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The ritual landscape of the seaboard in historical times: island chapels, burial sites and stone mazes - a Scandinavian exampled. Part II: ghosts, currents and winds - Island stone mazes (Labyrinths)

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Westerdahl, C. (2012). The ritual landscape of the seaboard in historical times: island chapels, burial sites and stone mazes - a Scandinavian exampled. Part II: ghosts, currents and winds - Island stone mazes (Labyrinths). *Deutsches Schiffahrtsarchiv*, *35*, 261-300. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-68177-7

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Deutsches Schiffahrtsarchiv 35, 2012, S. 261–300

SOZIALGESCHICHTE DER SCHIFFFAHRT

CHRISTER WESTERDAHL

The Ritual Landscape of the Seaboard in Historical Times: Island Chapels, Burial Sites and Stone Mazes – A Scandinavian Example

Part II: Ghosts, Currents and Winds – Island Stone Mazes (Labyrinths)

General Background: The Motif and Its History

In the first part of this article,[1] we explored the complex of archipelago chapels, the legends surrounding them, in this connection the place names, especially *Jungfru* ("virgin") sites (fig. 1), and also burial sites on islands (fig. 2), which in some cases may have preceded the erection of chapels. The so-called superstition systems – or, perhaps more accurately, the belief systems – of fishermen and sailors was also touched on (fig. 3).

The majority of these phenomena seem to my mind to derive from the Catholic Middle Ages, if not clearly later. The same goes for the subject of this article. Here I firmly resist the notion that the mazes date back to prehistoric times in the North, for which no incontrovertible evidence exists.[2]

The fascinating enigma of the stone mazes' original function has been discussed by many scholars. Suffice it to say here that this interest goes far back in time. Evert Baudou, in his new biography of the famous Swedish archaeologist Oscar Montelius,[3] mentions that the first lecture in the pioneering scientific forum of Historiska Föreningen, given in the spring of 1862 by Montelius's highly qualified colleague and friend Hans Hildebrand – who later became the *riksantikvarie* ("antiquarian of the realm") –, was concerned with labyrinthine stone formations (*labyrinthformiga stensättningar*). In more recent times, however, the most in-depth studies have been carried out by a qualified amateur, John Kraft.

The kind of labyrinth or maze to be discussed in this text is that laid out on the ground with loose stones, cobbles or boulders (fig. 4). Accordingly, we often refer to them as *stone mazes.* Sometimes open-air mazes are called *field* labyrinths or mazes. For the vital sake of comparison, the painted or carved mazes in parish churches, the stone-laid labyrinths in churchyards adjacent to churches, and at least one stone maze at an execution site have been included in this reappraisal. This is the first strict limitation of the studies accounted for in this text. I will, however, merely mention the fact that stone-laid mazes are also found at about a dozen prehistoric grave fields in Sweden, but not go into further detail. In my opinion, however, nothing precludes a medieval or even later dating, even here.

Fig. 1 The wetland entrance to the mysterious lagoon harbour *Jungfruhamn* (the name is found only on an eighteenth-century map) in Tynderö, Medelpad, Sweden. Now the harbour itself is reduced to a few tarns inland called *Jungfrutjärnarna.* (Photo: Christer Westerdahl, 1985)

Fig. 2 A simple grave construction for three drowned sailors near Grimstad, Aust-Agder, South Norway. (Drawing: Ø.Y. Gundersen in Wikander 1985)

Fig. 3 A fisherman and his wife smoking pipes in their boat. Note that the woman also smokes and is on board, which according to common prejudice she should not be. The custom being practised here, however, was couple-fishing. There may also be an element of church propaganda against this superstition in the painting by Roland Johansson Öberg, Ulvö Chapel, Ångermanland, Sweden. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl, 1982)

Fig. 4 The stone maze of Ratan, Västerbotten, North Sweden. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl, 1970)

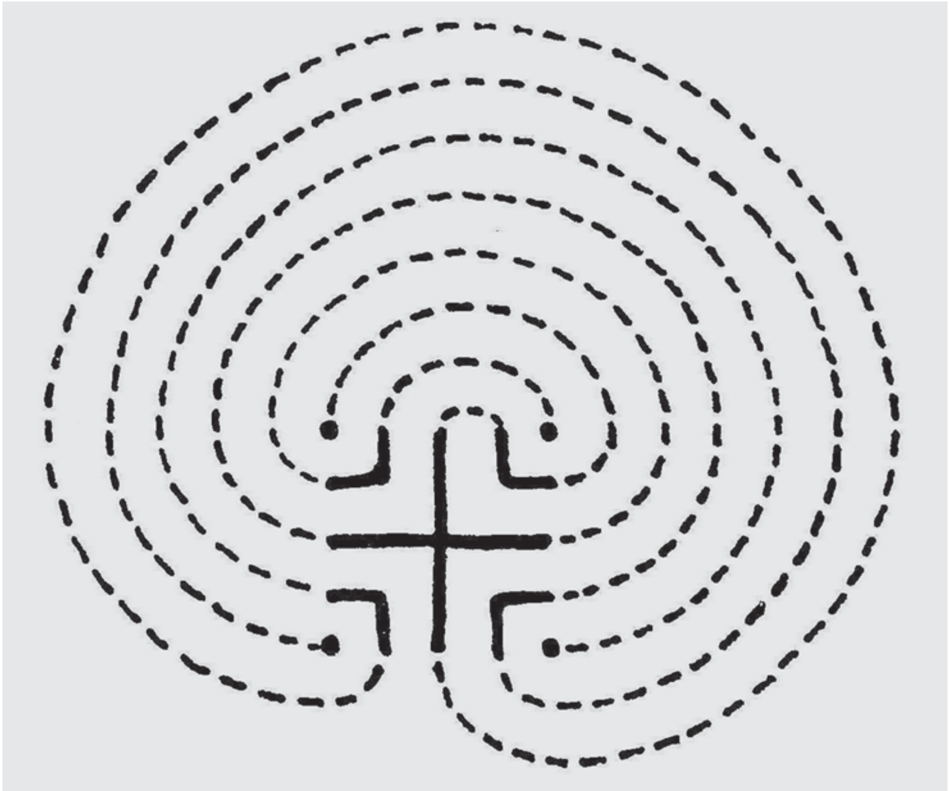

Fig. 5 The figure of the genuine maze, as defined here.

The second parameter is the motif itself. It is of considerable age. Yet it is also a very *specific pattern based on concentric lines, surrounding and adapting to a central cross* (fig. 5).[4] Accordingly, no other figures – for example the spiral – will be discussed, although they do occur in the same environment (albeit rarely) and may have had the same meaning. The figure of the true maze can, however, be extended outwards, in principle indefinitely. In our area, the stone mazes have a variable number of walls: 6, 8 or 12, corresponding to these lines (cf. figs. 4, 10, 16, 21–22).

I will repeat no more than a miniscule fraction of all that has hitherto been said about this extremely popular symbol.[5] Literary tradition immediately associates the specific motif with *the labyrinth* par préference, the "House of the Double-Axe"[6] at Knossos in Crete, and with its architect, Daedalus. The oldest dated depiction is found on the reverse side of a clay tablet bearing Linear B letters (phonograms) on front, dated ca. 1200 BC. Cretan coins still display the motif around the time of the birth of Christ. For some reason, the association with a house evolved into association with a town or a fortification such as Troy in the great epic of the *Iliad*. An Etruscan wine pitcher – an *oinochoe* from Tragliatella, Etruria dating from the seventh century BC, exhibits the word *Truia* inscribed in the outer circle of a maze figure (fig. 6). A pillar graffito from the house of Lucretius in Pompeii (destroyed in AD 79) features a maze circumscribed by the text *Labyrinthus -hic habitat Minotaurus*, a reference to the classical Greek myth of Theseus: "The Labyrinth – here

Fig. 6 The maze on the *oinochoe* of Tragliatella, Etruria. (After John Kraft)

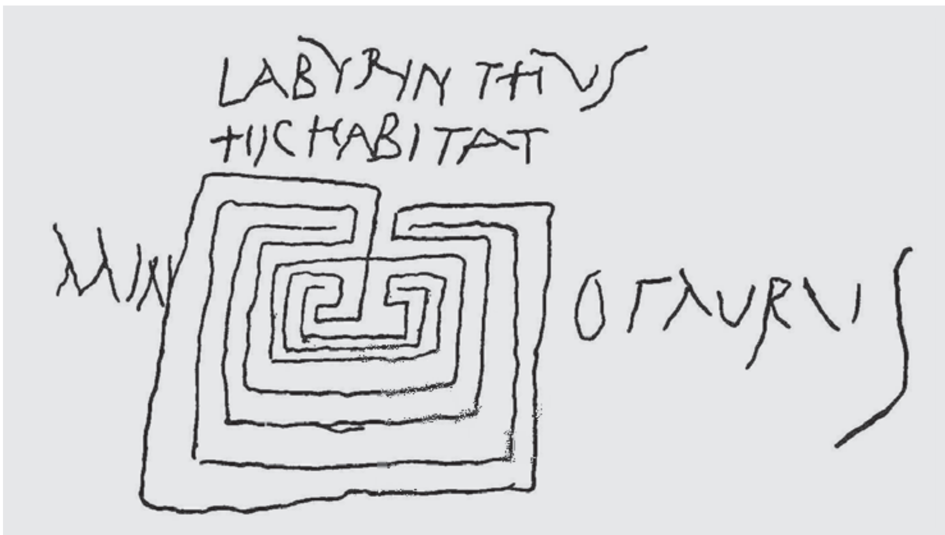

Fig. 7 The maze on a pillar of the house of Lucretius, Pompeii. (After John Kraft)

lives the Minotaur", i.e. the bull of Minos (fig. 7). A mosaic in a house floor in Conimbriga, Portugal is covered by a square maze with a bull's head at the very centre, likewise clearly a reference to the Minotaur. Since those early days, these associations have remained alive in Western civilization. Perhaps it should also be added that more recent speculations on the uses of mazes have often started with the centre: what was once thought to happen there? Or: what was once believed to be found there? No opinion on that matter will be expressed in this text, which will deal, rather, with the contexts of mazes.

One of the most general terms related to this phenomenon is the German *Trojaburg/en*,[7]

trojeborg/ar in Swedish, but also presumably related to *trelleborg/ar*, which sounds similar and may well have long-forgotten associations with forts.[8] Even where the terms differ, the basic principle still applies. In Iceland, labyrinths were often called *Völundarhús*, "the house of Völund". Völund (Wieland), the epic semi-divine smith, was also known as a primeval architect, like Daedalus. The associations of classical antiquity with the figure of the labyrinth were thus well known in the North, having presumably been transported there by way of the Catholic Church.

We must not lose sight of the fact, however, that the maze motif has numerous meanings and uses through the centuries, most of them clearly distinct from one another.[9] Their religious and mythical meanings have been discussed in part by the foremost expert on labyrinths of the North, John Kraft.[10]

Stone Mazes in the North

The stone mazes of the Nordic countries are most often found in maritime environments, along the coasts or on islands. This is, as such, a truly Nordic phenomenon (maps, figs. 8–9). Altogether approximately 750, or even more, may have existed. At present, there are at least 300 extant mazes in Sweden and possibly about 300 in Finland as well, and perhaps 10 in Estonia.[11] Concentrations of mazes are found in certain areas and on certain islands in these regions, especially in the extreme north of Sweden.[12] There may once have been more than 100 in the archipelago of Norrbotten, the northernmost county in Sweden. Further accumulations are encountered on the coast of Central Österbotten in Finland and in the very south of West Finland, at the corner to the Bay of Finland.[13] The majority of the mazes are in fact found directly in the Baltic littoral zone. Smaller accumulations can be found along headlands and on certain islands. One environment studied in some depth by the present author is that of the region around the promontory of Skagsudde in Ångermanland, Sweden, where approximately 25 mazes are known.[14] Moreover, in the Baltic the existence of mazes is clearly related to coastal areas settled by Swedish-speaking fishermen and farmers in Finland and even in Estonia, although a few mazes are also found elsewhere. These settlements cannot predate the thirteenth century, probably the latter half.

The meanings of the motif, as revealed by the names of labyrinths, appear to be culture-specific to some extent, at least in later times in the Baltic. They may well be related to the motif's origins in connection with the medieval colonization of the coastal areas by Catholic Swedes. In Finnish, stone mazes are often called *jatulintarhat*, "giant's fences",[15] and possibly other epithets, which, however, bear entirely different connotations. It should also be noted that there is comparatively little relevant folklore to refer to in this connection.

In Norway we find mazes in the far southeast, possibly associated with the Swedish west coast, which was once Norwegian and Danish,[16] and in the extreme north.[17] There is mention of at least 5 in Iceland, all at fishing camps.[18]

In Russia some occurrences are known on the White Sea, notably on the mainland of the Solovetsky archipelago and on the coasts of the Kola Peninsula.[19]

In the northern Baltic, a simple *compass card* made of cobbles or boulders may accompany a stone maze (fig. 10). Some mazes have also been carved in the rock, and carved compass cards are found in a few cases in central Sweden and the archipelago of Åboland,

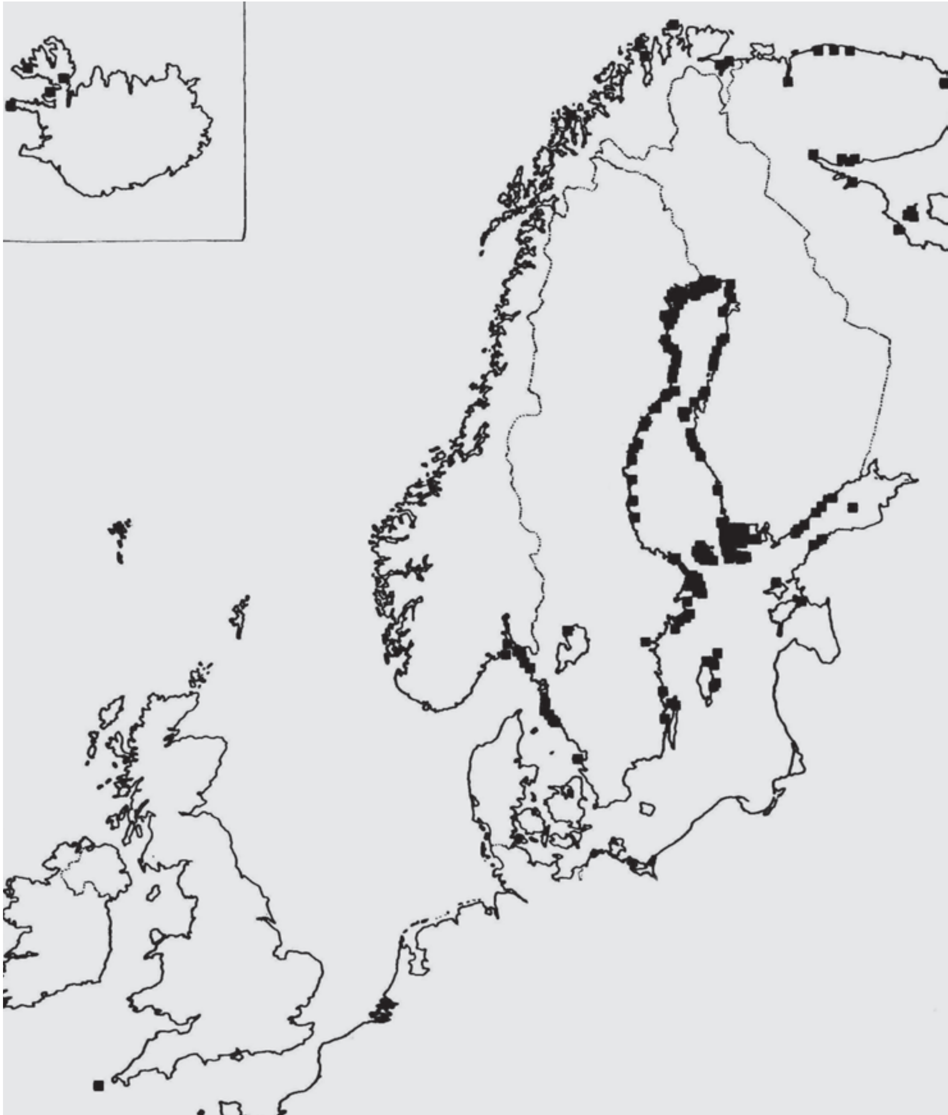

Fig. 8 The distribution of coastal stone mazes in Northern Europe. Cf. fig. 9. (After John Kraft)

South Finland, and are quite numerous along the coast of South Norway (fig. 11).[20] In rare cases, they have been dated – in Norway mainly by the change of compass direction, in Finland with the aid of lichenometry – back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries at the latest,[21] which proves them contemporary with some mazes. However, a very small number of *carved* compasses may hark back as far as the late fifteenth and first half of the sixteenth century.[22] It is doubtful whether there is a connection between the two categories of compass cards, those consisting of stones and those carved in rocks. To a considerable extent, the carved compass cards can be ranged in the same category as other contemporary rock carvings frequently lining rocky havens and harbours in the north.[23] In any case, this

Fig. 9 The distribution of all kinds of stone mazes. Cf. fig. 8. (After John Kraft)

carved variety presumably bears little relation to the mazes. Nor are they always found close to the shore. On the contrary, they were often located at elevated sites overlooking a fairly large expanse of sea.

This study will accordingly focus on the stone mazes in distinctly shore-aligned locations. Although that criterion appears at first sight to be merely topographical, it could, I maintain, be extended to include culturally determined contexts. Below we will return to the exceptions. Some are (or were) found close to churches. A small number of stone mazes are found further inland with a less obvious context – approximately 15 in Sweden, and an unknown number (presumably lower) in Finland. The majority of them are probably situated at prehistoric grave fields. Another possible type of location is the execution site, of which there is only one extant example, that of Galgberget outside the northern walls of medieval Visby, Gotland. There are, however, indications of further instances of stone mazes at execution sites.

Fig. 10 A compass card laid of stones. Haraskär, Ångermanland, Sweden. Several stone mazes exist on this island, which was also a pilot station. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl, 1982)

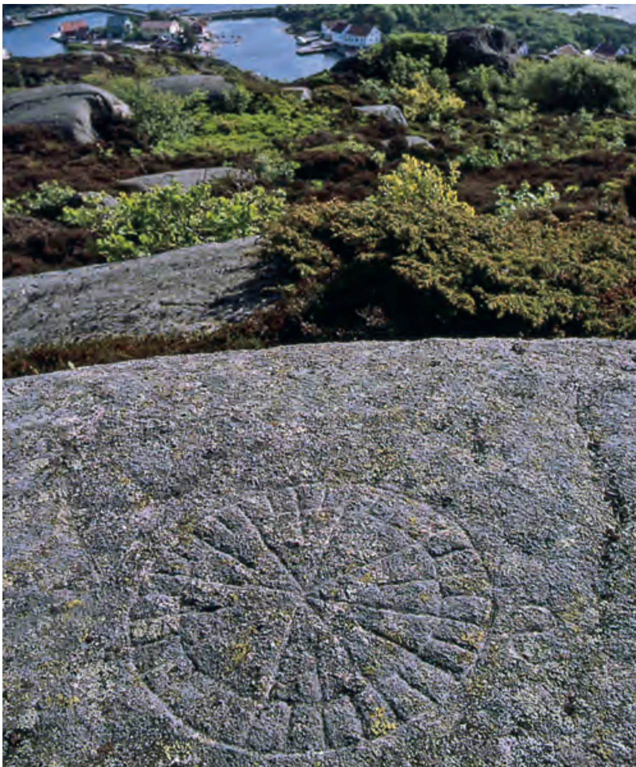

Fig. 11 A carved compass card at Korshamn, Vest-Agder, South Norway. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl, 2003)

Context and Early Ideas about Function

Due to their vulnerability, it is no wonder that many stone labyrinths have been destroyed or re-laid, the latter often in other or similar patterns. It is possible that place names known to be associated with mazes reveal the locations of labyrinths now no longer extant.[24] The absence of extant mazes in a certain area does not necessarily mean there were never mazes there.

It is reasonable to assume that the mazes had something to do with magic. Magic does not work if its procedures and beliefs are revealed to outsiders. Explicit statements of this principle on paper may be sparse, but it is a well-known rule in folklore, not least of all in its maritime variety. On the custom of sailor baptisms, for example, the foremost expert, Henning Henningsen (1961: 201), writes: "Seamen were not very communicative about the custom; there may even have been a sort of taboo about it…". In a questionnaire on mazes sent out by the folklore department of Nordiska museet in Stockholm in 1933, Viktor Olavsson of Juotsarova, Gällivare, northernmost Sweden, commented that "the labyrinth castle was presumed to lose its power of having an effect if unauthorized people learned about it" (my translation). In other words, if strangers learned about the labyrinth, it would be "profaned".

People have always been fascinated by these mysterious constructions and many legends have been told about their background. In fact, all kinds of fanciful ideas can be ascribed to mazes. Most of the stories passed along about them today still ascribe them to idle, often shipwrecked sailors, or to fishermen who were thought to have had nothing else to do.[25]

However, there is also a clear association with the female gender in the folklore surrounding the origin of mazes. Bengt af Klintberg has recently summed up the popular Swedish labyrinth legends as follows: "Paved labyrinth (Trojeborg). A young woman (called Troja) has been captured by robbers who threaten to kill her. She constructs a paved labyrinth which is so ingenious that her life is spared."[26]

Undoubtedly, a prototype in a given area inspired children and adults of later generations to construct new stone mazes. This practice is still alive today and probably looks back on a long history. A single old maze may thus have been the prototype, and thus the origin, of a concentration of mazes in the surrounding area. It is the story of *the original maze* which is the main object of inquiry here.[27] It is also true, however, that the conceptions I will propose as a background were very much alive until well into the nineteenth century, if not later.

On the Swedish side of the Bothnian Sea, which is the chief geographical focus of this study, we find at least 156 occurrences. Of these mazes, a minimum of 128 are found on islands. In many places there are more than one. On the island *Snöan* in southernmost Västerbotten, for example, there are 9, dating from 1388 until well into the nineteenth century. About 70 mazes are found at a distance of less than 200 metres from former or existing fishing settlements, large or small, 19 within 500 metres, and another 19 within 1 km of such a place or the remains of it. There are only about 50 which cannot be characterized in the same way, but 16 of them are found on islands. As to the their height above sea level, most are found less than 5 metres a.s.l. (earliest dating perhaps ca. AD 1500–1550), possibly 20 between 10 and 15 metres a.s.l. (indicating a date of perhaps AD 550–1550), and

only 15 at elevations higher than that, and theoretically predating ca. AD 550.[28] To an extent, these date conjectures, calculated on the basis of land uplift, corroborate well the dates calculated with the aid of lichenometry, the measuring of lichens, and other studies of surface erosion (Schmidt's test hammer).

As it is well adapted to these barren environments, the method of dating with the aid of lichenometry has been applied efficiently in areas where there are lichens of certain species, for example *Rhizocarpon geographicum* and – primarily in more Arctic milieux – *Rhizocarpon alpicola*. These are species with very slow growth rates, our knowledge of which can help us to ascertain their relative age. In Sweden, the geographer Wibjörn Karlén introduced this method for the analysis of climate fluctuation. He applied it to the maximum expansion of the mountain glaciers since the last Ice Age, evident in moraine walls pushed together at each glacier front.

The circumstance of the mazes' location on stony beaches enables us to use the lichenometry to date the mazes, since the growth of lichens can be correlated to the process of land upheaval. No lichens could be established before they permanently above water, and then of course allowing for high-water periods. When the mazes were constructed, the stones were turned and the natural growth of lichens was arrested. This resulted in differing sizes of lichen surfaces. This means that the date of the main parts of a certain stone maze can be established only through statistical computer analysis of a large number of stones found in a given stone maze. As part of the dating process, the erosion on the surface and what is found underneath is compared to samples found in the immediate vicinity of the waterline today.[29] The dating method is essentially sound, although some doubts have been expressed as to the effects of unknown factors. When applied to the small number of dated stone mazes, it dates a very small number at around 1300, another few in the following century, a marked concentration at ca. 1550, and the rest in early modern times between 1600 and 1850. This corresponds well with the general process of land uplift. We will return to the dating of mazes a little later.

Rarely has the mazes' function been discussed except in more general terms. They were undoubtedly connected to fishing and fishermen. John Kraft is in favour of interpreting them as "a universal instrument of magic".[30] I would like to comment, however, that this must not necessarily be understood as *any* kind of magic. We need not be that defeatist. The environment and the cultural context suggest a few rather obvious implications.

As for the far north, Bjørnar Olsen thought that pagan Saami may have used the coastal stone mazes in rites of transition as a kind of "counter-pattern" to the church buildings of the Christian Norse.[31] Mazes are often found at Saami *burial sites* – interestingly so, in view of the hypothesis presented below. The idea of the octagonal wooden churches built in the interior of Lapland in the first decade of the seventeenth century as a prototype for pagan Saami cult sites of similar shapes has also been substantiated by Anders Huggert.[32]

Obviously with Olsen's hypothesis in mind, Rabbe Sjöberg, on the basis of his lichenometric findings, believed[33] that the mazes of upper Norrland, of which a majority are dated at around AD 1550, were a kind of protest against the Reformation. According to this line of thought, the settlers and skerry users wanted to apply what they considered ancient and thus reliable Catholic symbols.

I would like to emphasize that there may very well be some truth in both these hypotheses. Maze figures are notoriously multi-vocal, and bear different meanings – sometimes to

Fig. 12 The chapel of Kuggörarna in Hälsingland, Sweden, probably built in the 1760s. It stands quite exposed to wind, snow and other precipitation. Fairly close to it is the very maze, dated 1371, where the last recorded genuine ceremony took place in 1958. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl, 1976)

different people or cultures – and what is more, these meanings change over time. However, the principal idea I would like to present below goes in a different direction. It represents a clear alternative to all others, and one which is conceivable for most of the cultures in the area in question and their known conceptions.

I once tried to find a background for the mazes in pilotage.[34] I had noticed that some of the mazes which received an early dating by means of lichenometry were situated in transit zones, areas where the coast changed character. These were often dangerous areas for shipping. Sources on shipwrecks and difficult passages abounded. The accompaniment of a pilot was presumably a must. The apparently general association of the mazes with fishing or fishermen discovered by John Kraft appeared to present no obstacle to this train of thought, since fishermen were certainly the first informal pilots. Apart from the obvious potential of magic for safe navigation amongst the shallows, I introduced the notion of a "sign" to sailors. Nowadays I am rather sceptical towards such primarily functionalist ideas. But the most critical aspect of this hypothesis is the approach from above: the search for a contextual pattern *from a bird's eye view.* Here I will instead attempt to get down to *the immediate surroundings – the island, the shore and the direct vicinity – of the stone maze itself.*

There is ample proof that the mazes were used for magic in former centuries. The last mention of a person actually believing in and practising his magic in a stone maze was in 1958. This maze was later dated at ca. AD 1371 with the aid of lichenometry. John Kraft interviewed the sons of an old fisherman in the fishing harbour of Kuggören in Hälsing-

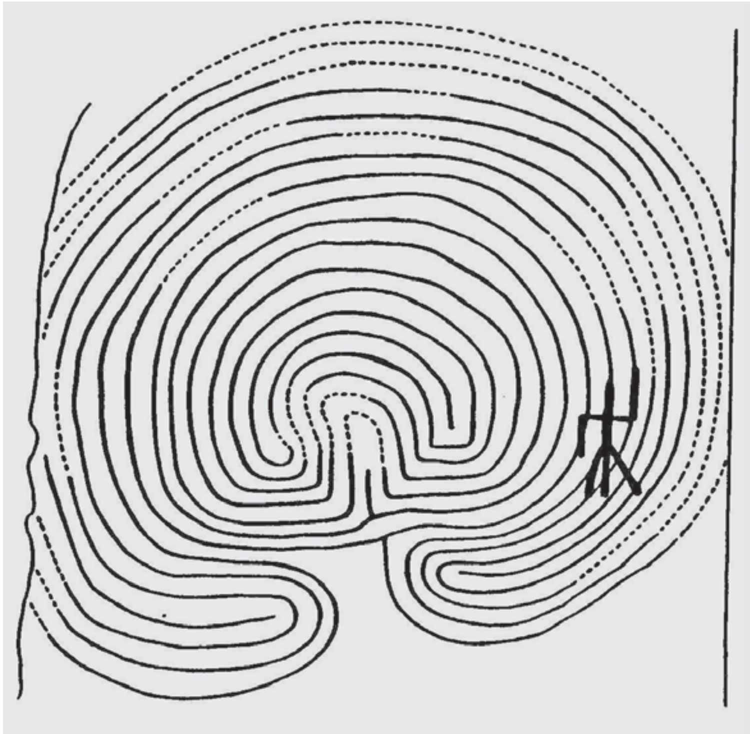

Fig. 13 The painted maze of Hablingbo church, Gotland, with a three-legged male(?) figure in its interior. (After John Kraft)

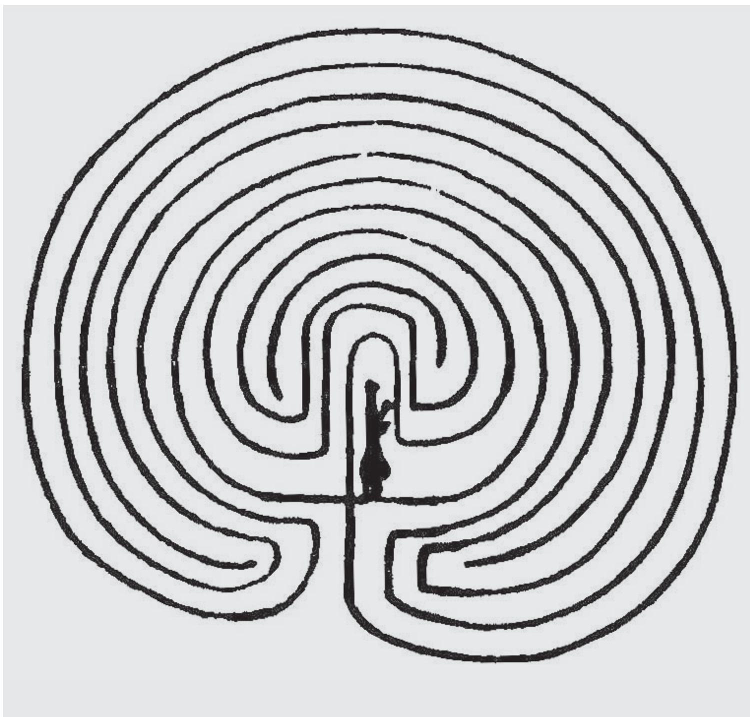

Fig. 14 The maze of the old church of Sibbo, Finland. A figure, probably female, is found in the centre of the maze. (After Rancken 1935 and John Kraft)

land, Sweden (the chapel of which is seen in fig. 12). The youngsters thought the old man was out of his mind. He did not want to tell them about his behaviour or what he wanted to accomplish with it.[35] As has already been pointed out above by myself and elsewhere by others, magic is not supposed to work if its principles are divulged to nonbelievers, or if it has become common knowledge of any kind. Essentially, what this old man did was walk all the way through the labyrinth, possibly mumbling something, and spit in his hand or on something in it, which he then apparently cast away over his left shoulder.

Walking along its stone lines must have been the only reasonable way of actually physically using mazes. In the church maze of the medieval Hablingbo church in Gotland (fig. 13),[36] we find a figure, probably male, represented with one arm raised and the other lowered, and, in the old church of Sibbo, Finland (fig. 14) a woman at the very centre. Of course this latter occurrence has been taken as a premature confirmation that the recorded eighteenth/nineteenth-century Finnish play featuring a Virgin imprisoned in the mazes – and accordingly referred to *jungfrudanser*, "virgins' dances", dated back all the way to medieval times.[37] Comparable plays were known in Sweden and Denmark as well. I think this is very doubtful, to say the least, mainly because of the fundamental change of religious beliefs during the sixteenth century, and also in view of the long timespan of continuity implied. The variable polysemy of mazes could be another indication.

So far, little has been made of the geographical contexts of shore-aligned mazes except their connection to fishing and seasonal fishermen's settlements, as illustrated by John Kraft for Sweden. In this text, an effort will be made to present various new suggestions for an analysis of the mazes' meaning in connection with their immediate surroundings.

The occurrence of stone mazes in the vicinity of Iron Age grave fields, or directly on them, in Sweden has been understood as an indication that the mazes dated back to prehistoric times. Earlier dates have also been suggested. There are indeed Bronze Age rock carvings exhibiting vaguely similar figures.[38] I firmly challenge that view in this text. As already mentioned, the maze figure that is applied to the field labyrinths made of stones have the specific pattern illustrated in fig. 5, although variations do occur.[39] My firm view, on the strength of the datings presented, is that the context of even the oldest labyrinths is high medieval at the earliest. The earliest date to have been established in a stone maze by means of lichenometry so far has been ca. AD 1300. Those were solidly Catholic times. It is reasonable to assume that the labyrinth we are interested in bears a connection to the ideological sphere of the Catholic Church. Thus it is obvious that we have to apply a perspective stemming from the Middle Ages for the first coastal labyrinths. And I maintain as well – hypothetically, of course, as no datings have been made so far – that the Middle Ages likewise represent the first possible dating for the inland mazes. What, then, would be the common denominator of coastal field labyrinths of the Catholic Middle Ages and mazes on pagan and prehistoric grave fields?

A Medieval Background

As already mentioned, there is certainly often a connection between stone labyrinths on the one hand and fishing sites and fishermen's settlements on the other. But this circumstance does not necessarily mean anything more than that fishermen were the only perma-

Fig. 15 The dated maze, the invocation to Mary, and the two tiny compass cards (?) in Hesselager church, Funen, Denmark. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl, 1996)

nent users of the seaboard and its archipelagos. We have already mentioned that the Virgin Mary was considered the foremost protector of fishermen in Catholic times in the North. This belief has perpetuated itself well into the present in solidly Protestant contexts. It is therefore no surprise to find the name *Maria* associated with a labyrinth painted in the church of Hesselager, Fyn/Funen, Denmark (fig. 15). The painting in question is *the only one explicitly dated* to an actual year, AD 1485.[40] It is moreover presumably no coincidence that the late medieval church bell of Horred in Västergötland, Sweden was cast with a maze and the inscription "help maria".[41]

Let us turn to the contexts of all other documented "ecclesiastical" maze figures of Catholic times. Mazes also occur more or less immediately outside church buildings. There is, for example, a large stone maze in the churchyard immediately beside the parish church in *Fröjel,* Gotland (fig. 16). We also know of the one-time existence of two labyrinths close to the great medieval church of *Köping* on Öland (now ruined). Perhaps they were also located inside the churchyard. The maze outside Vårfrukyrkan in *Enköping* was covered up in the nineteenth century. Another was found outside the lych gate of *Möklinta* church, also in Västmanland, but it has been removed. The same goes for the maze at the old church of *Sundsvall,* Medelpad. Somewhat more doubtful is the labyrinth, no longer extant, in the vicinity of *Fole* church, Gotland. For these statements I also depend on John Kraft. None of these mazes has been dated; however, a medieval origin seems plausible.

An important point to be considered in this context is whether the maze was inside the churchyard fence from the beginning, i.e. whether it was built inside the fence, or whether the latter was extended to enclose it.[42]

Furthermore, the maze figure is found in connection with the interior of quite a number of late medieval stone churches as well as two other locations – the aforementioned church

bell and a stone cross, both late medieval. The entire Nordic material known so far has also been published briefly by John Kraft.[43]

The painting in *Grinstad church,* Dalsland, West Sweden, displays a clear pattern of the same "cathedral" type (fig. 17) that we find in French Gothic cathedrals like that of Chartres, with a circular pattern, while that of Amiens is octagonal. This is a unique image in the North. It seems to denote the building of the church. The builder may have identified himself with the first mythical architect Daedalus, mentioned above, who was supposed to have built the original labyrinth in Crete.[44] In this case, the West Swedish painting is located on the interior *wall*, which could possibly mean that it is older than the vast majority of the other images. The church seems to have been built originally in the thirteenth century AD. As a rule, the maze figures were applied to *vaults,* which cannot possibly be older than the fifteenth century AD, probably even the latter half of that century.[45] There is also a painted figure which may be an embellishment of a consecration cross. Such crosses were located approximately at the site where the bishop had sprinkled water on the wall when the church was consecrated. This may mean that the maze may be as old as the stone church, and in this case older than any other.

On the Swedish mainland not far to the south of Stockholm, there is a maze in the church of *Sorunda,* where it is carved in a faulty manner on a shield sculptured in the vaults of a burial chapel of the Fleming noble family dating from ca. AD 1500.

Several are found in churches of Gotland. There are painted mazes in the parish churches of *Levide* and *Lye,* of a graffito type, one with a runic inscription: "I am a poor, sinful man." The phrase in question was apparently introduced during the Reformation in AD 1540 by the Swedish Lutheran pioneer Olaus Petri.[46] One is also found in the church of *Ganthem*, of "graffito" type, another in *Hablingbo*, where there are two: one painting[47] and one unfinished "graffito". Most of the others date from medieval Denmark proper.[48] But the occurrence at *Julskov,* Fyn/Funen was actually found on a stone cross taken here from *Levide,* Gotland, with runes dating from AD 1442,[49] but now apparently lost. We have already mentioned the maze of *Hesselager,* Funen, dated AD 1485 (possibly 1445), where a fifteenth-century vault partially covers the painting (cf. fig. 15).[50] There are others in the churches of *Nim,* where a painting was discovered relatively recently, and *Tåning,* where there is a painted but now covered maze, as well as in *Skive old church,* where there is a partly destroyed painting. All three belong to Jutland (Jylland). On Zeeland (Själland) we find one in *Gevninge* church, where, again, a fifteenth-century vault partially covers the figure.

On the present part of the Swedish west coast formerly belonging to Denmark, we find one in the church of *Båstad,* Skåne built AD 1470–1520. There is another in the church of *Östra Karup,* Halland, dating from the same period. Only traces of this maze remain, but here it is associated with the figure of a ship.

The maze-ship combination is one that is particularly stressed in the church of *St Marie,* Åbo, Finland, where there are four painted mazes with ships in their vicinity on the vaults, which will presumably have been built in the latter part of the fifteenth century (fig. 18). The general appearance of the ship figures agree with this dating. This is a unique and most interesting case.

Other Finnish occurrences are those of *Pernå* church in Helsinge, in *Pyttis*[51] and in the old church of *Sibbo,* probably built in the early fifteenth century.[52] Finally, mazes are found

Fig. 16 The stone maze in the churchyard of Fröjel, Gotland. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl, 1999)

Fig. 17 The maze on the wall of Grinstad church, Dalsland, West Sweden. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl, 1983)

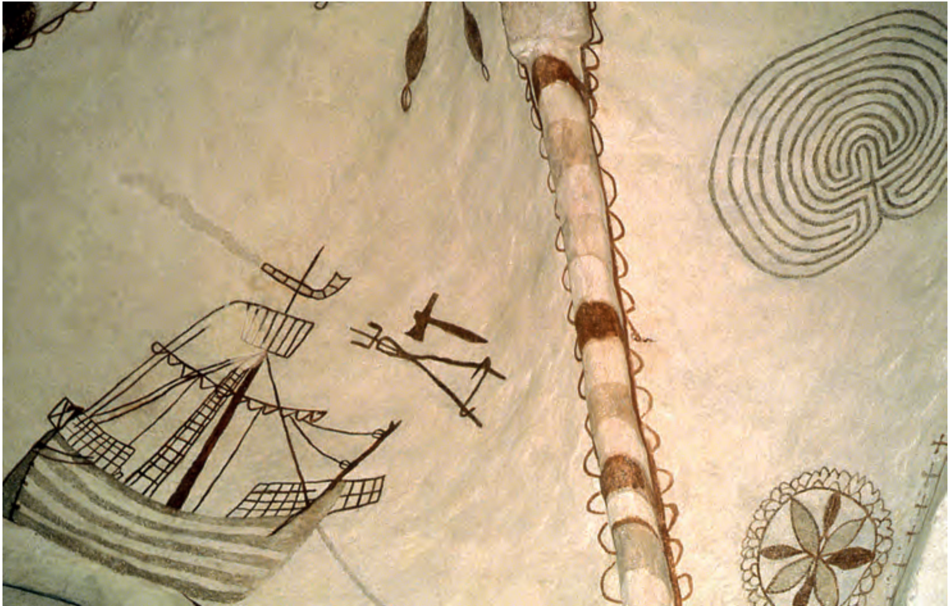

Fig. 18 An example of a ship and a maze on the vaults of St. Mary's church of Åbo (Turku), Finland. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl, 1997)

in the parish churches of the archipelago parishes of *Korpo*, where there are two mazes, and *Nagu*. Their direct association with the island environment of stone mazes is perhaps telling. Interestingly, these later maze figures are accompanied by pictures of mermaids.

The two churches with labyrinth figures in Norway are *Seljord* in Telemark and *Vestre Slidre* in Valdres.[53] These are both markedly inland occurrences.

It should be emphasized that what is called "graffito" here does not necessarily imply that the figures were carved just for entertainment. In any case, their purpose was not so offensive to the clergy that they were effaced in their own time. I have argued elsewhere[54] that it is important to realize that a church interior was a most sacred space in Catholic times. Thus, the act of carving ships *and* labyrinths could have had some propitiatory or votive purpose.

Let us summarize this evidence on cultural context and dating. In the region under discussion there is a clear connection between mazes and Catholic church buildings. But the labyrinth is also among the symbols of the Christian church in general, which adopted it – like so many other symbols – from classical antiquity for its own purposes.[55] In most cases, the late medieval paintings of mazes in churches bear a connection to – and date from the period of – the first vaults, i.e. a time before ordinary wooden ceilings were built above the stone walls. The majority of the vaults were constructed in the fifteenth century. On the vaults of the church of St. Marie in *Åbo*, for example, we find several painted labyrinths accompanied by figures of ships. These vessels appear to indicate a late fifteenth-century date.

There is absolutely no reason to assume a significantly earlier date than the fourteenth/fifteenth centuries for stone mazes on the skerries. Even the stone maze located at 85 metres a.s.l. close to a Bronze Age cairn on the mainland in Jävre, Norrbotten has been

lichenometrically dated at ca. AD 1299, one of the very earliest stone maze datings. Here the stone material was apparently taken from the nearby cairn.[56]

Noel Broadbent argues in his recent work on the Iron Age and medieval archaeology of the north Bothnian coast that the original mazes are a symptom of the penetration of medieval Nordic (Swedish) coastal colonizers. With a new kind of seasonal settlement, they were more or less superimposed on the remains of an ancient Saami coastal culture[57] which disappeared completely or was assimilated. Broadbent's conjecture may very well be correct.[58] As we have seen there is a connection between the distribution of stone mazes and medieval Swedish colonization areas in the Southern Baltic, both in Finland and Estonia. Thus, the inner Bothnian represents a potential contemporary parallel to this process.[59]

There is no reason to believe that the labyrinth lost its symbolic potency during later, post-Reformation, times. For example, four regular mazes are encountered in a Latin missal from Ångermanland, Bothnian Central Sweden, dating from the latter part of the sixteenth century.[60] In our own time, at least in the twentieth century, the drawing of labyrinths was still a pastime among children. In fact, even at this late date, some stone mazes were still in use by fishermen for serious magical purposes.[61]

My third limitation concerns the geographical area chosen for close examination. The coast of Swedish Norrland, roughly from the outskirts of Stockholm to the Finnish border in the North, was surveyed by myself in the years 1975–82.[62] The stone (field) mazes in this area are the best dated of all. Let me here repeat some of the basic facts: The dating of the mazes was carried out by Noel Broadbent and Rabbe Sjöberg. I participated only once myself as an observer of the fieldwork. The lichenometric dating of stone mazes covers the period ca.1450 – ca.1850, and indicates a clear concentration in the mid sixteenth century, while two mazes may date as far back as about AD 1300. Of all these cases, the only one truly located at the seaboard is one of those found at Lörudden, Medelpad, Sweden.[63] Above, we also mentioned the contemporary site of Jävre, Norrbotten, of 1299, and that at Kuggören, Hälsingland, of AD 1371. Many are thus much later, but otherwise rather evenly distributed over this later timespan. As likewise already mentioned, a considerable number were made in fairly recent times, well into the last century, although some of them may have been re-laid after total or partial destruction.

Catching the Winds and the Currents

In my understanding, the figure of the stone labyrinth is clearly meant *to imprison or to contain something within its winding paths* (cf. fig. 5). This can be understood in many different ways. Erik Nylén suggested as early as 1958 that stone circles placed inside prehistoric graves may have had this function – a form of protection of both the dead and the living – apart from being an ornament.[64]

A similar notion is also encountered in more playful contexts such as the "liberation" of the Virgin from the maze attested by Finnish folklore of the nineteenth century.[65] As stated above, however, the latter is presumably just a secondary or parallel use or a mere conception.

In the church of Hesselager, two tiny figures, probably compass cards, appear in conjunction with the maze (cf. fig. 15). In several cases we find a compass card in the neighbourhood of the field maze.

This circumstance is the point of departure for the hypothesis of a function related to fishermen's magic. The suggested implication pertains to the movement of fish shoals as opposed to sailing, the context I conjectured in the past.[66]

Thus the wind and the current are both implied. In this connection it is appropriate to refer not merely to popular magic in general. Almost all magic, and not only that performed in Protestant times, had some kind of religious or liturgical connection. What kind of Biblical association, then, would convey the image of the labyrinth? I would suggest the spiritual simile image of the Gospel of St. John 3:8: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Please observe here that "spirit" is also a generic term for "ghost".

However, I have found no relevant Biblical quotation pertaining to currents! On the other hand, fishermen are granted particular priority in the New Testament as the first and foremost of the Apostles. Their closeness to the Word may have made them susceptible to such associations as were relevant.

The first idea I would like to propose here is thus that labyrinths were supposed to catch, and to slow down, the winds and the currents. The compass rose may indicate the most profitable direction of either the wind or the current.

Support for this – possibly secondary – magical function of the mazes can be sought in their close connection with fishing and fishermen. The preoccupation with similar thoughts and anxieties is one of most important in the fisherman's life. Dependence on fish catch is one of the most fickle businesses on Earth. In Swedish oral tradition, the labyrinthine figure has been likened to permanent wooden fish weirs, so called *kattisor* or *katsor*.[67]

Yet storms were also a persistent threat, to nets and catches as well as to life. It was recorded at an early date that the ghosts of the dead people buried on the out-skerries were believed to warn of an impending storm by making loud noises, screaming and shouting.[68] Strong winds were indeed considered to be parallel to spirits, and thus also to ghosts. This circumstance forms a logical connection to the chapter below on the binding of ghosts.

Stone mazes have also been found in fishing contexts deep inland. One example is the labyrinth at the Edefors salmon fishing settlement on the Luleälven River, Norrbotten. It is probably the only maze actually to have been excavated, if only partially. With the aid of clay pipe fragments and other constructions at the site, it was dated to the seventeenth century.[69] This is entirely consistent with some of the lichenometric datings of the coastal labyrinths in the archipelago of this province. On Lake Vänern in the south-west of Sweden, there are four stone mazes on the Axelön island group. No settlement is known, but seine-nets were once used in the vicinity.[70] No dating has been possible, either by lichenometry or on the basis of land uplift. There has been land uplift, but since the lake basin follows it, the shore stays, for the most part, at the same height above the water. More specifically, however, it should be mentioned that the basin has slowly slanted to the west because of uneven land upheaval. However, this phenomenon does not appear to have much of an effect since excess water is channelled out by way of the Göta älv River.

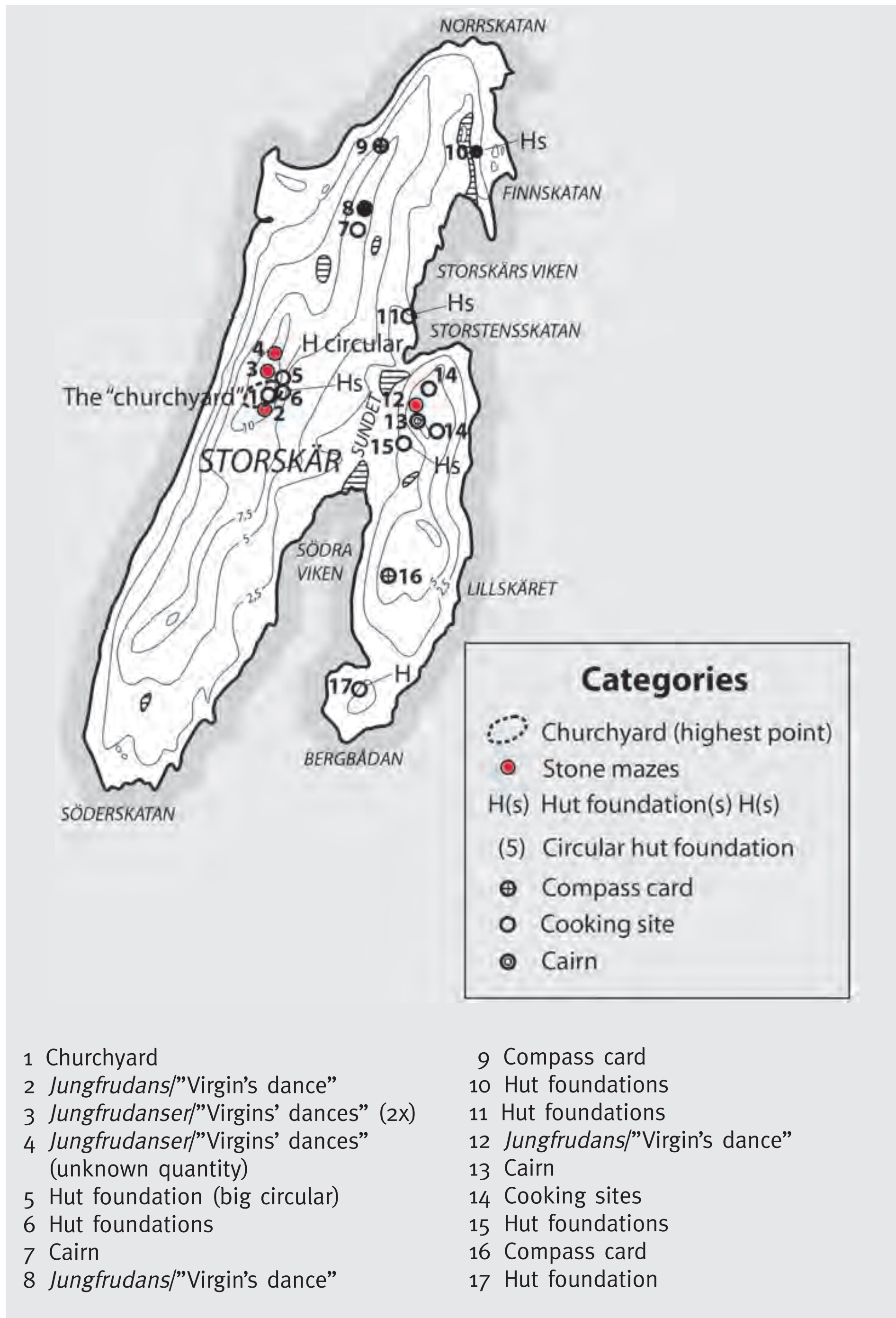

Fig. 19 Map of Storskär, Malax, Österbotten, Finland with the most important ancient monuments. Observe the fenced burial ground surrounded by stone mazes. (Basic map made by Bertil Bonns & Annika Sander, redrawn by Hans Drake, Stockholm)

The Binding of Ghosts

In my opinion, the primary function of stone mazes was quite different from what has been proposed by other scholars before me. The key to my interpretation lies in the fundamental habitus of maritime people in general.

Attitudes to the ever-present shadow of death are a fundamental component in all kinds of maritime culture. The mortality rate of sailors in the age of navigation by sail was the highest among all professional groups (Stewart 2011). The other main maritime folk group, that of the fishermen and pilots – the majority of whose members will also have worked as sailors at some time during their lives – had a singularly fatal profession as well. This general statement can be substantiated by statistics from such an eminently maritime country as Norway. There, an early pioneer of sociology, Eilert Sundt, pointed out the appalling mortality as early as the 1860s and also tried to find remedies (*På havet,* in English *On the Sea,* 1861–64). Indeed, most of the exposed coasts of Europe deserved the tragic name "coast of widows". The persistent presence of the shadow of death brought about a kind of fatalism which is fundamental to understanding the maritime cultures of the past.[71] The habitus of maritime people, i.e. the practitioners of maritime vocations but also their families, distinguishes them once more from the wider cultural matrix of the societies to which they belonged.

What is more, among the communities on land, the profoundly tragic situation often arose of not being able to bury one's beloved deceased. Either their bodies were not found after an accident or a shipwreck, or they had been committed to the depths at an anonymous location in the sea, sewn into their hammocks and weighted down by cannon balls. Most of the folks at home were poor; very few of them could afford a permanent commemorative marker in the vicinity, for example a gravestone or a memorial plaque in the parish church.[72]

Most of the deceased sailors and fishermen had died premature deaths. They were accordingly thought to live on as ghosts or wraiths, unblessed, unhappy, without roots.

It is thus no surprise that the anonymous dead who floated to land on one's own coast were experienced in a similar way. They might be buried, even in consecrated soil, but their identity and background had also been lost, and thus the peace of their souls.

A model site for this new explanation is *Storskär* or *Kyrkogårdsskär*, "the churchyard skerry", in the Storskär archipelago of the parish of Malax in Österbotten, Finland (figs. 19, 20). Here, probably more than three stone mazes surround the burial ground, *Kyrkogården.* It would definitely not do to play or "dance" here, as indicated by the Swedish term *jungfrudans* ("virgin's dance") in Finland. Such an activity would be tantamount to mocking or even challenging the dead within the fence, and would be entirely inconsistent with the rules of respect for the dead once in effect in such regions.

Furthermore, there are at least two isolated mazes at other sites on this island, as well as two stone compasses, a cairn and numerous hut foundations with cooking sites in different locations.[73] The cairn, whatever its background, is close to one of those other two mazes.

Interestingly, the burial ground is associated with two drowned "virgins" identified as the daughters of a historical figure, the last Catholic bishop of Åbo, Arvid Kurck. According to the sources, the shipwreck, which was a total loss, came about in May 1522, but was originally thought to have taken place much further south, "outside Wiggan", i.e. the island of Gräsö in Uppland on the Swedish side.[74] Yet there are several versions of the legends

Fig. 20 The maze south of the "churchyard" (seen at the far right) at Storskär (fig. 19) is surrounded by four more or less square cairns laid as "corners" and obviously intended to be placed at the four cardinal points of the compass. (Photo: Mikael Herrgård, Österhankmo, Finland)

surrounding this burial site, for example one according to which a Russian bishop was wrecked here with his seven to nine daughters. They starved to death on the island, but before dying they had laid the mazes as a pastime.[75]

It struck me, when comparing my own notes, that I have studied many traditions related to the foundering and wrecks of ships, drowned sailors, and place name types in this connection. In many cases there seem to be close connections with the stone mazes. I would say that, thanks to material supplied by John Kraft, my notes once covered approximately ninety per cent of all known stone mazes in Norrland and as many as sixty per cent of them had some connection of this kind. The first explanation was that these were generally dangerous places. This accounted to some extent for the need for pilotage.[76]

Similar sites may thus exist all over Scandinavia. In the Styrsö archipelago on the Swedish west coast, at least ten mazes have been found, some of them badly damaged. In this archipelago there are a considerable number of burial sites, with more than a hundred visible interments, most of them pointing in the direction of the sea. The mazes do not seem to have a close relationship with them. But one of the mazes on the main island was carefully enclosed within the fence of a new official churchyard as late as AD 1840![77] The old churchyard had been laid out in ca. AD 1655. In Hallands Väderö in Skåne (Scania), south Sweden, there is likewise a stone maze close to a burial site in the south, and another on the more exposed shore in the north. Another similar case is Kyrkogårdsskär ("the churchyard skerry") in the archipelago of Misterhult, Småland, East Sweden. This name and others with the same meaning recur in many places in Sweden, Finland and Norway, and strikingly often the sites are viewed by the local people with a sense of awe.

Moreover, the place names quite often indicate the onetime presence of a corpse, for example *Likskär, Manskär, Dödmanskär*,[78] or of a grave or cairn, for example *Gravskär, Röset, Rörbådan.* In a few cases there is a reference to a *Gast* (ghost) which may mean approximately the same. There were sometimes connections with a known wreck, but by no means always. In legends, the respective wreck often seems to have inspired stories of at least some people coming on land and, if they were alive, settling there, and if they had drowned, being buried somewhere inland.

In any case, most of the more specific statements concerned disasters which had happened very late. The event implied by the place name, however, is far more likely to have happened long ago. My extensive interviews with literally thousands of people[79] did, I am afraid, not help much. If I had the opportunity to return to this material now with a new approach, I am convinced that I would find a large number of striking instances of correlation. As far as I know, there are indeed stone cairns – although of indefinite function – on almost all of the islands where early stone mazes are also found. On the basis of certain evidence collected there, I believe that they are the remains of burials carried out in the Middle Ages or slightly later in early modern times, i.e. entirely consistent with the dating of mazes. Even if they are not truly the remains of burials – which is difficult to prove, since skeletal remains perish rapidly in this acidic environment – *they may have been believed to be graves* by the local people.

The region in question is a vast one to cover in an investigation. It presently far exceeds my own resources, and perhaps those of any individual. This is the reason why the Finnish site Storskäret of Malax, Österbotten, is the only model site. As the reader will know by now, I have made observations in many other places, but it is not possible to document them in the same way as at this site.

I would like to offer some advice to those who want to test my hypotheses in particular cases. The first possibility is to review oral traditions on drowning, shipwrecks and burials in a specific area that ought to be defined rather widely. The second aspect to be explored is the existence of a cairn or other undefined intervention among the usual shore boulders in the fairly immediate vicinity of the stone maze. The third is the occurrence of place names indicative of a burial, a corpse find, or apparitions/ghosts. Most often these names are those of tiny localities and have never been officially registered (for example on detailed maps, in place name or folklore archives, etc.) and belong to an oral tradition yet to be recovered.

As mentioned, many mazes are often found to have been laid on the same island after the pattern or prototype of an original older maze. It appears, therefore, that it is imperative to find the oldest, which admittedly is not easy. A good start has been made by the land uplift and the lichenometric datings.[80] However, I believe the oldest maze can be found in most cases. I faced the same problems when I was developing my first hypothesis, now more or less abandoned: that of a connection between the offer of pilotage by fishermen and the location of a maze.

Generally speaking, it was always unpleasant to have to take care of corpses of unknown persons. It remains a distinct possibility that mazes may have been erected in the belief that they would prevent such arrivals on a certain coast.

There will also have been a more pragmatic reason for the fear of corpses floating ashore – the danger of contamination. We are reminded, for example by Johansson 1962, of the

Fig. 21 The stone maze of the famous island Blå Jungfrun (*Swedish Virgin, Schwedische Jungfrau, Zweedsche Jounkvrouw)*, a Swedish National Park. Cf. Modéer 1927 for a discussion of the island. (Photo: Christer Westerdahl, 1978)

widespread fear of pestilence in the nineteenth century. Suspected pest corpses were brought ashore with the aid of long boathooks and physical proximity was avoided.

It should also be said without reservations that a number of late mazes were certainly laid for reasons other than protection from ghosts or evil spirits.

Yet no notion inspired as much fear in men of ancient times as that of the dead walking the earth. There are countless stories of wraiths in midnight churchyards and unblessed phantoms and spirits out in the open. Most of my readers will be aware of this.[81]

Interestingly, a small bronze plate, folded and inscribed on both sides with runes, was found in 1920 in the churchyard of Högstena in Västergötland, only eight metres from the northwest section of the church itself. This church was built in the twelfth century AD, and the plate has been preliminarily dated to that period.

The inscription is clearly a spell against spirits of the dead:[82]

"I cast a spell against the spirit
against that one who wants to walk
against the riding
against the running
against the sitting
against that one who is dropping down
against the flying
everything will lose its power of life and die."

There were many other ways of neutralizing haunted sites in popular magic. One was to find the grave holding the corpse and *pierce it with a pole.*[83] Another was a *burial in a wetland.*[84] These methods could presumably also be combined.

The Linnaean Pehr Kalm, also referred to elsewhere in this text, noted in 1742 that stone cairns were placed by visitors on graves in an island churchyard in Bohuslän. An experienced informer told him that people used to throw stones on them when passing by.[85] Another method, as we already know, was by way of foresight. If a corpse found on the shore could not – for any of several reasons – be brought to a consecrated churchyard, it had to be interred in situ or close to the place where it had been found. In such cases, a simple cairn was usually built on the seaboard of an island.[86]

From the first article of a Norwegian regional law of the thirteenth century, we know that, already in the Middle Ages, this type of interment had to be carried out *at the very edge of the (sea) water*.[87] The reason was that the water stopped the spirit. This would certainly apply to wetlands inland as well.[88] *The ghost could not cross water.* An island is thus an ideal place for a burial. This is a notion which does not apply solely to skerries or islands in the sea. Inland we encounter an astounding number of islands designated as islands of the dead. This is especially true of Saami traditions and place names in the North, and to an even greater extent of similar material encountered in Eastern Finnish (Ladoga) areas. The latter were mentioned in a relatively recent study by Jukka Korpela.[89]

In the following I will sketch a hypothetic scenario for the construction and use of a stone maze. A ghost may have been believed to wreak havoc on the island itself. It could possibly pass from there onto a boat, but to do so it would need assistance from humans.

Accordingly, when on the island you were never safe, especially if you had to spend the night (or many nights) there, or go to and fro. As a means of calming the wraith, a labyrinth was constructed. The evil spirit was called inside it and kept there by means of strong exhortations. This could mean that the maze was always laid out before people spent the first night on the island if any signs of unruly spirits were felt in the air. And that was very likely, in light of what we know about medieval – and later – superstition. What is more, the wraith could leave on the visitors' vessel if it was not incarcerated in the maze before their departure. Possibly the procedure in the maze, whatever it was, had to be repeated at every landing on the island and every departure from it. Memories of this hypothetical procedure, I suggest, may have been misunderstood in later times in Finland as the *jungfrudans*, "the dance of the virgin".

In several cases it has been observed that a labyrinth was built on top of an ancient structure.[90] This may well indicate a fear of ghostly disturbances from something that was interpreted as a former grave.

Such a function would help to explain why mazes are found in connection with fishing camps and to some extent also close to fishing sites. In the latter case, however, the practice of magic to control winds and currents would be quite as likely. There will have had to be a burial – or the suspicion of a burial – on the island. This hypothesis may perhaps also explain certain concentrations of mazes where there are no signs of medieval chapels or formal burial grounds. *This interpretation would imply that labyrinths actually replaced chapels or consecrated churchyards.*

It is important to point out that this interpretation does not rule out other uses of labyrinths. I think, however, that this function might have been a primary one. Our point of departure here corresponds to my first text in this short series on archipelago chapels. There I pointed out that it may not be a mere coincidence that the densest occurrences of

coastal stone mazes are found where there are few chapels, especially medieval ones. There is, however, a source-critical problem in the sense that land upheaval was not only very strong but also had a more visible effect in several of these northern areas since the sea and shore area are very shallow. Remains of mazes or chapels may have been destroyed.

Secondly, there are a number of references in legends to the founders of the archipelago churches and chapels being *virgins, young women,* of some standing, even royal, who were sometimes elevated to the status of saints, real or imagined. Place names in the archipelagos often evoke the first element *Jungfru-, Jomfru-,* etc. In terms of period, this element can be dated, since it is a German loanword introduced in earnest in the late Middle Ages, roughly in the fifteenth century.[91] The indigenous word and name element is *Mö-.* Yet there is no reason to believe that the naming itself necessarily took place that late; on the contrary, it is entirely conceivable that the sites were merely renamed, using the German loanword, in the period in question.

Thirdly, the Swedish-speaking population of Finland, mainly farmers and fishermen living on the coasts, called the stone mazes *jungfrudanser,* "virgins' dances". This has led authors to assume that the dances or playful acts known from later times had always had that playful character, even in the Northern coastal milieux.[92] According to my deliberations, the "virgin" was indeed intentionally caught inside the labyrinth from the beginning, but "she" was not supposed to be liberated from it, since "she" was a ghost (see below).

The precautions against ghosts may have been in practice beyond skerries and small islands quite early on. As we have seen, however, protection against ghosts in churchyards may date back to as early as the twelfth century (the Högstena galder or incantation).

The exceptions regarding field mazes are those located next to churches and even inside regular churchyards, for example the one preserved at Fröjel on Gotland (cf. fig. 16) with its impressive maze well inside the fence, and execution sites, such as at Galgberget, Visby, Gotland. The latter might actually be more revealing than a churchyard. However, the evidence is quite meagre. Virtually no execution sites have undergone archaeological excavation to date, but that circumstance seems to be changing.

The arguments related to the mazes at execution sites are based for the most part on assumptions. The executed persons were normally interred without ceremony more or less under the gallows. Their propensity to haunt that very place would seem obvious.

Then there are the prehistoric grave fields. As mentioned previously, there seem to be at least fifteen cases of this exceptional phenomenal in Sweden.[93] Even though they date back to long-ago pagan times, their existence would have been known in Christian tradition. According to this hypothesis, protective measures against ghosts could have been carried out there with the aid of stone mazes. Some of the grave fields also served as *thingsteads* – traditional meeting places for the governing assembly, called the *thing.* To judge from the example of Visby, there is a distinct possibility that the purpose of the stone maze was to bind the ghosts of the execution victims buried at the gallows. Executions were often undertaken in the vicinity of the thingstead. To date, no connection has been established between stone mazes and execution sites. Interestingly, however, at two Swedish execution sites where victims were interred – in the medieval town of Vadstena and in Morn in Dalarna – Viking-age burials have been discovered in the immediate vicinity, which would mean that the execution sites were located on grave fields of the Late Iron Age.[94] Another execution

site in the medieval town of Skänninge in Östergötland, in use well into the eighteenth century, was in fact called *Trojenborg* – a generic name for mazes.[95]

It is obvious that an array of other precautionary measures were taken against the spectres of the executed persons, usually by placing the corpses and their heads in a particular direction, driving stakes through their bodies, binding their feet, etc. Some were also interred in wetlands, yet another reminder of the power of water as a borderline between the dead and the living.[96]

In the eyes of the inhabitants, the depiction of labyrinths on the walls of churches, even though made for other purposes, may once have been thought of as a potent factor at burials in general. What is more, in Protestant times the churches themselves were in fact full of shallow burials beneath their floors. The congregation was thus reminded of their presence quite physically – by the stench – for a long time.[97]

It is important to repeat here that this is not the only possible explanation for the occurrence of a field labyrinth in a particular place. It does, however, seem to account for most of the pieces of the puzzle.

The notion that dead souls cannot cross water is well known in the entire region under discussion, including the Saami communities, even those in the East.[98] It can in fact be considered almost universal. I suggest therefore that the motivation for building a stone maze among the Saami was similar to that among the Swedes. As for the burial context of several mazes in the nuclear Saami area in northernmost Norway, we have already referred above to ideas put forth by Bjørnar Olsen.

With regard to the persistent notion of drowned, buried, rescued, or even dancing virgins, I would suggest a more complex principle. There must be a connection here with *a cognitive notion of virgins or female beings,* but what? I still believe that the fundamental idea is that the sea is female, in the form of a virgin, a mermaid, or the Virgin Mary, the helper and patroness of fishermen. A perfect amalgamation would have been made between age-old seaboard cosmologies and the theology of the Catholic Church. Its popular survival into Lutheran times is certain.

A Brief Summary

The first article on archipelago chapels provided an overview of the medieval and later chapel sites. Of the stone mazes known to date featuring the specific design referred to so far, none appear to date from prehistoric or pagan times in the North.[99] There is no substantial evidence to support such a notion, especially not in the main areas of maze concentration. The earliest mazes appear to be approximately contemporary with the first medieval island chapels and probably with island "churchyards" without chapels. They are also roughly contemporary with the medieval Swedish settlements on the coasts of northernmost Norrland, Finland, and Estonia, as can be conjectured on the basis of the overall distribution of mazes.

In the North, the maze or labyrinth in various forms and contexts would have to have been introduced with Christianity. In the form under discussion here, they were, from the beginning, an exclusively Christian symbol. As a symbol of architects initially rendered on the pavements, later on the walls, and still later on the vaults of churches, they came to be associated with churches. From there they were symbolically transferred to the function

assigned consecrated churches and churchyards to care for the dead and to *keep them in their graves*.

The Catholic Church was comparatively tolerant of popular notions. The last (formal) Catholic archbishop of Sweden was the ethnographic author Olaus Magnus (1490–1556). He actually expresses unequivocal nationalist pride in the fact that his countrymen, the Norse, the Finns and the Saami, had once been capable of practising as strong a magic as the southerners, *nota bene* in pagan times: "once".[100] Magic was never performed with the connivance of the Church, but certainly with the tacit support or indulgence of local priests. In indigenous folklore the latter were themselves sometimes believed to be the most powerful magicians, and some may even have exploited that status to enhance their standing in their local communities.[101] The later Protestant clergy was decidedly much stricter in their attitude towards magic and popular beliefs.[102]

Perhaps it was from here that the maze was spirited away to the sphere of islands and their burial sites. The shadow of death was omnipresent in maritime cultures, both on land and on board vessels. Of all professional groups in early modern history, sailors, fishermen and pilots had the highest mortality rates. The fear of death and of the unblessed dead was felt as much on land, amongst the affected families along the many "coasts of widows".[103] Similar ideas seem to have prevailed among the maritime communities of the Saami in North Norway.[104]

The virgin, in the guise of the mermaid, may already have been established on the coast. The significant factor in this context is that the spirits of the dead cannot cross water and are accordingly best caught, contained and pacified on an island. In this connection they were secondarily linked with the migratory myth of the grave of a virgin from the sea. This notion found a place within the missionary Catholic Church and its descendants, partially in the St. Sunniva legend of Norway, and its subsequent impact in the Baltic, which was explored briefly in the first article.

Taken as a metaphor, the playful dance of the virgin in a maze was possibly a misunderstood reference to a "dance of death", known as *danse macabre, Totentanz*, etc. in European Catholic tradition.[105] This allegory stems from the same period – the fifteenth century – as the depictions of mazes as well as the introduction of the word *Jungfru, Jomfru* in Nordic languages from the German *Jungfrau* ("young woman", or virgin). I would like to suggest that the culmination of this process spanned the period from ca. AD 1400 to 1550. Corresponding "pararituals" actually took place in a regular churchyard.[106] The period in question is moreover the great medieval era of the supreme Virgin, Mary, Mother of God.

That is very probably one of the salient reasons why mazes kept the name *jungfrudanser*, "dances of virgins", much later reinterpreted and used as settings for innocent play amongst youth. Only some of the island chapels or burial sites fragmentarily relayed the original reality and the widespread myth of the dead people – females and sometimes also males as consorts – coming to land.

It may have been from there that the mazes travelled on to the spooky grave fields inland, where ancestors were to be prevented from walking the earth, or even to execution sites, where corpses of wrongdoers had been interred without ceremony. Possibly, however, it was the other way around.

The mazes were also transferred to the sphere of fishery, where they became an almost universal instrument of magic associated mostly, I presume, with efforts to control the fish

shoals through the various directions of winds and currents. Here again, the stages in this development might, as indicated, have taken place in the reverse order.

The two articles together constitute my grand narrative hypothesis on the ritual landscape of the skerries in historical times. That hypothesis, in turn, is part of a broader perspective, also applied here, of the liminality of the border between sea/water and land which finds a wide range of applications in prehistoric times.[107] In the case of the mazes, it reappears in the maritime cultural landscape as a result of a merging of theology, myths and, above all, popular beliefs.

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Notes:

1 Westerdahl 2012.
2 But see Gourina 1957 and Fett 1975.
3 Baudou 2012: 66.
4 The possibility that it is an archetype, or universal, is rejected here; see Ullén 1994. A possible association with the monogram of Christ, based on a combination of the Greek letters Chi-Rho and a final loop at the top as a reminder of the crook of the Good Shepherd is emphasized by Russell, 1976: 19. In any case this is not obvious and appears rather doubtful. In any case, this is not the original meaning.
5 Much of this literature consists more or less of speculations. But see e.g. Krause and Matthews as early as 1893 and 1922 respectively, Purce 1974, Bord 1976, Kraft 1977, 1985a, 1985b, 2006, Kern 1983, Russell 1969, White 2001, Saward 2003, etc. See KLNM: Trojeborg.
6 If this is what it means; *labrys* undoubtedly means "double axe".
7 Kraft 2006. A comprehensive review with instructive maps of a wealth of names of mazes in Northern Europe has been published in Kraft 1986.
8 The Danish ring forts of the latter half of the tenth century, where two have kept the name *Trelleborg* as place names.
9 Kern 1983 is still the standard work, also cf. White 2001.
10 Kraft 1984, 1985b, cf. Ringbom 1938.
11 E.g. Kraft 1977, 1982, 2006, Kraft & Selirand 1990, Bäcksbacka 1973, Selirand 1991, Püüa et al. 2010; for the Baltic in general: Stjernström 1992, Tuovinen 1993. Historiska Nyheter 1995 contains a valuable survey.
12 A view from e.g. Uppland, Sweden, with a dispersed distribution, was delivered by Sundquist 1956.
13 See Maritimt arv… 2001.
14 Westerdahl 1985: 176–184, cf. Grundberg & Sjöberg 1991.
15 Furthermore, this term more appropriately denotes another type of construction (actually Stone Age; Risla 2001).
16 E.g. Kraft 1984.
17 Nummedal 1932, Olsen 1988, 1991, 1996, 2002.
18 Saward, J. & D. 1998.
19 Gourina 1957, Kuratov 1972, Sjumkin 1990.
20 Wikander 1991, 2003, 2005, 2009a, 2009b.
21 West et al. 2009.
22 West et al. op. cit. – Wikander 2005 concerning an occurrence at a well-known harbour site, Foldrøyhamn in

West Norway. On a historically interpreted and dated compass of the fifteenth century at a Swedish harbour, see Hallström 1954.

23 According to a preliminary list by Staffan von Arbin at the Museum of Bohuslän in Uddevalla, there may be at least 150 sites of such carvings in Scandinavia, including Finland. For Bohuslän cf. Lundin 1999.
24 On the astounding name flora, see Kraft 1986.
25 E.g. Kraft 1982: 94f., and on the type with shipwrecked sailors, also Klintberg 2010 (see note 26).
26 Klintberg 2010, type T 98: 354.
27 Cf. Westerdahl 1991, 1993, 1995.
28 Kraft 1977: 65.
29 Broadbent 1987, Broadbent & Sjöberg 1990, Sjöberg 1987, 1991, 1996.
30 Kraft 1982.
31 Olsen 1988, 1991, 1996. Saami have been identified as the builders and users of stone mazes in North Norway and on the islands of the White Sea in Russia by Manyukhin & Lobanova 2002, Olsen 2002 and Hansen & Olsen 2004: 227.
32 Huggert 2000.
33 Sjöberg 1995.
34 Westerdahl 1991, 1993, 1996.
35 Kraft 1981.
36 This figure, however, painted in another colour, seems to be a later addition.
37 Ringbom 1938: 80.
38 E.g. Fett 1975; cf. Krause 1893 and Gourina 1975.
39 Stjernström 1982.
40 Thordrup 1976: 23, Kern 1982: 413. The year 1445 was first proposed by Johan Wikander.
41 Kraft 1991, after Åmark 1960: 213f., pl. 59H.
42 We could perhaps compare with the maze intentionally included inside a new churchyard fence in Styrsö, Västergötland, built in 1840. It is referred to elsewhere in this text. On the context of Styrsö in this respect, see Danbratt & Odenvik 1966: 21–23, 32–41, 75–88.
43 Kraft 1991.
44 Svanberg 1994 (1983).
45 Karlsson 1986.
46 Gotland belonged to Denmark at this time politically, but ecclesiastically was a part of the diocese of Linköping in Sweden.
47 Where a figure, probably male, is depicted, fig. 60, but apparently in a colour different from the rest.
48 From AD 1361 and past the end of the Middle Ages, Gotland also belonged to Denmark.
49 Moltke 1950.
50 Here we find two tiny "compass cards" painted fairly close to the maze.
51 Oral information, but not found in Kraft 1991.
52 This maze has a female figure in it, fig. 61, to some observers an argument for a very early dating of the play *jungfrudans*, "virgin's dance", in Finland. I strongly doubt this interpretation. The maze was originally published by Rancken 1935.
53 Olsen 1996, Kraft 1991.
54 Westerdahl 2010d or 2010e, ms. in prep.
55 E.g. Stigell 1974.
56 Broadbent 1987.
57 Broadbent 2010; the crucial proof is a bear grave, contemporary with a Viking Age (ca. AD 1000) seal-hunting hut excavated at Bjuröklubb, Västerbotten, N. Sweden. The bear grave could be considered an "ethnic signal" of the Saami culture.
58 A recent critique of Broadbent 2010 is Liedgren & Ramqvist 2012. However, to accept my hypothesis it is by no means necessary to agree with Broadbent. The earliest labyrinths may have been laid by ethnic Saami or Swedes, but the pattern of distribution along Swedish medieval coastal colonies is rather striking, apart from the very north, in Finland and in Estonia.
59 Wallerström 1995: 1, 154ff.
60 Grundberg & Sjöberg 1992: 86f.
61 Kraft 1981 on Kuggören in Hälsingland, Sweden (1958), another statement from the Torne archipelago in the very north of Sweden seemingly originally about 1900, referred to by Kraft at the end of Stjernström 1982: 112.
62 Westerdahl 1987, 1989a.
63 According to lichenometric dating, the stone maze at 85 m. a.s.l. at Jävre, Norrbotten – mentioned above – is almost contemporary, but not at the shore.

64 Nylén 1958.
65 Ringbom 1938, Bäcksbacka 1973.
66 Westerdahl 1991, 1993, 1995.
67 Explicitly in an enquiry carried out in the 1930s by Nordiska museet, Stockholm, by Carl Viking, Kråksmåla, Småland.
68 Kalm 1960 (1742, publ. 1746): 185. Interestingly, seals were believed to do the same. The notion that seals actually were the materialized souls of drowned people, although perhaps not necessarily those buried close to the sea, was widespread in the North. It was greatly encouraged by the conflation of the Swedish words *säl*, for seal, and *själ*, for soul. In fact, in Norrland and Österbotten the normal term for a seal was indeed *själ*. Cf. Edlund 1989.
69 Wallerström 1995: 2, 97–103.
70 Westerdahl 2003: 85 (ill. 83–84).
71 Westerdahl 2007b.
72 Stewart 2011.
73 According to a report by Bonns & Sander, 1983. From Harjula & Hellman 1999 emerges a slightly different picture. Since I have been there myself at an early date, I rely on the first report.
74 Cf. the almost contemporary chronicler Peder Swart, published in Swart 1870: 54, who gives this place name. In fact, during my interviews with local people on the island of Gräsö, I found that an alleged burial ground was believed to contain a "Finnish priest" and a number of nuns who were shipwrecked in the area long ago. Westerdahl 1987: 110, 115, registered as C 303, compare with C 446. In the translation of the Åbo episcopal chronicle of Paul Juusten, late sixteenth century, by Schmidt 1942: 65 it is said that bishop no. 23, Arvidus, boarded a small vessel in Närpes, South Österbotten, to go to Sweden, and perished in violent storms together with the dean, Master Conradus, and other of his relatives and servants. No particular locality is mentioned. However, since the prevailing wind and storm direction in the Bothnian Sea is north-easterly and with a departure in Närpes, the Gräsö area would be extremely probable as the end point of the tragedy. This is the oldest record of a specific shipwreck in the Bothnian area. Interestingly there is in fact one single lonely stone maze in the area, on the out-skerry of Norrskär, east of Gräsö.
75 FSH II: 1412.
76 Above, Westerdahl 1991, 1993, 1995.
77 We may remember the stone maze on the churchyard of the medieval church of Fröjel, Gotland (above) and the questions on its relationship to the erection of the fence (and ultimately to the church). A general earlier reference for conditions on Styrsö is Danbratt & Odenvik 1966: 21–23, 32–41, 75–88.
78 Cf. Westerdahl 1989a: 98, Dahlström 1940 and Wennstedt 1988.
79 Westerdahl 1987, 1989a.
80 Broadbent 1987, Broadbent & Sjöberg 1990, Sjöberg 1987, 1991, 1995, 1996, West at al. 2009, also accounted for up to that year in e.g. Westerdahl 1995.
81 Generally on the place of medieval magic in connection with burials, see Caciola 1996, Gilchrist 2008, 2012, Gordon & Marshaller (eds.) 2000. More northern beliefs and rituals of death and burials in early modern times up to the present: Hagberg 1937: Ghosts in chapter XXIV: 545ff., drownings in *När sjön tar*, chapter XXV: 585ff. for Sweden. Swedish legend and tale types on death are outlined by af Klintberg 2010: 50ff; *Death and the Dead.* See various death-related entries in *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens 1–10,* 1927–1942: Begräbnis, (Beigabe), Geist, Gespenst, Leiche, (Seele), (Tod), Wasser; *Totenreich, von Wasser umgeben,* IV: 196, Widergänger. The notion can of course by no means be eliminated as an important factor in prehistoric beliefs. The Swedish archaeologist Erik Nylén, who has been particularly active in Gotland, suggested as early as 1958 that one of the intended purposes of a stone ring or circle concealed inside a Bronze Age burial cairn could be to bind the ghost, apart from also serving as an ornament and a means of protection (Nylén 1958).
82 Jungner 1936, Jungner & Svärdström 1958–70, Vg (= Västergötland) 216, here text after Åhlén 1991.
83 Cf. Sandklef 1943 on comparable cases and traditions to the find of the medieval Bocksten man of Halland. A fairly recent contribution on legendary material is found in af Klintberg 2009.
84 E.g. Floderus 1944.
85 Kalm 1960: 132. The custom of throwing stones at a place where something tragic has happened is otherwise often referred to as "votive". Westerdahl 2007: 93.
86 E.g. Dahlström 1940.
87 *En Þa menn er nu talda oc. scal grava i flœðar male. Þar sem særr mœtesc oc grœn torva.* Keyser, R. & P.A. Munch 1846: Den ældre Gulatings-Lov ch. 23, p. 13.
88 Sandklef op. cit. Another interesting case is a young woman obviously re-buried in a simple coffin-like wooden frame in a bog in Dannike parish, Västergötland, in the latter part of the seventeenth century. Her grave goods may reveal her status as a witch. Her hands were bound, possibly even her feet, if following the custom. Floderus 1944. This custom was also practised later in more central areas of Europe with all sorts of

outcasts. According to Thomas 1988: 711, a stake driven through the corpse's heart was the legally required method of burial for suicides in England until AD 1823! And precautions were sometimes fairly normal even at a later date. In fact, until the First World War it was customary in parts of Lincolnshire to tie the feet of the dead man to prevent him walking.

89 Korpela 2008: 221–224.

90 E.g. a hearth in Broadbent 2010: 88.

91 Söderwall 1884–1918: *iungfru*.

92 Ringbom 1938, cf. Kraft 1984, 1985.

93 Kraft 1977: 71ff.

94 Remains of persons executed in the Middle Ages are also recorded from Anglo-Saxon grave fields in England by Reynolds 2008. On execution sites, see Fendin (ed.) 2008, cf. Lager 2008.

95 Leander Aldenius, Skänninge, questionnaire on mazes in 1933, Nordiska museet, Stockholm. Presently, however, the only possible location for a destroyed stone maze is situated approximately 400 metres from the execution site; research by Olle Lorin, statement by John Kraft.

96 On water as a border between the dead and the living, see Haavio 1947. On wetland burials, see e.g. Sandklef 1943, Floderus 1944.

97 Troels Lund 1914, vol. VI: 64.

98 Storå 1971: 59; Svestad 2007: 53–55 comments on the Saami tradition of burials on holms, skerries and islands, including temporary "summer graves". A standard work on the graves of the Saami is Manker 1961. Saami links to the motif of the maze is indicated by a reference in a rhyming chronicle in the Linnaean papers in London; Wiklund 1909: 27. Here the maze is supposed to protect the reindeers against the wolverine. On East Finland (Carelia) see Korpela 2008: 221–224. Cf. also Edsman 1959, Olsen 1988, 1991, 1996 and Lindblom 1998. In Anglo-Saxon literature, see Barber 1988 on the burials of vampires, Davies 2007: 57f. on water between life and death, Parker Pearson (ed.) 2000: 124f. on burial on islands. Richardson 1993: 96f. mentions the passage across water by funeral processions in England. Among the works of the *Annales* school in France, Schmitt 1998 presents valuable sources, especially ecclesiastical ones, on the ghosts of the Middle Ages, but understandably little on popular representations.

99 Despite the arguments of Gourina 1957 on the White Sea, or Fett 1975 on Scandinavian rock carvings, of which the latter is less definite.

100 Olaus Magnus 1976 (etc.): Historia de gentibus (1555) on sorcerers 2:23, 3:4, 12, 14–15, 5:1, 11:5, 14:19, 18:8, 17, 46). Cf. extensive comments by John Granlund.

101 The legendary priest *Spå Herr Ola*, "the Reverend Wizard Ola" of Mid-Norrland, could serve as an example. He might have been one several known parsons in the area called Olof/Olaus in the sixteenth century, although I have guessed that he even might have been a distant memory of Olaus Magnus himself, in 1518–19 an itinerant seller of indulgences in Norrland; Westerdahl 1989b, 2008: 29.

102 Cf. for England Thomas 1988 (1971), for Sweden Oja 2000.

103 Stewart 2011.

104 Cf. Olsen 1988, 1991, 1996, where burial sites are recorded, but with a different interpretation.

105 Cf. e.g. Clark 1950: its urban application in the arts, lyrics, music, etc. would of course have been unknown to the fishermen of the North.

106 Cf. Gilchrist 2012: 193. Caciola 1996 even suggests that these dances may have had an apotropaic purpose.

107 Westerdahl 2002a, 2002b, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011.

Die rituelle Küstenlandschaft in früher Zeit: Inselkapellen, Begräbnisstätten und steinerne Labyrinthe – Ein Beispiel aus Skandinavien. Teil 2: Geister, Strömungen und Winde – steinerne Irrgärten (Labyrinthe) auf Inseln

Zusammenfassung

Der erste Artikel zum Thema der Kapellen auf Inselgruppen gab einen Überblick über die mittelalterlichen und späteren Kapellenstätten. Keines der bisher bekannten steinernen Labyrinthe, die der in diesem Beitrag besprochenen Gestalt entsprechen, stammt aus vorgeschichtlicher oder heidnischer Zeit. Die frühesten Irrgärten scheinen in etwa gleichen Alters wie die ersten mittelalterlichen Inselkapellen und wahrscheinlich auch insularen »Kirchhöfe« ohne Kapelle zu sein. Die Gesamtverteilung der Labyrinthe legt nahe, dass die mittelalterlichen schwedischen Siedlungen an den Küsten im nördlichsten Norrland, Finnland und Estland ebenfalls aus dieser Zeit stammen.

Im Norden werden Irrgärten oder Labyrinthe in ihren unterschiedlichen Formen und Zusammenhängen in Verbindung mit dem Christentum in Gebrauch gekommen sein. Wohl von Anfang an wurden sie als mächtiges Mittel verstanden, das zunächst als architektonisches Symbol Verwendung fand und später auf Kirchhöfen und Grabfeldern ausgelegt wurde, um für die Toten zu sorgen und sie in ihren Gräbern zu halten. Die katholische Kirche war gegenüber Volksglauben verhältnismäßig tolerant. Magie wurde zwar nicht mit Billigung der Kirche, wohl aber mit der stillschweigenden Unterstützung bzw. der Nachsicht lokaler Priester praktiziert. In der heimischen Folklore galten Letztere zuweilen als die mächtigsten Magier, und manche von ihnen könnten dieses Ansehen sogar genutzt haben, um ihre eigene Stellung in den örtlichen Gemeinden zu stärken. Die späteren protestantischen Geistlichen waren deutlich strenger in ihrer Einstellung gegenüber Magie und Volksglauben.

Denkbar ist, dass das Labyrinth aus diesem Zusammenhang in den Bereich der Inseln und deren Begräbnisstätten gelangte. In maritimen Kulturen war der Schatten des Todes allgegenwärtig, an Land wie auch an Bord der Schiffe. Von allen Berufsgruppen der Frühen Neuzeit waren die Sterberaten unter den Seefahrern, Fischern und Lotsen am höchsten. Die Angst vor dem Tod und vor den Toten, die bei ihrem Ableben keine Segnung empfangen hatten, war unter den betroffenen Familien entlang der vielen »Witwenküsten« weit verbreitet.

Von wesentlicher Bedeutung war die Vorstellung, dass die Seelen der Toten kein Wasser überqueren könnten und somit am wirkungsvollsten auf einer Insel gefangen und ruhig zu halten seien. Die See, die – im Gegensatz zum männlich besetzten Land – als weiblich angesehen wurde, war in gewissem Sinne die Jungfrau, aber auch die Meeresjungfrau. Diese Ideen vermischten sich mit der Legende der Heiligen Sunniva, einem Migrationsmythos über eine Jungfrau, die Schiffbruch erlitt und nahe dem Ufer zu Grabe gelegt wurde.

Das Bild vom spielerischen Tanz einer Jungfrau in einem Labyrinth hängt möglicherweise mit dem »Totentanz« der europäischen katholischen Tradition zusammen. Diese Allegorie stammt aus der gleichen Zeit wie die Darstellungen von Irrgärten, dem 15. Jahrhundert, in dem der Marienkult besonders hervortrat und auch das Wort *jungfru, jomfru* aus dem deutschen »Jungfrau« Eingang in die nordischen Sprachen fand. Hierin ist wohl auch einer der Hauptgründe dafür zu sehen, dass im Norden die Bezeichnung *jungfrudanser*

(»Jungfrauentänze«) für Labyrinthe selbst in einer Zeit beibehalten wurde, als die Irrgärten längst umgedeutet waren und als Kulisse für das arglose Spiel unter Jugendlichen dienten.

Die Labyrinthe erreichten auch den Bereich der Fischerei, wo sie als nahezu umfassendes Instrument der Magie Verwendung fanden, größtenteils vermutlich im Zusammenhang mit dem Versuch, die Bewegungen der Fischschwärme mit Hilfe der unterschiedlichen Richtungen der Winde und Strömungen zu beeinflussen.

Die in den beiden Aufsatzteilen aufgestellte These zur rituellen Landschaft im Bereich der Schären ist Teil einer weiter gefassten Betrachtungsweise hinsichtlich des Ideenkomplexes das Ufer als Übergangs- und Schwellenzone bzw. Grenze zwischen Meer/Wasser und Land betreffend. Labyrinthe und die mit ihnen verbundenen Vorstellungen gehören zur maritimen Kulturlandschaft, in der Theologie, Mythos und Volksglauben verschmolzen sind.

Le paysage côtier rituel autrefois : chapelles insulaires, sites funéraires et labyrinthes en pierre – Un exemple scandinave. 2e partie : esprits, courants et vents – labyrinthes en pierre sur des îles

Résumé

Le premier article sur le thème des chapelles sur des groupes d'îles a fourni un aperçu sur les sites de chapelles médiévaux et plus récents. Aucun des labyrinthes en pierre connus jusqu'à présent, qui correspondent dans cet article à la forme évoquée, ne date de l'époque préhistorique ou païenne. Les plus anciens dédales semblent avoir fait leur apparition environ à la même époque que les premières chapelles insulaires médiévales, et également que les cimetières, sans être des chapelles. Considérée dans son ensemble, la répartition des labyrinthes permet de penser que les colonies suédoises médiévales sur les côtes dans le Norrland le plus septentrional, en Finlande et en Estonie, datent également de cette époque.

Dans le Nord, les labyrinthes auront trouvé dans leurs formes et contextes variés un emploi en relation avec le christianisme. Dès le départ, ils furent compris comme un puissant moyen qui trouva tout d'abord sa vocation en tant que symbole architectonique et, plus tard, fut installé dans les cimetières et les champs de repos pour veiller sur les morts et les maintenir dans leurs tombes. Face aux croyances populaires, l'église catholique était relativement tolérante. Même si la magie ne rencontrait pas l'accord de l'Église, elle n'en était pas moins pratiquée avec le soutien tacite ou l'indulgence des prêtres locaux. Dans le folklore du pays, ces derniers passaient parfois pour les magiciens les plus puissants, et certains d'entre eux auraient même éventuellement mis à profit ce prestige pour renforcer leur position dans les paroisses locales. Plus tard, les ecclésiastiques protestants furent nettement plus stricts dans leur façon de considérer la magie et les croyances populaires.

Il n'est pas impossible qu'il s'agisse du contexte dans lequel le labyrinthe est arrivé dans la région des îles et de leurs sites funéraires. Dans les cultures maritimes, l'ombre de la mort était omniprésente, à terre comme à bord des bateaux. Au début des Temps modernes, de tous les groupes de métiers, le taux de mortalité le plus élevé se retrouvait chez les marins, les pêcheurs et les pilotes. La peur de la mort et des morts qui, au moment de leur décès,

n'avaient pas reçu de bénédiction, était très répandue dans les familles concernées le long des nombreuses « côtes des veuves ».

L'idée, très répandue, que l'âme des morts ne pouvait pas traverser les eaux, débouchait sur la conclusion que l'idéal était de garder les âmes prisonnières sur une île, où elles seraient également plus faciles à calmer. La mer, contrairement à la terre attribuée au domaine du masculin, était d'une certaine manière considérée comme étant la vierge, mais aussi la sirène. Ces idées fusionnaient avec la légende de sainte Sunniva, un mythe de migration sur une vierge qui avait fait naufrage et fut ensevelie près de la rive.

L'image de la danse ludique d'une vierge dans un labyrinthe a probablement une parenté avec la « danse macabre » de la tradition catholique européenne. Cette allégorie date de la même période que les représentations de dédales, le XVe siècle, au cours duquel le culte marial connut son apogée et aussi que le mot « *jungfru, jomfru* », de l'allemand « *Jungfrau* », fit son apparition dans la langue scandinave. Il s'agit ici également de l'une des raisons principales expliquant que la désignation de *jungfrudanser* (danses des vierges) pour les labyrinthes ait été conservée dans le Nord, même à une époque où les dédales avaient subi depuis longtemps une réinterprétation et servaient de coulisse à des jeux innocents d'adolescents.

Les labyrinthes ont également fait leur apparition dans le domaine de la pêche, où ils servaient d'instrument pratiquement global de magie, probablement en grande partie pour tenter d'influencer les migrations des bancs de poisson grâce aux différentes directions des vents et des courants.

La thèse exposée dans les deux articles sur le paysage rituel dans la région des archipels n'est qu'une partie d'une approche plus vaste du complexe d'idées concernant la rive comme zone de passage et de seuil ou frontière entre mer/eau et terre. Les labyrinthes et les idées qui s'y rattachent appartiennent au paysage culturel maritime, dans lequel s'amalgament théologie, mythologie et croyances populaires.