

THE LABYRINTH OF THE HEART

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The Divine Mother

The divine, feminine, Gnostic character known as Protennoia, a Greek name which can be translated into English as “First Thought,” was one of the most important figures in Gnostic literature. She figures prominently in “Three Forms of First Thought,” a scripture dedicated to the Divine Feminine. These are her words:

I am invisible within the thought of
the invisible one,
although I am revealed in the
immeasurable and the ineffable.
I am incomprehensible, dwelling in the
incomprehensible,
although I move in every creature ...
Through me comes knowledge.
I inhabit the ineffable and the
unknowable.
I am perception and knowledge,
uttering voice by means of thought ...
I resonate in everyone, and they know
it, since a seed is in them ...

I am before all, and I am all, since I am
in everyone ...

I am androgynous.

I am mother and I am father, since I
mate with myself.

I mate with myself since it is myself
that I love.

Through me alone the All stands firm.
I am the womb that puts forth the All
by giving birth to light shining in
splendor.

I am the age to come.

I am the fulfillment of all... the glory
of the Mother.

- Protennoia (First Thought), from
“Three Forms of First Thought” (Turner
2009, 720, 721, 730)

“Three Forms of First Thought” is
a second century Christian Gnostic text
from the Nag Hammadi Codex XIII. In
many texts from this genre, Protennoia is
the first being to have emanated from the
Creator.



Trent Anthony Francis, MOTHER: XIHE (2023).

This giving, loving, feminine aspect of divinity reflects our divine selves back to us. She is birthing and embracing us at the same time, and it's a beautiful description of the knowing, nurturing wisdom in our hearts.

During the winter solstice, the Divine Mother is such an important figure.

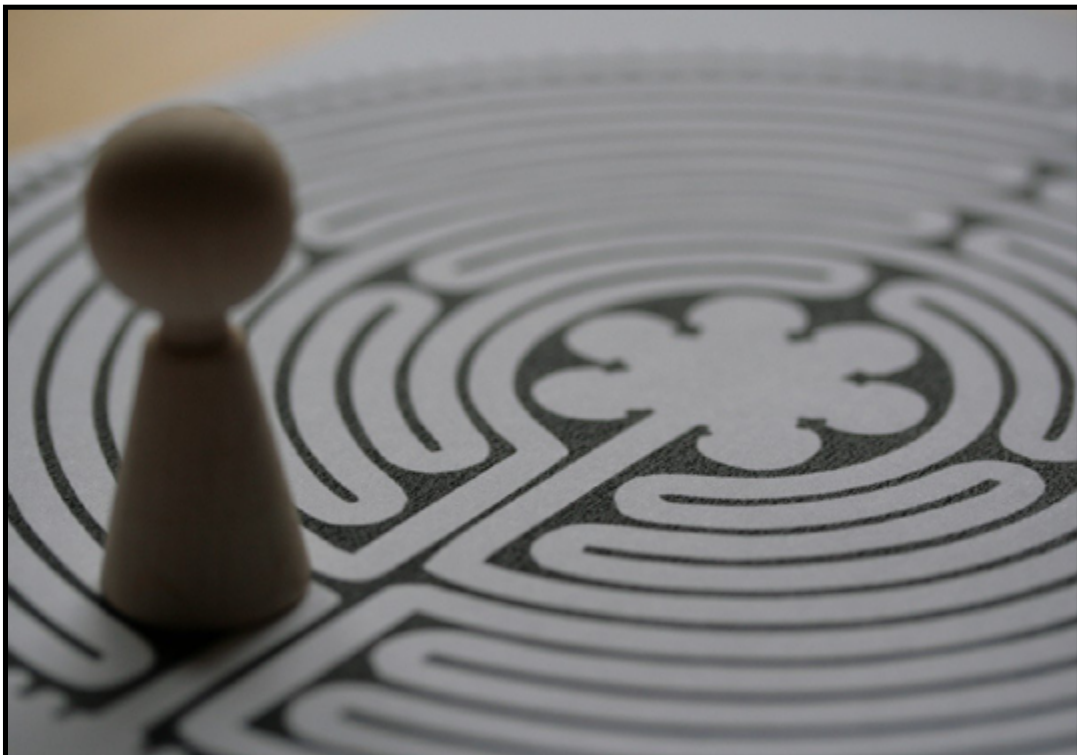
At this time, in many traditions, the Divine Mother, sometimes called the Great Mother, gives birth to the Divine Son, who is usually associated with the power of the light. The Divine Masculine comes at the time of greatest darkness, and this occurs across traditions. We see this in Mithras and the Egyptian god Horus. In Welsh mythology, this is a theme with the divine child, the Mabon. And we are of course familiar with the birth story of Yeshua.

In this passage, First Thought says that we all carry this light and she refers to the sacred marriage that our higher selves exist in, and are guiding us toward. She is also sometimes referred to as "Father, Mother, and Child" (Turner 2009, 720). And she is

very much connected to the labyrinth, its symbolism, and its spiritual power.

Labyrinths have been used for meditation, pilgrimage, self-renewal, and preparation for spiritual work. Surprisingly, though, they have also been long associated with fertility rituals and dances, and even childbirth (Lorimer 2009, 51; Pennick 1990, 26). The labyrinth is about the journey into the sacred darkness and back out into the light. It's about a journey into the womb and back out into that light shining in splendor that First Thought enunciated.

It can also be about a journey going into the God of our Heart, and then emerging back out into the world carrying new light. The labyrinth also serves as a form of entrapment if there's something you want to leave behind. And the labyrinth is a symbol of, and a tool for, navigating the territory of our spiritual and profane natures. A labyrinth has one center and a set path to that center. That path may be circular or free form, but the focus is on navigating the journey to the center and the return.



Labyrinths over time



Classical labyrinth



Chakra Vyuha
(Ancient Indian birthing labyrinth)



Wise Woman "Troy Stone"

From *Mazes and Labyrinths*, Nigel Pennick, (15, 27)

Photo credit: Cheri Gandy

Labyrinths Over Time

Labyrinths are found all over the world and we are familiar with the classical labyrinth form, primarily from Crete and mythology surrounding that location. According to scholar Nigel Pennick, this form also may have been in Scandinavia even before Crete (Pennick 1990, 26-27).

The labyrinth is a universal human symbol and some believe that it goes back to the Paleolithic era, the late ice age when humans were creating remarkable drawings and paintings in caves. The author Jodi Lorimer discusses this in her book, *Dancing at the Edge of Death: The Origins of the Labyrinth in the Paleolithic*. The interiors of caves were dark, winding formations of stone, and in many, the concentration of the most sacred artwork was in the deepest darkest center. When we made the cognitive leap to create art and symbols, the labyrinth form was created out of the need to symbolize that sacred space. That space served as a container for the inhabitant's sacred activities and artwork, which were part of the sacred activity for the psycho-spiritual processes undertaken during the shamanic journey of the participants (Lorimer 2009, 50, 64,85).

As alluded to earlier, the labyrinth is also associated with the feminine and shifts of consciousness. The Chakra Vyuha above is an ancient Indian birthing labyrinth. It is a two-dimensional labyrinth that was used in childbirth. The diagram would have been consecrated by a priest at the time of birth. The woman giving birth would have to mentally follow the winding path in deep concentration. Once she found the center, she would then make her way out. The idea was that the mental movement through the pattern helped her undertake the same actions in her womb, helping to make an easier childbirth (Lorimer 2009, 26).

The "Troy Stone" above was passed down through generations of wise women. It was used for obtaining states of altered consciousness. The wise woman would trace her finger over the labyrinth, back and forth, while humming a specific chant or intonation until she reached a transcendent state. This stone is located in the Witchcraft Museum in Boscastle, Cornwall, in the UK (Lorimer 2009, 26). The Native American Hopi referred to the labyrinth figure as Mother Earth, it being the universal plan of the Creator (Pennick 1988, 64).

The Labyrinth as the Holy Cosmic City

Interestingly, labyrinths usually had names. Many were named after significant Mediterranean cities—Babylon, Nineveh, Jericho, Troy, and Jerusalem—that had been constructed in the “archetypal form of the Holy City with seven surrounding walls and an interior shrine in the middle” (Pennick 1990, 36). In these instances, the center of the world was a macrocosm of the labyrinth and the labyrinth was a microcosm of the city. The city being another omphalos, or center of the world (Pennick 1988, 64).

Above, you can see on the far left a moon-shaped labyrinth that was designed after the city of Jericho. The middle image is an ancient map of Jerusalem and Palestine, designed to feature these locations as the center of the world. On the far right, there is the diagram of the Chartres labyrinth. You can see the similarities. As Christianity became more widespread, labyrinths began to reference Jerusalem as their source of inspiration (Pennick 1990, 36).

In his book *The Ancient Science of Geomancy* (1988), Nigel Pennick notes on




page 5 that “when pilgrims did manage to travel to Jerusalem, the city was laid out so that they traveled through it in a specific pattern. In Britain, labyrinths were sometimes called “Paths to Jerusalem.”

The Labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral

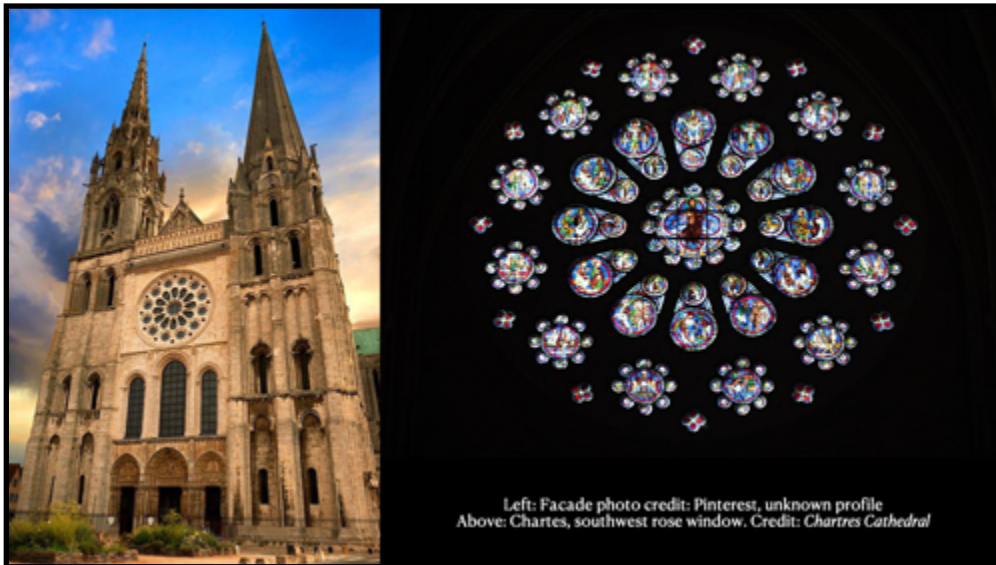
This leads us to the most recognizable pavement labyrinth in the world, that of Chartres Cathedral in France. Here, the labyrinth was called “The Jerusalem Way” or “The League.” The current Gothic cathedral itself was built from 1194 to 1260, and the labyrinth was built around the year 1200.

There are some exquisite details about the Chartres labyrinth that make it a stellar example of the power of the labyrinth. In the Middle Ages, many cathedrals across Europe housed labyrinths. Since labyrinths were symbols of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and since many pilgrims couldn’t actually travel to Jerusalem, they instead traveled to the cathedrals. They undertook the journey of the labyrinth either on their knees or by walking. The journey around the labyrinth represented the soul’s journey to the Heavenly Jerusalem referred to in the Book of Revelation. And

Labyrinths as the Holy Cosmic City

		
Moon-shaped labyrinth of Jericho 12 C. Manuscript, Germany	Ancient Map of Jerusalem and Palestine	Chartres labyrinth
Credit: Pennick, <i>MAL</i> , 53	Credit: The French School	Credit: <i>Chartres Cathedral</i> , inside cover





Left: Facade photo credit: Pinterest, unknown profile
 Above: Chartres, southwest rose window. Credit: Chartres Cathedral

the cathedral itself was also a symbol of the Heavenly Jerusalem. In *The Ancient Science of Geomancy*, Nigel Pennick states on pages 64 that “the pilgrimage along the labyrinth would have to be made at times when the currents beneath the omphalos were at their height, for instance on the church’s patronal festivals or solar solstices, barefoot so as to absorb the sacred energies. The dance to the center would be a solemn yet joyous occasion when enlightened spiritual experiences might be received by the pilgrim.”

Chartres, like other Notre Dame cathedrals, is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, though this site has been dedicated to the Divine Feminine for a very long time. This is even the location where Druid lore predicted the birth of a son to a virgin. Sacred structures have been built on this spot for thousands of years, and the area was originally named for the Carnutes, a Celtic tribe that worshipped Isis. They held their seat of power here and the name was eventually changed to Chartres (Silva 2015, ch. 2).

The cathedral features multiple statues of Mary holding and enfolding Yeshua. In Christian tradition, the rose is a symbol for Mary, and there are rose windows on three sides of the cathedral.

This image that you see above is on the southwest wall above the main entrance, also called the Royal Portal. Most churches of the time were oriented east-west, so the altars would be in the east. At Chartres, the central axis of the cathedral is actually oriented in a northeast-southwest orientation, along the path of the summer solstice sunrise and the winter solstice sunset (Silva 2015, ch. 8).

The southwest is the direction of the winter solstice sunset, so, fittingly, the southwest rose window, above the entrance, features Christ as judge at the Second Coming.

In the above photograph, you can see the outside facade with the rose window between the two towers. In the interior shot, you can see the central figure of Christ with his arms out at Judgment. The proportions of the cathedral are such that if the entrance wall with the rose window were to be laid flat, the central window with Christ would fall into the center of the labyrinth. Christ would be embraced by the rosette in the center of the labyrinth. Remembering that the rose is a symbol of Mary, here we see the celebration of the Divine Mother and the Divine Son together in the center of the labyrinth.

Numbers and Geometry in the Labyrinth

The Chartres labyrinth is also rife with numbers and symbolism. The details that follow are excerpted from Freddy Silva's book, *Chartres Cathedral: The Missing or Heretic's Guide* (2015).

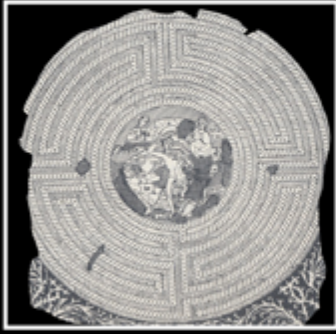
- The Chartres labyrinth is known as an eleven-circuit labyrinth, which means that it has eleven concentric rings around the center.
- 11 concentric rings represent the solar sunspot cycle of a little over 11.060606 years. These meet at a central cluster of six cusps, the number of the hexagon, the solar geometry representing the masculine. Thus at the center, the masculine meets the building's pentagonal geometry, the female. This is the alchemical union.
- The 112 cusps forming the outer perimeter mark six lunar cycles every 112 years.

- $112 \div 6 = 18.6$, the Metonic cycle, the calibration of the solar and lunar calendars.
- Seen from above the design is formed by four quadrilaterals, the cross. $112 \text{ cusps} \div 4 = 28$, the average lunar month.
- Still on the perimeter, 56 cusps form the right side, and $56 + 1$ (the entrance) makes 57:56. Converting these two numbers in gematria yields the phrase *ECCLESIA DOMINE*, the heavenly church.
- The entire design is made of 272 stones: the number of days in the female gestation cycle.

You can see how the labyrinth's geometry is the union of the solar and lunar, the sun and the moon, and the Divine Masculine and the Divine Feminine. This theme is echoed throughout the entire cathedral, but it's all captured here in the microcosm of the labyrinth.



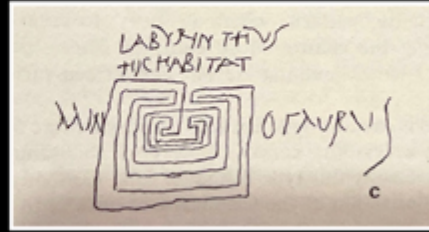
The Minotaur, Ariadne, and Theseus



Mosaic labyrinth
Ariadne, Theseus, and Minotaur.
Kato Paphos, Cyprus, ca. 350 CE



Missing Chartres labyrinth plate
Ariadne, Theseus, and Minotaur.
Removed, 1793.



"Labyrinth. Here lives the Minotaur."
Graffiti, Pompeii.
Date unknown.

The Minotaur, Ariadne, and Theseus

Above is an illustration of a mosaic labyrinth from Cyprus with the image of Ariadne, Theseus, and the Minotaur. At the center of the Chartres labyrinth, legend reports there used to be a square copper plate with a depiction of Theseus, Ariadne, and the Minotaur. We don't know exactly what it looked like, but we do know that it was melted down for canon metal in 1793.

Note the image on the right is graffiti from Pompeii. We don't know the date of the graffiti, but we do know that it was before 79 CE, which is when Pompeii was covered in ash. This says "Labyrinth, here lives the Minotaur." The existence of labyrinth graffiti shows how poignantly and deeply embedded these elements are in our psyches.

The Minotaur, which many of you are familiar with, is a mythical being with the head of a bull and the body of a man. In the most widely known myth, the Minotaur is trapped in the center of the labyrinth, which has been designed by the crafty architect, Daedalus. Theseus, the hero of the story, wants to slay the Minotaur and to help facilitate this, Ariadne gives him a magic thread to help him get to the center and find his way out.

The Minotaur is seen as our beastly, earthly self that needs to be slain and

triumphed over. The Minotaur had a name, Asterius, which means "starry one." And Ariadne's name means "shining one." Author Lorimer notes that "as Mycenaean Greeks supplanted Cretan culture," they rewrote important characters in the myths. Ariadne was believed to have been an incarnation of the cow moon goddess and Asterius the Minotaur was an incarnation of the star bull god; and he was her consort. Together they performed a fertility dance into and out of the heart of the labyrinth (Lorimer 2009, 51-53).

In this scene, we have a representation of the sacred marriage taking place at the center of the labyrinth. The theme of a woman at the center of the labyrinth exists in many different cultures, notably, in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Scandinavia, and Germany (Pennick 1990, 37-44).

Lorimer has a beautiful catalog of work on the origins of the labyrinth and the Minotaur, and it turns out that the Minotaur goes back to the Paleolithic. The Minotaur in the middle of the labyrinth is very ancient. Bulls have been revered, worshipped, and interacted with in many cultures throughout time. She discusses that in some caves, the Minotaur was even dancing in the middle of a labyrinth. This suggests that the Minotaur, half bull and half man, could actually have been a shaman. His ability, as a shaman, to negotiate worlds of different

consciousnesses, be it spirit, human or animal, placed him at the center of the spiritual process (Lorimer 2009, 50, 67).

His power was confined to the center because it was a result of the center. While the Minotaur shaman represented our earthly bestial self, he also represented our transformation into a bright star. He transformed into a star and fulfilled his potential through the union with the Divine. The Minotaur is also representative of our ability go back and forth between these realms and polarities. You can also see the descent into the darkness as being of the lunar feminine polarity and the emergence into light as the solar masculine polarity, which brings us back to the winter solstice.

The Madonna on the Crescent

The image below, by the German artist Albrecht Durer, is called *The Madonna on the Crescent*. This particular woodcut was made to be a frontispiece to a body of work he did called *The Life of the Virgin*, in 1511. This features Mary as the Queen of Heaven, as the Divine Mother and deity bathed in the sun and cradled by the moon. You can also see that it looks like she's also cradled in the horns of a bull. In this image, she encapsulates the many roles of

the Divine Feminine. This particular motif refers to the passage above, from the Book of Revelation.

As with the Chartres rose window, we see Yeshua at the Second Coming being enfolded by the rosette, but here in the form of Mary, the rose. Here we have again the power and the beauty of the Divine Mother to carry and hold us.

When the Sacred Feminine and Sacred Masculine come together in the heart of the labyrinth, this joining of polarities is the key. This represents how we can perform this alchemical act inside ourselves as well, by bringing and accepting all parts of ourselves, and by using the power of the center to integrate them.

How Do Labyrinths Physically Work?

We have talked about much of the symbolism of the labyrinth, but physically, how do they work? The labyrinth is a combination of different sacred geometrical patterns and these patterns exert an influence upon our bodies, the environment, and Earth. Labyrinths are very much about polarity and attraction.

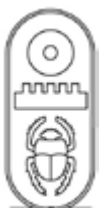
This is similar to the poles of a battery. If you were to take a pendulum and

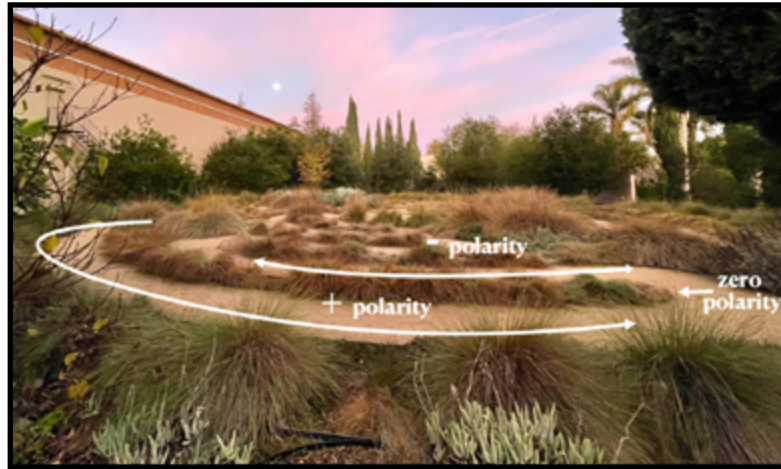
A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant ...

- Revelation 12. 1-2



Albrecht Dürer
The Madonna on the Crescent, Frontispiece to The Life of the Virgin, ca. 1511
Metropolitan Museum, Digital Catalog





calibrate it correctly, you would see that the pendulum swings in a clockwise fashion on the positive end, a counterclockwise fashion on the negative end, and stays in a neutral position in the middle where there is no polarity. In the above picture, you can see the directions of the positive and negative polarities as they exist in the labyrinth at Rosicrucian Park in San Jose, California. In the area where the change of direction occurs, the middle of the arc, there is no polarity. Many of you are used to working with polarities because we use these principles in many of the Rosicrucian exercises and techniques.

One reason labyrinths are so potent is because the geometry of the pattern works to balance and synchronize the body, the psychic centers (chakras), and our consciousness, by constantly alternating polarity. Labyrinths also attract underground water and the electromagnetic effect of the water exudes an influence on the body. In *The Ancient Science of Geomancy* (1988), Pennick stated that “in turf and pavement labyrinths, the patterns of forces in the earth below are translated into material form, two-dimensional renderings of the water line spirals below and tourbillons, vortices of energy, above. Tourbillons are the transition places from the physical to the astral world, whose points of support

are generated by the sacred dance on the sacred omphalos.”

He goes on to state that “on these multiple levels, physical, psychological, spiritual, and astral, the labyrinth acts as a boundary between various states of being, preventing the unauthorized from treading on the holy place, defining its nature to the initiate, [and] acting as a practical channel for the adept” (Pennick 1988, 65). Not only does the labyrinth mark a place of central importance on the earth, but it can anchor the site across time and dimensions.

Meditation

As an exercise, please sit comfortably, preferably so your back is straight and your feet are on the floor and your hands are in your lap. Take three positive breaths and feel free at any point to close your eyes. (Positive breathing is when you breathe in and hold your breath as long as is comfortable, and then exhale.)

Take a few moments to relish the vital life force moving through your body.

At this time, you may decide to have a specific intention for the meditation, or you can come as a pilgrim seeking a spiritual experience.

During this meditation, we will use our eyes to move through the labyrinth. Feel

free to also feel yourself walking by foot or knee through the pattern.

Open your eyes and focus on the image of the labyrinth. Now, begin to visually move through the labyrinth as if you were walking it. Go at a reasonable pace that feels suitable for you.

When you reach the rose in the center, pause and feel the power of this location.

If there is an intention that you brought in, you may feel enlightened or inspired.

If there's a problem you carried in, perhaps there's a solution waiting for you at the center.

Or, you could let all your troubles and worries go, right into the center, into Mother Earth.

When you're ready, exit the center. As you follow the path back along, you may feel as though you're emerging back out into the light. You may repeat this visual labyrinth walk as many times as you like.

Video

<https://youtu.be/lav8JmpMiXY>



Labyrinth at Rosicrucian Park, San Jose, California.

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