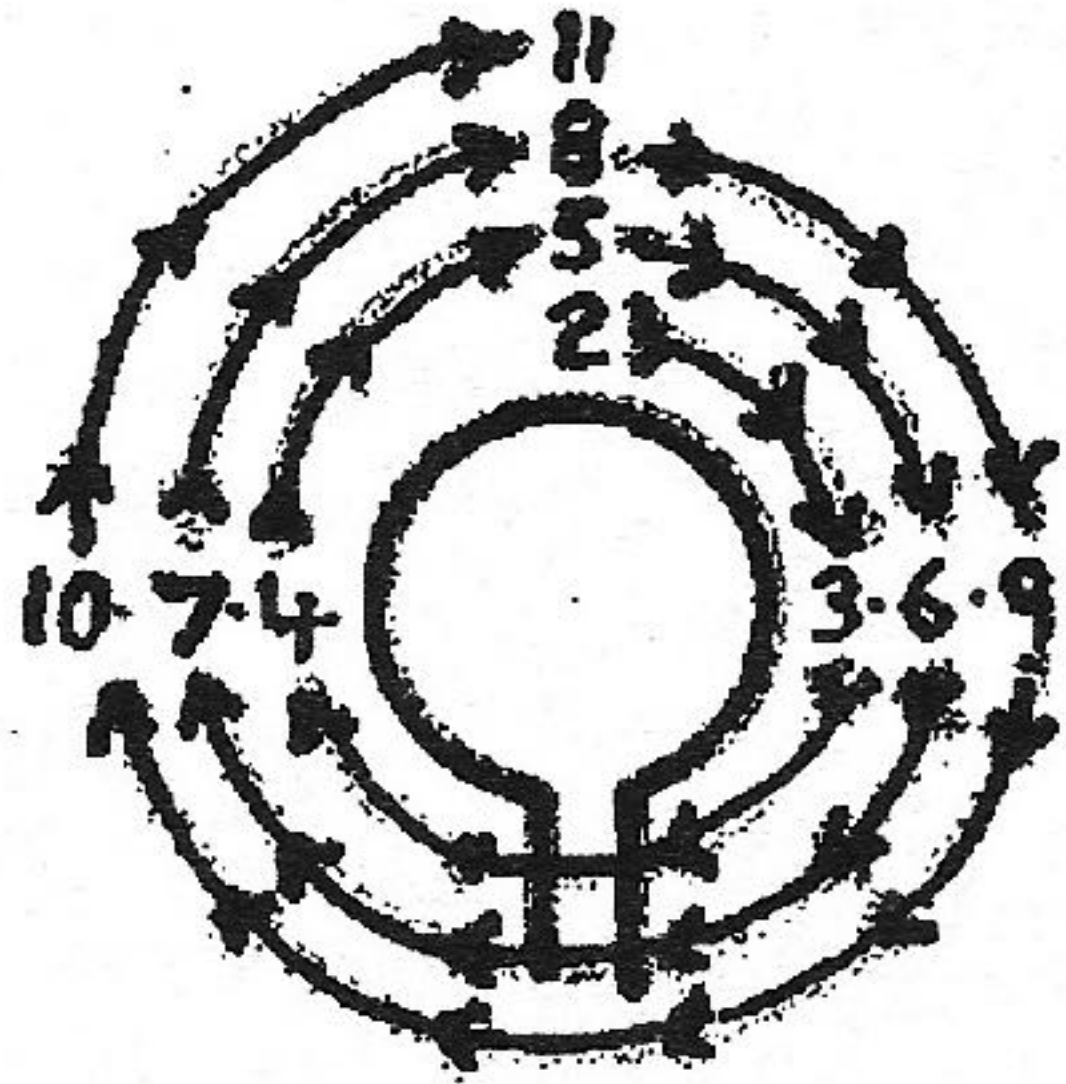
34

turns





A spiral is also embedded in the Chartres Cathedral labyrinth.



The clockwise spiral formed by the labryses.

Diagram by Robert Ferré, Chartres Labyrinth





Center: 6 Petals (with 12 divisions) formed by 7 Circles

7: The meeting of heaven and earth (Number of the Virgin)

6: Stability and balance (Number of Christ)

12: Perfection; Infusion of matter (4) with (x) Spirit (3)

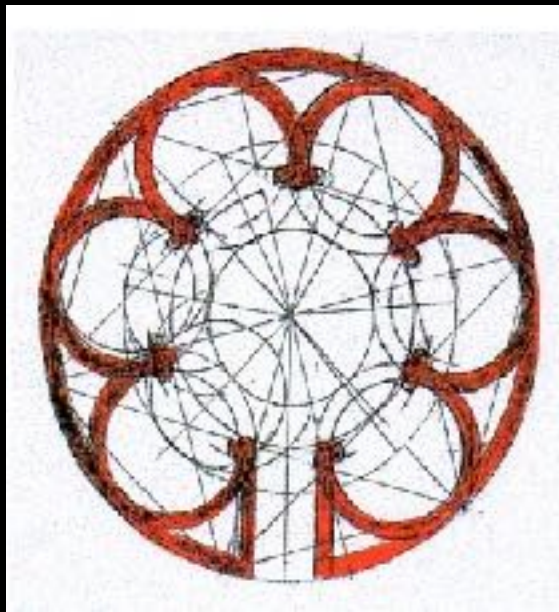


Diagram by Robert Ferré

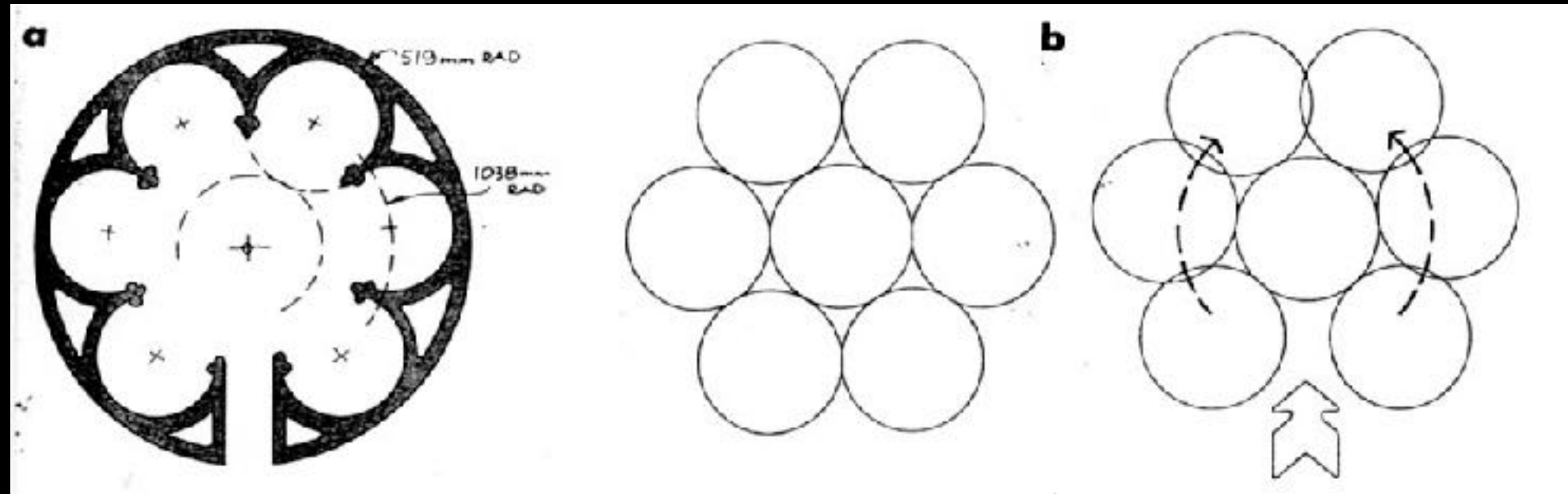


Diagram by John James



Wisdom

Might

Understanding

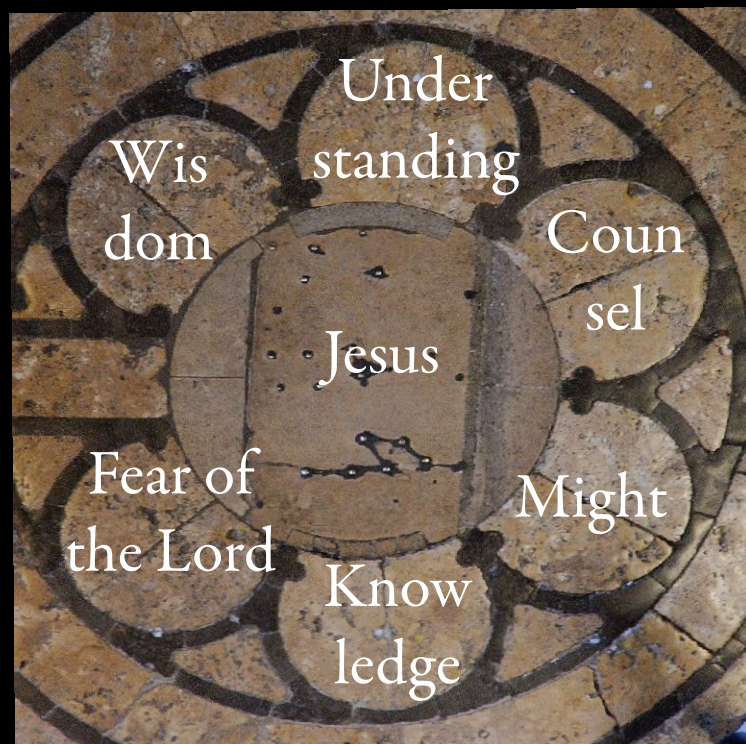
Knowledge

Counsel

Respect for
the Holy



*Window in the north clerestory
above the labyrinth
1210-1215*

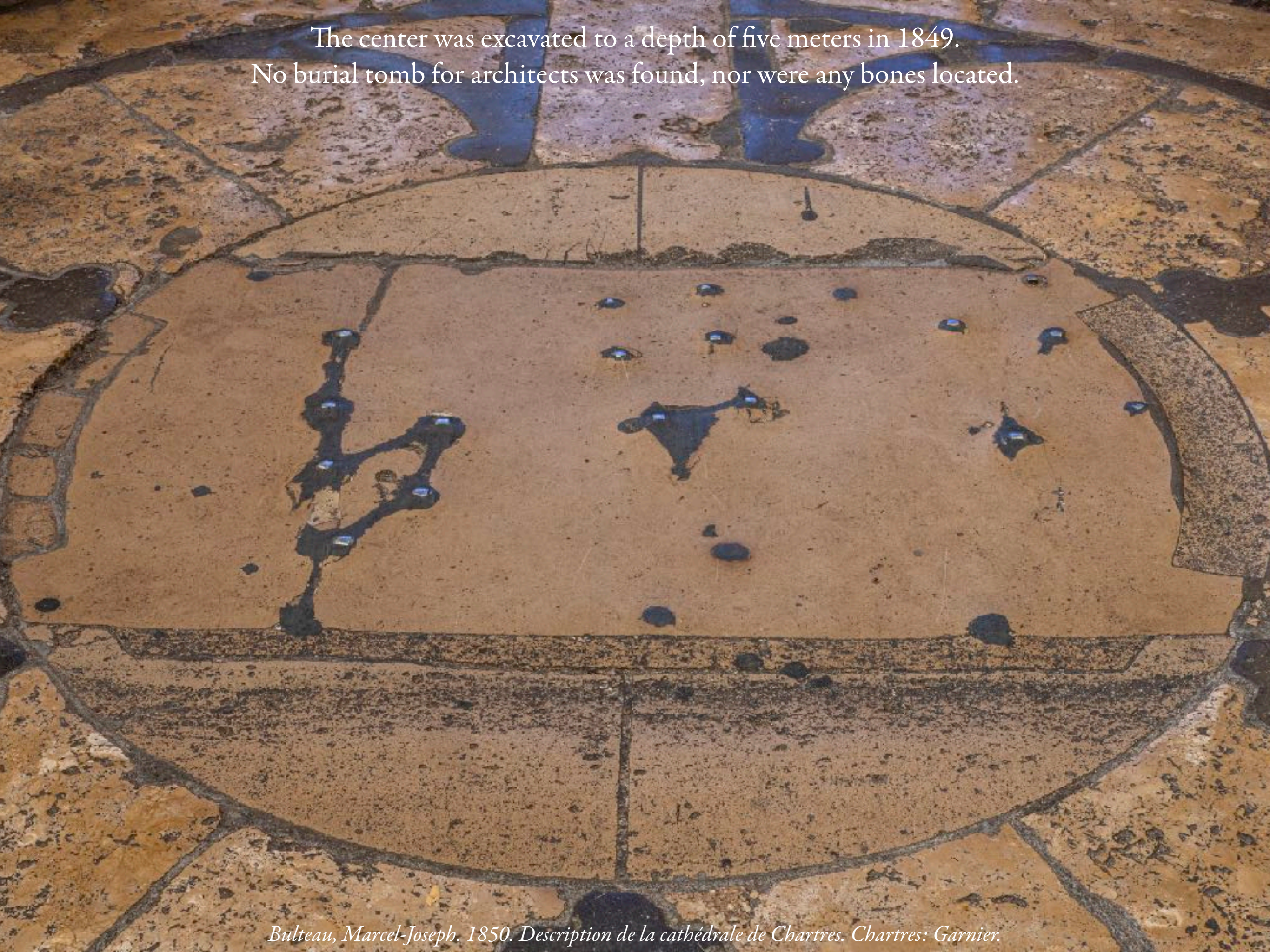



A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, he spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

Isaiah 11:1-3

*Window to the west of the
labyrinth (1145-1155)*

The center was excavated to a depth of five meters in 1849.
No burial tomb for architects was found, nor were any bones located.





“It is likely that [the central brass plaque from the labyrinth] disappeared during the revolutionary period, around 1792 or 1793, when the roofing lead was melted to make cannon balls and when the bronze of clocks, as well as copper was converted into canons for defensive purposes.”

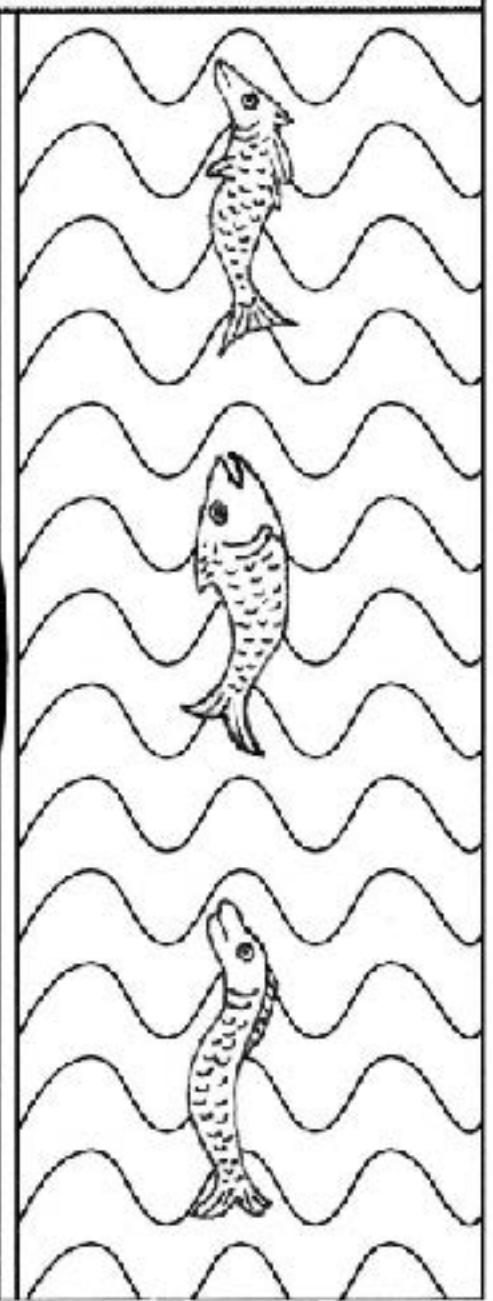
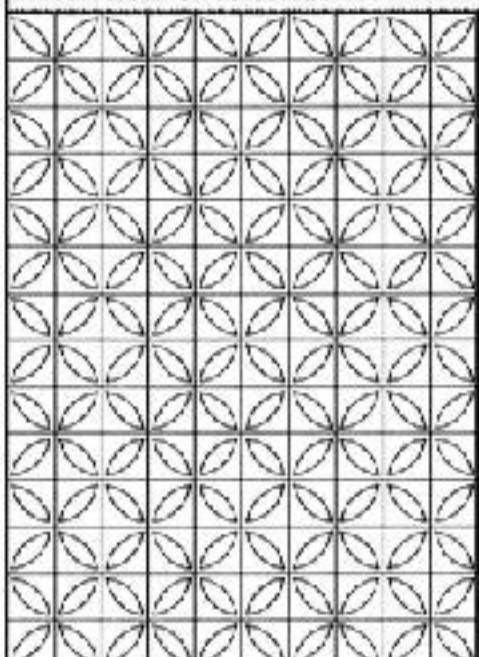
Jean Villette, 1971. "« Quand Thésée et le Minotaure ont-ils disparu du labyrinthe de la cathédrale de Chartres »."
Bulletin de la Société Archéologique d'Eure-et-Loir 42 (3): 270.

WHAT WAS THERE IN THE CENTER OF THE LABYRINTH?

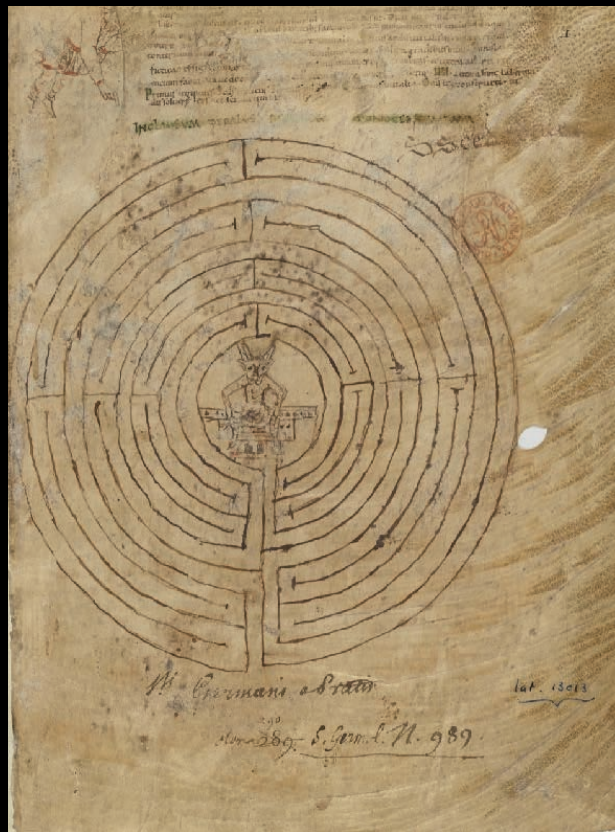
In the center of the labyrinth of Chartres, a copper plate was visible until 1792, held by steel rivets that can still be seen there. Perhaps only the figures were line-engraved, as Jean Villette suggests, the rest of the plate being hollowed out, which could explain the very irregular arrangement of the rivets in place. If we follow the testimony of Challine, around 1655, we recognize the fight between Theseus and the Minotaur. Around 1765, Janvier de Flainville, author of a history of Chartres, quotes a manuscript by Courtois, just as convinced that it is Theseus and the Minotaur. For him, he adds: “The figures which were at the center of the labyrinth are very effaced; it is impossible to recognize anything.” We have seen thanks to the manuscripts that this hypothesis has some serious credibility. However, it is difficult to go further without looking for examples outside Chartres.

Gilles Fresson - Rectorate of Chartres Cathedral

<https://www.cathedrale-chartres.org/cathedrale/monument/le-labyrinthe/le-labyrinthe-enfin-devoile/#part1>



Pavia, Italy Labyrinth Mosaic San Michele Maggiore, 1107 Image © Jeff Saward



901-1000



1121



1126-1150

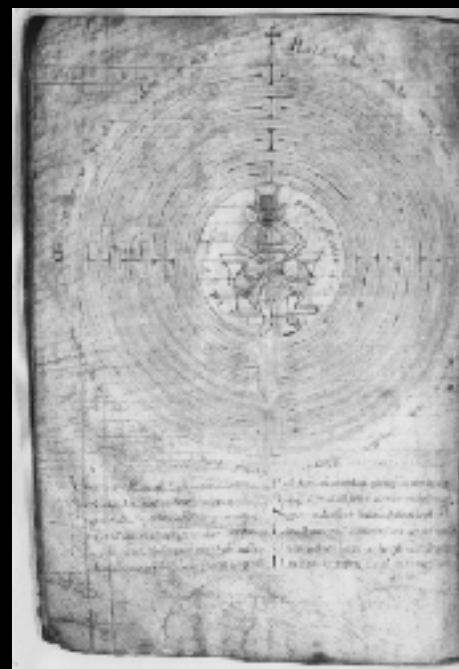


1150-1200

Minotaurs and later Theseus and the Minotaur in the center of medieval manuscript labyrinths



1101-1200



1101-1200



1101-1200



1101-1200



Extensions around the Chartres labyrinth

Quadrant

Quadrant

2

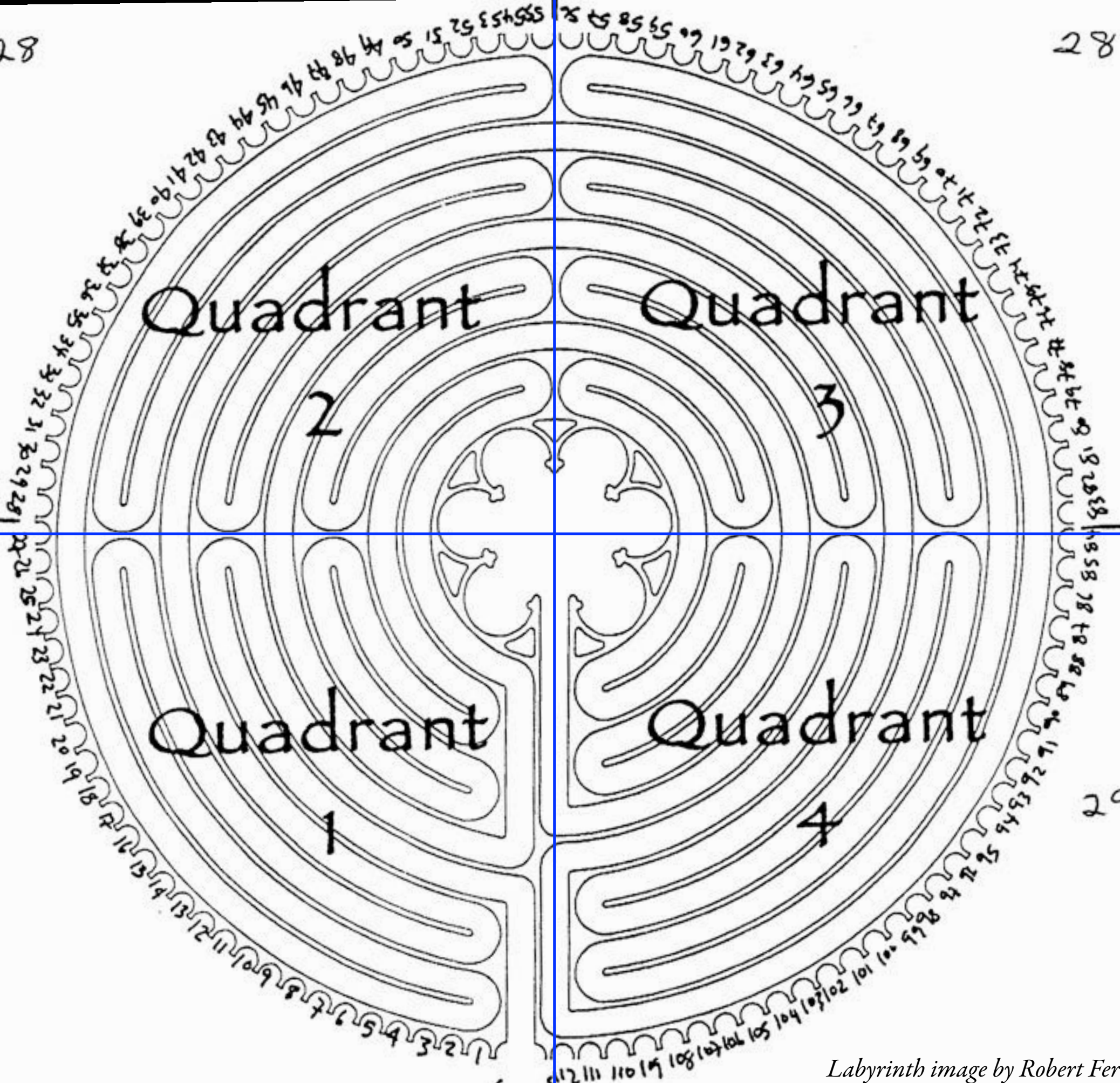
3

Quadrant

Quadrant

1

4



Labyrinth image by Robert Ferré



Names use for the extensions & partial-circles around the outside of the labyrinth



Cogs (spokes of a wheel): John James

Crenellations: John Connolly

Cups: Helen Sands

Halo (of ornamentation): Jeff Saward

Lunations: Keith Critchlow (1973)

Teeth: French common usage «*Dents*», Jean Villette

Ring of Fire Around Paradise: John James

Arches (of a cloister), Scallops, Cusps, Crown of thorns, Spikes

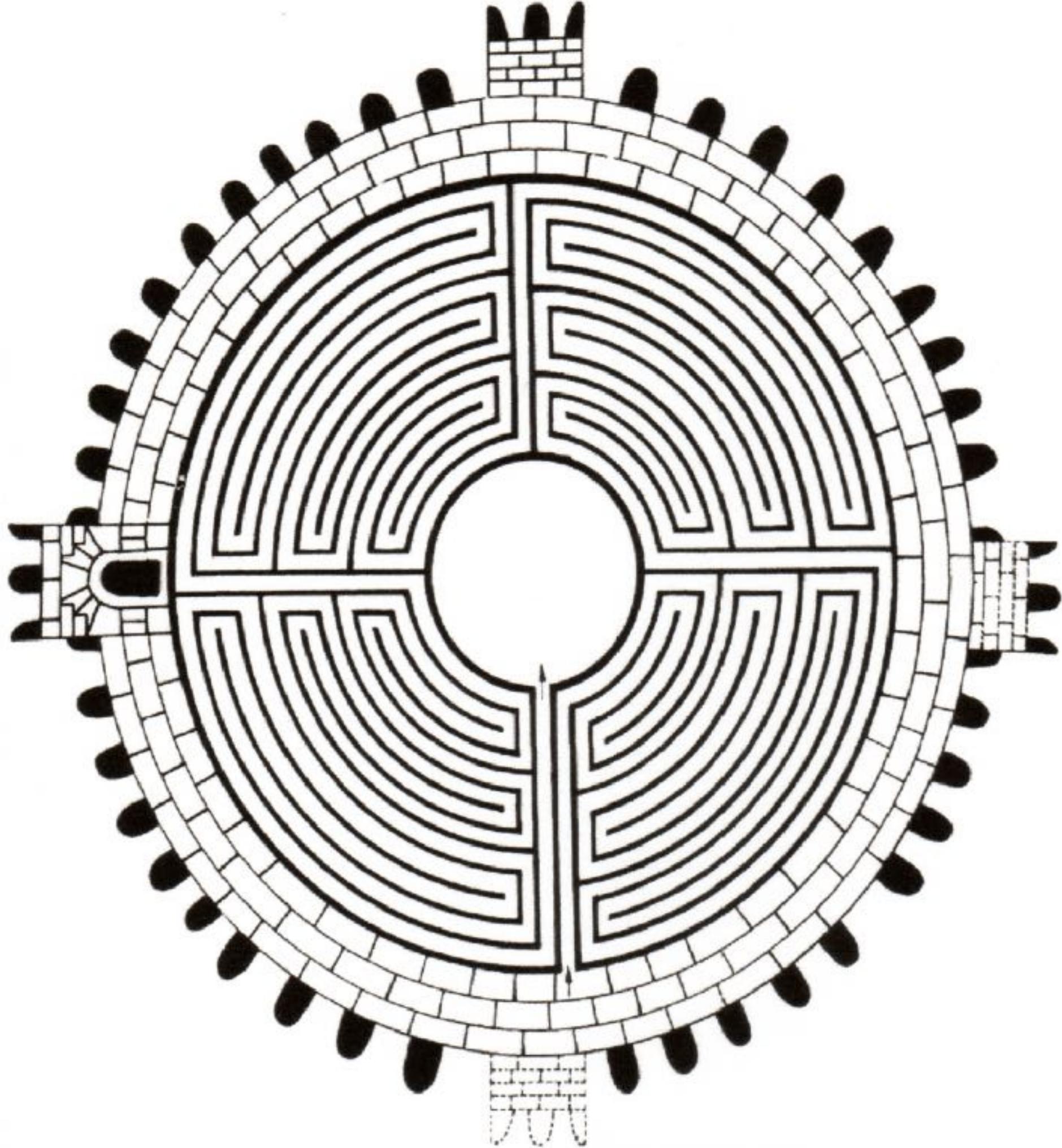


There is no original documentation about their purpose, but it is unlikely they functioned as a lunar calendar. Lunar months are 29.5306 days. Medieval clerics used a lunar calendric system with alternating months of 29 and 30 days along with some other features that kept the cycle on track.

They used these calendars to determine important days of the church year.

For more information: Jeff Saward, Is That A Fact? Caerdroia 33:2003, 26.





3rd Century CE
Image: J. C. Golvin in Hédi Slim.
1980. "La mosaïque du labyrinthe
*de Thysdrus." *Antiquités Africaines**
15 (1980): 204.









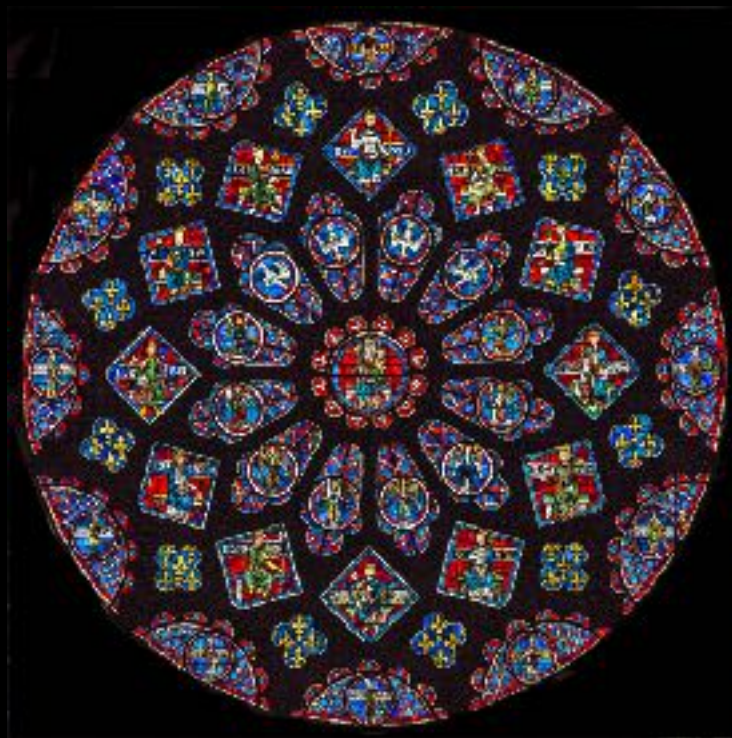
The labyrinth is the largest “decorative” element in the cathedral—
even larger than the rose windows.



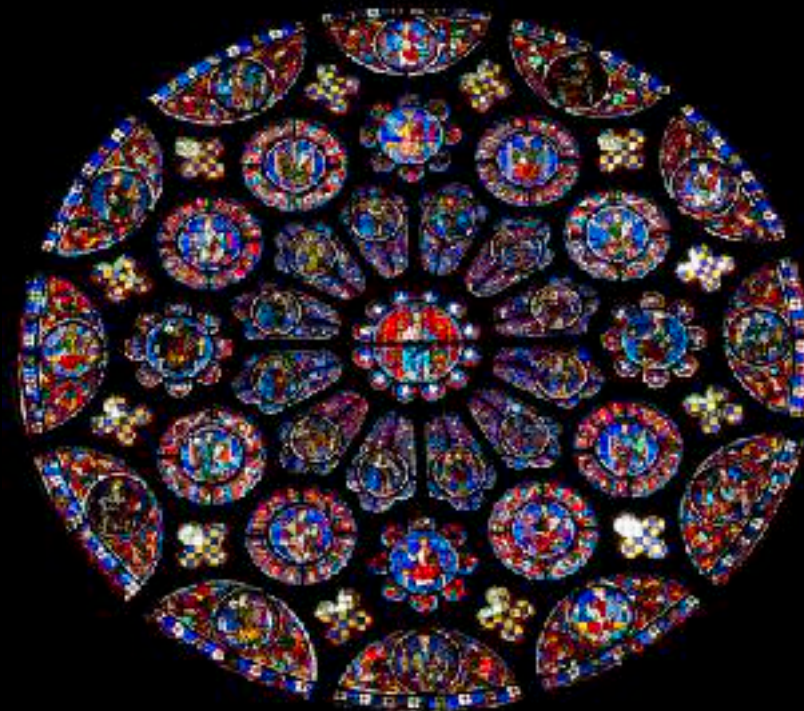
Diameter of labyrinth: 12.9 meters (Saward)



West rose (glazed area) 11.9 meters



North rose diameter: 10.5 meters



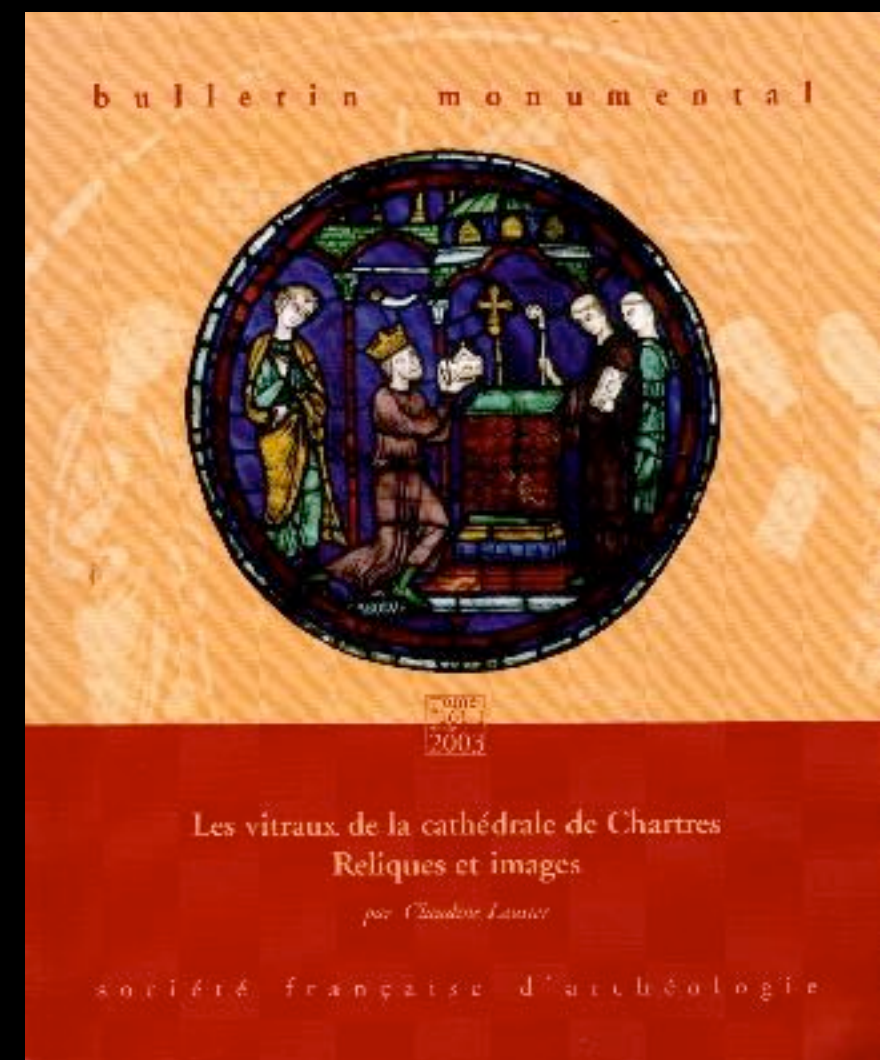
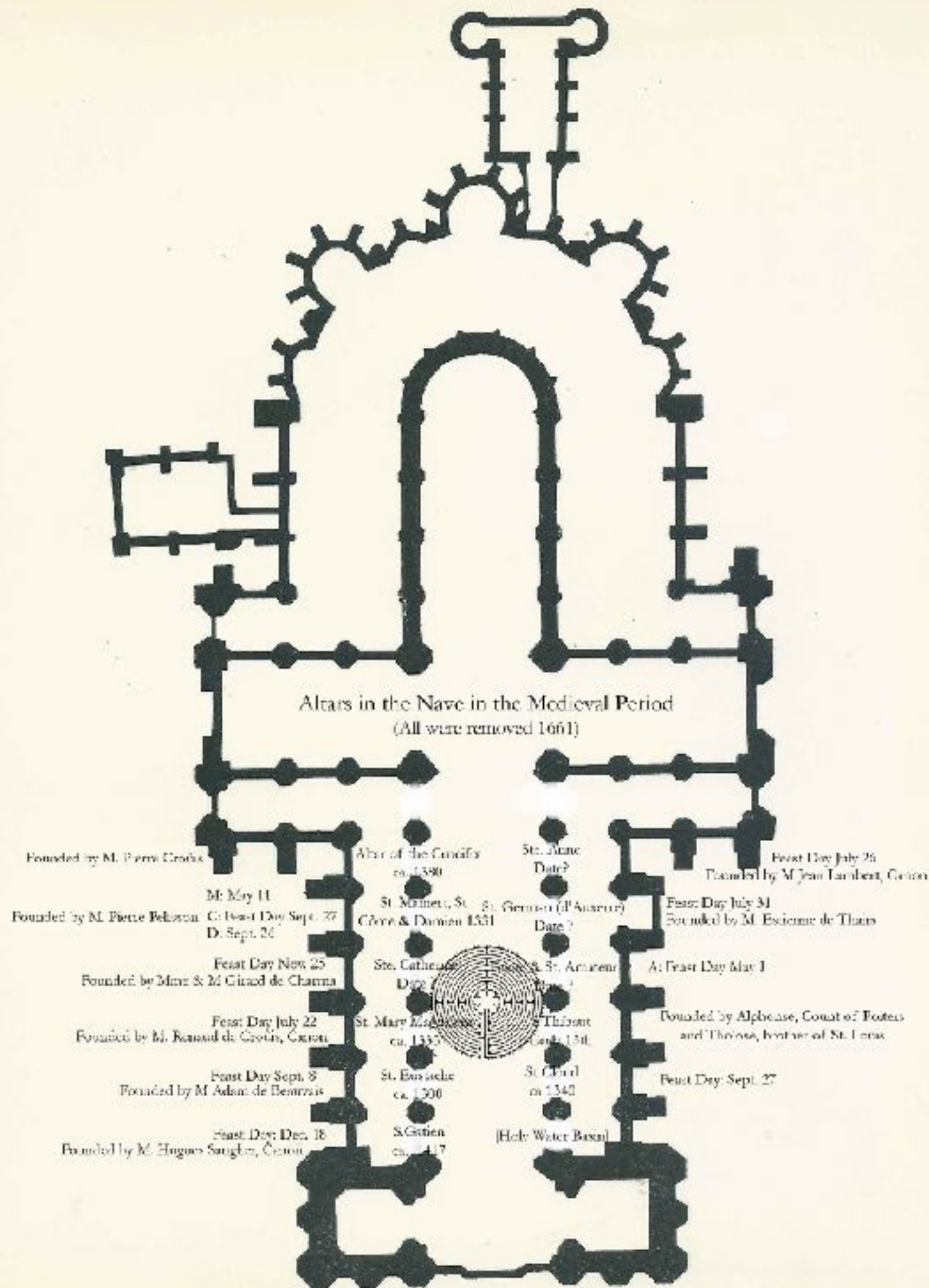
South Rose: 10.56 meters

The twelfth century scholars at Chartres perceived all of tangible reality to be an expression of the mind of God. They immersed themselves in the newly rediscovered philosophical works of antiquity and were especially fascinated by the teachings of Pythagoras, Plato and the later neo-Platonists. They were eager to understand the inter-relationships between the macrocosm and microcosms of the universe and believed this to be a key to insight into the workings of the divine. A cathedral that was a microcosm of the divine macrocosm, they began to discover, could be a bridge between the human and the divine. The wisdom of the ancients, they realized, could open a doorway to God.

<https://chartres-sacred-geometry.com/topics/chartres-sacred-geometry-the-middle-ages/the-sacred-cosmos-theological-philosophical-and-scientific-conversations-in-the-twelfth-century-school-of-chartres/>

Peter Ellard, The Sacred Cosmos: Theological, Philosophical, and Scientific Conversations in the Twelfth-Century School of Chartres, University of Scranton Press, Scranton and London, 2007.

As early as 1300 altars were built abutting the pillars of the nave. Masses were celebrated around the labyrinth on a regular basis until 1601.

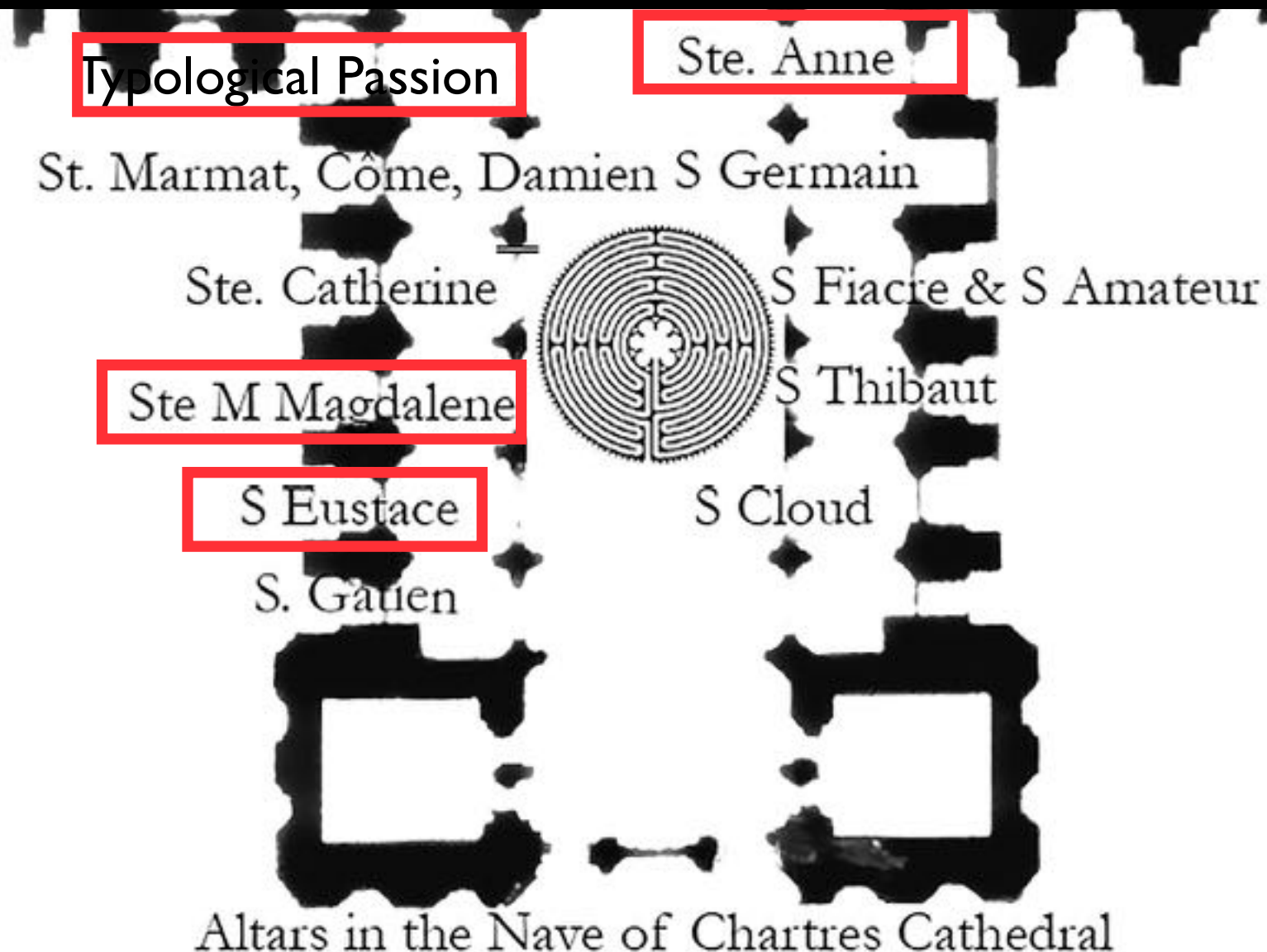


Some of the altars by the labyrinth related to cathedral relics shown in nearby windows.

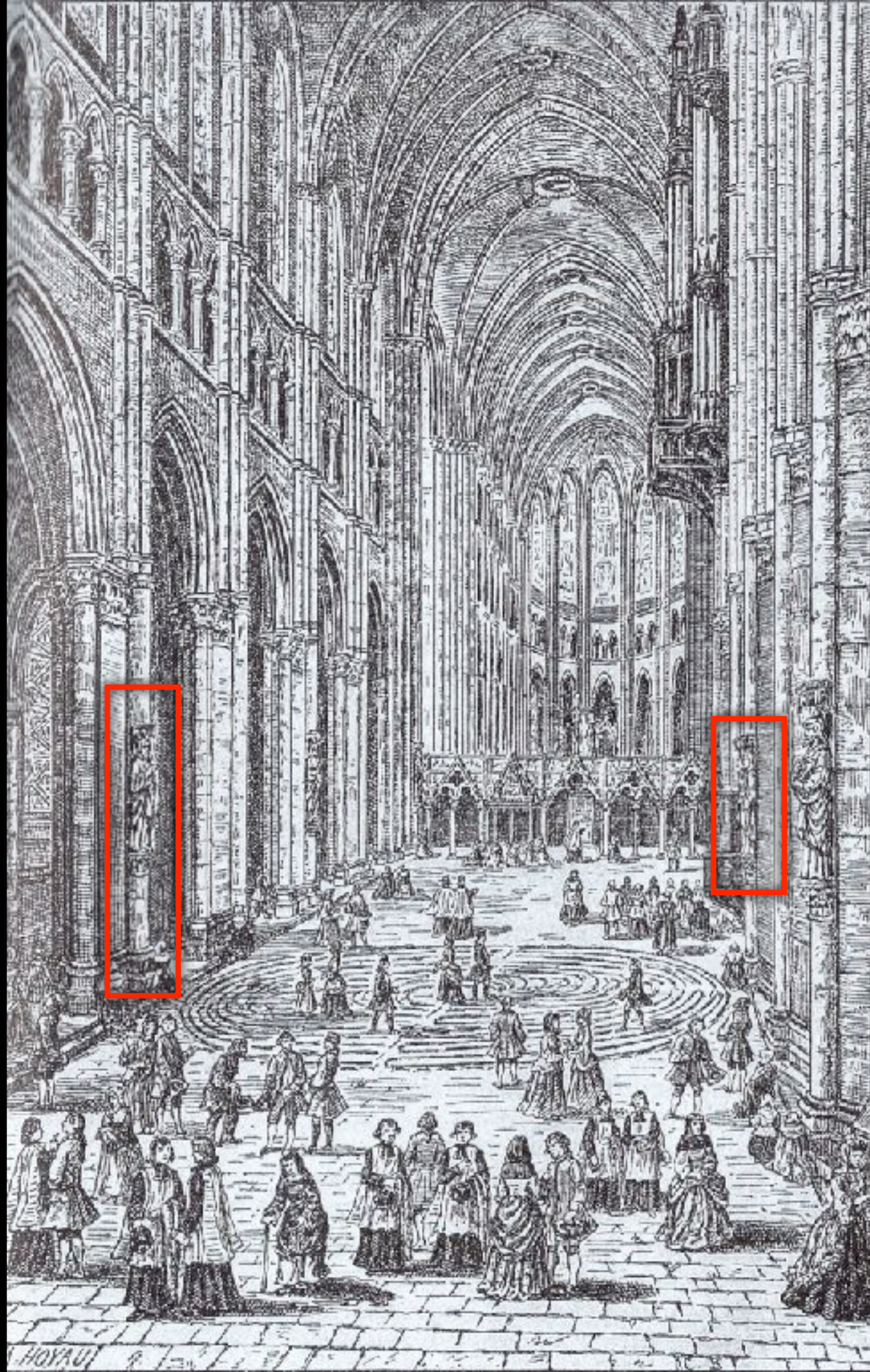
Chartres had relics of St. Eustache (altar & window in north ambulatory),
Mary Magdalene (altar in north; two windows in the south nave and south clerestory)
and the Cross (altar and window in the north nave).

There were many others that were connected with the clerestory windows.

See Claudine Lautier. 2003. *Les Vitraux de la Cathédrale de Chartres. Reliques et Images*. Paris: Société Française d'Archéologie, 20.



Thomas



Simon





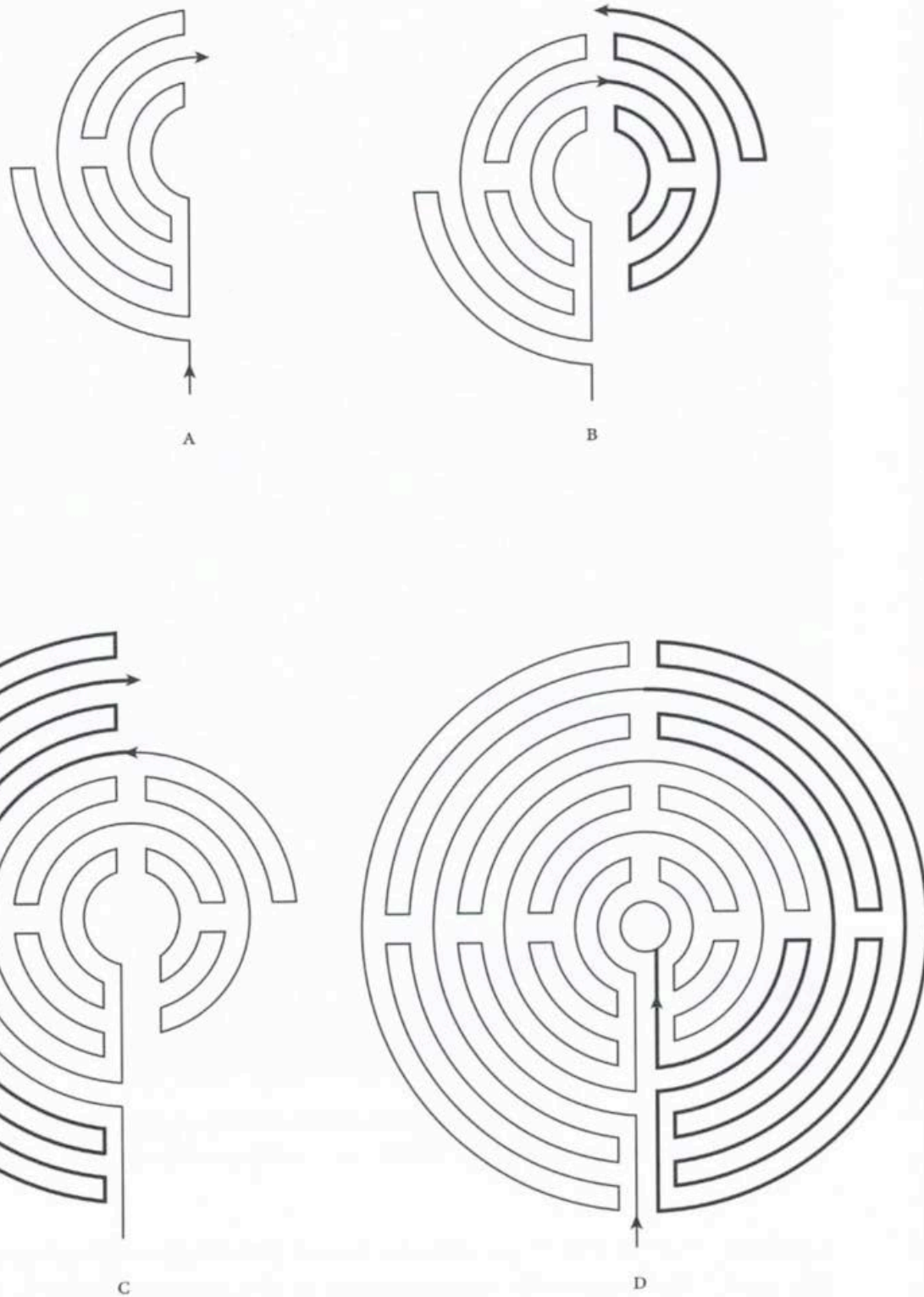


FIGURE 1.11 The systematic process that creates a labyrinth of the Chartres-type design.

The labyrinth as a place where liturgical dramas of Christ's descent to hell and freeing of the captives could be reenacted.

"...[there was a] need for a sizable space within the church to act out Christ's harrowing of hell."

"[Christ] suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again."

(4th and 5th line of the Apostles' Creed)

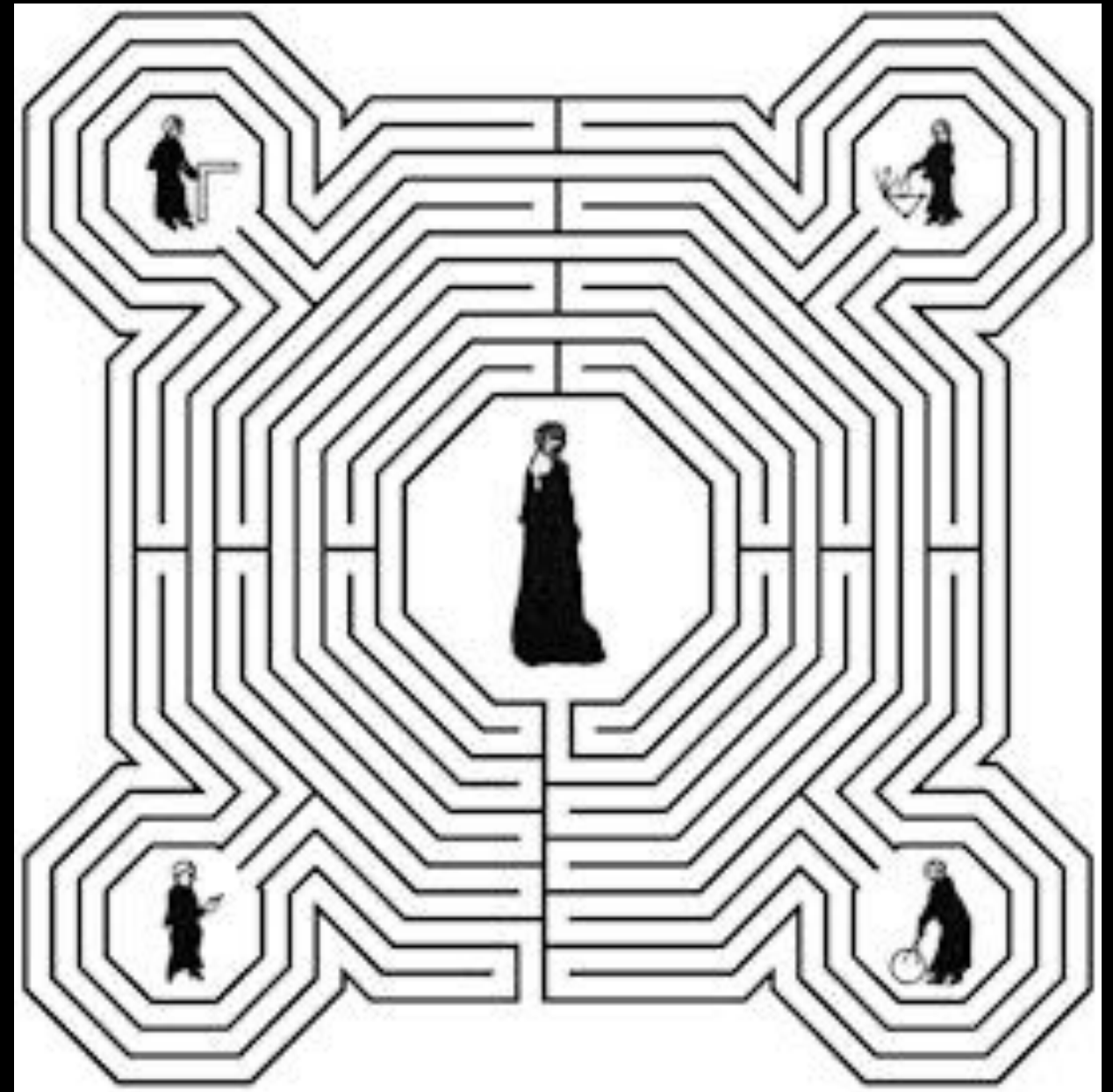
Easter dances on the Cathedral Labyrinths

Before 1165, Jean Beleth, a theologian from the University of Paris speaks of a ball game in the cathedrals of Amiens and Reims in which a bishop threw the ball.

(Both French cathedrals later installed labyrinths, Amiens in 1288 and Reims, around 1290.)



Amiens labyrinth
Installed 1288



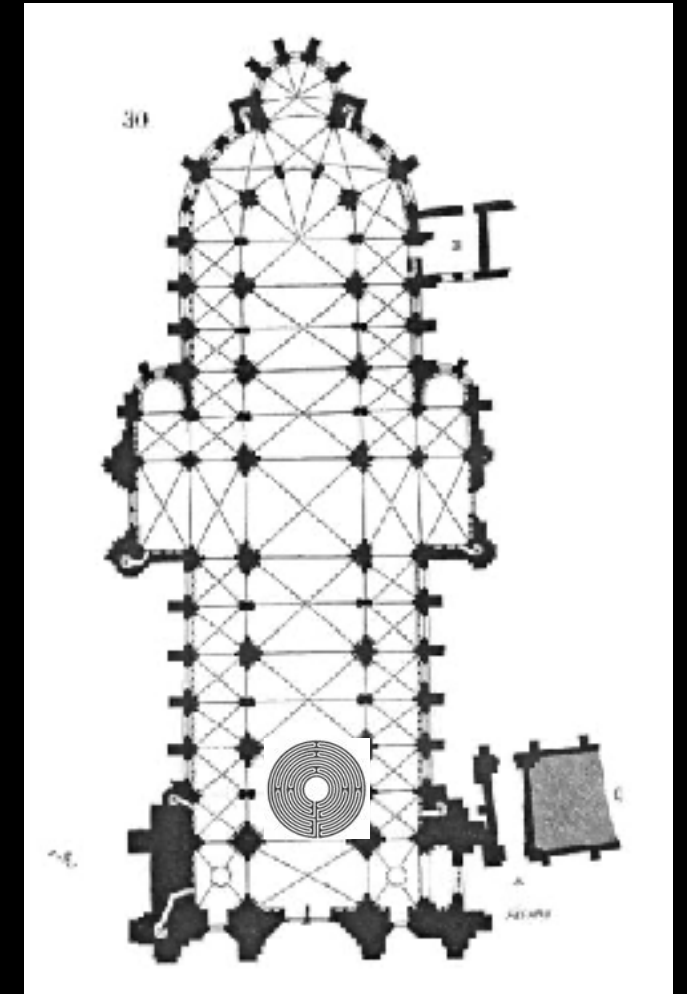
Reims labyrinth
Installed around 1290

Easter Liturgies including Processions across the Labyrinth on the way to the Baptistry



The labyrinth in Sens was installed in the 13th century and was removed in 1768.

Image: Gailhabaud



After the clergy at Sens celebrated Vespers [on Easter Sunday Eve] in the choir, they processed to the baptistry attached to the north side of the church. The line of march proceeded across the [labyrinth] and out the west door... En route to the baptistry, the clergy chanted the responsory *They are the New Lambs* which celebrates the martyrs whom Christ liberates from Purgatory. During the processional return to the cathedral the clergy again crossed the labyrinth; the canons and their subalterns sang the psalm *When Israel came out of the Egypt* commemorating Moses' rescue of the chosen people from the bondage of Pharaoh. ...Before Vespers, the clergy at Sens, like their brethren at Auxerre, danced on the [labyrinth].

A procession across the labyrinth and to the baptistry also marked Easter Sunday at the cathedral of Auxerre.

Craig Wright. 2001. The Maze and the Warrior. Symbols in Architecture, Theology, and Music. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 57-8, 145.

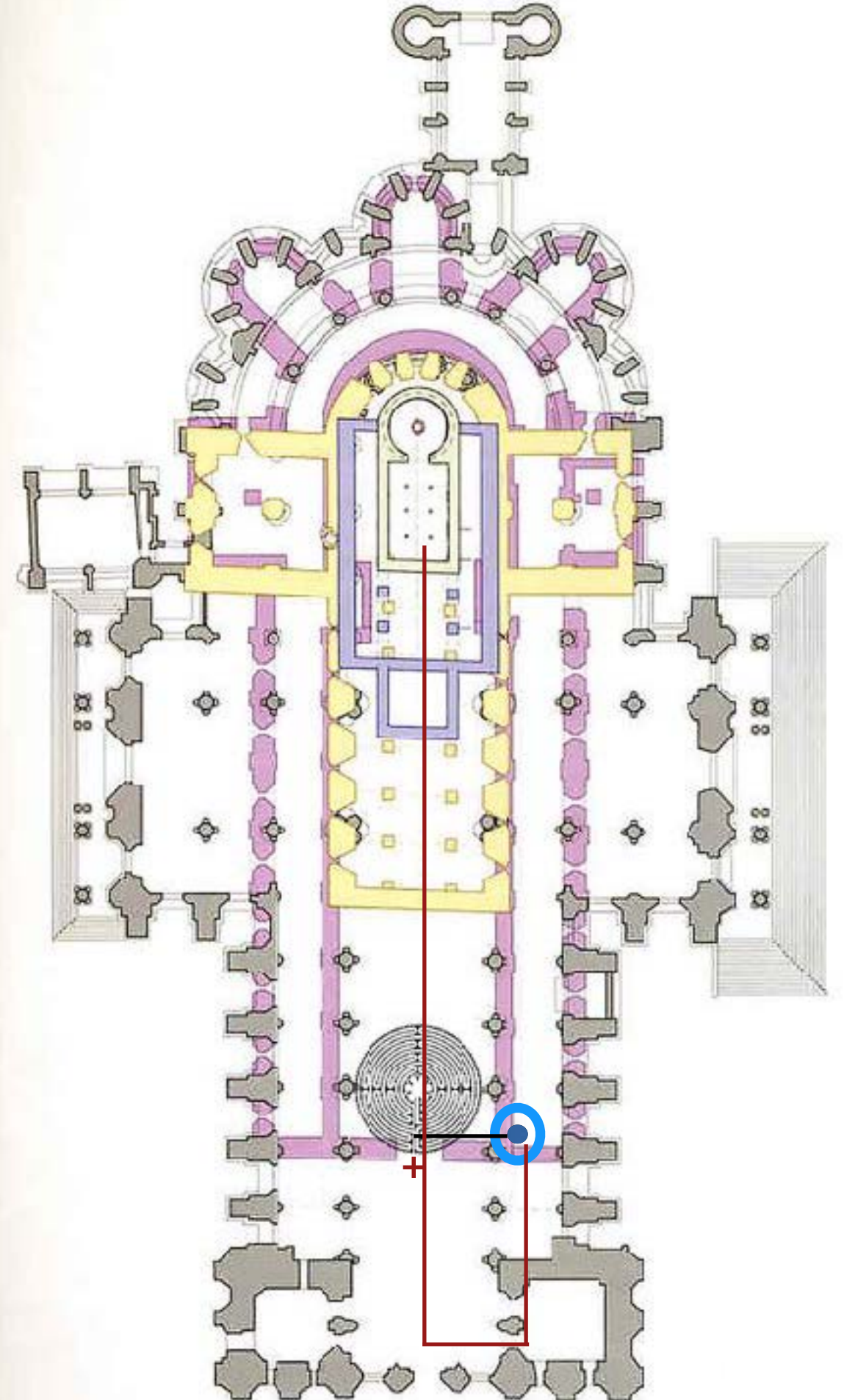


Diagram from Gordon Strachan, Chartres: Sacred Geometry, Sacred Space. 2003. Note the baptismal font marked in the south crypt in blue.

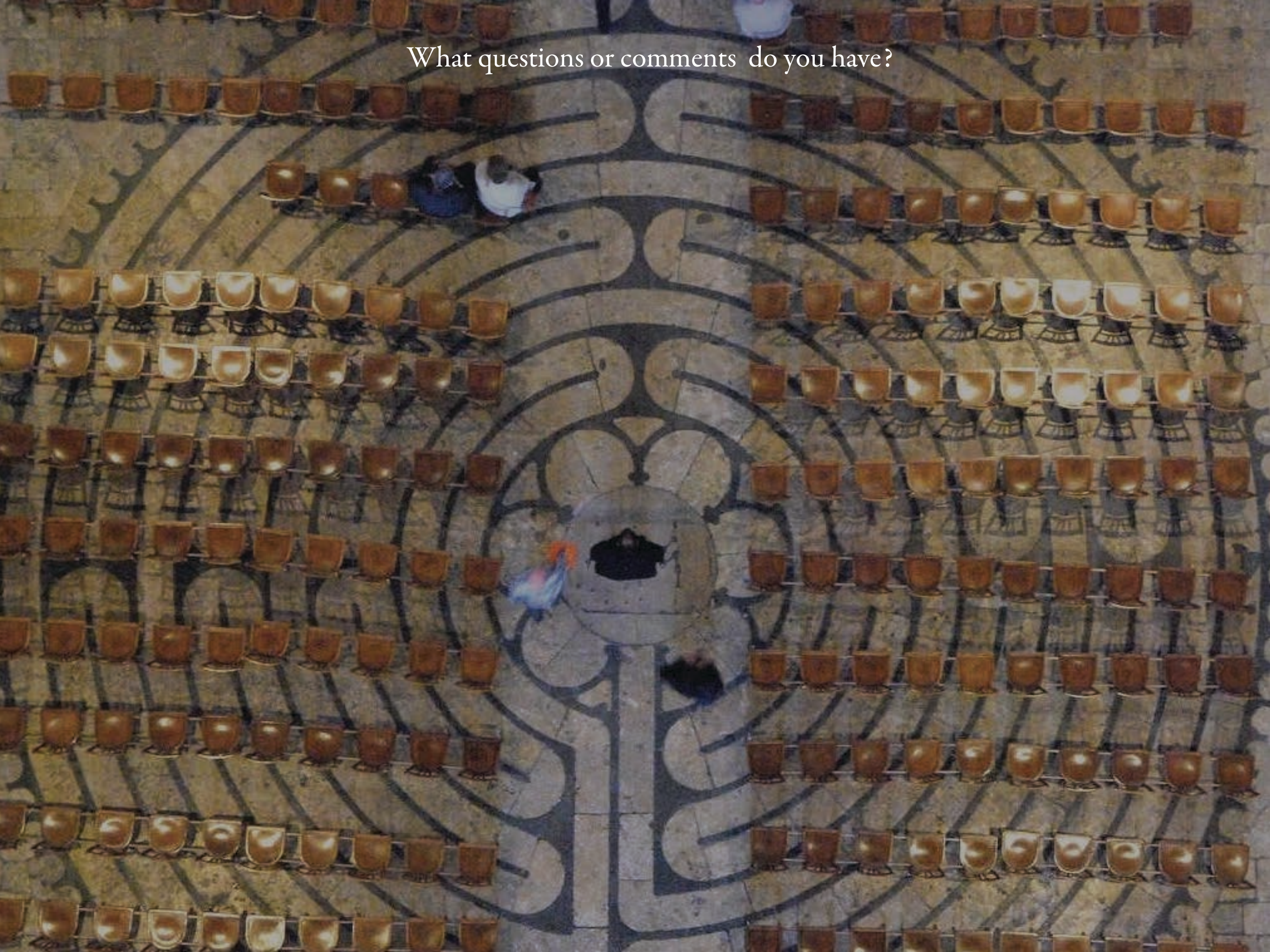




S. GEORGIUS



What questions or comments do you have?





www.jillgeoffrion.com

Labyrinth resources: labyrinthprayer.com

Chartres resources: praywithjillatchartres.com

jill.geoffrion@gmail.com