

IN THE LABYRINTH



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BOOKS



In the essays collected here, unpublished in Spain, Karl Kerényi illustrates the multiple aspects (symbolic, iconographic, literary, mythical, ritual) through which the original form of the labyrinth takes shape—whether in prehistoric, ancient, medieval, or modern cultures—an enigmatic sign that has fascinated and obsessed religious, philosophical, psychological, and artistic thought in every era. For Kerényi, the image of the labyrinth must be sought in a ritual and memorial dance, in a journey of initiation into the underworld where one must learn the way back and the emergence into the light. The maze of intricate paths with which Greek myth sought to represent the mysterious theatre of Theseus' struggle against the Minotaur thus becomes the most extraordinary and luminous metaphor for reflection and search.

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Introduction n^[*]Kerényi in the labyrinth

"We prefer tortuous paths to reach the truth."

F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

"Philosophy is often nothing more than the courage to enter a labyrinth."

K. Kraus, *Pro Domo et Mundo*

1. Western culture wanders around *in the labyrinth*. What is more, the very origins of the culture we can define as "Western," its images of identity and otherness, the varied signs of its way of searching for itself, finding itself, losing itself and finding itself again, the myths that narratively condense this historiographical and ideological vicissitude are preserved *in the labyrinth*.

'Being' and 'moving' *in the labyrinth* is a combination that constitutes, first and foremost, a condition of existence and a project of survival. It then becomes a form of symbolic projection, a scheme of self-representation to which the idea of the labyrinth provides a mythical-figurative support structure.

First, therefore, we "find ourselves" *in the labyrinth*, and we must "move" along the path

along which it extends, "pointing to the centre" in order to 'resolve the problem'; and immediately afterwards "seeking a way out" to escape the very logic of that search. This is the fundamental mythologem of religious origin, elaborated in the form of a story and an image within the most ancient Mediterranean civilisations and articulated in multiple variants throughout ancient, medieval and modern mythography.

This mythologem has often been analysed in detail, albeit with different results, and reconstructed in its coherent entirety by archaeological, historical-religious, historical-literary, linguistic, iconological and disciplines^[1]. Therefore, it will not be necessary to evoke its entire narrative movement, which is well known and which, apart from everything else, runs the risk of distracting attention from the thematic-figurative axis (the sign, the myth, the image of *the Labyrinth*) and shifting it to the multiple literary "functions" of the mythical story (the characters, the plot of their exploits, the assumptions and consequences). In other words, the danger is losing sight of the overall unity of the facets, allowing oneself to be drawn in by the vicissitudes of the specific narratives encompassed by the myth, or at least in the most complete and complex form that the myth takes. In other words, there is a risk of following the numerous 'stories' as they unfold and intertwine, losing the continuous thread that makes them a single 'story'. And as we can see, far beyond a mere play on words, this is already a labyrinthine problem.

In any case, those who want specific elements and illustrated summaries can turn to the broad scope of Plutarch, a scholar and at the same time a moralist and pessimist, who, in a justly famous passage (*Theseus*, 15-21, pp.

6c-9e) managed to concentrate ancient testimonies into a single narrative parable, thus incorporating the most disparate mythical stratifications into a compact textual edifice: as if he wanted to re-establish the infinite complexity of the labyrinthine figure through the sinuosities and contradictions of writing, a collage of sources and conflicting opinions. Either the chests of the great ancient encyclopaedists will be reopened: Diodorus Siculus (*Library*, I 61 ff.), Pliny (*Natural History*, XXXVI 85 ff.), Apollodorus (*Library*, III 1, and *Epitome*, I 9 ff.), Isidore of Seville (*Etymologies*, XV 2 36); or we will dig into the deep folds of those cryptic encyclopaedists of wisdom that are the learned poets, who sometimes preserve, under the admirably compressed ice of their verses, mythographic fossils and the bones of traditions that cannot be recovered in any other way after the shipwreck of ancient culture: Virgil (*Aeneid*, V 588 ff. and VI 14 ff.), Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, VIII 151-259), but also the very archaic Homer (*Iliad*, XVIII 590 ff.), with his scholiasts admirably imbued with rare doctrines.

Quite apart from its purely religious values, the labyrinthine mythologem has left an important mark on the history of European culture since the most remote origins *as an abstract model of conjecturality* ^{d^[2]}, of the very form of dialectical thought: in other words, a form of thought that overcomes obstacles by attacking them, not by eliminating or bypassing them; that fights against the unexpected by devising plans that are always appropriate to the goal and the need, never repetitive, but rather elastically speculative and at the same time deforming with respect to the object of competition. The ancients gave this form of thought the

name of *mêtis* ^[3]: the ability to adhere firmly to reality in a complicit, chameleon-like, ambiguous, and ductile manner: that illusionist force, that cunning and plasticity allow victory precisely where no solution or resolution would find its way in the common intellect.

Like Daedalus, the ingenious craftsman who devised it, it can hide the excessive and threatening truth of the Minotaur (but also the 'other' truth, equally ineffable and secret, which can only be conquered by traversing the tangled and ever-interrupted path): like that Daedalus from whom it takes its name ^[4], the labyrinth condenses within itself *mêtis*, the conjecturality capable of deception and malice in which the paradoxical character, the extension of the very logic on which it is based 'to the limit' of what is possible, and even its decisive reversal, the final *twist* that allows us to 'retrace our steps' safely, are already implicit.

And it is precisely on this level that the labyrinthine mythologem opens up to a broader dimension, to a philosophical and hermeneutical horizon, imbued from its origins with sacredness and a dangerous proximity to truth and death, since 'death' and 'truth', coinciding, await in the heart of the labyrinth the arrival of the hero endowed with *mêtis*, shrewd and at the same time aggressive, enigmatic insofar as he is dialectical. In its mythical-religious filigree, what we could safely call, in the words of Blumenberg ^[5], an 'absolute metaphor' now shines through in all its depth: a metaphorical structure that cannot be reduced to strictly logical and conceptual terms, a radical anthropological scheme whose illustration allows for the analysis of broad spaces of collective imagery. As an 'absolute' metaphor, the

labyrinth embodies the original dialectical scheme, the archaic and violent association of dialectic and death that Greek culture established in Oedipus's inquisitive relationship with the Sphinx and in the myth of Homer's death, who, unable to solve the riddle, tremendously innocent, posed to him by fishermen on the island of Ios (a very banal riddle, mind you: and all the more tragic in its outcome the more insignificant the subject of the challenge), "died of despondency" (Heraclitus, *fr.* 56 Diels-Kranz). That is, the labyrinth reveals in its very figurative form, as an absolute metaphor nourished by religious and mythological baggage, the structure of dialectical conjecture, of pointing to the end of the hermeneutic process as the end itself, implicit in Theseus' journey-to-the-centre and journey-back, as in all subsequent variants of the mythologem.

Thus, *interpretation*, the dialectical flow from one turn of argument to the next, always following the same path and always believing it to be varied, is the thread of Ariadne that *logos* provides to Western reflection. The archaic cruelty of the enigma, of which multiple traces remain in the labyrinthine mythologem (the devouring Monster, the sacrificed youths, the courageous venture of the warrior-sage into the tangle of deceptive paths, the killing of the Lord of the Secret, the exit and then the suicide of the Father due to the forgetting of the enigmatic knot of the white or black candles), becomes cerebral in dialectics, softening the bloody harshness of the origins: "Victory is no longer won in the drunken moment of mockery, but must be untangled through the entanglement of argumentation" ^[6]. Deep down, "the wise man is a warrior who knows how to defend himself" ^[7]: and Theseus is the prototype of the warrior-sage who knows how to advance along the tortuous path of

knowledge and truth that leads him to confront the Minotaur sphinx, mistress of the Centre (both of the labyrinth and of knowledge): he is a wise man who knows how to defend himself because he attacks and because he has learned to translate wisdom into praxis and into the action of conquest.

The deepest truth of the labyrinth is that a wise interpreter is needed to untie its enigmatic knot and translated to a thread dialectic; that that "unleashing" is a battle in which what is at stake is, on the one hand, death, and on the other, knowledge; and that therefore the wise man is a hero, a combatant, who is required not to be deceived, and even more, to defeat deception with its own weapons: that is, to deceive deception by unmasking it and finding, first, the centre that can be used as an axis and, second, the 'way out'.

In this sense, the enigma, divination, the journey through the labyrinth, the mystery-initiation process, the philosopher's dialectical argumentation and the politician's shrewd diagonal strategy can all be reduced to the same archetypal and hermeneutic scheme.

In that place of contradictions that is the labyrinthine mythologem (a place of contradiction itself, even, and of Ja contradiction as a symbolic-iconographic emblem), behind the literary divergences and interpretative nuances, one senses a solid and coherent network of meaning, which is both metaphorical and mythological at the same time. And the dispersion of concrete features, which has misled more than one interpreter, can thus be compensated for by distinguishing the major problematic knots through which the labyrinthine mythologem lives.

2. It was precisely to "re-sewing" this journey

unravelling thread of the labyrinthine mythologem, as well as to indicate the hidden points of suture between the mythical-religious moment and the metaphorical-philosophical or symbolic-iconographic moment, to which Karl Kerényi applied himself in the various texts produced over a period of some twenty years and which we present here once again in a single volume.

Following the first study, from 1941, we have included various occasional interventions and non-specialised collaborations, in which Kerényi rethinks, enriches and refines the basic ideas set out in his inaugural work: all the writings are autonomous and at the same time linked, in a chain of genetic filiation, to the previous and subsequent ones, with a uniform hermeneutic density that is articulated by extending almost in volutes or, we might say, 'in spirals' from one text to another.

This formal coincidence between the problem and its scientific and literary crystallisation cannot fail to exert an immediate attraction: and this is already a first element (precisely literary, or stylistic) that familiarity with Kerényi's pages gradually softens, but which remains a topic worth reflecting on. It is also worth pausing to examine a kind of 'X-ray' of Kerényi's thinking in search of its hidden roots, h s^[8] that have so far been scarcely revealed' which are deeply embedded in the philosophical, ethnological-anthropological and historiographical thinking of the early 20th century. Never before attempted systematically, this archaeological excavation (of which these pages can obviously only provide a general outline) could hold extraordinary surprises and allow us to begin reading Kerényi's research beyond the predictable and insignificant frameworks established thus far.

established (irrationalism, phenomenological anti-historicism, etc.), projecting it at least onto its natural horizon of reference: that of the great European culture of the interwar period.

Anyone who reads the studies collected in this book following the same project fundamentally "philological" project for which the coordinator has been responsible and which Kerényi, accustomed to manipulating and recomposing his studies according to an ever-changing guiding idea, would most likely have loved, will quickly realise that, for Kerényi, the labyrinthine problem is anything but a matter of pure historical-religious and scientific reflection.

The numerous pages Kerényi devoted to the relationship between literature, art and mythology (for example, his correspondence with Thomas Mann, his research on the link between psychoanalysis and mythological science, his writings on Freud, Jung, Heidegger, Mann himself, Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Homer and Hölderlin)^[9] indicate that no problem was ever exempt from personal, theoretical or aesthetic implications for him.

On the contrary, in a sense that is profoundly Greek, and just as deeply linked to the discourse on the labyrinth and the enigma to which we have alluded above, every problem is for Kerényi, etymologically speaking, something that is "thrown forward", an obstacle to be overcome, with the same festive, joyful and heroically Thesian style with which the journey into the labyrinth is approached. That "dark source of dialectics" that Giorgio Colli has pointed out in the archaic kinship between philosophical thought and the religious-mystical enigma reappears from the very first page of Kerényi's work on the subject of the labyrinth. The search is

above all a mystery that must be faced in an initiatory sense. In Greek, the verb *mueîn*, from which the noun *mysterion*, derives, alludes to 'to arrive at the centre', to "complete", even before "initiation" as "beginning": for Kerényi, the mystery that lies within the labyrinth is, from the outset, its endless centre. And that place in which consciousness is contained, the possession of which requires death and rebirth.

Most of the time, Kerényi himself clearly states in the preface to *Niobe*, a scientific question opens up unexpected paths, both in the mind of the author and in that of the reader: it becomes a labyrinth, assuming its enigmatic-dialectical features and demanding the patience of the reader to bravely retrace the same twists and turns of the writer, 'almost tracing the twists and turns of a spiral', in order to reach the 'central point' [10].

However, even if we adhere to the seductive and persuasive power of Kerényi's argument, it is difficult not to acknowledge, at least as natural, the doubts expressed by one of Kerényi's most intelligent and, at the same time, most constructively critical disciples: Angelo Brelich, who, in completely rethinking his teacher's theoretical foundations in [11], pointed to the 'original state of fusion' (*Verwobenheit*) between man and world, between subject and object of hermeneutics, as the most significant danger in Kerényi's methodology. And it was precisely this concept that came to Kerényi from an extensive Central European cultural tradition, philosophically centred on the perspective of phenomenology and reflected, on a scientific level, in the schools of Leo Frobenius and Walter E Otto.

The use of the testimonies of poets,

along with those of the classical tradition and with an authority that carries the same weight —as Brelich himself observed elsewhere— ^[12], as well as the insistence on the idea of

'contact' or 'familiarity' with the subject matter, conceals dangers of aestheticism, aggravated by the 'rhapsodic' procedure of writing.

But, if we look closely, what really interests Kerényi is not the philological verification of data but, through a criterion he himself defined as

"existential philology", the approach to that "secret man" whom, in his opinion, mythological science must seek out and analyse, and whose traits are known to poets before scientists and better than them.

In the initial movement of *Studies of the Labyrinth*, however, it is also possible to glimpse a certain desire to distinguish himself from psychoanalytic methodology, especially that of Jung, whom Kerényi was approaching at the very time that saw the birth of their collaboration on the *Prolegomena to a Scientific Study of Mythology* (1942) and the gestation of *Studies on the Labyrinth* (which is dedicated to Jung). An identical objection, despite numerous theoretical dependencies, clearly acknowledged, was implicitly confirmed by Kerényi throughout the book with regard to Otto and Frobenius, the two great teachers of his youth.

We will not dwell here on Kerényi's variously interwoven relationships with these two great scholar ^[13]. What can be highlighted, however, is Kerényi's increasingly decisive distancing himself from the positions of both: his departure from Otto's views began in earnest with *Niobe* and reached its full maturity in

the years immediately following *Studies in the Labyrinth*, triggering a process of abandonment made up of cautious distinctions, approaches, and nuanced stances ^[14]; however, his distancing from Frobenius was slower, as demonstrated by the persistence of some of his fundamental categories throughout Kerényi's work.

For example, the persistence of the idea of *Ergriffenheit*, that is, the enigmatic and obscure 'being seized', being dominated and guided by a truth that transcends the intellect and scientific-problematic research itself, sinking its roots and reasons into the dark depths of the unconscious. 'Being seized' is therefore essentially 'being possessed', 'being invaded'. And perhaps not foreign to Kerényi's thinking is a dark and profound link between *Ergriffenheit* and the archaic deceptive 'web' of the Greek *grîfos*, with which it enveloped and bound the *mêtis* to its prey, in exactly the same way as the spirals and thousand paths of the labyrinth.

A similar state of absolute submission to the hermeneutic object is linked to the distinction of a synicological prototype of *the Weltbild*, that is, of an integral sphere of existence and reality. The concept of "prototype" (*Urbild*) will also play a decisive scientific role in Kerényi's thinking during his years of study on the subject of the labyrinth, especially in the increasingly clear identification of a relationship with Jungian "depth psychology", which precisely at that time (between the 1930s and 1940s) introduced, with marked theoretical insistence, the concept and function of the "archetype".

At the same time, Kerényi's interest in the problems debated

by Husserlian philosophy grew in Kerényi because of his association with the group gathered by Leo Frobenius around the project of a systematic 'cultural morphology', first in Munich (from 1922 to 1925) and then (from that year onwards) in Frankfurt.

For example, Adolf Jensen (an author whose findings Kerényi also used liberally in his "Studies on the Labyrinth") based his thinking on the concept of *Ergriffenheit*, defining it, with a frank terminology typical of Frobenius, as "suspension" ^[15], as a phenomenological "putting in parentheses", exquisitely Husserlian in nature, of science and its criteria for verifying truth.

Thus, for Kerényi, *Ergriffenheit* is, in the scientist's destiny, the non-scientific reason for science, the hidden intent that drives their work. It is not the scientist who "chooses" his subject of study for strictly disciplinary reasons; on the contrary, "the fundamental feeling of 'being seized' is that truth chooses us and not that we have chosen truth. But it is precisely this feeling of 'being chosen' that leads us to same time to assume our "responsibilities" ^[16].

The complementary complementary of the Kerényian positions with regarding to the of the philosophy and research anthropological-ethnological of the interwar period between the wars is obvious and allows us to get to the heart of the point of view that presides over the "Studies on the Labyrinth". Nor is it coincidental that it is precisely in *Paideuma*, the journal of the Frobenius-Institut, in whose first issue Jensen presented his phenomenological ideas at the time of the commemoration of the late master, Kerényi published some years later a quite remarkable approach

quite remarkable approach to the categories of 'archetypal' and

"culturally typical," which had originated respectively in the Jungian reflection on psychological psychological "archetypes" —already articulated, as we have said, in the early 1930s— and in the work carried out in Frankfurt on "cultural morphology" in the field of ethnology (Adolf Jensen, Ewald Volhard, Frobenius himself) and in the field of classical humanism (Walter F. Otto, Karl Reinhardt and others) ^[17].

In the 'Studies on the Labyrinth', in the work on *Hermes* (1943), later included in 1949 in *Myths and Mysteries* alongside, among other things, a text on *Image, Figure and Archetype*, from 1946; and above all in the important theoretical work *Umgang mit Göttlichem* (1955), psychological and ethnographic points of view converge in a global rethinking of the methodological problems on which historical inquiry is based.

3. Once again, the contiguity, or rather the solidarity, even genetic, between Kerényi's thinking and the European cultural debate as a whole (despite the harsh contradictions and bitter controversies in which he himself did not always manage to see the 'right path' with balanced clarity) demonstrates how profound and decisive Kerényi's contribution was, as a leading figure, to the great project that not many years ago Giorgio Agamben, in a text on Aby Warburg (another great Father who only recently, after a long delay, emerged from the labyrinth of our oblivion), defined as "science without a name".

That project aspired to the maturation of a "future 'anthropology of Western culture' in which philology, ethnology, history and biology converge with an 'iconology

of the interval' in which the incessant symbolic effort of social memory operates"; and in that radically anthropological and radically labyrinthine project, the name of Aby Warburg can be placed alongside "those of Mauss, Sapir, Spitzer, Kerényi, Usener, Duniévil, Benveniste and many, but not very many, others" [18].

Very by below of the assumptions of fictitious "identities," Kerényi extended a parable of problems that touches on the extreme regions of modern knowledge in substantial harmony, often in extraordinary "resonance" (to use a term dear to him) with the experiences and surveys carried out throughout Europe. His originality, his immoderation, and at times even his intolerance and incomprehension of the reasons of others are indisputable; it is equally true, however, that Kerényi is constrained by the strictly "phenomenological" perspective to which too many exegetes and detractors have sought to limit him. And this book seems to indicate this perhaps more than any other.

For although it is true that *Studies in the Labyrinth* begins with a page that is even 'mystical' by Romano Guardini, and although it is true that the initial gesture denounces the return to phenomenological discourse around the *mysterium* (think of Rudolf Otto's *mysterium tremendum* in *The Sacred*), in the 'suspension' of judgement and the search at the moment of *Ergriffenheit*, one cannot fail to notice how unprecedented and essentially revolutionary the referential horizon of Kerényi's 'mystery-labyrinth' is.

First and foremost, the allusion to Guardini is a translational way of referring, on one level, to Gabriel Marcel, to whom the observation about the

difference between 'mystery' and 'problem', and, on another level, to Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, which Guardini comments on in that passage. And from this perspective, the opening of the "mystery-labyrinth" and the "problem-labyrinth", against the backdrop of Rilke's poetics, is not too far removed from the interest that Kerényi would show, especially in the last years of his life, in the "philosophy of myth" and by the problems of the "demystification". On the other hand, Kerényi's approach to the problems of language, and in particular "mythical language", derived in one respect from the parallel attention of Walter F. Otto, and in another from a substantial proximity of his thinking to certain Heideggerian formulations and, in a broader sense, to those of the "philosophy of existence".

It is not that Kerényi's thinking can be inscribed without residue in the theoretical-problematic circle of the philosophy of existence: the cultural assumptions are too different, the heuristic instruments too distorted. It is a fact, however, that precisely the lexical-conceptual instrumentation, the series of allusive connotations, the wordplay, the ' ' of "suitcase words" that stand out mainly in the connective tissue of the "Studies on the Labyrinth" and in many other essays from the same period, reveal an impressive identity with the key categories of existentialist thought, especially in its Heideggerian formulation.

The Rilkean quotation, implicit once again in the introduction to "Studies on the Labyrinth", is also an indication of a direct and profound knowledge of the poet of *Duino*, whose influence on Kerényi is only comparable to that of Hofmannsthal or la de Thomas Mann, entre sus

contemporaries. And it is to this influence, to these literary passions, that the fundamental elements of Kerényi's hermeneutics (Nietzsche, Bachofen, depth psychology, Walter F. Otto) are linked. Kerényi devoted important pages to Rilke in 1955, in a text whose title (*Geistiger Weg Europas [The Spiritual Path of Europe]*) alludes to the labyrinthine mythologem, to the path of the 'meditative pilgrims', and at the same time recalls the contemporary Heideggerian [metaphor](#) [19].

And although in his 1955 book Kerényi does not spare his critical gaze towards Heidegger's position, which he essentially reduces to its distant Nietzschean and, in poetic terms, Rilkean roots, he is not without reason to show interest in the philosopher's interpretation of Rilke in *What Are Poets For?* where, paraphrasing Rilke, Heidegger speaks of the 'lack of foundation' or 'abyss', adding that 'the age that lacks foundation is suspended over the abyss', and then completing his discourse with the activation of an authentic metaphorical labyrinth and thesis: 'Assuming that, in general, some decisive turn is still in store for this empty age, it can only come about and take place if the world is turned upside down, that is, if it is turned upside down from the abyss'. 'In the age of the night of the world', concludes Heidegger, as if providing a verbal-conceptual garment for the idea and mythologisation put into poetry by Rilke, 'the abyss of the world must be recognised, lived and suffered to the end'. However, a hero is needed; it will be the poet, the ancient 'man of *mêtis*', Theseus, 'lord of the enigma of the labyrinth', now subject to the harsh law of time:

"For this to happen, however, there must be

someone who descends into the abyss, to the bottom" [20].

As for Heidegger, and already for Rilke and even earlier for Hölderlin, for Kerényi too the journey into the abyss is the poet's undertaking. And equally that of the scientist, 'gripped' by the mystery of problems, who is similar to and a brother of the poet.

"The legitimacy of the hermeneutist," wrote Kerényi in 1963, "never lies in the *mysterium*, in the inexpressible that must not be given expression, but in 'oracularity'. Almost all great creations of the spirit conceal something of this kind: something not fully expressed, 'oracular', which is already in a certain way determined for future humanity. This, then, is what must be brought to light by giving it extensive form in the language of those who are here with us today (but who were already ancestors to the poet). This is the true hermeneutic task, the supreme task."

The conclusion of the first chapter, "The Spiritual Path of Europe," from the book of the same title: "It is inconceivable that we should continue along this path, which a poet has ventured to explore in depth. We are firm in this: in interrupted poetry. On the contrary, the spiritual path of Europe is not interrupted" [22].

Towards that place where Valéry's *Jeune Parque*'s cry echoes; towards that abyss where the limits of the voice are veiled by tears and language freezes in the desert of silence, points the discourse of the poet-scientist-philosopher Kerényi, reader and exegete of poets, scientists and philosophers. With a conceptual and syntactical movement not too far removed, Paul Valéry himself (another great poet-scientist-philosopher of the 20th century) spoke of that

labyrinthine place as the seat of the 'ineffable', the "source of tears": since "our tears are the expression of our inability to express ourselves" [23].

The labyrinthine journey into the abyss points to that spring of tears which is also the radical source of meaning and language. This path is spiritual because it accepts and leads to the depths of the great initiatory challenge of dying in order to be reborn. This is what Kerényi means when he writes, in 'Studies on the Labyrinth', that "To awaken the mythological reality of the labyrinth, we must imagine it within ourselves and transport ourselves to it."

Unlike Heidegger, however, and on a level that is at once philosophical and historical-religious, as well as literary, Kerényi reaffirms his humanist faith when he asserts that the world of mythology is 'a world of man': that is, a world 'totally oriented towards man'. And in a dimension of genuine controversy with Heidegger, "man must consider that he finds himself in a condition of being open, open to the outside, a condition that does not correspond to 'being thrown' (*Geworfenheit*), but rather to 'being woven' (*Verwobenheit*)" [24]. Walter F. Otto and Leo Frobenius, together with Rilke re-read through Guardini, with whom the 'Studies on the Labyrinth' opens, allow Kerényi to relate directly to phenomenological and existentialist inquiry, surpassing or supplanting Heidegger, however, in a direction that has not yet been sufficiently highlighted, but which is increasingly proving to be decisive in clarifying Kerényi's thinking in its entirety, a thinking that is based, in fact, on the lean, slender and fundamental "Studies on the Labyrinth"; in them, indeed, the answer to

Heidegger is clear and direct: in the idea of *Geworfenheit*, Kerényi seems to select and rescue that of 'project' (*Entwurf*). A 'project', a 'throwing oneself forward' towards the

'problem' and the 'mystery' is in reality the labyrinthine journey of inquiry; and it is an initiatory journey because his project tends towards the exit, towards the completion that lies in the ' ' (sinking into death) to return to exit,

"demortalised", from its dark spirals.

The infinite line of birth-death-rebirth, which constitutes the supporting idea of the labyrinth, is also the figurative support of the mystical wisdom reaffirmed by Kerényi. Philosophical, figurative, dance and sign expressions are nothing more than successive and different configurations of an idea, which is precisely that of the "infinity of the sequence life-death-life, which always repeats itself" like the spiral line entrusted with the task of visually *expressing* the profound and "silent" "meaning".

"Through death, even in death", sang Euripides, whom Kerényi quotes and agrees with. The essential thing is the prophetic-poetic certainty that this journey is a step, a crossing: a *poros*, no more and no less; and that deep down, as 'Life itself' obscurely knows, a solution will be found; that, after all, there is always a way out. With this certainty, optimistic in a humanistic way, the main study of this book concludes, with a light and joyful step, to the rhythm of a dance, and the gesture engraved on the tombstone that invites us to sink into the abyss,

"descending, descending to Orcus, with slow steps".

But to come out reborn.

4. The contradictory quality, typical of a 'man of *mêtis*', that characterises Kerényi's thinking is

luminous in the pages of this book.

As Furio Jesi wrote, evoking the ancient image of the astronomer who passes with his head through a first crystalline sphere of Ptolemaic cosmology to immerse himself, "at his own risk and at night, in the starry sky beyond" (an image commonly understood as the representation of a "protagonist of the 'art of questioning'"), when faced with Kerényi's work as a whole, we are led to wonder 'whether he is not rather a protagonist of the "art of speaking": not necessarily oracles (and Kerényi, even in moments of greatest and most explicit intransigence, did not want to present himself as an oracle), but words of contradiction' ^[25].

For this reason, the labyrinth, *signum contradictionis*, is also an existential emblem, as well as a scientific and cultural one, under whose sign Kerényi wished to operate.

And, not without reason, Mircea Eliade has also frequently taken the stone labyrinth as a paragon and hermeneutic, as well as heuristic, scheme for his life and work: 'A labyrinth is the defence, sometimes magical, of a centre, of a wealth, of a meaning. Penetrating it can be an initiatory ritual, as can be seen from the myth of Theseus. This symbolism constitutes the model of any existence which, through a series of trials, advances towards its own centre, towards itself, towards the *Atman*, to use the Indian term... On several occasions I have been aware of leaving a labyrinth or finding the thread... I had felt depressed, oppressed, lost... Naturally, I had not said to myself, "I am lost in the labyrinth," but in the end I had the feeling of having emerged victorious from a labyrinth. It is an experience that everyone has known. But it must also be said that life is not composed of a single labyrinth: the trial is

repeats itself" [26].

But Kerényi's labyrinth is above all in language: in Kerényi's language, which has always driven translators mad with the dizzying spirals of his metaphors, allusions and puns, multiple, often contradictory stratifications extend in the form of incrustations, veins and faults. The semantic and linguistic tectonics to which we have alluded, partly in relation to the hypothetical connection with Heidegger, are highly complex in Kerényi's thought. Here we only wish to draw and fix the reader's attention on some salient features, especially those in which the deepest cultural roots emerge, amalgamated and homogenised by irony and a sense of distance.

The idea of mystery serves Kerényi above all to cautiously introduce the other member, fundamental in "Studies on the Labyrinth", the archetype/prototype pair. Much could be said about the affinity of the archetype with a more Hegelian than Jungian idea of the history of the spirit. It is clear that Kerényi himself, at the beginning of his discourse, links the archetypal moment to a greater proximity to the 'world of ideas' rather than to an unconscious energetic-philosophical image, which he considers dominant in Jungian and Jungian-influenced thought[26].

The Kerényian archetype (this is a decisive point that exegesis has not yet sufficiently illuminated) is closer to the "original form" of phenomenological thought, of distant Hegelian origin, than to the energetic mechanics and dynamics, mechanistic as a whole, of the Jungian perspective. If we want to

find precursors and fellow travellers for Kerényi, we will have to look rather to the literary morphology of André Jolles (*Einfache Formen* [*Einfache Formen*] are from 1930) or, at most, in the archetypal mythology applied by Northrop Frye to literary criticism or in the "typology" of the function-ambiguity in poetic language proposed in 1830 and revised in 1947 and later in 1953 by William Empson^[28].

The hermeneutic proximity of Jolles' idea about the rooting of literary "simple forms" in language, which is expressed by them in various "modalities of discourse", and about of the "mental disposition" that determines specific "worldviews", to Kerényi's research on myth as a form of relationship with reality (and not a "way of thinking")^[29].

Kerényi expressly refers to "simple forms of the labyrinth" several times, establishing their origin in prehistoric times. This is directly related to the idea that forms, such as mythology and its linguistic-communicative expression, have a life divided into stages that are identifiable with those of human existence and correspond, on the level of large forms, figures, or historical configurations, with historical-cultural cycles. This panorama, which takes only generic terminology from evolutionism, brings us back to Leo Frobenius' theory of 'cultural areas' and his morphology of 'world images' of all cultures.

For Kerényi in his 'Studies on the Labyrinth', 'living mythology' represents the moment of expressiveness of mythologems; the question is of

special significance in the case of the labyrinthine mythologem, linked precisely to the idea of life and rebirth after death. But the mythologem, alive in prehistory (when it spoke with immediate resonance), dies a slow death in the historical periods closest to us: and just as it is possible to recognise a 'time of life' coinciding with the moment of its full expression (which is also the life of Mythology), the episode *de ese lento agonizar y extinguirse*,

"falling silent" and "losing meaning", can be divided historiographically into a "time of agony" and a definitive "time of death".

This vicissitude of the life and death of the labyrinth sign and the mythologem that gives it meaning is a perfect example of *Entwicklungsgeschichte*. The idea of an evolution and decline of the labyrinthine mythologem is, moreover, directly expressed by Kerényi, who uses the term *Entwicklung* precisely when he alludes to the decline of the mythological (and later philosophical) idea in the pure child's play of consumer civilisation.

But, to emphasise that this is not a naturalistic evolution but rather a substantial history of ideas and the cultures that embody them, Kerényi insists on the profound semantic value of the life and death of the mythologem and the sign: "A full life is also full of meaning, just as a full meaning is also full of life," he writes.

Meaning is the life of the sign, just as existence is the life of mythology and the mythologem. But the labyrinth cannot, by its very nature, be emptied of meaning and life: precisely because it is a mythologem of life and rebirth, in every death it is also reborn, specularly in both form and content. Its

final rebirth, paradoxical, takes place in the time of life. And, as the supreme paradox, it is precisely scientific activity that sets it in motion: the researcher must know that he is allowed to work only with materials from the time of death, and, rather than assuming that he can read into the time of life and in its original sense, he must, like a new Theseus-like hero of *mêtis*, find a way out, indicating where the true enigma lies, bringing life back to the heart of the labyrinth, just at the moment when he ascertains and produces its death. The evocative force itself, the vital energy that the labyrinthine mythologem instils in the poet, must be experienced by the scientist by abandoning himself to mystery. Far from referring literally to Rudolf Otto's *mysterium*, Kerenyi's *mysterion* aims to be a hermeneutic movement, an immersion in the archetype through which the scientist can restore the prototypes to their authentically historical-religious (i.e., cultural-historical) dimensions ^[30].

5. It has been called a hermeneutic 'movement'. And this image of a dance movement, of the 'infinity' towards which and through which the line extends and is endowed with meaning, in the mythologem and in the labyrinthine form, summarises all the work of the 'Studies on the Labyrinth' and other texts we have compiled.

Movement is the origin of the line; and the moment it originates, it is already fulfilled: in other words, it is unitary and organic, and when it articulates itself, it does so according to a natural rhythm. And this movement is autonomous in terms of its meaning; 'like all musical manifestations of man', it is 'endowed with meaning', it beats rhythmically by its very nature. What is more, like the

As Kerényi himself states elsewhere, it is mythology itself that moves the materials it contains and, so to speak, transports them: it is "something immobile and mobile at the same time; it is something material and not at all static, although susceptible to change".

As the essays on dance collected here show, dance is not only a heuristic key to unlocking the labyrinthine treasure trap. Dance is rather an expressive channel of Being which, 'with its truth, speaks through form, gesture, movement': so says Otto in a study on the *human figure and dance* that Kerényi mentions. But where Otto writes *das Sein*, Kerényi probably thinks, using the Heideggerian term, of *das Seiendes*, that is, of that 'being' which translates the Greek on, concealing what Heidegger defines as the enigma of being.

Less incredible, though infinitely more significant also with regard to Kerényi's overall stance towards Nietzsche, is the absolute silence about the many vibrant and often tumultuous pages that the philosopher devoted to the same subject, as well as those referring to the labyrinth as an 'existential form' and to the 'Minotaur of consciousness', which lacerates and tears apart by lodging itself in the 'labyrinths of consciousness'. And we must say that these are pages that could have offered Kerényi infinite stimuli for reflection, precisely because in them Nietzsche drags the labyrinth into the sphere of "signifying", tearing it away from the parchment-like administration of archaeologists and historians of the classical religions of his time, and, on the contrary, offering it renewed to contemporary thought. But that's how it is: silences also have their meaning. Particularly in the case of dance, Nietzsche

He focused on the idea of 'rhythm' as a 'compulsion' to 'get in tune' and on 'dance' as therapy against the loss of the 'right tension and harmony of the soul': and this approach could be reflected in Kerényi's work without too much significant deviation ^[31].

Labyrinth and dance thus appear linked in Kerényi by a thematic-archetypal, semantic, formal and figural solidarity. Through form, through gesture and through movement, the labyrinthine mythologem is also expressed. And therefore, dance represents its radical essence and meaning, both in concept and in its figural representations. This is an element of absolute importance in scientific (and, for Kerényi, also philosophical and mystical) reflection on the labyrinth. It is the first time, with Kerényi, that this quid has been brought to light and polished and refined with such precision and breadth: this alone would make the book the reader holds in their hands invaluable.

But there is more.

The labyrinthine figural ornament, writes Kerényi, is a *Linienreflex*, a 'linear reflection', according to the translation proposed by Anyelo Brelich, of a mythological 'idea'. Like a *mnemonic trace*, the linear reflection does precisely that, in a completely natural, spontaneous way, in the enigmatic mirror of its own elusive spiral-like movement, the 'prototype' that is enclosed within it, like a quid, a seed, potentially ready to germinate, and which lies within itself waiting, reaching out towards expression.

To make us suspect that the Kerenyian line is being completely rethought from a historical-cultural perspective, and to make us predict that the time will soon come when we can abandon the stage of apology or

defamation, we would at least like to mention the name of Ernst Robert Curtius here.

This is undoubtedly the least expected name for those who, until now, have approached Kerényi with the suspicion with which one regards great heterodox thinkers, those irregulars who are too dangerously open to the contribution of disparate skills and interests, without even the academic guarantee of 'interdisciplinarity'. While Curtius, in his scientific masterpiece a^[32], which even today remains the most striking example of a historical-cultural *summa* and a systematic attempt at a wide-ranging history of ideas, still appears as the *monstrum* of the most refined and orthodox European academic culture, the "untouchable" of historical-literary disciplines.

But, on closer inspection, the series of conceptual, even terminological, thematic and problematic references in Curtius' work that refer to an ideological area and an epistemic shift in which Kerényi himself plays a leading role is extraordinary.

From the first chapter, devoted to European literature, Curtius describes his hermeneutic object in terms of a 'history of cultural forms'. Cultural history is, above all, a history of forms and genres, which are both cultural and literary phenomena: 'European literature is diachronically coextensive with European culture', Curtius writes (p. 20). And such coextension, as the development of the work later shows, is much more than purely chronological.

Curtius's scheme is that of an archaeology of Western knowledge carried out through the analysis of formal systems, of the great rhetorical-literary structures, of the topical and of the genres themselves as

mediators in the process of cultural tradition and development, and as large empty containers or free signifying structures, capable of accommodating and transmitting ever-changing cultural content. And it is a scheme which, behind the screen of systematicity and the desire to systematise an imposing mass of data, conceals the desire to fix the *key forms*, the original ideas of the 'spirit of Europe' in its Kerenyian

'path': that is, in their becoming concrete expressions, forms, genres, canons and unique products of European artistic and cultural history.

And it is clear to what extent such a project of comprehensive philology is close in its radical assumptions, if not in its concrete results, to that of Frobenius and his Frankfurt school, as well as to the parallel work of Kerényi, a teacher without pupils in his private works. An epistemic model of a totalising history of culture, that is, capable of bringing to light even the deepest strata of cultural forms, the modalities of conservation-transmission and permanence-transformation, in a word, of

"continuity" and the infringements that introduce "twists" or "variations" into its flow.

But, with the exception of the specific content to which Curtius, Frobenius and Kerényi apply themselves, and also the absence, on the ethnographic and historical-religious front, of recourse to the idea of 'history', does the idea of a morphological-cultural science not reappear as a great effort to refound European knowledge? And does this science not depend, directly or indirectly, on the Hegelian epistemological proposal, despite its failure?

6. But let us take a step back to pick up the thread of the interrupted discourse on the idea of dance and its epistemological implications. Once again, we find the analogy between dance, music and mythology put forward by Kerényi himself. The stories told about Hainuwele, says Kerényi, are

"variations on the same theme, in the strictly technical-compositional sense: and they are comparable to philosophical, pictorial, mythological (and why not? also philological) and musical variants/variations, exactly.

The same idea also appears in a text contemporary to the second edition of *Studies in the Labyrinth*: the 'affinity' between mythology and music

"is in no way metaphorical" but "substantial", and illustrates "what distinguishes mythology from science and philosophy". Under the flow of mythologies, chords, and even scientific research in its methodological subdivision and in its ever-new yet ever-equal objects of reflection, one can distinguish

"a common theme that varies infinitely" ^[33].

The variants of a mythologem, then, if expressed in such a way that the "idea" translates into

"movement" (for example, in the labyrinthine mythologem), can "awaken in us something that moves against us" as divine reality, therefore incomprehensible unless it is in terms of divine figures and events or religious symbols. And it is then, in that golden moment of 'being caught', that 'we have the crux of the problem in our hands'. 'We have reached the centre and we possess it', writes Kerényi deliberately, who never escaped (perhaps partly because in German, he, whose mother tongue was Hungarian, wandered around like a

a pilgrim begging, like a melancholic exile) any nuance, semantic play, or etymological allusion, apart from the "scientific" value of words. And thus, in one of his infinite variations on the theme, Kerényi's identification—always implicit in this book and elsewhere—of Theseus = Seeker is confirmed.

Here again is Walter F. Otto, and here is the Thomas Mann of *Doctor Faustus* (the Mann who, in order to obtain 'material' for the composition of his novel, turned to the philosopher and musicologist Adorno). But here too is everything new and revolutionary that the labyrinthine mythologem originated when it emerged in Kerényi as *mysterion* and as *ainigma*.

We will not stray from the subject if we refer to the fact that the most conspicuous example of myth analysis offered by modern mythology, Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Mythologiques*, culminates in a text that is explicitly divided according to a musical distribution: *Le cru et le cuit*, whose "Overture" deals — albeit within a frame of reference and with theoretical assumptions quite different from those of Kerényi — the 'common character of myth and musical work', consisting in the fact that 'they constitute languages that transcend, each in its own way, the plane of articulated language, yet requiring, like this language and unlike painting, a temporal dimension in order to manifest themselves'. For Lévi-Strauss, mythology and music are

"machines for suppressing time", and "in law, though not always in fact, emotive function and musical language are coextensive"; we are not far from Kerényi's idea that "all Greek mythology could be danced", that this dance can "reveal" the secret of the mystery that lies at the heart of the Idea, and that in it "there is

(albeit blindly and unconsciously) a powerful longing that is also the longing for life, common to all living beings." *Ergriffenheit* as emotional and moving participation emerges from the darkly phenomenological background that lies at the roots of structuralism: indeed, in the last bar of the "Ouverture", it is precisely Lévi-Strauss who expresses his desire that the reader "may be transported (by virtue of the movement that will take him away from the book) towards the music that is in myths, as preserved in their full text: that is, in addition to their harmony and rhythm, with that secret meaning that I have laboriously tried to conquer, not without depriving it of a power and majesty recognisable by the emotion it causes in those who encounter it in its original state: lodged deep within a jungle of images and signs, and still full of spells thanks to which it can move us, since it is not understood in this way" [34].

7. Science and Art 'merge', extending to grasp the 'manifestation of the content of the world': the two positions are not too far apart: "In the most intimate and abyssal depths of man, where in each of us the world has resurfaced and continually resurfaces as a world that becomes spiritually transparent," one can distinguish "the psychic place in which they become revelations" "spiritual realities without place and time," that is, the *Ideen*. But what differentiates these ideas from majestic and powerful structures if not the fact that the structuralist scientist cannot contain his remorse for having diluted and undone the spells thanks to which mythology can still move us, and abandons the reader alone on his journey to the 'sad tropics',

in that immersion in the music that is in myths, which will be heard resonating if it is caught in its first state?

Kerényi's gesture is humanistic, on the contrary; it is the hermetic gesture of the 'guide of souls', who through the style and movement of dance brings to light 'what really matters', that is, 'the continuity open to infinity', but without 'teaching' or 'discussing'. It is the same movement, the same gesture that introduces the hero of *mêtis* and *Mysterion* into the labyrinth towards death, seeking the exit for a new birth.

The wise man is the only one who is not fooled by the enigma, it has been said; he knows how to find the entrance, he knows how to recognise the place of the 'turn' for the return. For this hero of *mêtis*, as for Quinto Julio Miletto, whose funeral inscription—made light by the fraternal pact of the cult community—closes the "Studies on the Labyrinth," the "turn" is easy, the path of the labyrinth "is not deceptive." This hero can 'enjoy the labyrinth'; for him, 'the journey is safe', the *poros* leads beyond the obstacle, solves the enigma of the aporia.

Speaking of the 'experience of heading towards death' in the epilogue to *Ancient Religion* dedicated to the religious idea of no- r^[35], Kerényi used precisely that noun: that it was the *Wende* granted to the world as hope only on the condition of "a total reversal on one's own basis, starting from the abyss," in the Heideggerian passage on Rilke mentioned above.

The same turn, or reversal of course, is "said and danced" in the "Studies on the Labyrinth" and in the other articles collected in this volume; said and danced under the sign of initiatory mystery: "What counts," once we have arrived where the ineffable resides (the *arretton* that is the

Monster-Minotaur), as well as the goddess who presides over that mysterious centre of the labyrinth, is 'to turn around, to change direction: and this is precisely the return from death to life'.

The unveiling of the intimate secret of the labyrinth may also be a place to turn around. Together with philosophers and scientists, the labyrinthine poet Borges has revealed the radical deception of this mythologem: the very non-existence of the labyrinth and the need to seek both its path and its meaning o^[36].

After learning to move towards the centre (towards meaning) — Kerényi seems to want to conclude, like Borges — we will learn to turn back, without hope and therefore full of hope, since we have discovered that the labyrinth is destroyed.

Our emblem may then become the *Destroyed Labyrinth* (*Zerstörtes Labyrinth*), drawn in 1939 by Paul Klee, the extreme result of the ancient mythologem, which confirms the will to search. Only the search counts.

However, this search is still overshadowed by the question that opens up the labyrinthine journey in these 'Studies': is it possible to solve the enigma, to unravel the mystery?

Once again, this is corroborated in the 'Epilogue' to *Ancient Religion*: 'Religious ideas have not arisen as answers to questions; religions are not solutions to ancient problems; rather, they increase the possible problems of the world, and considerably so, becoming presuppositions of questions and answers' ^[37]. And again, throughout Kerényi's work, the ideas of question and answer will highlight the sense dramatically inquisitorial and

interlocutory nature of our labyrinthine situation.

And today? Today, the 'simplicity' that Kerényi considered 'the secret of every true and great secret' has come to an end. Mysteries are complicated, to the point of being reduced to problems. The reversal of Kerényi's point of view is absolute.

The perfect synthesis of this reversal can be found in a recent book on the subject of sacrifice and violence: 'There is no enigma, however complex, that cannot ultimately be solved. (...) The unfathomable mystery of yesteryear, protected by the most terrible taboos, increasingly appears as a problem to be solved' [\[38\]](#).

And this, truly, is an unsolvable problem, a labyrinth with no way out.

Corrado Bologna

A thread of Ariadne for the Spanish reader

1. "Perhaps universal history is the history of the diverse intonation of certain metaphors," Borges suggested doubtfully at the beginning of the second essay in *Other Inquisitions*. In the Labyrinth, certainly the most enigmatic and tenacious of these universal metaphors, which are also metaphors of the universe and which, with Hans Blumenberg, I will describe as 'absolute', Borges was a specialist. 'Not in vain', he said through the 'cowardly man' who seeks the secret of 'The Garden of Forking Paths', 'not in vain am I the great-grandson of that Ts'ui Pên who was governor of Yunnan and who renounced temporal power to write a novel that would be even more populous than the *Huang Lu Meng* and to build a labyrinth in which all men would be lost'. Those who have lost themselves and found themselves again, after the metamorphosis, in *Ficciones*, will remember the secret of the Pavilion of Limpid Solitude: that 'chaotic novel', 'populous', 'contradictory', infinitely 'bifurcated', *is the labyrinth*, 'a labyrinth of symbols', 'an invisible labyrinth of time'. Literature then reveals its own nature as labyrinthine theology; Book and Labyrinth are a single figure of searching and losing oneself when one believes one has found oneself; of the infinite search for

meaning of life and its irremediable conclusion. The "Library of Babel," with its "spiral staircase, which plunges and rises into the remote," is an abyss filled with deceitful mirror games, which demands the difficult path of initiation that chooses *a* path and follows it. The sinuous spiral, illusory in its infinity, is for Borges the emblem of *perplexity*, of the doubt of those who would like to represent the unrepresentable, to give form to the image of the unimaginable.

The twists and turns of the 'tireless novel' constructed by the 'oblique Ts'ui Pên' are those of human life, with its countless folds and forks, without a predetermined course. The night sea must have seemed as labyrinthine as life itself to the sailors of Crete, aimless because infinite possible courses could be charted upon it: the only thing that offered them a way out was the contemplation of the stars, the accurate reading of the thread of Ariadne the Luminous that the constellations drew in the sky, showing them a reference map, the code of the difference between reality and deception.

The arduous conquest of one's inner course and trajectory in the world, in life, can be represented together by the emblem of the labyrinth. In one of the most enigmatic paintings of the Renaissance—the portrait of a knight by Bartolomeo Veneto, preserved in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge—a large labyrinth stands out on the chest of the mysterious character, whose hand hides from view the centre of the ten spirals, the seat where the ancients placed the spiritual centre of *the thymós*, the diaphragm that regulates the rhythm of breathing, the heart, daring, and *flatus vocis*. There are numerous seals of Solomon embroidered on the black cloak: the same ones that in those years sketched Leonardo in his

manuscripts, along with swirls and scribbles, circles coiled upon themselves, spirals, terrifying waves of the universal flood, and elegant, flexible spiral lines: *graphic signs of a way of thinking*, dynamic forms of inner search, from chaos to cosmos.

The enamel medallion that stands out on Bartolomeo's hat, adorned with a feather, depicts a ship sinking in a storm, surrounded by leafy trees; the pilot who fearlessly grasps the helm is referred to in the motto 'Esperance me guide'. The undertaking of the labyrinth and that of the ship in search of a course to salvation allude to the dual nature of the doubtful, labyrinthine heart, which in reserve and silence finds its way in internalised ethics, and of stellar thought that drives contemplation, raising its gaze to the sky as if to reflect intimate inquiry and secret *reflection* in the celestial mirror. Fifty years after Leonardo and Bartolomeo Veneto, among Claude Paradin's *Dévises héroïques*, Virgil's hemistich 'Fata viam inuenient',

'destiny will find the way out', dominates a labyrinth of features identical to those in the Cambridge portrait. And when in 1623 the Bohemian Comenius wrote *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*, a satirical allegory in which the world becomes a circular city in the centre of dark depths, once again the labyrinthine-worldly emblem is called upon to play the role of the secular pole with respect to the heart, in the dialectic between loss and bliss, between confusion and harmony.

The most admirable synthesis of this figure of the reflection of the heart and the universe as the trace of an ethical journey, which allows one to 'escape' from the meaningless confusion of 'life', is chiselled into the famous conclusion of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*

"Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and longer reflection on them is devoted: *the starry sky above me and the moral law within me*. I do not need to seek these two things and simply assume them as if they were shrouded in darkness or located in the transcendent, beyond my horizon; I see them before me and immediately relate them to the consciousness of my existence."

2. The history of the Labyrinth, a mythical place where all places are condensed and nullified, is lost in the shadows of millennia. A spatial implosion, turned inward, the Labyrinth is the visible trace of a search: a fiction constructed to induce error and to learn to let go of the tangle of endless possibilities and, in this way, to 'find the way'. Archaic is the link with Ariadne the Luminous, nocturnal and celestial "Lady of the Labyrinth": her image already appears on one side of the 5th-century coins of Knossos, while on the other side there is a four-armed meander, a multiplication and dynamisation of the unciform cross, a sign of fertile solar movement. As for Theseus, the hero who frees humanity from that threat, he seems to have learned the dance of the goddess Ariadne-Aphrodite, the 'Lady of the Labyrinth' of the Minoan age, on whose head Dionysus, falling in love with her, placed the diadem that shines in the sky as the 'boreal crown', a luminous constellation that traced a safe path for sailors in the labyrinth of dangers of the night sea with the thread of stars.

From his earliest research on the subject of the

labyrinth, all collected in this volume, Karl Kerényi related the labyrinthine form to the Greek opposition between the categories of *problem* (which, like the Gordian knot cut cleanly by Alexander, Aristotle's dialectical pupil, "must be solved and, once solved, disappears") and *mystery* (something that "resists interpretation" and "must be experienced, venerated", which must become part of our lives). In this way, he arrives at the heart of the labyrinthine mythologem, apprehending its radical mysterious-initiatory, that is, gnoseological and hermeneutical, instance. In Kerényi's interpretation ("the infinite line and its intrinsic meaning of 'life-death-life'..."), the icon of *the endless thread* that Ariadne offers to the hero-savior Theseus reveals its most secret aspect, that of the 'thread of history' that allows us not to 'lose the thread' in the labyrinth of Borgian Babel-Literature, mirror of Babel-Universe, an infinite ball of thread that each of us must unravel orderly to weave the tapestry of our own individual history. This invisible path of knowledge and self-knowledge is the "thread of the thread" that Coomarasawmy found in the *Vedas*, where the Breath that enlivens the Earth, the Solar Column that rises in the Air, and the Axis of the Universe that pierces and sustains the Sky merge. In this way, the meaning of the

A mobile and ductile "thread of light," adaptable to the folds and unknowable twists and turns that, in the form of a continuously unravelled rope, illuminates the journey of the hero-hermeneut. This thread runs through and turns inside out the fatal deception of the layout that the architect Daedalus sealed in his Mausoleum of Deception, a prison with an open door but no known way out for the monstrous Minotaur, the terrible fruit of the bestial union between the Bull and Pasiphaë, daughter of the Sun and wife of Minos, son of Zeus and

of Europa, for whose unspeakable libidinous desires Daedalus had built (just as Odysseus had built a deceptive horse to conquer Troy) a wooden cow, monstrosly mounted by the white bull consecrated to Poseidon.

Daidalon is the name of the perverse building imagined by Daedalus: in the form of *mêtis*, the practical, plastic, deceitful, animalistic intelligence of the sailor who uses nets braided with a thousand knots and of the hunter who spreads traps, and in reality of *the seeker*, the broad semantic field that collects the images, ideas and metaphors of *the dáidalon* is referred to: "Éclat mouvant et bigarré, ruse, piège dissimulé sous les apparences de séduction" [moving and colourful flash, ruse, trap concealed under a seductive appearance], according to Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux's precise definition. Between *découpage* and *ajustage*, fragmentation and recomposition, dismantling and reassembly, the figural energy of the daedalum extends; even when it is complete and unitary, it remains, like the polymorphous intelligence that generated it, *bigarré et multiple*, an icon of the curvilinear, the tortuous, the multiple irreducible to unity, a threatening reflection of the mobile universe of becoming and instability, *a figural mimesis of destiny*.

Every incarnation of myth in new forms is also a *variation* and an *interpretation*, in the *musical* and *hermeneutic* sense: it enriches, develops, unfolds, reveals an aspect more of the mythologem.

"original", increasingly difficult to distinguish, in the forest of signs and meanings that have multiplied around it throughout history. From the tension with the present of interpretation, the "origin" derives its value, its dialectical meaning, its historicity, which cannot be defined in any other way. In the end, it is almost impossible to "explain" the myth

by making it a situar in its "origin", ya that the

"explanation" itself is a new "origin" of meaning. Rather, it is a matter of recognising in the historical vicissitudes of the myth, in the succession of its variants, a *chord*, a *consonance*, a *harmony*.

3. There are countless variants of labyrinthine mythology that mythographers and hermeneutists have accumulated and expanded over the centuries, taking it to these and other mysterious-allegorical moorings, and which, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss's sharp hermeneutics, are all considered, regardless of their dislocation in time and space, an inalienable part of a single mythical system, complex but coherent. The most recent of these musical-hermeneutic variations-interpretations seems to me to be also the closest to the point of origin and foundation of the mythologem, and therefore also to the extensive research that Karl Kerényi has devoted to it. I find it in Friedrich Dürrenmatt's short story *Minotaurus* (1985).

Dürrenmatt takes up and develops, in my opinion, a splendid idea from Borges, who in 'The House of Asterion', a story from *El Aleph* (a book containing more than one labyrinth), places at the centre of a claustrophobic space a narrator who, exalted by his own self-referential and delusional loneliness ('The fact is that I am unique [...] Perhaps I created the sun and the stars and the enormous house, but I no longer remember'), lives locked up among 'stone galleries' through which he runs like a madman 'until he falls to the ground dizzy'. Innocent, since the nine young people who enter his house every nine years fall by themselves, the narrator awaits the Redeemer of his loneliness and wonders (suggesting that it is a monster

with a bull's face, exactly the opposite of what he fears to see coming): "What will my redeemer be like? [...] Will he perhaps be a bull with a man's face? Or will he be like me?" The catharsis reverses the traditional point of view as if in a mirror; the Monster allows himself to be killed by the Redeemer and thus resolves his perverse labyrinthine nature: 'The morning sun reverberated on the bronze sword. There was not a trace of blood left. 'Will you believe it, Ariadne?' said Theseus. 'The Minotaur hardly defended himself.'"

Dürrenmatt also decides not to stage the Labyrinth by entering it through the eyes of Minos and Pasiphaë, Theseus, Ariadne: his point of view is central, based on the Minotaur waiting for the Enemy. For the first time, if I am not mistaken, in the history of the labyrinthine myth, we are placed at the heart of the mystery, we are identified with the Monster, we are called upon to share its frantic despair, its lonely and innumerable confusion. That Person of Evil sees his own image refracted and repeated in the game of mirrors that besiege him and learns to know himself, to recognise himself, to fear neither himself nor death, which will arrive disguised as an Odyssean and Daedalic Theseus, with his face covered by a bull's mask, deceptively feigned in the thousands upon thousands of mirrors that dot the labyrinth: recognition and death necessary "so that the world may preserve its order and not become a labyrinth, falling back into the chaos from which it had sprung".

In the heart of his prison, the Monster, lonely and melancholic, waits for a scheme of order to bring light back and reduce to meaning the swarm of chaotic images into which his mysterious figure is fragmented. In the darkness of terror, the Minotaur becomes Ovillo (*zusammengerollt*), that is, Labyrinth: he folds himself like an intestine, like the

brain of a foetus floating in the whirlpool of unconsciousness and beginning to dream: "Rolled up, just as he had been rolled up in Pasiphaë's body, the Minotaur dreamed that he was a man." This is how Ariadne found him when she entered the labyrinth with a dancing step:

She came dancing with the ball of wool she was unravelling, and dancing, almost delicately, she wound the red thread around his horns, and left, following the thread and dancing, and when the Minotaur awoke on a glassy morning, he saw a Minotaur reflected countless times coming towards him, his eyes fixed on the wool thread as if it were a trail of blood. At that moment, the minotaur thought it was his image, although he still did not understand what an image was, but then he realised that the other minotaur was coming towards him while he was lying on the ground. This confused him. The minotaur got up and did not realise that the end of the red wool thread was wound around his horns. The other one approached.

Ariadne enters the labyrinth with a dance-like step. This is the rhythm of the labyrinth, the *figurative reflection* of its dynamism (Kerényi uses the uncommon category of *Linien-reflex*, which I interpreted in the Italian translation as "linear reflection"). With the entrance to a light and harmonious dance rhythm, the confusion of the scribbles will be transformed into a consonance of gestures and signs, which, developed in the opposite direction, will allow the way out to be naturally recovered. Like Ariadne, the Minotaur also tries to abandon himself to the oscillatory and disharmonious movement, in search of the right rhythm to start the

dance. But Ariadne, 'Lady of the Labyrinth', advances through the dizzying twists and turns with the heavenly grace of the luminous goddess, protected by the thread she wisely unravels, which will allow her to return. The Minotaur's movement is frenetic, orgiastic. The Monster explores the right rhythm, but fails, entangling himself in the thread that gives light and salvation to Ariadne and Theseus. He loses himself in the labyrinth of which he is the owner and connoisseur: he is no longer oriented [*orizzonta*], *he* literally *loses the horizon*, the meaning of life, life itself. This is what happens, according to Ernesto de Martillo's brilliant reconstruction, with the *tarantata*, who allows herself to be swept away by cultural remorse, losing her own presence in the crisis, and finally reconquering it by harmonising the spasm of her gestures with the musical rhythm of the *tarantella*.

The minotaur snorted happily, and when that being waved the cloak again, he began to dance. Before the walls, which the sunlight made radiant, the two moved like shadows, the minotaur dancing and jumping, clapping his hands and then again quickly striking the ground with his feet, the creature waving its cloak, advancing or retreating, repeatedly attacking with the sword, which, hidden under the cloak, it had brought with it into the labyrinth to kill the monster, and now, finding itself face to face with it and realising its innocent candour, it was ashamed. The minotaur danced around him, clapping his hands and stamping his feet. He danced with joy at no longer being alone, he danced with hope of finding the other minotaurs, the girls and the beings like the one with whom danced now. He forgot the sol dancing,

dancing, he forgot the curse.

Nor does the Minotaur escape his fate of death in Dürrenmatt's story, the fulfilment of which is necessary for the labyrinth to consume itself, and for the threat launched, fold upon fold, meander upon meander, against the cosmic order to end with the extinction of this deceptive synecdoche of chaos. But in that dance, not only is the fatal fate of the Monster and its Place fulfilled: the dynamism of the movement-inward and its liberating result, the movement-outward, is exhausted. From this moment on, the energy concentrated in the ritual-initiatory place is transferred, ordered and harmonised, to the mind of Theseus and, behind him, to all those initiated into the labyrinthine mysteries of life: to every living being, initiated into the mystery of life.

4. It is precisely this element that strikes me as extraordinarily innovative: Dürrenmatt captured and fixed in a highly iconic emblem (I wonder if it was precisely through his study of Kerényi's essays on the labyrinth) the *rhythmic, dancing nature of the labyrinth*, its character as the trace of a spiral movement, coiled upon itself and seemingly infinite, whose uninterrupted impulse is a harmonious *metric of space, time and the conquest of both*. In this kind of *prosody of ritual gesture*, the initiate learns, by harmonising the interior with the exterior, to control external danger through internal exercise. By rhythmically matching his steps to the rhythm that resonates within his mind, he learns 'not to get lost', to 'find the way', reproducing a mental sign in the gesture of the body and concentrating it into a sign of immense allegorical power.

The "linear reflection" that Kerényi sees above all in the labyrinth dynamically represents the mysterious journey of initiation and metamorphosis of the inner self. And, not without a deep bond of affinity between the basic mythologems of the mythical-ritual complex of the labyrinth, the dance that Kerényi recognises as the origin of the labyrinth dance is the *geranos*, the "love dance of the cranes," whose fleeting footprints left in the sand of Knossos are said to have inspired the invention of the *daidalon*, transmitted in the secret of the *mystérion* to the liberating hero, Theseus.

For Kerényi, who goes back to the testimonies of the most ancient Mediterranean civilisations, even before an idea, an image, a form, the Labyrinth is the "linear reflection" of an impulse, of a choreographic step. In Kerényi's subtle and original hermeneutics, cultural anthropology and philology, archaeology and philosophy, art history and depth psychology come into play alongside the history of religions. Under his rigorous lens, the labyrinth reveals itself to be the clearest and at the same time the most obsessive of the figures of interiority and search: the form-image of ritual initiation, and therefore of the journey to hell and the return to light that it represents.

These ideas form the basis of Kerényi's texts, which I first compiled in 1983, ten years after the death of the great historian of religions (1973), selecting them from his extensive bibliography and translating them into Italian with the permission of his widow. That book is now being published in Spain, translated from German, of course. It does not exist in the original language as a separate volume: Kerényi, who probably thought about it, never got around to coordinating it, as the labyrinthine theme appears in

many of his studies. What guarantees the legitimacy of my choice of subject matter, however, is the fact that the author himself, in the first volume of his *opera omnia*, published in 1966, while he was still alive, in Langen Müller (Munich and Vienna) under the title *Humanistische Seelen-Forschung*, included the first three of the texts translated here (the order in which I have arranged them gives preference to the fundamental text, published in the series "Albae Vigiliae", with a dedication to Jung).

In the last twenty years, many studies on the labyrinth have been published: none of them possess the clarity in the presentation of the problems and the documentary and argumentative strength of Kerényi's studies. Dürrenmatt's story, published in 1985, five years before the Swiss writer's death, and translated into Italian in 1987, still seems to me to be a perfect synthesis between the continuity of the mythologem on the creative and scientific-hermeneutic levels.

Silas Haslam's famous encyclopaedia, *A General History of Labyrinths*, cited by Borges in a labyrinthically misleading note in 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis tertius', is nothing more than one of his admirable fictions, an unattainable dream, or perhaps a nightmare, which finds adequate illustration in Escher's dizzying games of unevenness between Figure and Ground and which Douglas Hofstadter, a scholar of Artificial Intelligence (*Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, Basic Books, New York 1979), linked the "Strange Ring" and the "Tangled Hierarchies" of the great Platonic mathematician Gödel to Bach's *Musical Offering*, *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and *The Art of Fugue*.

Given the breadth of information they offer, Kerényi's book could perhaps be supplemented by selecting from the

labyrinthine Babel bibliography on the subject (more than two thousand titles in the early 1980s), William Henry Matthews' classic book, *Mazes and Labyrinths. Their History and Development* (London 1922), *Il libro del labirinti*, by Paolo Santarcangeli (Vallecchi, Florence 1967) and *The Idea of Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages*, by Penelope Reed Doob (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1990), as well as the magnificent catalogue of the exhibition *Labyrinthe, Erscheinungsformen und Deutungen. 5000 Jahre, Gegenwart eines Urbilds*, edited by Hermann Kern (the exhibition was held in Munich and Milan between spring and summer 1981).

5. A step of amorous dance, a fragile but very fine thread of Ariadne, links my Italian work of twenty years ago with today's Spanish edition. It is not only the thread of research and hermeneutics, which delve into the darkness with harmonious steps; now it is the thread of a history of scientific passions, of the memory of ideas and affections that, with a small and wonderful group of friends, we unravelled and wove between Rome, Paris and Barcelona, *in search* [in search] of what, borrowing from Victoria Cirlot's splendid title (Siruela, Madrid 2005), I will call our *intertwined and labyrinthine Figures of Destiny*.

The *intertwining* of medieval adventure romances is our emblem, the plot of our difficult but not lost path danced together, a living sign of a destiny that I love to choose together with Victoria, with Amador Vega, with Cario Ossola, with the other knights errant to whom this book is ideally dedicated. With them (I resort to Cario's perfect formula

), *incapable of plenitude, nous goûtons* [incapable of fullness, we savour]. We taste, we savour, we relish, and we invite to the banquet anyone who dares to repeat, like one of those medieval knights: "I am a knight errant who goes without pause in search of adventure and the meaning of the world, and who has never managed to find it".

The *figure of destiny*, Ariadne's thread in the labyrinth of uninterrupted and always unfinished inquiry, is offered to us by the lofty meditation of Leo Spitzer, the author of the most intense inquiry into the *Harmony of the world*:

I would like [...] the work to be written, so to speak, on the edge of Nothingness, clinging to knowledge against the vertigo of Nothingness, with an irony turned in on itself and no less defensive energy; written, perhaps, with the intention of escaping Nothingness. Only the part of Nothingness that is within the work can give it that humble, problematic character, that higher *effacement* that accompanies all selfless effort: it is necessary to accept the dead and 'crushing' element, without which one cannot be alive. [...] The true inquirer shares the company of an object, a supernatural reality, a man, in the face of Nothingness. And this is equivalent to saying: not being alone.

In the harmonious reunion of what Roland Barthes defined as *chant de solidarité*, a polyphony of reciprocity, grace and gratitude that manages to abolish the labyrinth of time and transfigures it, lightening its weight, perhaps, in the confines of Nothingness, which is for us the only Labyrinth, the irremediable inconclusión of ser

temporal beings can aspire to a necessarily imperfect
History of eternity.

Corrado Bologna

In the labyrinth

Chapter 1 Studies on the labyrinth: The labyrinth as a linear reflection of a mythological idea

"The desire to approach this abandoned,
almost forgotten mystery of life...".

Henriette Roland Holst

1. Problem-Mystery

The problem of the labyrinth presents a unique circumstance, one common to most problems in mythological research as soon as we seriously question them. There is no solution that will make them disappear from the world. They are mysteries in the sense that an excellent interpreter of hermetic poetry can reciprocally confront "mystery" and "problem":

"This must be solved; if so, it will have disappeared. The other, on the other hand, must be lived, respected and integrated into one's own life. A mystery that is solved with an explanation has never been a mystery. The authentic mystery

resists 'explanation'; not because it shies away from examination with some double truths, but because its very essence does not allow it to be solved in a rational way. But it belongs to the same reality to which the explainable also belongs, and it maintains a relationship of absolute loyalty to explanation. It resorts to it, and its task is precisely to detect where the truly inexplicable lies ^[1].

Mythological motifs, divine figures, or religious symbols cannot be resolved as if they were problems, but only attributed to ideas, archetypes, original figures — or whatever you want to call them. These, as is often the case with true mysteries, will continue to occupy us! When asked about the meaning of the legends, drawings, and customs related to the labyrinth, Brede Kristensen, a great and intuitive researcher of religions at Leiden University, gave a simple answer: the underworld. Does this word really solve the mystery of the labyrinth? On the contrary: labyrinths, expressed through stories, or captured in visual representations or through movement, are more conceptual, more archetypal, more primal forms than a not-so-mysterious, albeit amorphous, 'underworld'. An explanation that abandons structured form in favour of formless form—whether in favour of a spiritual reality or a concept—renounces precisely what is essential. Kristensen bases his interpretation on the fact that the labyrinth, 'with its twists and turns and misleading paths, from which no one can find the way out', can only be an image of the realm of the dead itself ^[2]. But is this really characteristic of representations of labyrinths, rather than the fact that the exit can indeed be found among their many twists and turns? ^[3] And is this

feature of the realm of the dead, rather than the term "underworld" as the essence of the labyrinth?

Henceforth, as a basic principle, it is preferable that no attempt at explanation lose sight of the graphic representations of labyrinths, and that non-graphic material—thoughts, stories, or dance figures—be interpreted only to the extent that it has been effectively transmitted as tradition. If, in this way, in the depths of what has been explained, something remains unexplained—such as the unconscious knowledge that life has of the existence of a solution—we will recognise this as a mystery yet to be clarified which, although unexplained, enriches us.

2. Babylon

Labyrinths are recognised when they appear, as monuments to ancient religious traditions or at least as archaic artistic creations, in a more or less distinguishable spiral form, often of great simplicity. Each spiral line, apparently decorative, drawn as a mere figure, or a spiral-shaped meander, becomes a labyrinth as soon as we identify it as a path, which we travel as if in a certain way we were doing so through a mental entrance or passage. *We need* this kind of imagination and the ability to delve deeper into it in order to awaken to the mythological reality of the labyrinth. For those who support this reality, it was equivalent to 'being inside' and 'moving inside'. From time to time se despertaba en ellos y se mostraba en

silent movements or in stories that translated the meaning of what was experienced immediately into an intellectual language. If we want to understand that meaning, we also need those narratives: the texts concerning the silent labyrinths.



1. Labyrinth of Mesopotamia

It therefore seemed highly significant that, at the beginning of the 20th century, representations of labyrinths were found on clay tablets that arrived in European museums from Mesopotamian excavations, some of which also contained cuneiform writing. Two unique pieces, one exhibited in Berlin [ill. 1] ^[4] and another in

Leiden ^[5], incidentally lacking explanatory text, show the spiral shape in its purest form. The close relationship between the drawing and the labyrinthine representations on Cretan coins, as well as the spirals formed by large stones and similar monuments in northern Europe, immediately caught the attention. The accurate interpretation of these unique pieces was achieved by means of larger tablets, filled with entire series of the same basic shape accompanied by texts [illus. 2] ^[6]. These texts are poor and difficult to understand, but we must rely on them to learn anything about the meaning these drawings had in the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia.



2. From a Babylonian archive of viscera

According to these cuneiform texts, it is certain that the tablets show representations of the viscera of sacrificed animals that were used to make prophecies. Thus, according to it seems that they used to preserve cases historical of

studies of viscera, including explanatory comments, as documents and examples for the future. They refer to the shapes of the intestines. "They are twisted to the left, and then they dissolve," translates an Assyriologist [7]. 'This must mean,' he adds, 'that the viscera first turn to the left in a spiral shape, that the spiral formation ends, and the intestines move separately towards the end, without further convolutions, to reach the exit side by side. The drawing supports this explanation.' In another case, the conclusion also seems clear: "The deity does not lend its protection" [8].

Such conclusions were deduced from what was discovered in the intestines. And what was seen in those viscera? Part of the answer is found in the drawings themselves, and part in the accompanying texts. The drawings are anything but realistic: they reduce the multiplicity of intestinal formations to meaningful basic lines. It is clear that for the artist, the spiral is the fundamental line of all variations. The different formations of this original shape can be seen in the viscera of the different animals destined for sacrifice. Through the obvious particular case of the body, a different reality shines through: something mythological, which is also mentioned in the corresponding texts. There, a palace was visualised: 'The palace of the viscera' (in the original language: *êkal tirâni*). *The true meaning* of this palace was [revealed](#) [9]. It is the underworld, which shows different behaviours towards the world of the living, as can be deduced from the different forms of the entrails, some favourable, some unfavourable. There it is presented, as a higher reality in the depths of the phenomenon of pure bodily appearance, in the form of a construction in

spiral, whose sinuosities are reproduced by the intestines of the sacrificed animal, in the same way that the celestial regions are represented through the liver^[10].

How did it happen, then, we ask ourselves next — that the intestines were given the name '*palace* of the viscera' and that the underworld could be presented as 'the palace of the viscera'? The equation between the underworld and the intestines is also shown by the fact that a creature from the other world and Gilgamesh's adversary, the demonic companion Humbaba, dweller of an enchanted forest, 'with secret paths' and 'dead-end trails', is represented as 'the man of the viscera', by a face formed by intestines^[11]. This example nos aclara algo decisivo. «Laberíntico» e

'inframundano' appear to be identical. The labyrinthine had absolute priority over his other forms of expression, the 'enchanted forest' and the 'intestines'. Nothing proves, moreover, that external experiences, such as observations of the intestines, took precedence over the mythological content that arose from the soul. The attire with which the substance is displayed may come from such experiences, but it is its inner form, in this case a spiral, that contributes to giving it an appropriate outer appearance. A spiral-shaped underworld has been equated with the intestines. Only in this way can we understand the double meaning of "palace of the viscera".

However, we must also mention something that cannot be found in viscera, at least not in the examples known to date: a kind of womb or maternal bed. Although in the explanatory texts

"la puerta del palacio" plays as well as a role

Importantly, however, it offers no basis for using "the grand conception of the fertilisation of the motherbed of the earth" as a clarifying principle ^[12]. It cannot even be used as a "supporting hypothesis" with which to examine the scattered individual material. Instead of such a hypothesis, we have the spiral itself as a guiding thread. We must admit, however, that it has remained almost silent, despite the cuneiform texts. Only the name *êkal tirâni* brought us closer to the mystery. Even without an effective link or reference point to the Babylonian cult building or its cult rituals. The structure of the renowned towers of the Mesopotamian temple — the ziggurats — could correspond to the celestial counterpart of the labyrinths in the underworld. This, in turn, could be related to the *lobus pyramidalis* of the liver. However, if one wishes to refer to the discordant elevation in the spiral outline of the unique pieces found in Berlin and Leiden as a ziggurat, this would be done without evidence and without any intrinsic plausibility.

The unique piece in Berlin reminded its first editor, with the circular shape of the tablet, of the commercial writings of the time of Lugalanda and Urukagina ^[13], that is, documents from the beginning of the third millennium BC. The same scholar dates the tablets, whose inscriptions are quite legible, to around the year mi l^[14]. More than a thousand years separate the era in which the labyrinths of Mesopotamia were a lived mythological reality and the use of the aforementioned explanatory texts. Hence the fruitlessness of these texts from the point of view of living mythology. The text that turns the silent labyrinths — wherever and whenever they appear — into eloquent testimonies of human experiences

was recently found in a completely different area. It belongs to those Indonesian stories related to the Greek myth of Kore. In order to clearly explain the fundamental meaning of the new text, the points of contact between the new indications from the Indonesian island of Seram and the ancient Hellenic instructions about the queen of the underworld should first be established.

3. Death-Life

Like the feminine essence that, at the height of her life, succumbs to her devastating destiny, and this destiny, when fulfilled, means death for her and, at the same time, her reign in death; thus appears to us the divine maiden of the Greeks in the figure of Persephone. There is something so moving and significant about this that the exemplary nature of the Greek queen of the dead's destiny should attract the attention of admirers of the poetic and monumental representations of her mythological theme. Mythological figures are archetypes everywhere: the goddess Persephone is one in a particularly convincing way. The maiden's natural destiny can be seen as a corresponding imitation of Persephone's destiny. It can also be understood as the fate of every living creature, for all are equally mortal with the sole hope, also exemplified by the mythological motif of Persephone, of the return of the abducted. This return is celebrated in Eleusis as the revelation of a birth in death:

in itself permanently repeated, an inexhaustible creator of life, so inexhaustible that it also ends up, as a divine event, creating wealth, bringing Pluto himself into the world. On the one hand, the abduction of the maiden as wedding and death, and on the other, death and birth, as events closely related to the figure of Persephone. Strange connections, alongside those no less strange that appear in the Greek sphere: Persephone's relationship with the moon (conceived by the Pythagoreans as the identity of the goddess and the celestial body), with cereals and with the sacrificial animal, which in some respects represented her and gave her meaning — the Kore with the pig.

These relationships, placed side by side in apparent nonsense, suddenly appeared as a whole, sustained and full of meaning: in the mythologems of the maiden Moon of Seram, Rabie, called Hainuwele or also Rabie-Hainuwele. We will only highlight the most important points. Rabie is the mythical name of the moon. The maiden Rabie is kidnapped by the Sun man. She is represented by a sacrificed pig, as a bride. As a woman, she appears as a sow with her son, a piglet. With the name Hainuwele, she represents the personification of wealth on earth, and when she is killed, tubers are born from her body. The murder committed against her has yet another consequence: her murderers, the original men, are transformed by this act into normal creatures, who must also die from that moment on. Since then, through that first murder, death has come into the world and life exists. Life, whose very idea implies death, originates from the destiny of the moon, the plant and the animal that nourish it; all disappear and always reappear. Or if we reflect the same idea but with a figure

Human: through the fate of the original maiden who, kidnapped or murdered, gives birth and nurtures. This reveals the idea of life based on the idea of death, and certainly also through the mythological theme of Persephone, because it links the same relationships. Or considered from another perspective: that idea of death that establishes the foundation of the notion of life. In all these original maidens, we must recognise the eternal being who lives and dies eternally, whose destiny is the divine archetype of earthly life.

Let us pause for a moment on the most important stages of this journey that leads us through the abundant Indonesian material towards an almost incomprehensible mythological idea. The individual mythologems, whose heroine is Rabie or Hainuwele, satisfy us in themselves as global entities full of meaning. The stories of the maiden Moon and the man Sun, or of the maiden Hainuwele, function as poetic narratives. However, it would be a mistake to understand that Rabie's stories are only about the moon and *nothing else*. In fact, Hainuwele, the plant maiden, is also Rabie-Hainuwele: the equality with the moon is not entirely true. The analogy with music is more noticeable than with poetry. The narratives about Moon maidens, as well as those about plant maidens, should be considered variations on the same theme, which only form a meaningful and broadly satisfying whole when placed side by side to be contemplated as a larger composition; only together do they also make the world more transparent to the spirit. There are also other variations on the same theme; perhaps philosophical, musical and pictorial (or graphic, as we see them in the labyrinth) variations, or even variations

mythologies of other peoples. They are possible because the subject of great philosophy, art, and mythology is always something objective; a reality with many aspects that is not fully exhausted in any of the variations. As a reality that is offered to the spirit—as a spiritual reality—the subject is always an *idea* (here it is the idea of life, which corresponds to the reality of nature

'life'), a philosophical or mythological idea, depending on whether it captures an aspect of reality that is better expressed philosophically or mythologically. Only when something awakens in us through the variations of mythologems, approaching us as something divine, even if it is incomprehensible and very different from what we experience with divine figures, divine events and religious symbols, do we reach the centre from which all the details of myth and cult become transparent — to the conceivable limit of what is inconceivable in its greatest depth. The reality of 'life' is a particularly apt example to show the difference between an ancient philosophical idea and a mythological idea. The ancient philosopher conceives of the idea of life as opposed to death, which, because it is so closely linked to its opposite pole, can only be present in the absence of the other. For Heraclitus, such a union is equivalent to a profound identity. (The name of the bow is *life*, even though its work is *death*, or if expressed mythologically: Hades and Dionysus are the same as ^[15].) In Plato's *Phaedo*, this polarity is the guarantee that death cannot negatively affect the soul (= life): one excludes the other (105). Epicurus also defends the point of view of this exclusivity of life, although he reaches other conclusions: "When we are present, *death* is not, and when death is not, we are no longer present."

[16]. Only late European thought began to understand the phenomenon of "life" in a way that was neither identical to death nor exclusive, but rather considered it an integral part of life itself [17].

The complete separation of life and death — on which Plato and Epicurus agree, but each in his own way — corresponds to the reality of the distinction that absolutely separates the living from the dead, which is mythologically expressed by the idea of the border of Hades. Ancient religion does not close itself off to the reality of death as non-being [18]: Persephone, as ruler of the other world, also belongs to the realm of non-being. On the other hand, the mythological idea that forms the basis of the ceramic mythologems of Kore does justice to both the reality of life and that of death. At first glance, it seems incredible that an idea as rich and complex as that of life and death (the idea of Plato and Epicurus is comparatively much less extensive and complex) is not the subject of an ancient philosophem, even though it is found in the primordial mythologems. Meanwhile, however, it should be remembered that throughout the world, mythological accounts of the origin of death are part of the myth about the origin of normal human life d[19]. Of the countless examples, we will mention only one: in a Vogul cosmogony, life on earth has almost been born, only death is missing to make normal existence possible. The necessity of death to make normal existence possible. The necessity of death is established with the famous argument that, otherwise, the earth would have too many inhabitants s[20]. Only when men can die, it is said: 'At last, now the age of man has been born, now at last the age of man takes place. In this happiness they live (men

[21].

The mythological idea of death as the basis of life, considered on its own, represents in the circle of Rabie-Hainuwele myths—the authentic higher reality for the supporters of mythology—an instructive example of how a mythological idea can be expressed. In Rabie's stories, the death of the heroine—an event that is also related to the death of men—is narrated as the abduction of the maiden. The event itself in the Hainuwele mythologem is described as a ritual event of primordial worship. These are two representations that only coincide in their agreement on the fundamental idea, but not in their subsequent execution. In the cult, the abduction of the maiden is not imitated in any way as in a religious pantomime, but rather a dance is performed whose basic pattern forms a *spiral line*. This same spiral also constitutes the plane of a door, which leads to the goddess of the underworld and ensures those who pass through it the existence of a human form. This is a mode of representation that can be defined as the reflection of the line on which the mythological idea is based. The Greek labyrinth can be described in three points: 1) as a mythical construction,

2) as a dance, and 3) as a spiral line. The similarity is suggestive. From now on, we will consider it in more detail.

First, I will present the part corresponding to the mythologem, according to the description of its discoverer, Adolf

E. Jensen, and his clarifications [22].

4. Seram, Polynesia, Australia

(The maiden Hainuwele as Pluto)

In those days, a great maro dance took place in Tamene siwa (= nine dance sites) that lasted nine nights. The nine families of men participated in it, forming a large spiral of nine turns in the dance. When the men dance maro at night, the women remain seated in the centre, without dancing, and the dancers are given sirih and pinang (leaves and nuts from two species of plants) to chew. At that great dance, the maiden Hainuwele, standing in the centre, gave sirih and pinang to the dancers. The dance ended at dawn and the humans retired to sleep. On the night of the second day, they gathered in another place, because when the maro dance is performed for nine nights, each night it must be done in a different place. Hainuwele stood in the centre again and distributed sirih and pinang. However, if the dancers asked for sirih, she gave them corals instead, which all the brothers found very beautiful. Then the dancers, as well as the spectators, crowded around to ask for sirih and pinang, and everyone received corals. In this way, the dance continued until dawn, when the men returned to their homes to sleep. The following night, the dance took place again in another location, and Hainuwele once more stood in the centre to distribute sirih and pinang. That night, she distributed beautiful porcelain plates, and everyone present received one. On the fourth night, she gave away even larger Chinese porcelain plates. On the fifth night of the dance, she handed out large knives, machetes, to clear the undergrowth; on the sixth, beautifully crafted copper pots for sirih; on the seventh night, gold earrings; and on the eighth, precious gongs. Thus,

night to night, the value of the objects that Hainuwele distributed among the dancers increased, and the humans found this disturbing. They gathered together and began to deliberate. They were very jealous that Hainuwele could distribute such riches, and they all decided to kill her.

(Raptus in terram)

On the ninth night of the great maro dance, Hainuwele was once again placed in the centre of the circle to distribute sirih. But the men had dug a large hole in that spot. That night, the Lesiela family danced in the inner circle of the great nine-turn spiral formed by the dancers. With the slow circular movements of the spiral dance, they pushed the maiden Hainuwele towards the hole to throw her inside. The shrill trio of the maro song covered the girl's screams. They threw earth on top of her, which the dancers trampled with their movements to cover the hole. At dawn, when the maro dance was over, the men returned to their homes.

(Clarification from the ethnologist)

Even today, the maro dance is still danced only at night. Both men and women participate in it. A man leads the line, followed alternately by other men and women, all with their arms crossed as prescribed. The alternating line continues to grow until all the dancers form a circle. When the last ones in line reach the head and join in

new dancers, the line evolves in a spiral around the first circle until it completes the shape of a multiple spiral. Thus formed, accompanied by a three-part song, the group of dancers moves in a circle with slow, heavy steps, albeit in a counter-clockwise direction. Today, the maro is also danced almost exclusively in ritual ceremonies and undoubtedly retains its close connection with the imagery of the journey towards death. We would also add that, in principle — that is, according to the genuine mythological view —, the dance described in the myth is the primordial dance, and the other maro dances that are performed are really just simple imitations. Originally, Hainuwele was at the centre of the spiral from the beginning, and only later "the other women who were not dancing" joined her. According to other accounts, it was the deer or the cat that taught the maro ^[23]. In both cases, it was a kind of triumphal dance that was performed after being saved from death.

(Construction of the spiral building and the realm of the dead)

Ameta (Hainuwele's father) cursed the men, and Mulua (= Core) Satene was angry with them because they had killed. She built a large gate in a square in Tamene siwa, formed by a spiral of nine turns, just as the men stood in the maro dance. Mulua Satene then climbed onto a large stump on one side of the gate and held Hainuwele's severed arms in her hands. She then gathered all the men on the other side of the large gate and said to them:

"I no longer wish to live here, for you have killed. Today I will leave you. You must all now cross through this door to meet me. Those who cross will remain human, but those who do not will suffer a different fate." All humans wanted to cross the spiral threshold, but some did not succeed. Those who could not reach Mulua Satene immediately turned into animals or spirits. This is how pigs, deer, birds, fish, and the many spirits that live on earth were created. They were once men, but they failed to pass through the door behind which Mulua Satene stood. The other men, those who did pass through the door, went to Mulua Satene. Some passed to the right of the cut trunk, and others to the left. As she struck each one with an arm of Hainuwele. Those who passed on the left had to jump over five bamboo canes. From those human beings came the Patalima, the five men. Those who had passed mulua Satene on the right had to jump over nine bamboo canes. From those men came the Patasiwa, the nine men. Then Satene said to the humans:

"Today I will leave you, and you will no longer see me on earth. Only after your death will you see me again. But even then, you will have to undertake a very arduous journey before you can meet me." At that moment, Satene disappeared from the earth and since then has lived as a nitu (= spirit) on the summit of Salahua, the mountain of the dead in the south-west of Seram. Anyone who wishes to reach her must first die. However, the path that leads to Salahua crosses eight mountains, in which eight other spirits live. Since that time, in addition to humans, animals and spirits have also existed on earth

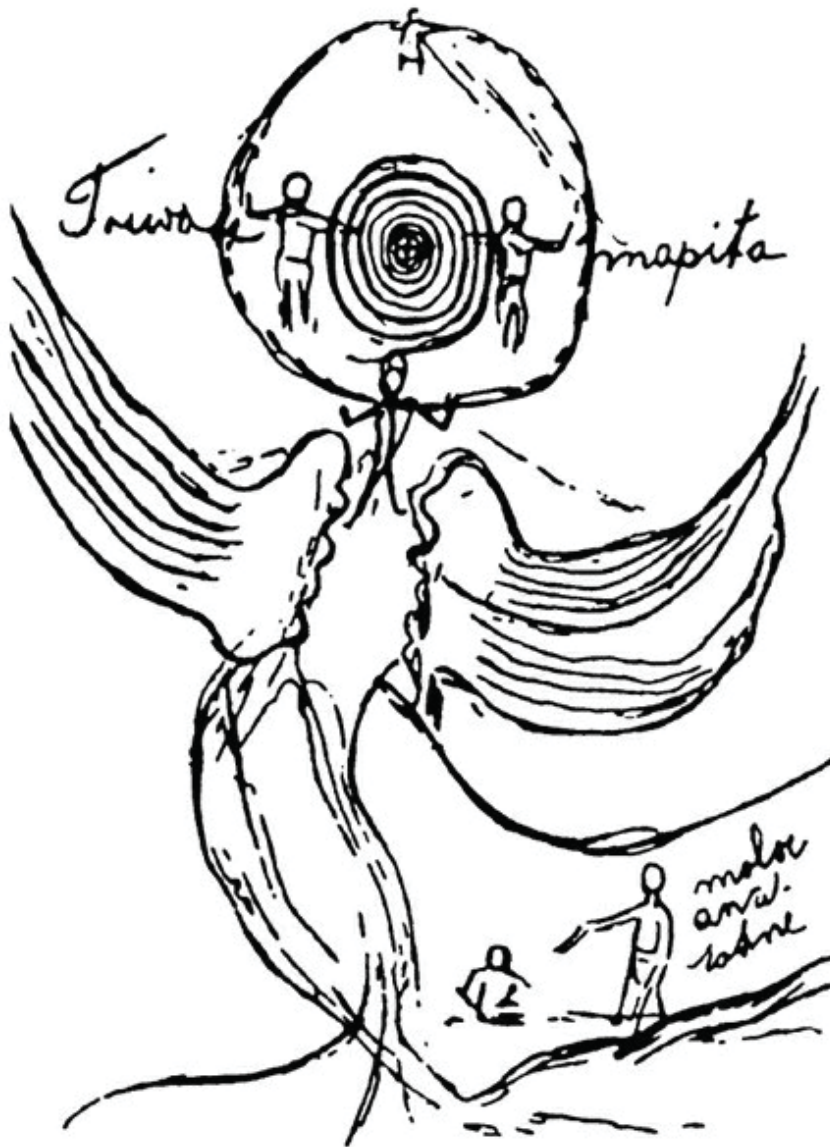
spirits have also existed on earth. From then on, men have been divided into Patalima and Patasiwa.

*(Explanation by the ethnologist, who
who the indigenous people helped by
the indigenous people with their drawings)*

The narrators took great pains to describe the gate that Mulua Satene had built in Tamene. The illustration [illus. 3] reproduces one of the many drafts in which the indigenous people sought to clearly depict the construction of the gate. The only thing that can be deduced with certainty and without ambiguity from the various indications is the coincidence between the gate and the spiral formed by the chain of maro dancers, although leaving aside the indication that Mulua Satene, the goddess of death, was on the other side of that spiral that humans crossed to reach her. Apparently, this was difficult, as men who failed to cross the spiral instantly ceased to be men. In the drawing, Tuwale (the sun man) and Mabita can be seen next to the spiral structure, while Mutua Satene, the future goddess of death, is depicted at the bottom right with the arms of the dead Hainuwele. In the centre of the drawing, the winding lines to the left and right of the path may indicate the nine mountains on the road leading to the realm of the dead, while to the left and right of it are the nine or five stumps marked with stripes that have been mentioned in the division of men into Patasiwa and Patalima.

One gets the impression that the relationship between the drawing—an obvious legacy passed down by the indigenous people—and the

division of men into the two tribes mentioned at the beginning was secondary; originally, the drawing depicted a large bird in contact with the spiral. However, this impression should not lead us to draw conclusions. Jensen himself points out that similar ceremonies are also held in other parts of the world, mentioning the one in the New Hebrides, researched by John Layard. There, too, the dance creates specific figures, and these figures also correspond to labyrinthine forms that take on great importance for the deceased on their journey to the realm of death. There, too, only the goddess of death, who is able to traverse the labyrinth, can reach the destination. It could be that these figures continue to exist as drawings of remarkable geometric art by the indigenous people ^[24]. Underlying these labyrinthine dances is also a mythological idea of death, which simultaneously encompasses the idea of life. For Layard, the reason for the supposed journey to the realm of the dead is not death itself, but the desire for renewal of life through contact with dead ancestors, with those who already live an existence beyond the grave ^[25]. Layard refers to the ritual as a whole as a "fertility ceremony" and characterises the dolmen — the most significant sacrificial monument, located at the centre of the first part of the celebration — with the following words: "This dolmen represents, first of all, a stone tomb, but it also represents a cave, which the dead person passes through during their journey, and finally, the bed through which the living person, aided by offerings, achieves rebirth" ^[26].



3. Drawing of a labyrinth referring to the myth of Hainuwele

These examples of danceable labyrinths are not fragmentary, but endure in relation to entire cultures; they are alive and full of meaning, and their significance is clear: they are not merely the womb, nor a

crude body image, but rather a *direction* that delves into death and transcends it. This is confirmed by other observations. The first was made by Layard ^[27]. In southern India, among a Dravidian tribe, he found the representation of a labyrinth as a model for tattoos. There it appears related to a mythology similar to that of death in the New Hebrides. The cultural background is also similar: an island characterised by dolmens and menhirs dating back to megalithic times. We might add that tattooing has since become a typical sign of initiation. It is obtained by those who, born into a new community and, in a sense, into a new life, are reborn through it. This rebirth is preceded by the event of death, usually swallowed by a monster or represented by sliding through a door. New Zealand offers us classic examples of the spiral as a very common motif in tattoos, as well as, in the same territory, as decoration for the doors of places of worship ^[28].

There is also no shortage of spiral designs where the spirits of ancestors are symbolically helped to be reborn. It is known that sticks were made to buzz for this purpose. The souls swayed inside them, while the circular movements of the sticks prepared the way for a new life. Among the various drawings that accompanied the *tjurunga* (oscillating sticks and stones) of central Australia, collected and made known by Géza Róheim, there are always spirals, which, according to the explanation of the indigenous people, most often indicate the places where spirits dwell before entering a woman's womb: in caves, in tree roots, in tubers and in water. In

other words: places *through* which the dead return to life.

5. Scandinavia, England, Germany

The figures, which until now have been compared to the Greek labyrinth, seem more silent and insubstantial when placed alongside similar examples. They are fragmentary, dead and, in essence, enigmatic. However, they demonstrate that the mythological phenomenon, known in Greece as 'labyrinthos', appears not only in the Pacific cultural area and in ancient Mediterranean cultures, but also in western and northern Europe. The fundamental possibility that this is a cultural asset of humanity whose origins date back to the Stone Age remains open, although no one dares to date the existing monuments, not even those from the Bronze Age ^[29]. Of these European examples, we will highlight only the most important ones.

In northern Europe—Scandinavia, Finland, Lapland—there are mainly two ways of placing the stones: without a winding path, although difficult to use [illus. 4] ^[30], and with a winding path that has an end [illus. 5] ^[31]. As these are clearly monuments whose primitive popular ritual has endured through several prehistoric and historical periods, it is preferable to refrain from classifying them exclusively to a specific period. Instead, it is advisable to proceed with another ordering of the periods. On the one hand, we can speak of the period of life; on the other, of the period corresponding to death, and in between we can

refer to a period of agony of the rites. The period concerning life can be attributed to both prehistoric and historical times. As wonderful as it might be to know exactly when these stones were placed, the verdict could only be made on what remains of them, that is, well into the era of death. Only in this era can they be investigated scientifically, and the researcher must know that they will necessarily begin with data from the periods of death.



4. Stone labyrinth in Visby, Sweden



5. Stone labyrinth in Wier

Descriptions from northern Europe relating to spiral-shaped stone formations should be regarded—unless there are reasons to indicate otherwise—as belonging to the time of death. Most of these are names of devastated cities, such as Babylon, Nineveh, Jericho, 'destruction of Jerusalem', Lisbon, probably after the famous earthquake. Scandinavian names with the meaning 'Trojaburg' should also be understood in this sense. In England, these formations are called 'Walls of Troy', and in Wales 'Caerdroia' in the Celtic language. This reminds us

remember that these monuments in their decay resemble city plans. Because the ancient and authentic meaning has been forgotten, they have been given a new and erroneous meaning. The new name is derived from humanistic or biblical-Christian scholarship, and sometimes also from popular legends or sagas, such as Pietar-inleikki, 'St. Peter's game', or Jatulintarha, 'Forest of Giants', in Finland; Völundarhus, 'House of Wiland', in Iceland; Wunderkreis, 'Miraculous Circle', in northern Germany. However, they do not add anything new about the period in which they were built or their original meaning.

Much more important is a name of a different nature. Among the Swedish peasants of Finland—alongside biblical names—is the name Jungfrudans, 'Maidens' Dance'. This seems to refer to the period in which it was played. A report entitled " " [32] recounts that in Aaland and other Finnish coastal islands, various games are played in labyrinthine stone formations, where a girl sits in the centre while young men run through the passageways until they reach the place where the "maiden" is. Thus, in northern Europe, we suddenly return to the living era of ritual—or, at least, to the era of its demise. For there is no reason to suppose that the maiden's dance is anything more than entertainment and a game laden with meaning for these dancers. A *full* life corresponds to the fullness of the senses, just as the culmination of the senses corresponds to a fullness of life. However, everything is vividly reminiscent of the Scram celebration, where a girl is also the target of the spiral movement. If I may, I would add that "ring-shaped stone walls" were found, according to the description of a trip to the Mortens Naes promontory.

In Norway, in the Varanger Fjord, at a point of Kran visibility, right there, in the same place where the Lapps previously had a cemetery or^[33]. I returned from Grebbestad, in Bohuslän, impressed by the connection with the realm of the dead. Unfortunately, we do not have systematic research on the relationship between the labyrinthine Nordic stone structures and the cemeteries. Perhaps in the northern regions, the territory itself would make us feel closer to its original meaning. Brede Kristensen made a rather significant comment when he suggested that some stone circles may have been built by shipwrecked sailors who were saved ^{by the} Lapps [34].

The labyrinths of the English — —no "building of stone", but "turf-cut mazes", "mazes cut into the meadow itself"—are located very close to a sacred place, a church or a chapel and, consequently, in the vicinity of the cemetery that is also usually found in those places. It seems that this circumstance was not taken into account and that the situation is explained by claiming that these mazes were originally used by penitents, as they were paths for atoning for their sins. It is a fact, however, that these constructions are a very special attraction for children to play in, and that they awaken in the players a mixture of feelings between affliction and desire, which seem more pagan-worldly than Christian-penitent. Most of the labyrinths, embedded in the floors of medieval cathedrals in France, had to be destroyed because children considered them playgrounds and competed with each other to see who could reach the central courtyard first I^[35]. We could refer to a

a kind of spontaneous revival in times of death. In England, too, the unconscious pagan tradition of the 'desire-attraction of the labyrinth' — if I may coin this expression — seems to live on in the background. The testimony of a 17th-century *Itinerarium curiosum* is therefore significant I^[36]:

The lovers of antiquity, especially of inferior class, always speak of 'em with great pleasure, and as if there were something extraordinary in the thing, tho' they cannot tell what... what generally appears at present is no more than a circular work made of banks of earth in the fashion of a maze of labyrinth, and the boys to this day divert themselves with running in it one after another, which leads them by many windings quite thro' and *back again* [Lovers of antiquity, especially those of the lower classes, always speak of them with great pleasure, and as if there were something extraordinary about them, although they cannot say what... What we generally find today is nothing more than a circular work formed by banks of earth in the shape of a labyrinth, and to this day children amuse themselves by running inside it one after another, which leads them through numerous twists and turns from here to there and back again to the same point].

Cook adds an important indication from another source:

At the Maze (called there the *mazles*) at Camberton, in Cambridgeshire, it has been a

custom, from time immemorial, among the villagers, to hold a feast every three years about the time of Easter r^[37] [In Camberton, Cambridgeshire, it has been a custom among the inhabitants since time immemorial to hold a feast in the Labyrinth (which they call the labyrinths) every three years around Easter].

The installation was renovated at the same time, on a regular basis. This is how the labyrinth also appears to be related to 'a sacred time' — contrary to the traditional Christian calendar, a pagan tetraeteris (Greek name given to a period of three years).

The labyrinthine monuments of Germany and, above all, their ancient labyrinthine rituals were also examined ^[38]. Interesting trends were found in this research. Ritual customs mainly consist of *dances*. An impressive Swiss example can be found in Uhland's writings ^[39]: "On a Sunday evening, seven people began a circle dance on the lawn of Greyerz Castle, which did not end until Tuesday morning in the market square of Saamen, after seven hundred young men and women had alternately joined the circle, and together they formed something resembling a ring like that of a snail." The figures may not be accurate, but the gigantic *spiral* is undeniable e^[40]. The *double spiral and triple* turn also appear as dance figures ^[41]. The centre is often marked in a special way, most often, though not always, by means of a tree. Also a stone can play

perfectly. Sometimes both are present: in the village of Wolfsbehringen, under the largest lime tree, a large stone was found that served as a table. The line of dancers jumped several times around the huge stone ^[42]. In Scandinavian stone formations, such as the one near Visby, one stone acts as the centre. However, under no circumstances should the spiral shapes be understood only from a significant central point: the reverse direction, i.e. facing the centre, is also congruent. With the vitality of the May tree traditions, it is not surprising that they also incorporated labyrinth dances, which were already in an advanced stage of disappearance, into their customs. In Germany, too, the original meaning was more of a

"passage" rather than a "turnaround". This is clarified by the fact that descriptions of labyrinths were found on the upper part of a beam, on the door of a farmhouse in the Westphalian village of Marmeke ^[43]. One possible explanation could be the carnival tradition typical of Westphalia: an authentic labyrinth dance ^[44]. The butchers' guild in Miinster celebrated this dance in the 16th century. 'When they passed in front of a butcher's house, he had to open the *lower part of the door* completely. The master of the guild and *his bride*, leading the procession, entered first, took hold of the rings they wore on their hands, and pulled each other along'. We shall recall this later with the italicised *chorus Proserpinae* and the dance called *tratta*.

In the 16th century, the 'tree of life' already dominated from the central point. But the spring paintings by Lucas van Valkenborch and Hans Bol ^[45] show another characteristic of the labyrinth German archaic, also

recognisable as highly mythological: it is located in the middle of a spring landscape on a very special and tiny labyrinthine island. Here too we have ethnological evidence: an ancient circle dance was performed *every three years* in Schwäbisch-Hall, under some very old lime trees that shaded a small *island* ^[46]. Once again we encounter a tetraeteris. Even in the 17th century, in northern Germany, a 'sacred time', more of a Christian nature, continued to be linked to the labyrinth. The 'miraculous circle' that stood near Neustadt-Eberswalde in Brandenburg was renewed annually on the Monday before the Feast of the Ascension of Christ ^[47]. Meanwhile, the revival of the tradition, on the one hand, increasingly leaned towards a sporting event: real races were organised in the 'miraculous circle'. On the other hand, it tended to become — in the form of the typical garden labyrinths of classicism — a kind of game of skill and deception. The playful and even tiring *passage* in its festive essence degenerates into a *maze*. This evolution ultimately leads to something completely rational: a purely ingenious construction. The final step in this decline is the pocket maze, a toy in which a clever child must push a tiny ball to the centre.

6. Medievo-Virgilio

We will enter the area of the ancient Mediterranean through French territory. The fundamental figure is the same as in Germany, Scandinavia, England, and the Celtic lands, especially Ireland ^[48]. In the temples of

France and Italy, the main meaning of the labyrinths points in another direction. They show us that this figure is not only capable of provoking movement, but also of arousing reflection. It is made in such a way that it cannot remain entirely lifeless or entirely meaningless.

The labyrinth on the floor of the small basilica of Reparato de Orleansville in Algiers is considered the oldest example of an ecclesiastical labyrinth, provided that the date of the church (325) is correct and also corresponds to that of the mosaic. In those years, the ancient labyrinth had already ceased to exist or was only kept alive by children playing games. The art of the catacombs was unfamiliar with this figure; the flourishing period of labyrinth representations is rather in the Early Middle Ages. And it cannot be proven whether the most grandiose examples originally served as passages of penance. Some are too small, such as the one in Orleansville, or are positioned vertically, such as the much-admired labyrinth in the vestibule of Lucca Cathedral. Inscriptions and names, such as *Maeandre* r^[49], *Daedalium* or *Maison de Dalus* (Daedalus), along with other more popular ones, such as 'lieu ou chemin de Jérusalem', as well as representations of the Minotaur in the inner courtyards, attest to the fact that people were aware of the antiquity of the figure. The figure of the labyrinth has also been described in manuscripts and commentaries. The most widespread medieval labyrinth figure—that of Lucca, Sens, Chartres—is attributed to *two* simple meanders s^[50], whose main importance we will recognise later. Now we will focus more on the reflective. The fact that the figure was located in cathedrals—most often on the floor—is of fundamental importance, because it was intended to express a

significant content. The inscriptions and handwritten comments are enlightening in this regard: the labyrinth is the *mundus*, in the medieval Christian sense, conceived as a kind of underworld. In the oldest example in Orleansville, the *Ecclesia* is still at the centre, and whoever has managed to traverse the arduous path will have reached their destination. Later, according to scholarly tradition, the meaning of the figure is adapted to the legend of Theseus, and the difficulty of *the return journey* is emphasised:

This world is typically represented as a labyrinth:
wide at the entrance, but narrow at the exit.
Sic mundo captus viciorum mole gravatus Vix
valet ad vite doctrinam quisque [redire](#) [51]

[Our world is described by a
characteristic way through this
labyrinth:
wide for those who enter, but very narrow for
those who want to return.
Whoever was were trapped by
the world, he will hardly be able,
because of the burden of his sins, return to the
teachings of life].

The Minotaur in the centre represents hell, the devil, and the labyrinth a *wrong path* that leads to certain perdition, unless Christ-Thes or ^[52] grants salvation. It is here that we can recognise the religious antecedent to the 'intellectual project of the world'.

The new content is Christian, and its introduction is secondary, as it takes place in times of death. It corresponds to the style with which allegories were developed in the Middle Ages. For in this way something is still evoked

through the labyrinthine figure that vividly recalls the primitive examples mentioned above. In both forms, the labyrinth represents an aspect of death. In both cases, it leads to the realm of the dead and, despite everything, to life—with the help of Christ in the medieval examples. The difficulty of returning is a characteristic of the realm of the dead, of which it is said in the sixth canto of the *Aeneid*: the entrance is wide open, ...*sed revocare gradum — hoc opus, hic labor est*. Returning is an arduous task! We must think of the poetic preparation for that ancient journey through the underworld: Virgil's description of the labyrinth. What he narrates was called 'the propylaea of the realm of death', and it was assumed that for 'the poet and his contemporaries, the labyrinth and the realm of the dead were still a living image' [53]. It would be all too easy to make a crude comparison based on a genuine poetic allusion! Aeneas, in his search for the entrance to the kingdom of the dead, finds the representation of the famous Cretan labyrinth [54] at the gates of the sanctuary cave of Cumae. This is certainly not without significance. Not surprisingly, according to tradition, the architect of this temple and that of that miraculous work are one and the same: Daedalus, who, after being saved, consecrated his wings to Apollo here in Cumae. We will soon understand the coherence of the above. What we should feel immediately, and what the ancient reader surely felt, is the evocative power of the labyrinthine representation; a power that the very image of the labyrinth exerted on the poet — whether or not it is true that he saw it where he describes it.

Here the labyrinth is *only* the marvellous Cretan work, and

even so, from somewhere, before its image and before these mysterious caves of the sanctuary of Apollo, a *mythological idea* of death emerges: precisely that of the *labyrinthine* underworld. But we still have to discover whether the idea of death underlay the Greek labyrinth, and what kind it was.

7. Cave-building

In late antiquity, we find the labyrinth—at least in the urban culture of the Roman Empire—in a moribund phase: as decoration for pavements and children's *playgrounds*—in *pavimentis puerorumque ludicris campestribus* —^[55]. There is a period prior to this that reaches the Middle Minoan period, and surely also the preceding one. Someday it will be known that, in reality, classical antiquity should already be considered a phase of its decline, and that its true vitality is limited to early Mediterranean antiquity and may also extend, at most, to the first archaic period. In this agonising phase, meaning has already died; only form remains alive and is still capable of evoking something of the original meaning. The great variety of labyrinthine figures apparently constitutes a difficulty for the observer of monuments. The complex labyrinth that allows circumvention does not appear on the coins of Knossos until the late classical period (4th century), and even there, at first, it is stylised and has a square shape ^[56]. The corresponding round labyrinth [illus. 6] ^[57] is found in Italy, on coins from Knossos in Hellenic times.

late (2nd century), although—as a representation of the game of *trivia*—it dates back to the early archaic period [illu. 7] ^[58]. Ancient labyrinthine representations in the Greek area are meander-shaped. A meander labyrinth had already been discovered in a fresco in the second palace of Knossos ^[59]. If it is from the same period as the palace, then it corresponds to the third Middle Minoan period. And in the fifth century, the labyrinth was still reproduced in the paintings on Attic vases in the form of a meander; a form of representation that was explained ^[60] to attribute those labyrinths to an earlier and more primitive composition. This explanation was confirmed by the architectural calculations of Didymus of Miletus, where meanders were called *labyrinthoi* ^[61]. We discovered that even in the Middle Ages, the *labyrinthus* was also called *maeander*. The modification of the master line does not affect the essence. Apart from formal variations, there were also a variety of uses. These representations—whether of a building, dance, spiral line as an attribute or as an ornament—will now be analysed in succession. We will begin with the labyrinth in the form of a building or cave.



6. Knossos coin



7. Tragiatella pottery

From the earliest classical period, the conception of the labyrinth as the floor plan of a building undoubtedly occupied first place. It is very likely that this depended on the appreciation of the quadrangular labyrinth that allowed circumvention. For classical antiquity, the labyrinth primarily signified an ingenious installation, the work of a creative architect, Daedalus,

built for a rational purpose: to hide the shame of the royal family, the Minotaur. The rational element predominates in this creation, a sign of later ages from a mythological point of view, really, times of demise and death. The conception in the form of a plan or as a rudiment of destroyed walls is characteristic of the period of death. This observation contradicts the conception that does not place the starting point in a mythological idea, but rather seeks it among the ruins of Knossos.

"The ruins of the palace, the ignorance of its former layout, the strange, incomprehensible construction methods, the scattered remains of the frescoes, vague memories of an archaic and unknown domination must have first woven a web of mystery around the place, before the legend and that dark concept of the labyrinth could take shape." This is how this conjecture sounds in its most cautious form ^[62], and it represents a clear example of how one might imagine the origin of a legend. A construction of this kind would explain the development of the myth in its dying phase, but it would not clarify two other ancient conceptions: first, that the labyrinth had been a cave, and second, that one could dance in the labyrinth; Daedalus is said to have invented dance and built the place for dancing. Knossos did not show the conception of *the Minoan palace*, but rather the *palace of Daedalus' dance*

"on white stones" ^[63].

The first evidence of the Minotaur's cave dates back to the 1st century v ^[64]. An underground quarry near Gortyna ^[65]—in the area of Minos' legendary domain—was shown to travellers as if it were the famous labyrinth o ^[66]. This belief is supposedly supported by the possible etymology of the word *labyrinthos*, from *labrys*, 'double-edged axe'. The relationship between the two words is

I could understand that *labyrinthos* originally meant 'quarry, mining plant with many passageways, grottos and stone caves', and *labrys*, the axe that was used there. The tools of the ancient stonecutters—including the double-edged axe—are shown to visitors to the passageways of the underground sanctuary in Cumano as an example r[⁶⁷]. The tradition of Daedalic origin is not only related to the great age of the plant (the oldest of the galleries shows traces of the Mycenaean and ancient Etruscan style of the *dromoi*), but also because it recognised the labyrinth due to the nature of the place. The reason for this recognition is the underground layout. That Daedalus had represented the Cretan labyrinth on the door of the sanctuary and that Aeneas went to this place to begin his journey to Hades are reasons that lend coherence to the conjecture. Virgil's description proves to be accurate even in the details of the shape of the enclosure o[⁶⁸]. A similar consistency is attested to by a group of monuments that have not received much attention, in a quarry area in the south of France. A quarry tool, a very unusual axe, appears there, already in Roman times, as a characteristic element of sepulchral symbolism l[⁶⁹]. An artistic prison and underground passages are as indicative of the idea of death as the tomb is here. The first two are so closely related through this idea and to each other that they both bear the name *labyrinthos*. That this idea was not conceived as one of extermination is demonstrated by the legends of the salvation of Daedalus and the return of Aeneas, both linked to the symbolism of the sanctuary of Cumae. Labyrinths, underground constructions and the underworld are its forms of expression. **A n d** only from this idea can one

understand that one and the same thing is not only recognisable in caves nor conceivable as a construction, but can also be expressed through dance.

8. Dance

Any research on the labyrinth should be based on dance. Literary and archaeological evidence of labyrinthine dances and games are among the most primitive, both in terms of their age and their characteristics. Only the figure of the labyrinth itself —as a spiral (or meander) projecting inwards and outwards— can be traced in the archaic Mediterranean area. However, the figure is silent and timeless in itself: a primal human gesture that remains evocative wherever it appears. Only when it becomes more complex does it begin to speak to us about itself. The maro dance and its connection to the mythological figure of Hainuwele were examples of this type of realisation. A labyrinth dance is mentioned and described for the first time in Greece in the *Iliad* (18.590). However, Homer does not use the term labyrinth. This is also natural, if we are guided by the above explanations. Originally, what was represented through dance was not called *labyrinthos*, nor was death conceived as a mythical place, which one enters and perhaps manages to leave, but rather something from which that place could be seen or through which it could be represented: first, an underground construction, then the legendary building. The transfer of the word *labyrinthos* to

dance did not have to occur. However, the definition of labyrinth dances is in any case as certain as that of the labyrinthine spiral: either through the same mythological characters or through the form itself, or through both circumstances at the same time.

Homer knows of a place for dancing (*chorós*), which Daedalus had prepared (ἤσκησεν) in Knossos for Ariadne. Just as they danced in that famous place, the young men and maidens danced in the other place that Hephaestus had depicted on Achilles' shield: with their hands linked at the wrists, 'very lightly, as when a potter sitting in front of the wheel checks its rotation with his hand'. The whole group moved in a circle, in unison, just as the rim of that wheel turned. Although it could have been a very long line, for very soon "one group danced towards the other" (ἐπὶ στίχας ἀλλήλοισιν). This must necessarily have happened when the line turned in a spiral or meander, or when it retraced its steps within the complex labyrinthine figure: the dancers in front moved parallel to and in the opposite direction to those behind them. The conception of the two forms of labyrinth described corresponded to the same canon. A labyrinthine figure can be intuited as the basic outline, and this possibility is confirmed by multiple ancient sources. Firstly, by Homer's mention of Daedalus and Ariadne. Secondly, by the commentary on the pitfalls, according to which Theseus performed this dance together with the survivors after defeating the Minotaur, imitating his walk through the labyrinth —entrance and exit—. The art of this dance had been taught to him by Daedalus of⁷⁰. Eustathius' commentary maintained that some sailors

of the old school still knew how to perform this dance with its many twists and turns ^[71]. A marvellous work of archaic pottery painting depicts the dancers: the so-called François vase. Ariadne watches them, like Hainuwele or the 'virgin' in the Nordic dance of Jungfrudans.

Further confirmation comes from the dance of Delos in honour of Aphrodite, who in that place was a superior figure to Ariadne, as Ariadne Aphrodite in Amatunte e^[72]. This form presupposes the death of Ariadne (those of Amatunte showed the tomb of Ariadne Aphrodite) ^[73], so at the same time we could now talk about the figure of Persephone e^[74], a goddess whose idea — in addition to corresponding exactly to the essence of Persephone — united life and death. According to the legend of the cult, Theseus was the one who brought the image of the goddess for veneration, the work of Daedalus and a gift from Ariadne ^[75], and together with his companions he performed this dance for the first time in Delos, which with its twists and turns imitated the labyrinth o^[76]. This dance celebrated salvation and, at the same time, mortality, that is, the death from which they were delivered. The celebration took place at night. Among the inscriptions on expenses found in Delos, mention is made of the lights needed for the dances of the festival of Aphrodite ^[77]. The reference to the ropes used for the same festival is not entirely certain. There are Roman authors s^[78] who mention a rope in Greek dances, as does Livy in reference to a festival of the goddess of the underworld and abducted maiden, Persephone ^[79]: *per manus recte data virginis sonum vocis pulsu pedum modulantes incesserunt*, 'with the rope in their hands, matching their steps to the song, they walked'.

the maidens"; this is how the *Proserpinae chorus* was celebrated in Rome, following the Greek model. In performing this dance figure, the dancers hold onto a rope.

This was especially necessary when the spiral dance was complicated. The orientation of the Delos dance can be deduced, as they circled around an altar formed with horns, but exclusively on the left side of^[80]. The left is the direction of death^[81]. Thus, the dance moved, as in the Maro dance, towards death, to finally lead to the origin of life. The rope as an essential requirement and the strange name of the dance — it was called *geranos*, 'dance of the cranes' — are two striking features that we should look at closely.

The two are closely related, as the leader of the circle is called *geranulko s*^[82]. The name indicates that these 'cranes' were 'dragged' by their conductor: the dancers carried Ariadne's thread in their hands, so to speak. And just as it was let out and gathered up, the *geranos* dancers carried their rope first *inwards* and then *back again*. The direction does not change: in the centre of the spiral, the dancer spins in a continuous movement, which from the beginning is a movement around an invisible centre. But from now on, it is no longer in the direction of *death*, but in that of *birth*. This also applies to Delos, the island where Apollo was born. It was believed that the rope dance described by Livy must be 'Greek, Apollonian'^[83]. This definition does not exhaust the subject. Two elements must still be considered: the feminine, which corresponds to birth, and the archaic Mediterranean. The accounts of Delos also mention, with the same requirement, the dances at the festivals of Artemis and especially those of Artemis Britomarti s^[84]. Britomartis is a Cretan figure

of Artemis who can just as rightly be called a Cretan figure of Persephone. In this case, the relationships between Crete and the kinship in the cult of Persephone become visible. In Delos, Artemis was also the goddess of birth, and was present at the birth of her brother Apollo ^[85]. The three goddesses—Artemis, Britomartis, and Persephone—are associated with death or birth, or both at the same time. If one looks for analogies to this dance, there are many, especially in the Balkan countries; although the most striking are the *women's dances*, which are still alive today in southern Italy and Greece: just to mention a few, the dances that in Italy are called *tratta* (the dance of the women of the village) significantly *tratta* (from *trarre*, "drag" ^[86]), those of Corfu ^[87], the Easter dance of the women of Megara ^[88]. The representation of a women's choir in a tomb in Ruvo has been compared to these more recent examples ^[89]. Both here and in the dance of Corfu, the men appear as leaders of the circle. The women follow them with their arms crossed, linked together, which is even more striking, as intertwined hands are a rarity in Greek dances ^[90]. These women are literally dragged along by their hands. A cult of women, from which men are excluded—such as those of Demeter and Persephone—includes the chorus of the Thesmophoria rituals, where the dancers also move in a circle, holding hands ^[91], just like in the dance referred to by Terence: *tu inter eas restim ductans saltabis* ^[92]. This is the distinction given to the man who tolerates the joyful Demeterian activity of the women's world in his home.

This line leads us to a sphere in which the

Women are essentially in their domain: in the circle of death and birth. In this realm, the pull towards the underworld is not surprising and is likely to continue beyond life. But how should we understand that it is cranes that are 'dragged' in the *geranos*? One might assume that, having observed on occasion the similarity between the dragging itself and that of those migratory birds, between the game itself and the behaviour of cranes, the dance was subsequently renamed *geranos* ^[93]. But then another thought arises: that this identification of the dancers with the birds could mean something deeper. A broad similarity was believed to have been discovered between the crested ibis's orientation flight and the labyrinth dance, and this seemed to be confirmed by the comments of Sami fishermen and farmers. A Greek scholar reports on this issue without ceasing to think about death: "It can be assumed that *geranos*, at least in its origin, not only meant 'dance in the manner of cranes', but also 'the dance of the time when cranes fly', that is, in autumn, on a day of mourning for Ariadne" ^[94]. He also refers to evidence from other labyrinths, in which the idea of death is as clearly evident as in the Egyptian labyrinth described by Herodotus ^[95], or in the Etruscan labyrinth mentioned by Varro, in the tomb of King Porsenna ^[96]. And he quotes the inscription on the labyrinth mosaic in Hadrumetum: *hic inclusus vitam perdi t* ^[97] [whoever remains enclosed here loses his life]. With this background, it is not the living labyrinth, the *geranos* dance, that is characterised, but only the dead figure: the dance speaks of imprisonment and liberation, of death and at the same time of the afterlife.

How profound and serious this identification is in the

primitive dancers, as any ethnologist can attest. That we are dealing with a primitive or, rather, original case is demonstrated by one of the oldest representations of the labyrinth. For a long time now, the archaic Etruscan jug from Tragliatella, depicting the game of *truia*, has been used to interpret Homer's verse of [98]. On the jug, seven young warriors can be seen dancing and two equally hairless horsemen. Behind the first horseman sits a monkey, and behind the second—as if both came from that place—is drawn the complicated labyrinth in the form of a map [ill. 7], which does not appear on the coins of Knossos until 200 BC [ill. 6] [99]. The Etruscan inscription on the labyrinth reads: *truia*. The Indo-European word [100], probably Etruscan in origin from Latin, means 'whirling dance': the appropriate diminutive —*trulla* from *trua* in Latin — [101] corresponds to "molinillo". The drawing shows the basic rules of the game of Troy described by Virgil: *alternis orbibus orbes impediunt* [102]. Virgil himself provides the comparison with the Cretan labyrinth, but also with the games of dolphins. In the fifth canto of the *Aeneid*, the funeral games in honour of Anchises culminate in the so-called *Ludus Troiae* or *Troiae decursio*. According to Virgil's description, it is a kind of competition between young men, and according to an ancient spectator of [103], a "dance with horses" and a *mysterium*. In any case, it was an archaic game and, although different in style, it resembled the Greek dance of the labyrinth. One cannot be derived from the other, and yet the players of the Etruscan game *truia* carried the image of a large bird on their shields. Thus, the identification of the bird

becomes a very archaic and essential feature.

And now we return to the rope, whose use seemed justified by the difficulty involved in the labyrinth figure. But don't dancers perform the complex figures of the dance with greater skill if they have more freedom of movement? A bird dance must require even greater agility to glide and float freely! Although putting oneself in the shoes of a crane dance performer is no easy task, we can draw some conclusions from a case where the experience of the labyrinth re-emerged and was subsequently described [as *circumambulatio* \[104\]](#). It was a case of *automatisme ambulaire*, a form of sleepwalking that nevertheless has the capacity for memory, a labyrinthine walk with hypermnesic activity or *circumambulatio*, as the Romans called these ritual walks. First walking to the left and then, once the centre was reached, to the right. This experience was repeatedly accompanied by the phenomenon of "levitation". Those who suffer from this condition have the sensation of rising off the ground, as if held up by a strong wind. It is necessary to hold on tightly so as not to lose contact with the ground. This was also done in that case, and I quote these phrases almost literally from the medical report. In no case is this a form of madness. The patient is not mistaken, and the whole process takes place in a state of 'double consciousness'. She holds on to the garden fence, even grabbing a thorny holly bush to prevent herself from flying away and losing this side of the world.

Could the rope used by the Delian dancers and those in southern Italy have had the same purpose? Or in both cases did it represent the possibility of a precise execution of the figure and at the same time serve to hold on? Is it possible that the *geranium* dancers experienced so

powerfully the liberating flight that they were forced to hold on to each other to cling to the reality of this world? In any case, we cannot underestimate the power of their experiences.

And finally, it is also worth highlighting the feature of this experience that stands out for its power, but which was not an experience of madness: "at the end of this *circumambulatio*, she discovered a giant *ammonite* in the grass. This made her feel enormously attracted and fascinated, absorbed in its contemplation, she was delighted. She had the clear feeling that she had found what she was 'looking for'. In ammonites we find the purest form of the spiral, as we will see more and more clearly: the original form of the labyrinth.

9. Sinking-Taking flight

The meaning of identification with flying birds is revealed in a chorus by Euripides. It is a case in which the author of the tragedy creates something very profound. Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff believed he recognised in it something very personal, individual, which departed from the style of the tragic choruses s^[105]. It is a lyrical expression by the poet that does not fit with the situation in the drama. Women from Troezen sing these strange verses from *Hippolytus*, whose intimate coherence was as little recognised as the link with the drama that precedes them. Nothing speaks in favour of individualistic lyricism. The situation, in which the verse fits beautifully, was not unbearable for the poet (we know nothing about his attitude to life at that moment), but it was for the chorus, conscious bearers of the

general fate of women and accomplices to the intentions of their master. He knows that Phaedra will take her own life and drag the innocent prince to his death with her. He wants to be "far from here", as Wilamowitz accurately reproduces, following the meaning of this song. What this great philologist reveals as so typically Euripidean, and perhaps even lyrically romantic, is, in the strict sense, the eternal origin, the primordial mythological that always and everywhere re-emerges, and whose guardians are, according to Euripides' thinking, above all women^[106].

The chorus would like to disappear into 'gigantic caves': this is the beginning of that song. Although the word in question refers to a kind of cave as a hiding place, Wilamowitz still felt compelled to think of the 'shadows of the clouds'. For what follows already points upwards: the women wish to become birds and join the migratory birds. How could such a transformation take place in *gigantic caves*? Wilamowitz did not recognise a coherent meaning and chose to reinterpret the first line of the verse, rather than accepting what is expressed in lucid words: the path leads through the cave, the tomb, the underworld, to new life. By including a simple word, 'if', we can follow his translation from the second line:

If a god would turn me
into a winged bird among
airy flocks!
And lifted me above the sea
wave of the Adriatic
and the waters of the Eridanus,

in whose purple flow unfortunate
young women lamenting Phaeton
the amber glints of her tears!

And the shore full of apple trees
of the melodious Hesperides, where the lord of
the purple
sea no longer traces
no longer traces for sailors, the
sacred boundary of the sky
set, which Atlas holds up, and
ambrosia springs forth beside the
bed of Zeus,
where, rich in gifts, the divine earth
increases the happiness of the gods!

Through the underground caves, desire goes upwards, through death towards a better life. Cave and bird figure are part of a context full of meaning, the same as labyrinth and cranes. Only this contextual union fully explains how the architect and prisoner of the labyrinth, Daedalus, knew the two exits from his deadly work: the thread and flight. In an era when mythology had become rationalised, it was natural that the great inventor of all kinds of tools should also know how to artificially imitate the flight of birds. The spirit of late, dying mythology corresponds to the classic legend of the reckless Icarus, the son of Daedalus. Alongside it, however, there is another, much more archaic legend that recognises the kinship between a bird and Daedalus. The sister was called Perdice, partridge, according to tradition [107], and according to another s[108], the son

of the teacher's sister. It is said that she threw her nephew, the partridge, from a rock on the Acropolis out of envy, since Perdice was also a great inventor, that is, he taught him to fly, as was customary in the sphere of cult o^[109]. Next to the temple of Apollo in Leucade — in the area of power of Icarius, father of Penelope — in historical times, criminals were still thrown into the void from the rocks of Leucade. The testimony says that this was the way in which the voluntary jump of a priest was replaced. This is the only way to explain why attempts were made to soften the fall by attaching false wings (or simple feathers) or birds, and why boats were waiting below in the sea to save them. (We know from Virgil that Daedalus, after his salvation in Cumae, consecrated his wings to Apollo). The ritual leap from the rocks of Leucade can be understood as an example of 'ritual flight'. Through it, funerary art points to the same thing explained by Euripides' chorus, which we have already discussed: 'Through death, life'. Sappho's leap from the rocks of Leucade appears in the apse of the so-called Basilica Sotterranea di Porta Maggiore in Rome, as an image that has this meaning there. A similar ritual practised by Etruscan swimmers appears, much earlier, on the wall of the Tomba della Caccia e Pesca in Tarquinia ^[110]: below, the sea, with dolphins, and numerous birds in the air convey the same meaning, in no way allegorical, but evocative, due to the atmosphere that pervades the entire painting — as in the *geranos* dance.

10. Infinite-Immortal

The labyrinth-cave and the labyrinth-building reveal something mortal. The labyrinth dance called 'crane' goes further. Similar forms of expression that point to the conceptual link between death and life—the song of the Trojan women, Sappho's leap in the Basilica Sotterranea, and the fresco in the Tomba della Caccia e Pesca—not only emphasise salvation, but also idealise, explicitly or by allusion, to a greater or lesser extent, the state that follows. In the living form of the labyrinth, the crane dance, we cannot say that such idealisation exists. It is possible that there is a tendency towards this end. But the only thing that is certain is that it expresses the return from the world of the dead, that is, *continuity*. This is what the simplest and oldest forms of the labyrinth aim to do, and they do so in order for us to be able to speak of *infinite continuity*. These simple figures are the spiral and the spiral-meander, a stylised meander with angular contours, as an essential representation of an *infinite line*. Now, however, we can look back at the two basic Nordic figures: the more complex one [illu. 4] and the figure of the crossroads [illu. 5]. The latter, perhaps related to that idea of death, recognises a better and a worse destiny in the afterlife, and consequently also knows a path to the right and another to the left. The path on the right leads to the central point of the spiral-shaped stone constructions on the island of Wier. The other form only fulfils its destiny with the *return*, as demonstrated by the Etruscan representation of Tragliatella, where the horsemen emerge from the same plane [ill. 7]. It is very likely that this complex spiral figure appeared in the Mediterranean, initially associated with an equestrian competition, with an Indo-European name

Indo-European name, and finally, coming from the north, it appears on the coins of Knossos, thus replacing the variations typical of the south.

The original relationship between Daedalus and the spiral could not escape the researchers, although until now it has not been integrated into a coherent conception of the evolution of a mythological idea. The relationship already appears in a very ancient story, which Sophocles used for his drama *Kamikoi*, now lost o^[111]. According to this narrative, Daedalus' skill lay in his ability to thread a string through the sinuosities of a snail shell. In the narrative, which had already undergone a certain rationalisation, Daedalus attached the string to an ant so that it would cross the shell carrying it with it. If we disregard the shift towards picaresque literature, the labyrinth and the snail are shown as two forms of expression for the same idea: the first —the snail shell—directly provided by nature; and the second —the labyrinth danced, drawn or imagined as a construction

—, created by man. In both cases, the world reveals the same aspect of being: its capacity to transcend all deaths infinitely. Consequently, there is a natural relationship between the two symbols, which in poetry almost emerges as identity. The mythologem is saved by an enigmatic word, in a kind of Kenning, something like an association by contiguity. The epigrammatic Teodoridas calls a snail shell extracted from the ma r^[112] a 'labyrinth of the sea'. It was offered as a gift to the nymphs of the caves, as they were the dwellers of a labyrinth created by nature. Greek lexicographers preserve the tradition of that close relationship. For them, the labyrinth always represents a place in the shape of a snail shell l^[113].

This primitive figure of the labyrinth corresponds to Ariadne's ball of thread being drawn as a large spiral on a three-legged Etruscan pile ^[114]. If we think about this drawing, in the sense of the mythological theme of Theseus and Ariadne, we must bring the line of the spiral to life and contemplate it as the image of a movement that, once it reaches the centre, bends and continues its rotation to return from the inside to the outside. Let us now consider this movement performed by a group, when a line is drawn from the inside outwards, alongside the other line that has led from the outside inwards: the whole forms a spiral meander that is infinite in itself and tends to expand across the entire surface available to it. The movement returns along the same line from the centre, creating a double spiral. In prehistoric monuments, this figure already seems to form a coherent unit. We refer to the prehistoric goddess of the Thracian and pre-Thracian burial mounds of Philippopolis, who bears a double spiral in the triangle of her lap [illus. 8] ^[115]: in the sense of our observations of the line that perpetually continues and repeats itself, birth-death-rebirth.



8. Thracian votive statuette

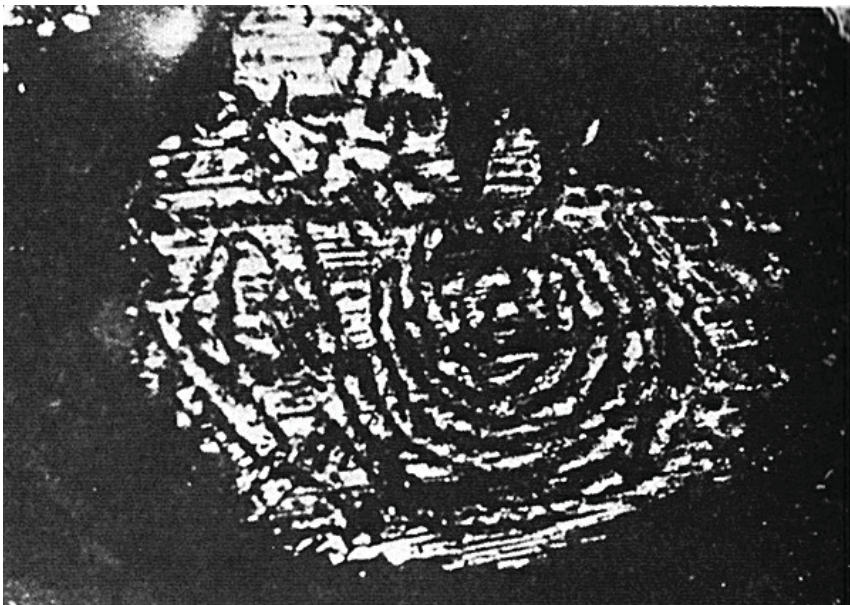
This figure of a woman, along with several others characterised by simple spirals, was found in Tiryns, Thessaly, and the northern Balkan o^[116], small monuments with Neolithic "idol sculptures", referred to by ^[117] to refute the

assumption that the drawings

were originally reproductions of the sun's trajectory. That idea, which was widespread and akin to the prehistoric cult of the sun, was based on the notion that the artists who drew the spiral, through observation and construction, were aware of the entire apparent trajectory of the sun, even though half of it remained invisible. Since the sun describes smaller semicircles each day from the summer solstice onwards, and larger semicircles each day from the winter solstice onwards, until it completes its orbit with the invisible nocturnal semicircles, we obtain a spiral, that is, a double spiral. However, we must not forget that the sun never reaches a central point, and never turns to the left, towards the smaller circle, only to return on the right side. These reservations against the solar orbit hypothesis were also raised alongside the argument that it is hard to believe that a prehistoric people had this combinatorial capacity ^[118]. But if one wishes to discover in the spiral, as well as in the double spiral, a symbol of the maternal womb, and therefore a relationship with the moon, this only demonstrates *another* different combinatorial capacity, more characteristic of modern man than of the archaic artist. Because when they wanted to draw the maternal womb and the moon — at least consciously — they did not choose any symbolism. They drew all parts of the body with honest realism, or else with a stylisation that concealed nothing. A good example of this is the statuette shown here. The double spiral is not a graphic variation of the maternal breast, but rather transcends something more than the crudely corporeal.

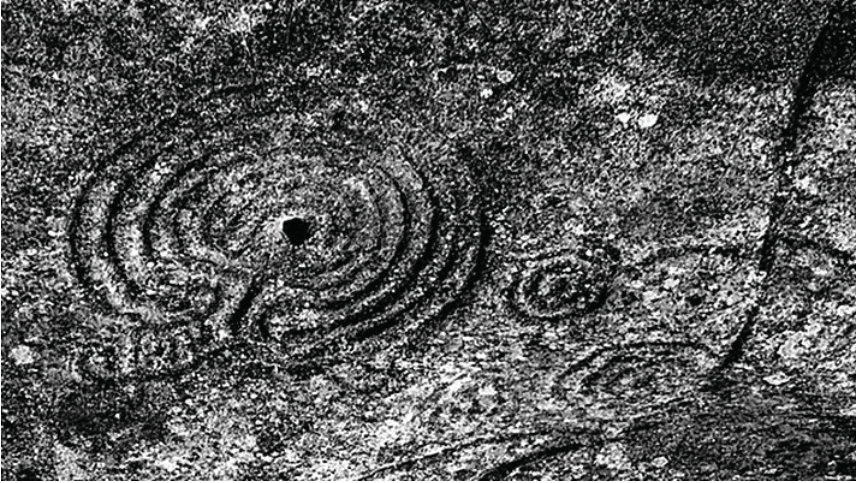


9. Double spiral from Bohuslän



10. Double spiral from Val Camonica

However, there are other monuments that are closer to the interpretation of the spiral as a solar orbit. The double spiral rising upwards in the cave paintings of the north, in Bohuslän [illus. 9]^[119], are certainly not just ornamental, but have a cult significance. The gesture, as in similar monuments in that area a^[120], indicates a solar cult. Between the north and the south are the cave paintings of Val Camonica in northern Italy, which often depict links. The labyrinth could be seen as a spiral line [illus. 10], and it was believed to represent the symbol of the sun's trajectory, because the spiral starts from the roof of a small temple-like building, which also appears to be related to other representations of sun worship [¹²¹]. A cave painting in north-western Spain shows, among many others—including concentric circles—the complex labyrinth of the Visby and Tragliatella type as a fixed form, but with the addition of two arched doors [illus. 11]. Probably no free passage, therefore, but rather a new transit as in the Maro dance of the Serameses. In all these areas of cave art, these same variations of the basic labyrinth figure return: spiral, double spiral and the Tragliatella type, complex and built. Should we consider this basic figure to be meaningless? Or should we equate it with the solar orbit? Do these statuettes bearing the signs of the spiral really exclude such an equation? Is not that goddess also the bearer of the powerful sun, just as any pregnant woman is the bearer of a little sun? ^[122] And does she not give birth to and give new life to the great sun again and again?



11. Drawing of a labyrinth in Pontevedra

This is the question we are now faced with, and I will even venture to answer it. It is not necessary to refer us to the 'association by contiguity'. There is another, more natural source, which lies in a deeper stratum of the soul where we no longer find the individual, but the world itself. The spiral is not only a primordial human gesture, but as a movement it is an original event in which we participate. The spiral of the solar orbit is not constructed geometrically: it is recognised again as a line akin to that to which one surrenders as a participant in the circular movements with which death is celebrated and overcome; solar orbit and spiral are here "Allegories" in the Goethean sense. The "event" becomes even more evident in a moving symbol such as the Maro dance. The reason for this movement must be found in the depths of man. What is spontaneously expressed through dance and drawing? The same thing that germ plasma provokes in living creatures: the infinity of life in mortality. Today we believe we know — for those archaic artists and dancers did not

suspected—that eggs and seeds contain spiral formations that carry immortality. Perhaps with this we have approached the core of the mystery: the link between life and spirit, visible appearance and invisible intimacy. I will stop here, and in view of the monuments and the texts that have been passed down, I will limit myself to establishing a possible parallel. The spirals drawn and danced represent the continuity of the life of mortal creatures beyond their gradual death: what in plasma is *function*, here embodies precisely *meaning*.

This lived immortality, internalised in the deepest part of the self, is an aspect of being, a reality that, as a mythological idea, appears in narratives, cult representations and artistic representations. Objectively, it can be expressed by the spiral line: as the infinite repetitive succession of life-death-life. An idea like this should not necessarily arise as if it were an explicit thought, nor even take the form of a mythologem. It could also simply be danced or drawn. But the line and the silent mythological image are capable of evoking the same primordial reality, even if one is accustomed to conceiving it philosophically. The philosopher Anaximander called that absence of limits, in whose endless flow each individual emerges only to disappear into it again, *apeiro n*^[123]. And a later interpreter of Aristotle still feels how the labyrinth reminds him of this: with this mythological image, he illustrates the meaning of that word ^[124].

11. Ornament-Symbol

The infinite line, with its inherent meaning, not necessarily conscious, of "life-death-life," is capable of extending in all directions and covering large areas in the palaces of Knossos ^[125] and Tiryns ^[126], in the burial mounds of Mycenae ^[127] and Orchomenus or ^[128], in Egyptian tombs from the Twelfth Dynasty, and later especially under the Eighteenth Dynasty ^[129]. Mycenae, Tiryns, and Orchomenus depend on Minoan culture, and one wonders whether this decoration had not arrived in Crete from the south ^[130]. Against this, it is argued, among other things, that the spiral is a foreign element in Egypt because it is not related to the monuments of the cult characteristic of the place ^[131]. This is very different in Crete and in the Neolithic culture of the Cyclades: there, the spiral adorned such notable ritual monuments as the sarcophagus of Hagia Triada ^[132], a sacrificial axe from Malea, in the shape of a panther ^[133], and a domestic urn from Melos [illus. 12] ^[134]. From the Twelfth Dynasty onwards, when the Minoan influence in the Nile Delta really began to be felt, the spiral also appeared on scarabs, and it is there that it acquires a logical meaning ^[135]. The sacred scarab already symbolises in itself the becoming, identical to the uninterrupted solar rebirth. In 2000 BC, this ornament had not yet fallen silent.



12. Urn decorated with spirals from Melos



13. Thracian temple of Tarxien (Malta)

The question of the origin and direction of propagation is also complicated by Malta. The monuments of the Neolithic religion on this island display impressive ornamentation with spirals [ill. 13] ^[136]. They are found on stone monuments or on the walls of underground sanctuaries, as it were, still in a state of living growth. The spiral ornamentation is associated with that of the caves in the sense that it forms the drawn variation of the natural labyrinth [illu. 14] ^[137]. The characteristic spiral plant drawings on the island of Malta [illu. 15] ^[138] are also full of meaning: The mythological idea, which in Seram appeared linked to the labyrinth, is expressed not only through the symbol of the plant there, but also, and very precisely, in the ancient area of the Mediterranean Sea: on Hellenic soil, in the cult of Demeter, and in Egypt, in the cult of Osiris. From Malta, we know of an altar with a representation of the divine plant a^[139]. Since the fullness of life and senses are found there as nowhere else, it was therefore easy to derive the spiral style of Cretan art, particularly in the vases of Camares, with plant elements from the same island [illus. 16] ^[140]. It seems even easier to relate the prehistoric culture of these small and curious islands to Africa, or at least in part. The unique spiral is found in Egypt, and has been there since long before the figure appeared under the Twelfth Dynasty, even dating back to the Predynastic Period ^[141]. Nor is it absent from the Palaeolithic in southern Europe ^[142]. The meander motif also dates back to the Palaeolithic period, not here of course, but in Ukraine ^[143]. In any case, both the spiral and the double spiral have been part of human culture

since the late Neolithic period.



14. Hal Saflieni cult cave (Malta)



15. Thracian relief from Tarxien



16. Middle Minoan vase from Phaistos

The trajectory of propagation from the south and west is only one possibility among others. The possibility of a different orientation—coming from the east and north—is established because the Cretan-Mimeic culture of the

The continent and the islands come into contact with the territory of another Neolithic ornamental decoration of spiral shapes: the enormous field of pottery with meanders and spirals. This extends from Belgium, through southern Germany, Bohemia and Hungary, to the northern Balkans, where an important find such as Butmir in Bosnia is located. It is more or less related to the culture of the aforementioned idol figurines, which also developed in Neolithic Thessaly and the Aegean islands ^[144]. Much more recent is the art of the Bronze Age in northern Europe, so rich in spiral motifs that, at first glance, it could be considered the result of an internal development ^[145]. However, that development took place on top of an older megalithic culture. Ultimately, the cultural heritage of the Neolithic period can also be found here.

On the other hand, it is difficult to draw a line separating meander-spiral pottery and the paintings on those vessels, whose name, like those from southern Russia, comes from the place where they were found, Tripolje ^[146]. The difference is limited to technique, but does not affect the form or essence of the spiral as a decorative motif. Tripolje pottery is the link that connects the ancient Mediterranean world with the Far East, as far as Oceania. Small statuettes decorated with the Aegean spiral were found in parallel in Japan ^[147]. The Eastern symbol of wholeness—the union of yin and yang in the circle—is shown in Japanese ornamentation, called Tomoje ^[148], or in the Korean Tahgook ^[149], as a kind of double spiral; a characteristic motif of Tripolje pottery, traces of which were also found in China ^[150]. The same motif is used for decorative purposes

decorative purposes in New Guinea and in central and northern America ^[151], in isolation, probably for cultivation ^[152]. In monuments of the archaic cultures of South America, simple or double spirals stand out impressively, suggesting a deeper meaning ^[153].

This is not intended to be an exhaustive geographical list, but merely to indicate the possibilities for dissemination. All of these could have originated in Neolithic cultural and religious centres—in Oceania, the Mediterranean and, finally, northern Europe. However, this does not rule out the possibility of a revival in later prehistoric or historical periods, with other sources or focal points of dissemination. Once again, I will limit myself to presenting the fundamentals. This implies, above all, the understanding that the true source lies deep within the human being, which never reveals itself without meaning, but manifests itself in happy moments of creativity and full harmony with the world, which is otherwise so silent. To attribute too much influence to the technical process of its genesis would be tantamount to taking a step backwards in the research into styles ^[154]. The origin of the line is movement, which arises as if it were growing, that is, in an organic-unitary manner, and when it is structured, it is naturally rhythmic. Such a movement has meaning in itself. It has as much meaning as any musical expression of man. The spirals that wind and unwind correspond to similar movements; the concentric circles that appear alongside them either mark a step towards a goal not yet technically achieved, or that of relaxation and dissolution. This is the case, for example, in the oldest Nordic cultures of the Bronze Age ^[155].

In the Cyclades, there are vessels printed with spiral patterns ^[156], alongside others with concentric circles, which could have been either drawn or printed. However, it cannot be verified that the spiral in motion continues its unfolding from printed concentric circles. Live observation strongly suggests otherwise. If concentric circles are joined to similar ones by a transverse tangent, the eye will see a double spiral. The hand gesture that freely describes such circles always creates a spiral movement: it makes the original image to be imitated real. And the meaning of imitation is precisely that of the original image. As an example, we refer to a vase from the Cyclades, whose ornamentation in the midst of infinite spirals — that is, imitations of spirals, since they are only concentric circles joined by tangents — shows a ship floating alone [illu. 17] ^[157]. There is no need to look for subtleties in the image, but rather to let oneself be carried away by its evocative power. Is it the ship of death?

Is it the ship of birth, indicated by the appropriate feminine symbol beneath it? The meaning lies in the immensity of that line that the master initially drew as if it were a game—a game full of meaning—and which, later, under the force of tradition and perhaps due to greater lightness, he even replaced with concentric circles. But beyond the ornament in which the allegory has been recognised, no great 'reflection' should be sought. The ornament emerges as the spontaneous reflection of an idea, a reflection of the line, with the content of the original image, which could often also be danced. Let us remember that most prehistoric ornaments with a spiral already adorned

funerary buildings, sarcophagi and grave goods. (The Cycladic vessel mentioned above was also a grave accessory: a flat vessel that contained water and served as a mirror.) There, the idea of death predominated naturally and certainly dominated entire prehistoric cultures in the form of expression through the spiral line: as a turning point in the path of life that indicates continuity.



17. Cycladic vessel with representation of a ship

The infinite spiral line is a variation on an idea; a variation that, in turn, also proved to be varied. One of these variations was the spiral-meander, and the other was the meander itself. The latter was formed from the spiral-meander by the preference of the angular on the

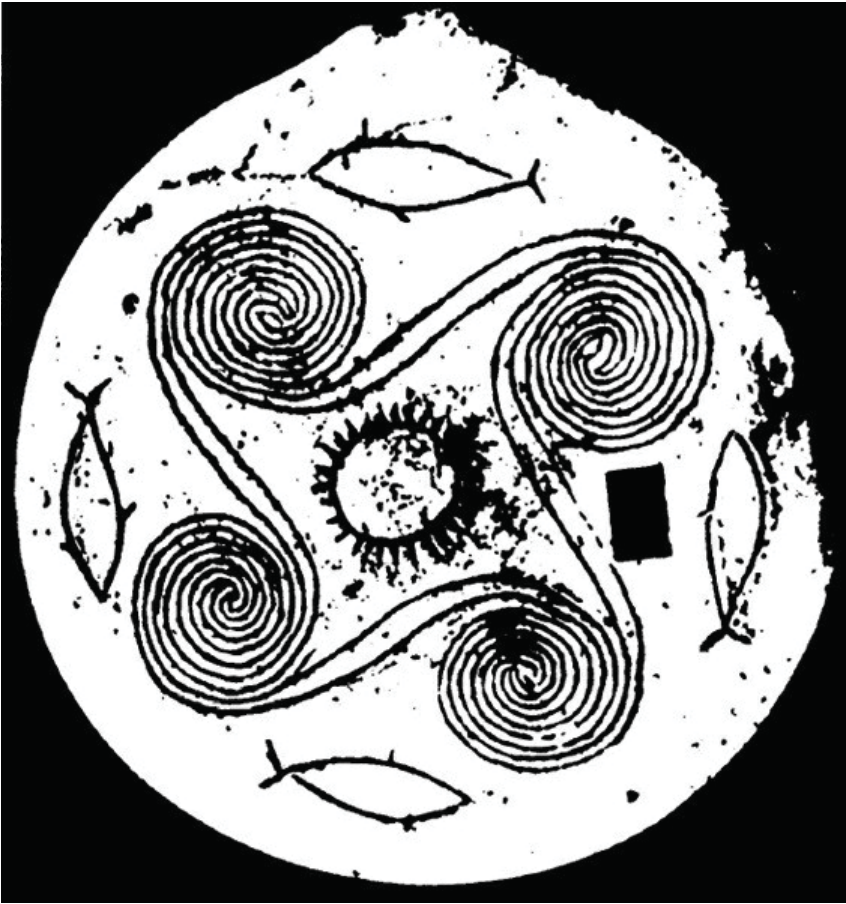
round: often marked a profound change in lifestyle. Classical Greek culture already considered the mention of the labyrinth as a meandering angle to be so archaic that a great archaeologist defined it as 'an astonishing example of the tenacity of an iconographic tradition' ^[158]. But Attic vase painters also used the meander and the spiral-meander, still side by side, as two variations on the same theme: with both at the same time, they designated the Minotaur's tower as *labyrinthos* ^[159]. This case helps us understand how the origin and meaning of the meander was conceived: the basic idea of the spiral, realised in itself, was once *reoriented* into the figure of the meander (reoriented in its lines, not in its concepts!), and that is how it was born.



18. Coin from Knossos

With this less natural, less fluid, more rigid form, we also arrive at the version of infinity inherent in the labyrinth, to which the variants of the swastika ^[160] belong, which remained canonical until the 4th century BC.

C. in Knossos. Already in the second stage of the Middle Minoan period—that is, even before the labyrinth-meander depicted in the fresco of the second palace—the *quadruple* spiral contained within the circle appears in the painting on the vases [ill. 16]. The tiny birds flying inside it give the figure a strange cosmic breadth. In a monument of the Aegean island culture, on a mirror-vessel from the Cyclades, this sign floats above the primeval waters: surrounded by four fish and with the sun in the centre [ill. 19] ^[161]. Infinity is concentrated in a delimited and yet exhaustible totality of the universe. The spiral in motion that moves towards the unlimited, in a certain way towards an infinite fluid, a beginning and an end, can be at the same time a wavy line, and then it becomes a symbol of the cosmos, of the four-part whole. This fourfold form of the spiral corresponds to the fourfold meander that forms a kind of swastika around a square, and in the centre of this, we usually find the Minotaur [illus. 18] ^[162]. The line does not necessarily return to itself through the sinuosities of the meander, but through the rotation of the angular double spirals, chained together like the blades of a windmill. Through its complexity, it still embodies the principle of the labyrinth and, at the same time, that of a wheel that turns eternally.



19. Cycladic vessel with quaternary spiral

A totalitarian symbol cannot be *solely* an unambiguous symbol of the sun as a daytime star. In Crete, it may have been a nocturnal sign. The Minotaur at its centre, also depicted in a fast-moving pattern—raising its knees to form a right angle—remains a creature of the underworld, although this pattern seems to unify the two aspects of the swastika: whether the movement is to the left or to the right ^[163]. Light, life—or whatever you want to call the positive, which is what

here is being discussed—nor does it cease to exist in the other world; in other words, not even the realm of the dead, the devouring Minotaur, is unequivocally negative. The image of the hideous bull-man varies with a star in the centre of the swastika spiral that corresponds to the Minotaur's other name: Asterion or Asterius ^[164]. It also varies with the moon, which is always reborn as the dominant star of the Hainuwele-Persephone mythologem. The labyrinth, although always nocturnal and subterranean in all its variations, is a symbol of infinity. Or, to be more precise, it is a reflection of the line, conceived exclusively as a drawn figure, and not more or less understood as a philosophical concept, which only in posterity would be transformed into a graphic figure. The line itself, while it remains alive, is identical to a thought.



20. Relief of Positano

12. Norman-Roman

The simple forms of labyrinths—spiral, meander, and the Tragliatella model—date back to prehistoric times. I must leave further research to scholars of prehistory. What mattered to me was the essential: that even the simplest form of labyrinth is not meaningless. The meaning emerges clearly from the corresponding ancient primordial myths and cults. In a mythological monument of Nordic origin — seen from its death side — this meaning becomes evident, linked once again to the simplest form of labyrinth. This is a monument of Norman art in Salerno, a relief embedded in the wall of the bell tower of Positano [illu. 20]. The Christian observer believes he recognises in this representation the sea monster that swallowed Jonah. However, there is no special indication referring to this biblical story. Fish swim alongside the monster, and below, between two fish, is the animal that reveals the pagan-mythological origin of the scene. A wolf, next to the sea monster, can only be the wolf Fenris, next to the Midgard serpent, transformed into a kind of hippocampus. Although it is undoubtedly the devourer of all things, it also bears the sign of its pristine nature: the spiral on its belly. Once again, the primordial eternal appears and speaks to us in an immediate way.



21. Östra-Stenby carpet

The monument is attributed to Norman art for mythological reasons. This attribution is confirmed by strange Swedish drawings of 'Kyrkepeller', ancient and valuable church carpets, created according to medieval patterns s^[165]—. They depict lions and other animals that play a role in the mythological narrative, with spirals on their bellies [illus. 21] ^[166]. Much attention was paid to them, with the aim of putting

I demonstrate a relationship between the Sassanid Empire and Nordic art. The Sassanid origin of this type of carpet in Sweden, as well as its animal ornamentation, has been confirmed by existing parallels and can be demonstrated in the Eastern world of late antiquity, especially in Persia. This transmission was possible because Scandinavia traded with the East from 800 AD onwards via Novgorod and the land of the Khazars s[¹⁶⁷]. Attempts were even made to go further by attributing the spirals of these mythological animals to the Babylonian labyrinths of viscera s[¹⁶⁸], without being able to overlook the gap that would explain the relationship between those archaic Mesopotamian monuments and the original Sassanid one.



22. Quaternary labyrinth of Châlons-sur-Marne

Even more important is the resurgent vitality that this legacy acquires in the north for fundamental reasons. Considering the possibilities of Nordic art, it is there that it merges with the Midgard serpent on an archetypal background. As a carpet ornament, in addition to the devouring beasts, it also shows the deer ^[169], the miraculous animal of so many mythologies of the Eurasian nomadic peoples, an animal that uses deception before leading to its final destination ^[170]. In northern France, not far from Normandy, birds of prey adorned with spirals, very popular in fairy tales

Sassanid art—are arranged in a double circle surrounding four labyrinths in the shape of windmill blades, similar to those of Tragliatella [illus. 22] ^[171]: here, against the archetypal background, a quaternity is formed—albeit much richer and more elaborate, with two variations built on the same motif—similar to that of the Camares vase [illus. 16], the Cycladic vessel [illus. 17] and the ancient coins of Knossos [ill. 18].

In this way, the labyrinth of our investigations always leads us to the same fruitful idea (in this sense, it could also be called "the budding of a flower," like Aretusa) ^[172], to the vivid image of the totality of "life-death." And it repeatedly guides us to places we have already been. The richness of what is

"historically abundant" and the "cultural characteristic" that is decisive in this work is not exhausted in any part, even though I believe I have found the "unifying" factor and, in this sense, a kind of archetype. Ancient Egypt in particular would have deserved closer observation. To conclude, only a few Roman monuments are mentioned—a type of monument unknown in Greece, and in Italy only the burial labyrinth of the Etruscan king Porsenna is known—where there is or may be a relationship between the tomb and the labyrinth.

First place goes to the "Castle of Sant'Angelo", the *Mausoleum Hadriani*, which may have been influenced by Egypt, although its shape and underlying idea correspond much more to the series of circular Italian tombs. Insofar as that idea has something to do with the cult of the sun ^[173], it is also Italian-Archaic. A parallel to this unifying plan of the circle and square of the tomb can be found in the founding ceremony of Rome ^[174]. Access to this imposing

building leads, from the left and in a spiral, to the burial chamber l^[175].



23. Mosaic of the Pyramid of Cestius in Rome

It is constructed as an ascending labyrinth in the double wall of the drum that rises above a square base, encircling a square tower: a union of square and circle, through which the gigantic tomb becomes (like the world itself) an expression of totality^[176].

Of the other two monuments, one was already known in the world of scientific literature; however, it is in light of these studies that it takes on greater significance. It is a marble monument with a Greek ^{inscription} ^[177].

The place where it was originally located is called, with special emphasis, Labyrinthos. The man responsible for this construction, Quintus Julius Miletus, came to Rome from Asia Minor as a spectator of a competition during the reign of Emperor Severus, and there he found his way of earning a living. "For the living," they say, "this is a path of misunderstandings, but you,

friends, must always enjoy the labyrinth." Quintus and his friends are united as if by blood ties in the community of the *marmorarii* (those who work with marble, either in the quarry or outside it): they form *a* *genos*—and also a cult community—that is under the protection of Serapis, the god of the underworld. We already know that a tool used by marble workers also became a funerary symbol. The marble worker, the god of the underworld and the *labyrinthos* emerge here as a conscious connection. The *marmorarii* seem to be aware that for those dead who — as in their cult community — are saved by Serapis, the labyrinth is not a misleading passage, but a safe passage.

The other monument is a mosaic depicting a labyrinth, found and preserved in the vicinity of the Pyramid of Cestius, where one would expect to find the remains of tombs. The mosaic was quite large. The preserved part—perhaps a quarter of the whole—has been restored and raised from its original level to its current one. It shows a union between the late scheme of ambiguous paths and meanders, as "labyrinths" are known today [illus. 23] ^[178]. Did it belong to a funerary construction? The place where it was found—located in the oldest part of the Protestant cemetery, in the same area as Keats's grave, at the back, next to the pyramid—is, in a way, a petrified gesture that points to the coming and going on the path that, as is well known, runs along the Cestius monument: 'gently descending towards the underworld'.

Appendix

Snakes and mice in the cult of Apollo and Asclepius

The hypothesis I would like to put forward here concerns the fate of the underground labyrinthine building known as the *thymele* or *tolos* of the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidauros. In the first edition of my *Studies*, I had limited myself to observing that this round building deserved special investigation to establish its connection with ancient circular constructions. At that time, I did not know that the monograph I was advocating had already been published shortly before; it is the valuable book by Ferdinand Robert entitled [Thymélé](#) [1]. The conclusion reached by the author, that the labyrinth of Epidauros was intended for the celebration of bloody chthonic sacrifices, remains impossible to prove, as I have undoubtedly already pointed out in my studies on Asclepius and the places of his worship [2]. In that text, I also referred to another discovery I had made in that same labyrinth which, in my opinion, could help to explain the building in the sense of the hypothesis outlined here.

I deliberately referred to it only briefly, as I was not yet entirely clear about the significance

of that discovery. Of course, it was not I who asked Henri Grégoire to quote my entirely provisional considerations in his book on Asclepius [3]. The sentence he included in this regard in *L'Asclépiade de Grégoire* [4] is a slip of the pen that I consider it my duty to rectify. It was certainly not my intention to prevent him from learning about my discovery, which apparently (that is, assuming that the entire methodological approach was correct) also supports his hypothesis. Therefore, in order to avoid further misunderstandings, I would first like to devote more space to this discovery. Anyone familiar with my writings will undoubtedly have noticed how far my method and, above all, my way of thinking differ from those of the Belgian scholar, for whom I have, moreover, the deepest respect.

During my last visit to the Heroon of Epidauros, I went down into the labyrinth to see how rituals could be performed there. I discovered that the circular structure, in which you have to make three complete turns, changing direction each time, to reach the centre, is clearly too narrow; that is why I believe that sacrifices could not be made there either. On the contrary, among the marble fragments in the corridors, I discovered the reproduction of a trunk with a mouse (or perhaps a rat) sitting on it. I immediately photographed and reproduced that fragment in a drawing and talked at length with my travelling companions about this discovery, unravelling it in all its aspects. I would absolutely rule out any error of perception on my part. The fragment had no artistic value; rather, it could serve to give movement to the architectural structure of the building. I placed it on the floor in a specific spot, with the intention of returning soon to examine the other fragments as well, but in the twenty years that followed

I was unable to travel there again. The photograph and drawing were destroyed in Budapest during the war, and I do not even know if the fragment has been seen by anyone else.

It was evident that the mouse (or rat) was closely related to Apollo in his role as Sniintheus: this name is clearly derived from *sminthos* ('mouse'), a term originating in Asia Minor ^[5]. The thesis I put forward in the aforementioned book, namely that the name Asclepius should in fact be understood as an aspect of Apollo himself, seems to me to be corroborated by this discovery. In my *Göttlicher Artz* [Divine Physician], I did not want to go any further: I only added that a round, semi-underground construction (as it appears after the excavation of the Asklepmon of Pergamon) was also later included in the cult of Asclepius. But what was the purpose of a similar circular building whose decoration also featured (at least in Epidaurus) a mouse? One animal that had to be bred in all the Asklepieia was the snake. When it was decided to found a branch of the sanctuary of Epidaurus, the first step was to transport a snake to the chosen site in a procession, by cart or ship. The legend emphatically refers to *a* snake e^[6], although in reality there must have been at least a pair of snakes. The snake breeding facility was, in practice, part of the cult of Asclepius; the Asklepieia were teeming with snakes, as evidenced by the monuments at Epidaurus and Athens. And for those sitting quietly at their desks, it is not easy to find an answer to the question that almost inevitably arises at this point: what did all these snakes feed on? Even today, there are large snake breeding grounds, and in them it is necessary to breed

also mice, precisely to feed the snakes. A visit to one of these breeding centres confirmed my idea that snakes were bred inside the circular buildings of the Asklepieia, whose shape reproduced that of the animal. The mouse could rightfully be considered part of the decoration of that building, since mice were offered to the sacred snakes within its walls.

Mice were, in a way, sacrificial animals, which were also victims of Apollo, their destroyer, *who* was called Smintheus *precisely for this reason*. In his book of^[7], Grégoire published findings of considerable interest, made by the Dutch archaeologist Vollgraf on the rock of Argos, the site of an archaic cult of Apollo^[8]: terracotta mice with their eyes covered by a kind of bow or bandage; these small votive offerings replaced sacrificial animals. Vollgraf also immediately thought of Apollo Smintheus; Grégoire, sticking to his own thesis, saw the blind mice as substitutes for moles. But this thesis raises the question of why terracotta moles were never modelled, if this was the animal that was intended to be represented. Vollgraf's findings, on the other hand, explain how the mice were brought to the snakes, which devoured them. One example shows that the mice could also have their tails tied. A painting on pottery, hitherto uninterpreted^[9], shows young men hunting mice, a ritual game, at least judging by the clothing of the participants. On the other hand, snake breeding is also attested in the cult of Apollo of^[10]. We should no longer harbour any doubts about the fact that the snake was one of the epiphanic forms

epiphanic forms of this god, although, mistakenly, it has been transmitted only for Delos ^[11].

A round building whose lower part was shaped like a labyrinth had (like snakes) a reference to the chthonic sphere: but not only chthonic, just as the serpent of Asclepius (which often lived in trees) was not only chthonic, or like the serpent that, according to myth, had climbed a palm tree in the sanctuary of Apollo at Anzio, thus demonstrating that it belonged to the Apollonian sphere. The upper part of the building represented, in a more or less accentuated way, an image of the celestial cosmos. What was hidden in the principle of circular constructions is explained by Angelo Brelich ^[12]. The religious significance of the labyrinth, that is, how it sinks into the abyss (but only to bring together the 'below' and the 'above' into a single whole) is also evident in Epidaurus.

Chapter 2

From *labyrinthos* to *syrtós*: reflections on Greek dance

1

It is inevitable for Hellenists to concern themselves with Greek dance. Sooner or later, they will encounter it. Dance comes to meet them and makes them see how little their science has advanced in this regard. The greatness of the subject was already known. Walter F. Otto, a singular connoisseur of Greek religion and its rediscoverer in its most essential form, elevated dance to the pinnacle of his perceptive philosophy with his way of seeing and feeling the Greek way of life. With his discourse on *The Human Figure and Dance* ^[1], he concluded his collection of studies on myth, *The Figure and Being*. In a more concise dissertation ^[2], he spoke even more sharply about what I would like to call —as is done with 'poésie puré'— 'pure dance':

Dance, in its venerable form of ancient worship, is the truth and at the same time the justification for being in the world; of all theodicies, it is the only one that is eternal and irrefutable. It does not

teach, it does not argue, it only takes steps, and with these steps it brings to light what lies at the heart of all things: it is not will or power, it is not fear or concern, nor anything else that is attributed to existence, but rather the eternally beautiful and divine. It is the truth of existence and, in the most immediate sense, the truth of life.

As soon as life is wholly itself, that is, when it is freed from the momentary and from needs and purposes, then dance is filled with rhythm and harmony, with the mathematics of divine origin that works at the heart of all things and becomes visible with the perfection of its forms. There, joy and sadness are no longer tragic contradictions, but both are united and illuminated by the clarity of the original essence.

It is the moment when the living creature lets go of the bonds of everyday life to be seduced by the slow or fast, sustained or passionate cadences of the primordial movements, even though they are always grand and solemn. This means being one and the same with the life of the universe, ceasing to be an individual or a person to become a human being as an original creature, no longer facing changing vicissitudes, but forming part of the universal whole. Moreover, not only is it not facing it, with dialogues and responses, but *it is* in it, *it is* itself. The being with its truth speaks through figure, gesture and movement.

If all art, as all those whose thoughts are deeper already know

whose thoughts are deeper, has precisely this fundamental meaning, then dance is even more primordial and venerable than any other form: for here man creates nothing material, but he himself is the answer, the form and the truth.

2

Walter F. Otto expressed these reflections from the highest point from which one can view dance, and it matters little what spectacle he might have observed from such an elevated position. His words were inspired by a performance by the Elisabeth Duncan school; he praised Isadora Duncan, who had dared to liberate dance from social conventions, taking it out of the limelight and returning it, under an open sky, to the freedom of nature. These words, however, aroused a certain fear, confronted with Otto's luminous idea about dance: the fear of excessive sublimation caused by enthusiastic imitation — even if it was only that, an imitation of Greek sentiment. Otto tells the truth about 'pure dance'. But what was the reality of Greek dance? From an archaic epic, we extract this line:

'In the centre danced the father of men and gods' ^[3] — something that neither Homer nor authentic Greek classicism would have tolerated— How violent Zeus's dancing must have been, when a simple nod of his head shook the whole of Olympus! What an impression his stature and countenance must have made on the archaic conception! Perhaps Socrates can help us reach a

middle ground in Greek culture, between "pure dance" and the divine ecstasy of archaic dance, warm and bloody.

The Athenian Xenophon, Socrates' least philosophy-loving student and a staunch defender of a Spartan and soldierly way of life, in his *Symposium* lets his teacher discourse on the teachings of dance ^[4]. We probably owe the assessment of dance as a mere gymnastic exercise to Xenophon:

then danced the young and Socrates said: "Have you noticed," he said, "how much more beautiful the young man, who is already very handsome, appears in the dance figures than when he stands still?" To which Charmides replied: "He seems to be praising the dance teacher." And Socrates answered: "Exactly. And I have observed something else in him: no part of his body is indifferent to movement, but his neck, leg and arm all participate, as they should in dance if one wants to have a lighter and more flexible body. I would very much like to learn from you, to learn the figures of dance, son of Syracuse," he said, for that was where the young man's teacher came from. And when the latter asked why, he exclaimed: "I want to dance, for God's sake!" Then everyone laughed. Socrates, however, said with a serious expression: "Are you laughing at me? Is it because with this exercise I want to be healthier or have a better appetite and sleep more sweetly? Or is it because I am looking for something for my body that does not make my thighs fat and makes my shoulders thinner, as in racing and not as in boxing, with thick shoulders and thin thighs,

because I, on the contrary, would like to achieve complete balance in my body at any cost? Or perhaps you are laughing because, seeing an old man, I don't need to find a young man for my exercises, or undress among the crowds at the gym, but rather a large space like this one, which has just been used by the young man to sweat, is enough for me?

Should I do my winter exercises indoors and seek shade during the heatwave?

Or perhaps you laugh because I want to reduce my untimely and fat belly? Don't you know that our Charmides surprised me dancing, not long ago, early in the morning? And it was Charmides who said, "Yes, by Zeus! At first I was frightened, and I feared you had gone mad. But when I heard you speak in a manner similar to how you speak now, I also went home, but not to dance, because I never learned how, but to gesticulate. For this I did know how to do."

He was well versed in the art of expressing himself through the gestures of mime dancers, who also took part in the banquet where the love of Dionysus and Ariadne was portrayed.

3

Another venerable old man is brought onto the stage by Euripides with these words:

Where should I dance? Where should I put my feet?
And, moreover, how do I move my white head?

It is the elderly Cadmus, who in *The Bacchae* s^[5] calls on the wise Tiresias to dance with the Dionysian women, who continues to help us. Here another point of view begins that is not insignificant for a future philosophy of dance: dancing is essentially 'dancing-with' or even 'dancing-before', which is what follows from participating in the dance. Socrates' dancing, in the solitude of his home—an extravagant image—resembles more the application of an abstraction of dance than the realisation of the very idea of dance, which concerns music and religion, as well as community, a concept that Otto also shares deeply. For Otto, the reason for the existence of dance is the primordial music of being, which has given rise to human song and language, and of which the Greeks possessed a secret knowledge: hence the wildest companions of Dionysus were not exclusively the Bacchantes, but also the half-animal, half-divine creatures, the satyrs, Silenus and Pan, dancers and musicians. Dancing, singing and whistling "were born from the silent rumbling of the miracle of an open nature and a world full of divinity that wanted to express itself through the figure and voice of man".

In *The Human Figure and Dance* and *On the Dance of the Elisabeth Duncan School*, we find the following words ^[6]:

It is therefore the cosmos itself, the sublime order of the heavens and their movements, a circle and a dance. According to the ancient Pythagoreans, the divine celestial bodies, the sun, the moon, our earth and the planets dance around the centre of the universe. That is why man venerates them, responds to them with dance, and by dancing becomes their

image. This is the original meaning of Greek cult dances and those of all archaic religious peoples.

The ancient Pythagoreans did not assert or develop, as Otto does, the role of the celestial bodies as "primordial dancers" in contrast to earthly dancers; rather, they communicated their astronomical observations through the most familiar and earthly form of the dance circle of the Greek world. In imperial Roman times, a Greek author, with an Orphic-Neopythagorean foundation, refers to human dance and the celestial circle back to the same source, to an original cosmic dance: "Those who express the truth of the origin of dance," we read in the treatise *On Dance* ^[7], among the writings of Lucian, "tell you that dance appeared at the same time as archaic Eros" (the creative love of the world). "The circle of celestial bodies, the rhythmic intertwining of fixed stars and planets, their well-ordered harmony, are proof of the original dance."

"In the centre danced the father of men and gods." This line from the epic poem about the defeated Titans brings us back, however, to Greek reality. Zeus performs his victory dance among the other gods, not the "pure dance", but an original dance: he was the dancer who set the pace for the dance, encouraging others to dance, as is still the case in Greek dance today. It may be on board a ship — one of those simple ships that make the crossing to Greece — in a large hall filled with young Greeks returning from their studies or workplaces, some sitting on the floor, others standing. Almost without our realising it, from what corner, from what instrument sounds the

first notes. A young man has stood up. He stretches — and immediately receives a name: the hero, in Greek, palikari —, he waves his handkerchief, towards no one in particular. But someone holds it by one corner. The second, third and subsequent ones only need their bare hands. Standing aside with their hands, they form a circle that draws everyone else into an infinite spiral.

4

Alongside dance itself, the essential point of this study lies in how to participate in it, regardless of its cosmic reason (which is certainly not a conscious imitation of the celestial bodies, even though the unconscious depths are an abyss in man). As a starting point, I will select two stories from modern Greece. Two stories of continuity, rather than imitations of ancient Greece: one is from Crete—I translate it from a modern Greek novel, *The Cretan*, by the author Pandelis Prevelaki s^[8]—and the other is from Corfu. The first takes us to the top of a mountain, to a chapel dedicated to Saint Elias, at a panijiri, or a popular festival in his honour.

The lute played and called everyone to dance. The palikaria tightened their belts, fastened their scarves to them and gathered under the big tree. The women untied the scarves from their heads and let them fall over their shoulders. A circle was formed. A vigorous old man stood at the front, stamped his foot energetically and began:

No dance excites me as much as the five!
Three steps forward, two steps back!

Men and women began the dance, holding hands. They started slowly, step by step, dragging their feet and stretching the circle to the right, as if they wanted to familiarise themselves with the ground or measure the space for the dance. The more daring elders joined the line. The first dancer sang his little tune, and the others followed, repeating it. As soon as he turned around to encourage the dance, he thanked the lute soloist. The instrument sounded pleasant, as if it too wanted to enjoy these first bars. The dance steps were clearly distinguishable: three forward, two backward, and the circle, as if breathing, shrank and widened.

Play the lute, my minstrel, for I will pay you well!
From the group I will choose a maiden and give her
to you as a gift.

The circle, as if convinced of the beauty of that breathing, suddenly stopped to form a diagonal line. The first and last dancers joined hands, and the circle closed. Suddenly it shrank, only to widen again. It resembled waves that, without ceasing to sing, spread out over the sand and then retreat.

They did this like the sea, until their souls were filled. Then the lute sounded more lively. The steps became faster, the feet crossed

crossed, agitated in the same place. The women took advantage of the occasion and moved like little partridges: two or three beautiful dancers broke the circle, ran to the front, and held each other with their left hands to rejoin the group. They did so with small, quick steps, their bodies undulating like waves, dancing with such mastery that one could lose one's head. The people, fascinated by such beauty, were left breathless.

"Happy are those who possess them! May they live and be happy as long as the mountains exist!" shouted an old man, his words giving wings to his feet. A verse rose up to fly like a bird, making the one in front blush:

Leader of the circle, adornment of her head, Green
and gold frigate in the middle of the sea!
And already a new compliment addressed to the
second could be heard:
My desire for cypress trees, for fragrant
wood, To you, maiden, resembles grace and
majesty!

The women formed a kind of wall around the circle, waiting for their turn to join the group. They sang verses in chorus and clapped their hands rhythmically. Words of praise came out of their mouths, forming a stairway from earth to heaven. In the first couplet, the dancer was a green and gold frigate. In the second, a fragrant cypress tree. Then, a lemon tree doubly laden with lemons, and a

apple tree laden with fruit. Each couplet lifted them a little higher. They greeted those who bloomed like jasmine and smelled of cinnamon. There are no words to describe their charms, dear friend!

They were more beautiful than the dawn, more golden and dazzling than the sun, they were like the archangel of heaven, like the liturgy of Holy Thursday, like the gospel of Easter Sunday!

Everything can easily be stripped of its Christian garb. Events of Christian worship replace a nymph or a goddess. In fact, if a goddess were mentioned instead of the religious experiences that their current church offers them, it would seem almost un-Greek! The mythological names associated with a dance performance would sound rather baroque, classicist and operatic today. Greek folk dance remains a dance as Otto believed it to be, and only occasionally is it spoiled by the purpose of the performances. Neither the ancient name nor the archaic essence has changed: *chorós*, as it is called, is the original word for 'choir', and the music 'sounds' both for the dance and for the call to participate in it. From the Cretan *chorós*, which Prevelakis described live, from the struggle of the women to lead the circle, from dancing in front of others, there is only a small step towards the past, towards the choirs of Spartan girls; those for whom the old poet Alcman wished to be carried, like the old kingfisher is carried by his female over the waves of the sea. The Dorian people were the ones who best knew how to survive in the high mountains of Crete. In Alcman's work, two maidens from the same circle, Agido and Hagesicora, also compete. The latter even had the proper name of

'circle leader': a role attributed to her on the day of her birth. The basic characteristics have remained the same. The cultural framework was replaced by the feast of the prophet Elijah. And then it was the young men who immediately took over the leadership. The rhythm and image change. And the story is transformed into the plot of the novel.

5

Emperor William II, in his book *Memories of Corfu*, describes in great detail a dance performed by the women of that place. It was celebrated on Easter Sunday afternoon in Gasturi, the village below Aquileion, and seems to have been as famous as the Easter Monday dance of the women of Megara:

The women line up for the dance and form dense columns of open rows, one dancer next to the other, with their little fingers intertwined, raising their hands to chest height, while in the back rows one or another woman holds the tip of the handkerchief attached to the belt of a dancer in the row in front of her. The music begins, the dancer in front — the only man — invites the women, greets them with his new Easter panama hat, and bows slightly. The column begins to move, walking in a circle and continuing at a slow pace. Three steps forward, two without moving from the spot, and one back to the right. Keeping the rhythm a n d beat is extremely

difficult.

The column of women moves symmetrically and in unison, efficiently and fascinatingly. Their gaze is fixed forward or downward, but never directed at the spectator. They walk with a deeply solemn air. They radiate elegance, decorum and a certain grace. While the front rows are made up of matrons and older women, as the column moves backwards, the women become younger and younger, until they reach the girls. It is a charming and fascinating image, especially because of the great solemnity shown in their expressions and posture. I am of the opinion that this dance comes from archaic times and imitates the old temple cult dances that were formerly celebrated around an altar located outside, in front of the temple.

(It is possible that William II was influenced here by the opinion of archaeologists whom he held in high esteem, most likely Wilhelm Dörpfeld.)

I remembered the poet's words: 'Thus do not walk the women of this earth', etc., verses that could undoubtedly have been written for this dance.

From time to time, the column breaks up and forms a large circle, turning around to dance in a circle, maintaining the same number of steps and rhythm. The women's heavy, smooth, narrow skirts

move with a slight involuntary flutter that gives the female figures a special charm. The dancer at the head of the column, in a way the leader of the circle, contrary to the measured seriousness of the women, dances with lively and cheerful movements...

He seems very aware of performing before their majesties! Somewhat less conspicuous is the handkerchief, the *mandili*, when it is not used to call people to form a line! It was not necessary for the women to hold on to each other, nor to maintain the line during the dance, nor for walking, nor for the circle. It was kept as a requirement from other times, that is, when it did have an implicit meaning. Precisely because it no longer makes much sense, it has somehow become a fossil that takes us back to the past ^[9]. In ancient Greek dance—and not only in pantomime—the hands played an important role. Hence, holding hands could not be a trivial matter. It was by no means a mere support, but something that—in the manner of dance—had its own meaning, as every movement does when dancing. Homer already said that young men and women 'held each other by the wrist'. But he was referring to a dance in a space similar to that beautiful building that was constructed for Ariadne, perhaps for the dance of the labyrinth. What also united the dancers could be something material. This was the case in the performance of a highly sacred dance, performed by three times nine virgins, to honour the queen of the underworld according to Greek precepts, in 207 BC, in the Forum Romanum. We find the same requirement in a dance of women in a comedy by Terence: possibly in accordance with the rite.

Greek. Roman authors mention it as a kind of rope that is 'led'. Suitable for loosening or tightening the line, to enable the dual nature that exists in each dancer: dancing for themselves and with others at the same time. This is the meaning of the handkerchief in a *syrtós*, the dance in which it is 'dragged' — this is the meaning of the Greek word — and this custom fits in with the dance, through which, on the sacred island of Delos, the sinuosities of the Cretan labyrinth are imitated. The dance was called *geranos*, 'crane dance', and the dancer who led the group was called *geranulkos*, 'he who *drags* the cranes'. The use of the handkerchief possibly dates back to such ancient times!

6

Research into the primordial forms of the labyrinth led to a result—which was made possible not only by my 'Studies on the Labyrinth', which I now take up again and complete—that they were not only danced figures, but also drawn s^[10]. No dance was called *labyrinthos*. The 'lady of the labyrinth' received honey for sacrifice at Knossos, according to a manuscript in Cretan script from the second half of 2000 BC. She was certainly not just the lady of a dance or a space reserved for dance. Greek legend made her the daughter of the queen, who was as delighted with the place as she was with the dance. Originally, however, she — whom the Greeks called Ariadne — was a ruler of the kingdom of the dead. Her kingdom, in its origins, could be danced, a n d

by dancing it could be traversed—as well as finding the exit. The primordial Cretan figure of dance was a spiral with many passages, whose lead dancer—the one who heads a group—turns around from the central point and dances parallel to the exit with those who enter again. A spiral of this style already appears on a green steatite seal, prior to the year 2000 ^[11]. Another figure, equally prehistoric, originating from megalithic areas, but not before historical times, appears in Crete on coins from the 4th and 3rd centuries. It is more complex, really subtle, when compared to the double spiral, although it presupposes the same turn of the dancers: this is the Tragliatella model ^[12].

One of these figures was already being danced in Delos, probably since prehistoric times, since the Athenian legend of Theseus' victory over the Minotaur, the liberation of the Athenian children from the labyrinth and Ariadne's help with her dance of the thread, considered to be that of victory, after the hero's action in honour of the heroine. That a thread accompanied the dance in some way has not been explicitly transmitted to us. Perhaps the assumption of a great philologist or ^[13], in the sense that strings — strings for dancing — were already mentioned as accessories for night-time festivities in Delos, is true. A first representation of the dance of *geranos*, performed by Theseus and the young men and maidens of Athens before Ariadne, was believed to be recognised in an image drawn on the neck of a vase from an archaic work of art, the very famous François vase in Florence. There we can see how the dancers hold hands, while Theseus is the only one who remains free, with his lyre, before Ariadne and her nurse, who, according to tradition, accompanied her in her flight from

Crete. The dance had not yet begun. The Danish archaeologist Friis Johansen demonstrated ^[14] with a very rigorous interpretation of the image that even the participants are not in Delos, but are still in Crete, where the Athenian ship is arriving to pick up those who have been saved. The victory dance will now take place — for the first time, before setting sail. But why does Ariadne once again give Theseus a ball of thread, just as she did so wisely to help him find his way out of the labyrinth? What is the thread for now, if it is not to be the guiding thread that leads the victory dance, the dance of remembrance of the labyrinth? The image on the neck of an archaic storage vessel, a *pithos* in the Museum of Ancient History in Basel, shows that the thread in the hands of all the participants corresponds first to the adventure and then to the dance.

The crane dance dancers were always a large group in Delos, and it is said that the two "points" —surely referring to the two ends of the rope— were held by two conductors ^{s[15]}. Thus, in a way, the cranes danced in captivity. The dancers' name, derived from that of the bird, expressed their other essence. When they "dance," the birds "are interpreters of themselves." This analogy of human dance was used by Otto to define his conception of dance, and from the perspective of the development of this reflection, we would venture to say that instead of "interpreters of themselves," we can also call them "dancers of themselves." Now it no longer matters that, for example, cranes during their 'dance' mix solemn and ceremonious bows with jumps and leaps. Deep within

human nature, where *dance* takes root, we must seek what is common to all living beings, and in dances of prehistoric origin, such as the *geranium* dance, we must consider a greater spontaneity of this condition common to all living creatures ^[16]. But we must not forget that real cranes, at one time or another, take flight! Yes, in the dance of the labyrinth — and we allow ourselves to call it that, even though the ancients did not — one could feel the desire for liberation, which was hardly different, but rather identical, to the impulse to take flight. The chorus of women sang it in Euripides' *Hippolytus* s^[17], and the story of Daedalus' escape from the labyrinth, with wings made by himself, tells us so.

7

The entirety of Greek mythology was danceable and could be represented by pantomimes. The aforementioned treatise *On Dance* presents the whole story from the beginning of gods and men to heroic legends, in order to justify the art of dance with these representations. However, a distinction must be made between this form of dance and an original one. No original dance *represents* myth. It is itself a statement, a myth in language, in the movement of dance. Dancing externalises what is fundamental. The author, guided by the Orphic-Neopythagorean concept, under the pseudonym Lucian, asserts that there was no ancient mystery without dance, and creates the concept of 'dancing to externalise', with the aim of discovering the secrets of mystery. **A n d** because what

truly matters, it does not depend on any era, just as 'primordial dance' does not contain any notion of temporality. A dance is always a historical phenomenon, but as long as *it* is an authentic dance that externalises —externalises what is fundamental

— it will always be an original and timeless dance.

Historically, we can start from the well-documented *geranos* dance, and by virtue of a distant resemblance in the way it is performed, even with simplified and liberated lines when later, as well as because of *the mandili* as a 'conductor fossil', we can talk about its later life as *syrtós*. However, a *syrtós* performed with total freedom, as an original dance, can also be a starting point for reflection.

—certainly more fertile than mere historical reflection

—. In the *syrtós*, an irrepressible impulse —blind and unconscious— clearly comes into play. Such is the desire to live, common to all living creatures —for which both the ancient and modern Greeks have the word *zoé*—, a desire for one's own infinite continuity. This is fundamental to any living creature. This is expressed by the line of *the syrtós*, the line that does not want to end: timeless and unbound to any *hipar*.

Uhland reports on a Swiss example, which I include in my "Studies on the Labyrinth" as a sign of the prehistoric existence of the labyrinth in ancient Europe, in a simplified form of dance ^[18]. But now I would like to emphasise the evident authenticity of *the* timeless *syrtós*, both Swiss and Greek. Perhaps this truth is not so visible to the dancers, although it is to those of us who reflect on dance. Let us also incorporate into our lives, with our thoughts, the point of view of *zoé*, which is identical in every creature, just

as we always and continuously do, for this is *true*: what matters is the continuity of the infinite line! But how does the *syrtós* behave with what it lacks, if we compare it with the *geranos*, with the rigorous and cultic dance of the labyrinth? This was certainly not a light or infinite way of dancing. It was danced towards change.

I have never assumed that when the long chain is coiled, it always causes a feeling of anguish, nor that it causes a feeling of liberation when it is uncoiled. We cannot say anything about the *feelings* of prehistoric or Greek dancers if we want to be responsible. Only what has been danced can be repeated in words. And this is the shift towards protection and towards the realm of a goddess, who in the context of tradition is a sovereign of the underworld. The shift towards her is what matters. She would thus be the return from death, the return to life! This would become reality in what interests the living creature: the *syrtós* would be justified in the *labyrinthos*. In the place of vast infinity, the mystery of return appeared. The mystery was *truly* danced—and in an *obvious* truth, these thoughts cannot transmute it either.

They stopped before the mystery, but perhaps they deepened their understanding that dance is one of the most important witnesses of religion. "In worship, one dances" — this is how a scholar of ancient religions expresses it — "because it was the will of our ancestors that no part of our body should be deprived of religious experience" ^[19].

Excavations at Pylos, in the southern Peloponnese, finally brought to light a drawing of a labyrinth from the area of influence of the Minoan palaces of the second

Millennium BC: Tragliatell type to^[20], angular structure. A scribe at Nestor's palace, who looked after the animals, was busy engraving when he was given eleven goats belonging to different people. As he engraved the list on the back of the soft clay tablet, the heat from his hand slightly closed the figure he had previously engraved of the labyrinth o^[21]. It is unlikely that the man intended to draw a map of the palace, or perhaps the winding paths of a cave. These conceptions of the labyrinth are revealed as later fantasies. The playful nature is evident. The drawing comes from late palace culture. Previously, games of this kind were usually considered serious games, such as cult dances.

Chapter 3

Aretusa: on the human figure and the mythological idea

1

The representation of divinity as an ideal figure of man, with well-defined features of expression corresponding to the idea of the god represented, is known to be a characteristic of Greek culture. The extent to which this is true is attested to by the fact that this presence could even be seen on coins. Money seems to have been something that belonged to the underworld in ancient times. In addition to Charon's coin, the findings and references to monetary offerings suggest this: the recipients were chthonic deities and gods of the fountains^[1]. The depictions of animals on the oldest Greek coins—sacred animals of the archaic Mediterranean world, creatures destined for sacrifice, oriental monsters that offer a glimpse of the afterlife—point in the same direction. Those coins from the underworld, which suddenly transform into divine faces, represent a unique experience for connoisseurs of Greek coinage, about

which can only be described in enthusiastic terms.

As far as possible, I would like to avoid such words, as I prefer to play with the idea that the images on coins are mythologems — which, in a way, they also are. The most normal thing would be to let them speak for themselves, in public or private numismatic museums or with the help of today's photographic technology, including images that have been significantly enlarged. Drawings or copies could not offer anything comparable to Goethe's contemporaries. But when it comes to the idea that was developed when considering the Greek coin as a work of art, in addition to actual contact with the valuable piece and the availability of the most modern technical means, making some general observations could also be very useful.

2

In a work that attempts to describe Greek deities in their landscapes, the following is [stated \[2\]](#):

Through the spells that myths, Homeric epics and representations of Greek plastic art cast on us, we are too devoted to the anthropomorphic appearance of the Greek god. We forget that the same god, also in Homer, transforms himself into a human figure so that the man he wants to influence can perceive him.

The scholar Paula Philipson goes on to explain:

Nor do we appreciate with sufficient energy that the

the divine is not represented as a human figure on the pediment of ancient Greek temples. Instead, from there, a lioness resting raises her gaze towards nature, towards the distance, her claws dug into the belly of a torn calf, on whose dismembered spine her udders now rest innocently. Or there are two lions tearing apart a bull lying between them. This too had once been the expression of the divine for the Greeks.

We need not delve into the deeper meaning of such representations, nor pay attention to their validity or their origin in Eastern areas, in order to speak of their obvious inhumanity. We can add something else. The gigantic and frightening image of the Gorgon, between two enormous predators on the pediment of the archaic temple of Artemis in Corfu, is in itself enough to shatter the observer's belief in the unique sovereignty of perfect human figures in the world of the Greek gods.

There are experiences, however, that can only strengthen and deepen this belief. A great expert and lover of the Greek way of being and feeling recounts his impressions:

Anyone who has seen the National Museum of Athens will never forget the circle of young men... Anyone who enters this marvellous gathering feels it suddenly, with a start: it represents the entry of Greek man into this world, and even

Much more: perceive that this is the appearance of man himself! The novelty and Greek character of these young men becomes all the clearer and more distinct when it becomes evident that their representation is based on a well-known Egyptian model. With a beautiful and perfect complexion, strong and energetic, the man advances with the smile of a free spirit on his lips. The more one delves into these images, the more irresistible their life becomes, the more powerful the vision of how the young Greek emerges, illuminated and smiling, in the midst of a world of dark and magical bonds. A new living figure has appeared that did not exist until now, a living essence whose characteristic is freedom, because it is determined by its own laws. The designation 'divine man', which in Sparta was given to the best, reaches its true resonance here ^[3].

In this 'new idea of man', Walter F. Otto saw fundamentally a Greek idea, whose birth, according to him, is due to the spirit that lives in Homeric poetry. Homer not only recognised 'the image of man in full light and full of life; he saw it as so great that, as an image of divinity, it could be erected in the unpolluted space. Human beings recognised themselves in the image of God; this is part of the historical and universal significance of the Olympian gods. How poor, in comparison with this event, is the discourse on the anthropomorphism of the Homeric gods. Goethe knew how to reply with apt words: 'The meaning and endeavour of the Greeks is to deify man, not to humanise the deity; it is theomorphic, not anthropomorphic'.

In this way, Goethe revived some words of the academic Cotta, from Cicero's dialogue *De natura deorum* m^[4]. The gods always existed —so the reflection goes— they were never born and, therefore, were there in their human form before men: "That is why their figure should not be called human, but ours, divine —*non illorum humana forma, sed nostra divina dicenda est*—. It is a playful argument against the opinion of the Epicurean Velleius, who wanted to attribute beauty and spirit (*ratio*) exclusively to humans, which is why he claimed that the gods were anthropomorphic s^[5].

The two poles of the Greeks' divine experience can best be understood in this way: the divine was suggested through the non-human or recognised in the human, so that the human was revealed in the divine. The two poles are represented, side by side, on the pediment of the Temple of the Gorgon in Corfu. The entire frontispiece group is constructed in the spirit of the characteristic correlation of μὲν [it is true that...] and δέ [but...]. In the corners, the struggle of the earthly powers of darkness against the sovereignty of Zeus, against the new Olympian order, embodied in conceivable human figures, was represented: *certainly*, those gigantic primordial creatures are defeated there, *but* the figure of the original goddess with the face of the Gorgon stands and dominates from the central point. Her two offspring, the horse Pegasus and the hero Chrysaor, who sprang from her dead womb, are *certainly* with her, but she is the one who, imperturbable, shows her power and eternity.

For the Greeks, the two poles are two aspects of the divine. One does not immediately cancel out the other, but in fact they complement each other over a period of time.

Thus, the historical image, which seemed so simple according to the images on the coins, must be completed:

Nowhere else is the evolution of divine figures, from the lowest forms to anthropomorphic conceptions, presented to us in all its plasticity except on coins. Bulls with human faces and other intermediate images appear. The concrete symbol of divinity is finally replaced by the representation of the god in his human form a^[6].

The apparent intermediate forms, creatures that are a mixture of animal and human, still belong to the animal sphere, and therefore to the original and monstrous world. The difference between the two aspects of the divine is even more striking.

The ancient, dark and inhuman aspect, despite its ghostly monstrosity, appears monotonous and undifferentiated when compared to the new, luminous and human aspect. The new appearance—with its more archaic background—signifies development and richness: a multiplicity of tones and variety of colours. What is specifically Greek, which is never sufficiently admired or appreciated, only exists when all the nuances and colours appear as features of the face and forms of the body, as perfect human figures, naturally united and full of meaning.

Perhaps in this way the inhuman aspect does not disappear! There is another possibility that something, probably suggested by inhuman signs, revealed its hidden richness through the expressive capacity of the human face. Something enabled the Greeks to perceive the divine in each of its aspects — divine in itself

itself—when, in its new Olympian aspect, it appeared human at the same time. Or, to paraphrase Cicero's Cotta: the human appeared as an image of the divine, as its form of expression, whose multifaceted variability equalled the divine conceived in a Greek way.

Whatever their richness, whatever the variability with which they could find their way of expressing themselves with human features, Greek images of the gods speak for themselves, spontaneously and more eloquently with the passage of time. Above all, we must realise that these images are not only ideal figures, but also ideal figures of great *diversity*. Otto called them figures of being, whose reason and possibility did not rest on artistic quality — which is easily invoked when one wants to explain their eternal youth — but on their truth. Through each Greek divine face shines a compelling idea, the idea of what the deity is, in a timeless and eternal way. Precisely what humanity occasionally reflects clumsily: the Apollonian in Apollonian youths, the Artemesian in Artemis' maidens. In the eyes of the Greeks, even perishable individuals are illuminated by eternal ideas: they too are symbols. The divine face that Greek artists saw and depicted surpasses that of ordinary individuals in that it is fully illuminated—in our language, it is a parable. The greater the artistic quality of the work, the more its spiritual content shines through.

In each face of a Greek god, through physical features, lies the possibility that we can perceive not only the spirit of the deity, but also their thoughts. It is a Greek possibility to represent the idea as a bodily experience, as already experienced by the young men of Apollo and the maidens of Artemis, with their complete and proper humanity. This presupposes a total vision of the god in an immediate and natural way: the Greek vision of divinity, which is characterised by being, at the same time, a vision of man. There are other beliefs in which the vision of god and man is one and the same. I only want to remind you of them so that we do not unthinkingly accept this very Greek characteristic.

Let us think of the divine man originating in Indo-Iranian mythology, ^[7]. He is the embodiment of superficiality: he is nothing more than a passing shadow, in his ephemeral state, forced to reign in darkness. However, these shadows are eternal, for their substance was the world, and they became the world. The more fleeting their form, the more substantial their earthly form. If it disappeared, it would become Purusha, the one with a thousand heads, a thousand eyes and a thousand feet, who is recognised throughout the universe. Before him we find the human image that returns to the Greeks in the gaze of their gods, not as an ephemeral gaze, but in the form closest to us, centred and evident, capable of embracing an aspect of the universe and making itself manifest. This human image will never conceive of the universe in its entirety, and will never have a thousand eyes. If it did, it would dissolve into the monstrous or the invisible.

The Gnostic god Anthropos is a different case ^[8]. He is not found as a fleeting shadow, but neither is he the universe of a thousand eyes. He does not lead us towards him.

the open attitude of antiquity towards the world, which also contains our death, the death of all mortals, but rather the Gnostic turn towards the interior. This divine something is also found on the path of the journey into the interior of gnosis: the divine that bears the clearest human traits, the traits *of* man, his conception. It harmonises the more general idea of man — timeless in himself — with eternal existence in time. As a figure of such generality, it would be nothing more than a sketch of man. In eternity, it would be, in a way, an essence that embodies the continuity of the cosmos. The world will die as soon as it is deprived of Anthropos. There is no Greek god so schematically human or, in his relationship to the universe, so abstracted. When the gods of Greece show human figures in their purely ideal form, free from any mortality, they also always show them as worldly, in the sense of the *richness of the figures* of the world.

That 'new idea of man' embodied by the archaic youths can be called theomorphic for this reason —an image of god and, at the same time, archaic—because it contains the world in this sense. The Greek image of the deity is not intrinsic Anthropos, thrown into the world; rather, it is a worldview, almost like Purusha, looking back to observe us with its thousand eyes. *Almost*: for the difference persists; this worldview is not anthropomorphic and, at the same time, monstrous, but rather, through the *two* eyes and the eloquent features *of* the human face, it is transparent. Humanity here means a special transparency of that worldview revealed in the divine countenance. Not a schematic transparency, which would correspond to the pretension of a scientific worldview, but a transparency that is a way of

approaching the spirit—both scientific and artistic united—and its claim to conceive in all aspects the rational and sensual aspects of the world.

The possibility of *only* recognising Anthropos in the world would mean nothing more than extending a new surface over it and not discovering those depths into which the gaze penetrates, once the face of a Greek god has been contemplated.

The most ephemeral part of me, weightless, dreams in you...

The Greek could also say, like the narcissus of the new poet Max Rychner ^[9], if he had never participated in those encounters in which he did not see the reflection of his schematic image in the depths of a spring, but something secret and hidden. We are already very close to such an encounter when we find ourselves next to a spring! And now, if the Greek mythology that is so familiar to us fails, it will be the images on coins that will help us. Arethusa, the goddess of the most bucolic fountain in Syracuse, appears on the most beautiful coins of antiquity. Let us observe *her* appearance from the beginning, from before her head adorned the most admired works of Greek numismatic art.

4

It is rightly said that the coin is a creation of the Greek spirit ^[10]; the coin was "worked on and promoted, at first unintentionally, but

later consciously, as a work of art" ^[11]. Now we would like to appreciate it in its form and understand it, even if in its development, in what it represents as specifically Greek ^[12], it arose by chance. A work of art also always transcends the artist's intentions: in itself it is a small world, richer in its various aspects than its creator could have consciously imagined. The same is true of Greek coinage. It is superfluous to try at all costs to differentiate between what was imagined by the artist and what was desired by his patron, the polis. Greek coins do not produce an effect very different from that of comparing a small shrine with the great temples of the city. Shrines and coins express the spirit of the polis, once again the spirit of a very particular small world. These artistic miniatures are full of spirituality and can be valued as the purest examples of the soul of their city and, in this sense, also of its image.

From the outset, two purely geometric trends were evident in the design of Greek coins. One stemmed from the shape of the coin disc, which was initially oval or irregularly rounded, becoming increasingly regular until it reached perfect roundness: the perfect circle, which was supposedly intended to facilitate handling ^[13]. However, another trend developed in parallel. This corresponded to the need for the square to also have validity within the circle, or at least to be valued equally. The coins show, on the reverse, "a slight rectangular or almost square concavity, with a more irregular geometric shape at the beginning, which later becomes regular" ^[14], surely for technical reasons ^[15]. But that deepening, the so-called *quadratum incusum*, if at first

leads to geometric patterns, it then leads to a tradition that gives the reverse side of many Greek coins a certain appearance until the late classical period, and which forms part of the artistic work as a whole. The coin's disc features a square, often divided into quarters, sometimes split in two by a diagonal, or into eighths by squares and diagonals. Inside, pointed stars, swastikas and windmill shapes emerge, or simple square frames, which encompass the characteristic representation of the city. Nor is there any lack of that representation n^[16] which, to those familiar with religious symbolism, brings to mind so many examples of the union of the circle and the square: the representation of an authentic mandala ^[17]. This 'symbolism' may arise unconsciously and involuntarily as a consequence of geometric games. Modern psychologists know from experience the appearance and expressive value of the mandala symbol. It is the sign of a whole or the representation—in the psychologist's therapeutic experience—of the individual's regained wholeness. Researchers of various religions find it in Eastern initiation rituals, used in the same sense. It was also used in the founding ceremonies of ancient Italian cities: it formed the basis on which a small world originated, the entirety of the city d^[18].

Even though the ancient coin maker only had a vague idea, he captured the shape of the square with extraordinary care on the "rolling coin", as this gave firmness and fullness to this small spiritual image of his city: the firmness that is both empirically and practically inherent in the square; fullness, insofar as firmness and rotation, earth and sky,

constitute the totality of the world. The square, the firmness on the coin, can even be mobile. As in the representations of the Eastern mandala, or as the representation of the mandala on the four-drachma coin from the city of Mende in northern Greece, where a circle is drawn inside a square, the *quadratum incusum* takes on rolling forms to become a swastika or windmill. Even the labyrinth, a symbol that gives a glimpse of the underworld ^[19], is represented in the form of a swastika in the *quadratum incusum* of the archaic coin of Knossos. In this mobility of the firm, and even of the subterranean, the trace of that repressed archaic mythology in which the rolling sun belongs to those powers that would later be called chthonic s^[20] apparently survives: The reverse side with the *quadratum incusum* is still, in a way, the chthonic side of the Greek coin, even though the face of the coin has lost any reference to that sphere.

It is on this more chthonic, and also more cosmic, side that, in the centre of a quadripartite, of *the quadratum incusum* that resembles a windmill, in the centre of a small representation of the whole world framed in a small circle, appears the head of a woman that will be the characteristic feature of the four-drachma coin of Syracuse. Later, dolphins surround this young face, increasingly sweet and expressive, and replace the cosmic, hieratic and rigidly square background with an oceanic perspective. No dolphins live in a spring. Originally, there are four of them, like the cardinal points. Other Sicilian, Greek and Punic cities minted the same head on the face of their coins: for them,

This symbol of the world has become a symbol of the city. For the Syracusans, with very few and late exceptions, the divine head remains in the square where it first appeared. If this head represented that marvellous and abundant spring near the port of Syracuse—a city of which Cicero wrote that the sea would often flood it if it were not protected by dykes —^[21] that spring also represented precisely the centre of the world. Not only the centre of the earth, but also that of those original waters, bearers of the world, which make their way and revive themselves. We know this oceanic centre of the world on the island of Calypso — 'where the navel of the sea is found', as Homer says — ^[22] with its four springs flowing in four directions. Deadly depths are also found in the immediate vicinity, even though 'the goddess who hides herself', Calypso, is no longer a queen of death for the poet: for the Greeks, these depths were everywhere where deep waters flowed or where — as in the sea — one floated above the depths. And Ortigia is also an island—a small secondary island next to the large island of Sicily, significant throughout the world—on which Arethusa flowed.



24. Head of Arethusa on a silver coin from the classical period (Syracuse)

From the beautiful tetrachms, the coins of Syracuse, with that head in place of a symbolism that is partly playful, partly traditional, half conscious, half unconscious, the purest mythology bursts forth. We encounter a divine apparition represented by a human figure: a human and divine face. It rises from the depths of the spring, from the depths of the world to the heights. In this sense, it is not anthropomorphic, it is not just a 'personification' of the spring, but it is theomorphic: an aspect of the world. This phenomenon, so characteristic of Greek religion, now becomes understandable to us [illu. 24].

Mythology makes its way in a sense that has already been discussed in these observations: as a form of encounter with the representative figures of the divine. Because of this systematised but not living mythology, the sovereign denomination of the world, of the tetradrachms of Syracuse, would encounter enormous difficulties. That permanent mythology rests on the Olympian divine order, as represented by Homer and Hesiod. According to this order, the great goddesses should not be mixed up or confused with the nymphs of the springs. On the tetradrachms of the classical era, numismatic experts claim to perceive the difference and say: 'From divinity comes that which is similar to divinity' [23]. With older coins, however, the question arises as to whether the head was not alluding to a great goddess, perhaps Artemis or Persephone?

The name of the nymph Arethusa only appears above the head in the later creations s^[24]. The annotation was necessary, as here the artist had strayed too far from tradition. He placed the head on the face of the coin [25], which until then only two artists had dared to do in a shared work [26], with an almost frontal profile, seen in three-quarter view. The solar face, always surrounded by four frolicking dolphins, had been definitively freed from the deep depths. In the past, it was Arethusa, the great goddess who showed herself quite naturally to the Syracusans, in the middle of the world, of the bubbling fountain and the dolphins that opened and widened the vastness of the sea. In the cosmos of Syracuse, *she*, and no other, was to be seen

as the centre of the world, *and as long as* she was truly a great goddess, she would be worthy of this position, among the other Olympian figures of women and maidens! Aphrodite, the goddess who occupies the square on the reverse side of the coins of Cnidus, had it easier! She could be recognised as the centre of the world and at the same time be a power of the chthonic depths! But Arethusa... *only* a spring nymph! On the same small island of Ortigia lived, within the Olympian order, goddesses of much higher rank than a nymph. Pallas Athena, first among them. Her temple is there, enlivened by the Catholic cult that took it over, and preserved from the solemnity of being nothing more than a simple bare museum skeleton, because it has become a sacred object. Apparently, if we refer to tradition, she was worshipped in that place before the other temple owner in Ortigia, Artemis s^[27]. Even if Pallas also appears on the famous tetradrachms only in that form, who is qualified to decide whether it is Arethusa wearing Athena's helmet, or whether it is the daughter of Zeus wearing the helmet and surrounded by playing dolphins? This is an unacceptable combination for rigid classical mythology which, according to its categories, demonstrates the impossibility of conceiving of Arethusa in Syracuse.

No attribute, such as the helmet, for example, indicates that the head could correspond to Artemis rather than Arethusa. This proposal has already been made several times by experts in Syracusan coins a^[28], and there are mythological reasons that support the possibility of a close relationship between Artemis and the nymph. Artemis is also named after Ortigia, the place of her birth, whether that mythical place was recognised on the island of Delos or in Ortigia in Syracuse. The words of Pindar

—which in the first a^[29] of the *Nemeans* praises as "holy resting place of Alpheus, glorious offspring of Syracuse, in Ortigia, camp of Artemis, sister of Delos"—grant it the status of island of birth. He also mentions another epiphany: the arrival of the river god, Alpheus, there, in Ortigia. Artemis is also called Potamia, queen of the river, and also bears the nickname Alpheus a^[30]. But the story that would clarify this relationship in different versions s^[31] refers to the nymph Arethusa. Artemis only conveys her connection with a small town in the western Peloponnese l^[32]. It was the story of the persecution that began in the western Peloponnese and ended on the Syracusan island of Ortigia. The persecuted goddess fled from the river god, Alpheus, to Siciha. Her pursuer followed her under the sea, and thus the spring of Arethusa was born. The place where the myth unfolded was, from the beginning, within the domain of Artemis, who had a temple there, at the mouth of the Alpheus o^[33]. It seems that one of her doubles was Arethusa, like the Cretan Aphaea, or Britomartis, both of whom were also pursued. The doubles did not defeat their persecutors, as Artemis did with Actaeon, and according to the myth of the western Peloponnese, even with Alpheus. The august Olympian maiden could not be caught, while the deep basin-shaped spring, into which she flowed and gathered, represents in itself the fact of having been caught. A maxim of a Delphic oracle said: "Where the mouth of Alpheus overflows and mixes with the turbulent waters of the spring of Aretus "[^{34]}. For Carducci, it is only the languishing of the river god who, after fulfilling his desires of love, still remains there.

Love, love, whisper the waters and Alpheus

Chiama ne' verdi talami Aretusa
A i noti ampless i^[35]

Love, love, whisper the waters and
Alpheus in the green bridal chambers calls
to Arethusa
to the familiar embraces].

Originally, this great goddess, who was in fact Arethusa, was also capable of containing within herself the masculine principle — which the Dorians who emigrated from Syracuse to the Peloponnese called Alpheus.

The close relationship between Arethusa and Artemis surpassed that of the classical goddess and pointed to a primordial figure. Her rich appearances were due to her presence as Persephone, bride and victim of a groom who was much more violent, vigorous and subterranean than the river god. One might also think that if the great goddess of the underworld was associated with a fountain in Syracuse, then it could only be Cyane 'the dark one', in whose waters bulls and other victims were indeed drowned for Hades, who is said to have returned from that place with the kidnapped Persephone to the underworld o^[36]. However, Aretusa also wears the crown of ears of corn, and it is questionable whether she represents Persephone o r Demeter. If other cities adorned their coins with her head, they were surely referring to the queen of the underworld o^[37] rather than any other goddess, thus recognising the true mistress of Sicily a^[38].

But perhaps Aretusa also wore, like Persephone, the crown of reeds of the goddesses of the springs. Among all the variants of divine maidens, bearers of the power of certain goddesses—such as Athena, Artemis, Persephone, and Demeter—as if it were a cocoon in her

Inside, there is the idea of the spring, which can be considered a variation on blossoming, and which constituted the predominant and unmistakable aspect of Arethusa's essence. While we contemplate the great Olympian goddesses as the unfolding of a mythical concept of a divine maiden, among them all, Aphrodite Anadyomene, who emerges from the sea, is the one who has the most right, we might say, to contain the essence of the blossoming of the world. Aretusa is the one who comes closest, in this facet, to the one who emerged from the sea and is its mistress. Aphrodite's birth was a spontaneous generation in the water a^[39]. Aretusa remained, like an eternal cocoon, in the sphere of a similar abiogenesis, in the small realm of the spring. Aphrodite extends above the foam and is the beauty of the sea, the sky, the universe; she is the beauty of the most beautiful, although there are indications that her roots lie in deep chthonic strata: her appearance on the reverse side of the coins of Cnidus is the most insignificant of them all. In the case of Arethusa, the relationships in which her name appears are disturbing: for example, the fact that one of the Hesperides, a daughter of Night ^[40], or from the depths of the ma r^[41], is also called Arethusa ^[42], as is one of Artemis' dogs that tore Actaeon to pieces n^[43]. But above all, this was the name given to springs throughout Greece. *The* great Greek goddess of springs seems to have shown us her essence in the figure of Aretusa of Syracuse.

6

The goddess who watched over the Greeks from the basin of

The beautiful springs also had other names, and with those other names came other mysteries. The mystery that concerns us here is that of their appearance with a human face. The question of whether that face, despite its mundane aspect, of the inherent essence of the spring that it expresses, emerges from the same depths as the Anthropos of the Gnostics, remains unanswered. The situation in which it arises is different from that of the Gnostics. Now we are not concerned with the original reasons located in the soul itself, but rather we are addressing a geographical event of natural origin. As for what happens then, one is inclined to think like Hegel [44]:

The bubbling of a spring in a dark cave awakened all kinds of premonitions in the Greeks; but the meaning it could have depended on listening carefully, with one's own imagination, with the fear of imagining the subject as something objective: springs are only the external stimulus. This was the case with the Naiads (the nymphs of springs and fountains), who would later be extolled as muses who express with their song whatever comes to mind... The muse into which the spring is transformed is fantasy, the spirit of man. Homer turns to the muse to hear her story, for she is his own creative spirit. Most Greek deities are spiritual creatures, even if their origin was a moment in nature.

It is precisely that moment of nature that Hegel pays very little attention to. The essential core of the muses of the springs form for always the

springs. Or for that spirit, which —like the Kriego — is capable of seeing the idea, the essential core lies in that divinity which is offered to man as an idea and whose natural worldly expression is the spring; an expression we call a 'symbol'. The essential core of the muses also resides there, and above all that of Arethusa, whom the Syracusans had chosen as the centre of their world, even without moving her from her tranquil waters. This goes beyond the purely subjective: both the Arethusa fountain and the content of the world expressed in the springing forth of the goddess from the spring are something that the spirit understands and therefore conceives as an idea. As long as the spring itself — the natural core of the goddess — has an ideal core, in the same way, a 'core' is found in every expression. A core that, if developed, would be an even grander vision for the mind, would be the idea of Aphrodite. The human face of the goddess of the spring comes precisely from there: from her natural core, which gives something ineffable, elemental, to her feminine essence, which confers a kind of moist radiance on her ideal core and, through human features, makes the element conceivable, for human features are more easily understandable to us than anything else.

Realities of nature, determined by place, have the capacity to reveal something divine when they become non-localised and timeless places of transparency for the realities of the spirit, for ideas.

Where, meanwhile, do we seek that spiritual place where such revelations occur? If it must be somewhere, then it can only be in the depths of man, where the world is reborn with each one of us and is perpetually recreated as a

transparent and spiritual world. It arose, like our world, from the same union that created us, from the feminine and the masculine, from the same creativity of two original cells that merged into one, which continues to create us until we reach the end of our organic being. For reasons of this creativity, in which organic growth and spiritual creation seem to have the same foundation, it happens that the world grows towards its own transparency or — in some human beings — towards its own darkness. Not only can it show itself to be transparent in diagrams and figures, but it can also become transparent in 'the way it has grown': transparent in the figure of the human being. If the assumption of *this kind* of profound creative stratum in man does not lie—because, for something more than an assumption, whose inspiring muse was the Arethusa of the silver coins of Syracuse, it should not serve— then there is nothing more natural than this result: the sudden appearance of divine figures with human features from the same male-female source as man himself, though not from his faded copy, but from *the fraternal gender of humanity*. What Hesiod and Pindar taught us in this sense may well be true [45].

7

The content of the ideas of the world is timeless and lacks space. When I spoke of the content of the world, as well as the world full of content, the reference was to this. However, that which *appears* from the content of the world has a beginning: the

gods, who appear to men, have the same origin as man. The deepest part of man, the content of the world that develops within him, is never moved by any *purely* external excitement, by any stimulus. Its repercussion is always stimulated by something specific. In those creative depths, a familiar tone that affects us from the outside is reproduced in a certain way — the source within us, which we extend, from the sweet spring of Arethusa in Syracuse — this is how a divine sound is born or reborn. It encompasses timeless truth and speaks to us in a human way: our brother or sister. But it can also roar with the voice of a bull or a lion. Instead of the birth of Arethusa's femininity, a silent animal head may be staring at us. There are periods when the divine manifests itself in one aspect or the other, or even in both at the same time.

The appearance of a deity with a human face can also be frightening. It is all the more horrifying when this vision is suddenly and abruptly torn from its reason and origin. The gods, when they appear, are "difficult" —Homer already knew this —^[46]. The divine nature of an epiphany —in its immediate and close origin— manifests itself more openly in its originality. With the epiphany, the figure emerges at the same time —a figure with such a broad meaning that even a simple voice can represent it— and with the figure, mythology. It is not only the most natural and inevitable form of epiphanies, but also the one that can still be humanly endured. It is a gentle river, which becomes gentler, wider and more playful the further it flows from its source. A river for poets and artists, so that they may draw nourishment from it and,

in turn, enrich it with their own source. Deities are myths at their core ^[47], which can become an infinite stream of mythologems; divine faces, however, are already elaborate myths, though not in words, like mythologems. Thus, the images on Greek coins are also gifts from this mythological river that flows abundantly.

Chapter 4

The origin of the religion of Dionysus according to the current state of research

Just as I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the invitation to give a lecture at the Arbeitsgenieinschaft für Forschung circle, I would also like to elaborate further on the topic of the lecture, beyond what the title allowed me to do. The time has come to report on the situation in which we find ourselves today, after having deciphered the previous linear script of the pre-Greek palace civilisation; we are faced with the question of the origin of the Dionysian religion, and we can say that, with all due reservations regarding the details of this process, the time has come to give an answer. My report will start from an overview, for which I must naturally take responsibility: an overview that I could not ignore during my autumn trip last September to Crete and Attica. And since during this trip I acquired at least some of the knowledge and findings that have since been confirmed by the subsequent deciphering of the Knossos tablets, and since

which I am going to talk about publicly for the first time today, I must thank the Bollingen Foundation for having facilitated, in view of the objects found, both the research and the resulting reflections.

Since 1952, we have been able to travel to Crete with a new perspective. Approximately fifty years ago, our eyes were opened to the pre-Greek culture, which its discoverer, Sir Arthur Evans, named 'Minoan' in honour of the mythological king Minos, and which I, due to the dominant image of the monuments as a whole, have previously referred to as 'palatial culture'. In 1952, something decisive happened that opened our eyes even further. The decisive factor was that the third and last script, whose monuments had emerged in the archaic Cretan palaces, revealed its secret. The oldest of the three scripts is iconographic and is still not legible today. The next two are linear scripts. Thanks to the brilliant efforts of the English scholar Michael Ventris, who strictly speaking does not belong to the guild of philologists or archaeologists, it has become possible to read the less ancient linear script. Its secret — or perhaps the most exciting of them all — can be explained in an instant. It was already written in Greek, for although it was not a system created for the Greek language, it allowed it to be written.

This was something completely unexpected. The adaptation of this type of writing to the Greek language most likely took place on the continent, in the centres of a subsidiary culture with some similar and other dissimilar features: this is how the relationship between the Mycenaean and Cretan cultures can be described most succinctly. At that time, it was already considered credible that the representatives of this subsidiary civilisation on the continent were Greeks. The

What is now novel is that even in the dominant palace of Crete, at Knossos, between 1500 and 1400 BC, the Greek language already prevailed. The dominance of that language was preceded by some five hundred years free of any Greek influence, with the flourishing of Cretan palace culture whose roots stretched as far as the Far East: to the most ancient cultures of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, in the Indus Valley. However, only the Eastern roots of this culture have been proven s^[1], because its language is still unknown to us. So far, we can only say that it was the language of the first developed European civilisation, and that it was formed with Eastern and Mediterranean elements characteristic of the prehistoric world of the Aegean islands. If the Cretan origin of the Dionysian religion seems probable to us, it is because it comes from that developed civilisation that was formed two thousand years ago and which, by approximately 1500, was already speaking Greek.

For now, the prehistoric silence of the marvellous halls, where it was so difficult to believe in prehistoric insensitivity in view of the great works of art, has come to an end. In the last palace of Knossos, today the most visited and prestigious, whose artistic treasures impress us and tell us of a simultaneous flourishing of the Cretan religion, names of Greek gods have appeared. This surprising and undeniable fact allows us to finally understand that ambiguity which, from its origin, will remain a characteristic of the entire historical religion of the Greeks. A certain ambiguity must already have existed in Crete, when Greek was already spoken in that world with such a distinctive style and religion, so different from the later Greek world, and when the revered gods already bore,

at least in part, the names that we associate with the gods of historical Greek religion.

"For us" —this is what should be added, incidentally, to the assumption of ambiguity in Cretan religion, however probable and necessary this assumption may be. If names such as *Athena Potnia*, that is, Athena, with the Greek invocation of "lady," appear on a tablet from Knossos; as does Enivalio, which for Homer is also the name of the god of war, alongside and for Ares; *Paiavon*, that is, Paeon, a name that behaves with Apollo as a healing god, in the same way as Enialio with Ares, and *Poseidaon*; thus, in almost each of them —perhaps with the exception of Poseidon—the question arises as to whether the Knossos document rather demonstrates the genuine ancient Cretan character of these gods. But precisely from these Knossos documents, no reliable conclusions can be drawn about the ancient Cretan religion, and even less so from the tablets that were found on the mainland, in Pylos. There, *Zeus and Hera*, *Ares and the Erinyes*, *Demeter* as *Damater*, closely related to the earth, perhaps also *Hermes* and certainly *Dionysus* are mentioned: names that, on the one hand, are characteristic of Homeric religion, with the exception of the last one, and, on the other hand, are characteristic of the

'Mycenaean' religion, of the aforementioned filial civilisation, whose supporters, as has now been demonstrated, were Greeks: solitary Greeks or Greeks who lived alongside others, but in any case representatives of a social class whose special *style*, different from that of the Cretans, we are learning to distinguish better every day in the monuments. And if I have spoken of ambiguity, it is not because I was thinking of layers that are only recognisable after scientific analysis (all historical figures contain invisible strata),

but rather I was referring to a *characteristic* ambiguity, one that really imposes itself on the observer, the stylistic uniqueness of a work of art.

The historical religion of the Greeks, incidentally, fulfils this condition much better than the religious world of the Cretan palaces. In Crete, as a continuation of Homeric religion, we have a second layer from the middle of the year 2000 that we must take into account, and which speaks to us directly from the wall paintings and small art objects. Knowledge of this ambiguity in the Greek religious and artistic world led Nietzsche to introduce the terms

"Apollonian and Dionysian" in European culture. This is a fact of spiritual history that I would not want to leave unmentioned, even though my task, strictly speaking, is Greek *cultural and religious history*. But I conceive of the science of the Greek way of being and thinking as something that forms part of European *intellectual history*. Behind the duality of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, as Nietzsche introduced them into our culture, Schopenhauer argues that there are two components of the world: "representation" and "will." To characterise what the Greeks represented as Apollo and Dionysus as "dream" and "intoxication" is an extremely violent simplification. Although Nietzsche, who in his first work on the birth of tragedy showed himself to be a persuasive interpreter of the Greeks, would never have dared to introduce that duality, and with it the consequent simplification, unless, in a certain way, something similar had been imposed on him through ancient traditions. Let us say that he was aware, at least in part, of his forced treatment, and he recognised it bluntly.

"Here we see first the beautiful divine, Olympian figures placed on the pediments" —this is how he describes the Apollonian side (of the building, which Nietzsche calls Apollonian culture)— "and whose exploits, represented in luminous reliefs, embellish its friezes. If Apollo is among them, like a god among the others, without any consideration for his uniqueness, this should not mislead us. Such an impulse, symbolised in Apollo, has in fact given birth to the whole of that Olympian world, and we must consider Apollo, in this sense, as its father." If Nietzsche had not started from the assumption of two basic impulses of opposite poles, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, if he had based himself on the beautiful picture of Greek culture and the world of the Greek gods, then, instead of Apollo, he would have had to cite the Olympians. However, if we disregard the Homeric splendour of the Olympians and seek a common name for all those divine figures, we should call them the *non-Dionysian* gods.

This is because, on the other hand, Dionysus is effectively opposed to the entire Olympus throughout Greek religious history. The usual juxtaposition of the Olympian and chthonic deities in no way gives rise to such a striking and unique feature of Greek religion and civilisation as the fact that, in the historical times of the Greeks, alongside the gods of Olympus, there also reigned a powerful god who did not rule the underworld like Hades and Persephone, nor was he united with the earth in the same way as Demeter. In this regard, I would like to quote an old assessment expressed by the Göttingen scholar Carl Otfried Müller, whose gaze is fixed on the idea

in a clear and unalterable way:

It is the intoxicating nature (whose most perfect symbol is wine) that robs the human soul of the serenity of a clear consciousness of itself and which underlies all Dionysian figurations. The circle of Dionysian figures, which in a way form the other Olympus, presents this natural life with its effects on the human mind, conceived in various phases, sometimes noble, sometimes ignoble; in Dionysus himself, the purest flower unfolds, united with an *afflatus* that brings well-being to the spirit without destroying the tranquil ebb and flow of sensations ^[2].

Does Carl Otfried Müller describe the effect of the murals in Cretan palaces more than a hundred years ago, we wonder in amazement, when he could not even have dreamed of them? The final impression of a kinship between the Cretan world and the Dionysian world, which at first is welcomed as a vague possibility, can be conceived more concretely if we limit the similarity to certain specific elements. Dionysus presented himself to the Greeks as *the god of wine, the god of the bull, the god of women*, and also a god of ecstatic goddesses, the greatest of whom was Rhea herself, the mother of the gods ^[3]. Now the name Dionysus, as I mentioned earlier, can be read on a tablet from Pylos in Cretan script. The presence of the great mother Rhea was recognised long ago in Cretan monuments. The four most striking elements of worship in the palace of Knossos are precisely these: the bull, wine — even both at the same time, united in valuable vessels, which were used

for drinking or for sacrificial libations, and were shaped like bull's heads—in addition to women as priestesses, and the *serpent* in the hand of priestly and divine female figures. The relationship with snakes, revealed through images on Greek vessels and tradition, is also a Dionysian element. That the Dionysian substratum prefigured the Greek religion in Crete, and that it now stands out in the palace of Knossos, is one of the profound impressions that travellers can take away with them after the Cretan linear script of the Greek language has been deciphered: the impression produced by a *noble* Dionysian religion, which could have been obtained much earlier, had there not been so many impediments.

Before presenting the results of another interpretation that seems to confirm the Cretan origin of the Dionysian religion, I would like to mention the obstacle that has, until now, prevented the achievement of this knowledge that is so close at hand. The deviation began with Nietzsche, due to his simplistic equation of the Dionysian with drunkenness, and later due to the thesis, dominant since Rohde, that Dionysus was a recent god in Greece. Equating the Dionysian with drunkenness was not without foundation in Greek tradition, but the simplification and reduction to a *state of mind*—that is, to a state of drunkenness—was forced. Nietzsche's friend Erwin Rohde sought a historical basis for this state, which is not purely psychological in origin but rather in the sense of universal drunkenness or 'mystical delirium', even if this psychological assumption is always emphasised afterwards, in his *Psyche* and in a classic lecture on the religion of the Greeks s^[4]. His description of the enthusiasm of the Thracian tribes around the god, "whom the Greeks later

call Dionysus" (in Rohde's words), became unforgettable, as did his description of the Dionysian cult in its most turbulent and unrestrained forms, which are imperceptible to us in the Cretan representations. In this way, he fulfilled the objective of justifying Nietzsche and at the same time correcting him. The correction had to emphasise the fact that this way of entering "into the thrill of the global divine life" (again in Rohde's words) had been introduced as "a drop of foreign blood into Greek blood", like a current that "blowed down from the north towards Greece".

Another correction to this theory is that of Wilamowitz, who, in his explorations of Greek religion ^[5], came to the conclusion that the Dionysian cult, being of Thracian origin, had arrived in Greece after detouring through the lands of the Phrygians, a tribe related to the Thracians, and through Lydia from Asia Minor, crossing the sea to Greece ^[6]: a hypothetical route which, however, is proven by the Dionysian cults and names. Dionysus' mother in the myth of Thebes, Semele, seems to bear the Phrygian name of the goddess of the underworld, and as soon as the Lydian inscriptions were deciphered, it became clear that theophoric names containing the name Bacchus had been formed there, which was also the usual name for Dionysus in Greece. That this word also came from Greece or could have belonged to the pre-Greek population, also from outside Asia Minor, must be attributed to Walter F. Otto ^[7]. In other cases, too, Wilamowitz went too far in his apodictic conjectures. He believed that Dionysus had become the god of wine in Lydia, and dated the time of his immigration to Greece "not before the eighth century

[8], and on the possibility of a Cretan origin, which was also considered, he expressed himself in these words: "But no one should believe in a Dionysus imported from Crete. Nor is there any trace of Ariadne in late Crete [9]." We will soon know what attitudes prevailed in Crete in the middle of the second millennium.

In 1955, the Swedish scholar M. P. Nilsson still attempted to combine the hypotheses of Rohde and Wilamowitz in the new edition of his history of Greek religion, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, in the series "Handbuch der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft" [10]. With regard to the time of Dionysus' immigration, he was not as decisive as Wilamowitz, and also took into account, on the one hand, the pre-Greek influences (difficult to separate from Crete) on 'the Lydian-Phrygian Dionysus', while, on the other hand, he considered the

"ancient repressed inclinations of a population subjected to an ecstatic cult in Greece" that would have paved the way for the new god [11]. Dionysus, according to his criteria, continues to occupy the last place among the "most recent" gods. His obstinacy, acknowledged by himself [12], in rejecting Otto's book on Dionysus unfortunately prevented him from considering the critical objections that this master of philological science raised against Rohde and Wilamowitz, so that his hypothetical construction of the double immigration — from Thrace and from Asia Minor — also falls apart.

Today it is also clear that Otto's observations in his *Dionysos* [13] on the subject of Dionysus' origins were much more prudent than those of Rohde, Wilamowitz or Nilsson. After examining the Greek tradition, he concluded that

conclusion: "By the end of the second millennium, at least, Dionysus must have been very familiar in Greek cultural circles." This is sufficiently demonstrated by the name of the god on the Pylos tablets. As for his geographical origin, he was even more reserved: 'To ask whether Dionysus came to Greece from abroad in an earlier period, for which we have no reliable evidence, is one of those questions that can probably never be answered with certainty'. The assumption that the Dionysian religion entered Greece from Thrace, which Wilamowitz had already dismissed as old rubbish—with his hypothesis that it had taken a detour before arriving—was refuted by Otto with an excellent, watertight argument. Among other things, he observed that Thrace played a minor role in the Dionysian myth. On the other hand, he did make a very significant assessment that in the description of the underworld in the *Odyssey*, Dionysus is related to Ariadne, daughter of Minos. This tradition also highlights the god's connection to Crete, the land of Minos.

If I may, I will repeat how I myself assessed the situation in 1950, in my lectures in Rome a^[14]. Otto's point of view can be summarised by saying that Dionysus was probably worshipped very early on in the southern Greek world, in Crete and the Aegean islands, as well as on the mainland. Nothing could be objected to this opinion, even if the area of early worship of Dionysus extended further to the southeast, which I believed to be true at the time. There are also many indications in favour of a later arrival from a somewhat more northerly direction, not precisely Thracian, although this would always, and above all, be due to the name of

Semele. The difficulty could perhaps be resolved, I thought, if one took into account that the great mother goddess, formerly Rhea, who would later be called by the Phrygian name Cybele, also came to Greece on more than one occasion: first from the south and southeast, and then from Phrygia. Thus Dionysus could also be, at the same time, a new god and an ancient god in Greece.

Today, we must speak more precisely of an early arrival of the religion of Dionysus from Crete and its consistency with identical or similar cults in Asia Minor and areas of the northern Balkans, which would make a dual origin possible. This would ultimately lead us to a duality of Dionysus—the one worshipped in Athens and the one worshipped by the Thebans—as claimed by mythographers and chroniclers s^[15]. The orgiastic features highlighted in Greece, the display of what has not been reflected in art in Crete, which has even been deliberately concealed, the maenadic and the phallic, are aspects of the history of Greek religion that can be partly explained by this continued consistency. A detailed analysis from this new point of view will still require some time. An extension of this perspective on women's cults can be found in the chapter 'Le ménadisme' in Jeanmaire's book *Dionysos* ^[16], in which he describes a 'renouveau dionysiaque', a new era of Dionysian flourishing, whose origins are investigated, although it is separated by a thousand years from the flourishing of Knossos. This distance should not be forgotten under any circumstances. Nor should the concordances, as they are all the more significant. Even the thesis of the Cretan origin of the Dionysian religion, which I now propose for discussion, requires further elaboration. It is not based solely on the

compendium I have presented, nor solely on the appearance of the name Dionysus on the Pylos tablets: this only opens the way to an interpretation that is also justified as a working hypothesis, provided that no further evidence emerges in the near future.

Although I already detected one in the lecture by Professor Palmer, the Indo-Europeanist from Oxford, in a true *palmaris lectio* on a tablet from Knossos. The "Lady of the Labyrinth" also appears there: *Labyrinthio potnia*. Offerings of mie l^[17] are presented to her, as to "all the gods", *pasi theois*. We also learn that the early Greeks in Crete pronounced the word *labyrinthos* as *dabyrinthos*. This does not necessarily mean that the word *labrys*, 'double axe', can also be expected to take the form *dabrys*. The general opinion is that *labyrinthos* originally meant 'house of the double axe' and, consequently, the palace of Knossos itself, which is an unconfirmed assumption and one for which there is no tradition on which to base it.

The equation of the labyrinth with the entire palace now collapses completely and on its own. The "Lady of the Labyrinth," to whom it was mandatory to make offerings of honey, as to all gods, is certainly not identical to the queen, the mortal mistress of the palace. Even if she had been worshipped as a goddess, the offering of honey—a

"honey pot" on the table—would not have been enough to feed him. The phrase we read in the pages of a later Greek writer, Porphyry (*The Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey*, 16), was valid for more than two thousand years: "Honey is the food of the gods." This had been known for a long time, and we are taught this in particular by the

The old master from Bonn, Herrman Usener, who in his article on milk and honey, 'Milch und Honig' ^[18], already took Dionysian testimonies as his basis. 'The ground flows with milk, wine flows, and bees flow with their nectar,' we read when Euripides' *Bacchae* ^[19] feel the presence of the god, and according to Ovid, it was Dionysus who gave us wheat ^[20].

Professor Palmer could not doubt for a moment that in Greek the "Lady of the Labyrinth" was called Ariadne. And even less so when he had read *Daidaleionde* three times on the tablets ^[21], that is, "in a building" —as I would cautiously translate it— "mentioned in honour of the master Daedalus". This still does not tell us whether *daidalos* only means 'a master craftsman' or whether it is already a proper name, that is, whether *daidaleion* simply refers to 'workshop' — perhaps a holy workshop — or to a specific work by the master Daedalus. This work could be the sanctuary of the 'Lady of the Labyrinth', which as a work of art, or according to Greek legend, as the work of the master Daedalus, bore the name *Daidaleion*. And it could be the image of the real realm of the 'Lady of the Labyrinth', representing the underworld from a certain point of view.

Let us disregard for the moment the meaning of the underworld of the labyrinth, which results from some contexts cited in my aforementioned "Studies on the Labyrinth" ^[22]. In Homer's description of Achilles' shield, it is said of Daedalus' work ^[23]:

Ἐν δὲ χορὸν ποίκιλλε περικλυτὸς ἀμφιγυῖεις, τῷ
ἔκελον οἶόν ποτ' ἐνὶ Κνωσῷ εὐρείῃ Δαίδαλος
ἥσκησεν καλλιπλοκάμῳ Ἀριάδνῃ

[The illustrious lame man (Hephaestus) performed a dance similar to the one Daedalus had once carefully arranged in the vast Knossos for Ariadne, she of the beautiful braids].

This is the meaning of the verse. Ancient chroniclers understood *chorós* in the only way possible in this context, as a place for dancing. However, in this case, the place for dancing and the circle are inseparable from one another. This ancient, mythologically widespread, cultic figure, which would later serve as a place for games: a place for dancing and a certain circle of difficult execution, around a divine maiden, are three elements of an original unity that have already been highlighted as an original unity in my "Studies on the Labyrinth" ^[24]. The minimal context of Knossos: 'For the Lady of the Labyrinth, a vessel of honey', I think this confirms it, and is completed by the Homeric tradition, according to which Ariadne is nothing more than a daughter of the king, albeit Cretan. The daughter of Minos, as a dancer who leads and guides the dance circle, may well have obtained a place to dance built by one of the great masters. That she was originally, as a goddess, the owner of a *place for cult dance* can be deduced from the following text from Knossos. The origin of the Homeric description is now very clear. At the same time, it becomes clear that the divinity of the 'Lady of the Labyrinth' was not limited to the honour of being the owner of a place for dancing. If the labyrinth marks her area of influence, then this must have been more extensive than the earthly spaces dedicated to dancing. But these could represent, in their own way, the image of her kingdom.

How should we proceed with regard to the meaning of the underworld of the labyrinth? The place and figure of the dance—according to the results of my 'Studies on the Labyrinth'—were reminiscent of the underworld, in which there is no way back, except in a very mysterious way, which is hinted at in the figure of the dance: in a spiral line of return. There, it seems to me, lies hidden the great gift of the queen of the underworld to humanity. In this sense, I spoke of Ariadne in my work *The Gods and Heroes of Greece* ^[25] as the 'Lady of the Cretan Labyrinth': as a goddess whom the epic of heroes links to the figure of Theseus. Thus arose the well-known story of Ariadne's help to the hero and her subsequent abduction, which was thwarted by the intervention of Dionysus. In another account, Theseus also appears as the failed abductor of the queen of the underworld, who in that version is called Persephone. We now know that the 'Lady of the Labyrinth' was a goddess for the Cretans. If I am not mistaken in my assessment of the labyrinth as an ancient form of the underworld, then the 'Lady of the Labyrinth' was the queen of the underworld for the Cretans.

Her Greek name fits this purpose. *Ariadne* is another form of *ari-hagne*, 'the purest'. For the Greeks Persephone, queen of the underworld, was primarily considered "pure." This does not mean that other goddesses, especially Artemis and the goddesses of all crystal-clear springs, did not also receive this nickname. Here, the comparison that expresses precisely her inaccessibility is significant, and led to the failure of all attempts at abduction — except for the first, the abduction committed by her divine husband. We also have an indication from the lexicographer Hesychius, in which Ariadne is called *Aridela* by the Cretans, that is

that is, the 'most clear' [26]. This shows once again that we are dealing with a goddess. As a goddess, she had two facets, and these two facets corresponded to two invocations: as the 'most pure', she reigned in the underworld, as the

"most pure" appeared in the sky. Having become the daughter of an earthly king, Ariadne suffered a double fate: one, dark, by which she must die, and one, light, by which she—and her crown—reached the sky. All this happened in her relationship with Dionysus.

Earlier, we merely suggested how close the bond between Ariadne and Dionysus was, as evidenced in the *Odyssey*. Among the heroines Odysseus encounters in Hades, he also mentions the beautiful Ariadne [27]:

Φαίδρην τε Πρόκριν τε ἴδον καίλῃν τ'
'Ariadne,
The daughter of Minos, the slayer of all, if Theseus ever
came from Crete to the sacred temples of Athens
he brought, but Artemis did not let him go
in the presence of Dionysus' witnesses

[And I saw Phaedra and Procris, and the beautiful Ariadne, daughter of the ruthless Minos, whom Theseus once took from Crete to the hill of sacred Athens, but did not achieve his goal: instead Artemis killed her, surrounded by the sea at Dia, at the behest of Dionysus].

The meaning is explained by Otto's careful interpretation in his *Dionysos* [28]. The beautiful daughter of the evil Minos was abducted by Theseus in Crete; he wanted to kidnap her and take her to Athens, but Artemis killed her first.

at Dionysus' request, already on the small island of Dia that rises in the bay of Amnisos, opposite the port of Knossos. The god must *have had* a claim on Ariadne, as Otto interprets this request, just as Apollo had on his beloved Coronis, who was also killed by Artemis, on the orders of the god she had cheated on with a mortal lover. Coronide dies before she can give birth to Asclepius, son of Apollo. Of Ariadne, however, the legend of her Cypriot cult tells that she died in childbirth. This is where Otto draws the parallel. It could be extended a little further, since Coronis, with her dark name of 'crow maiden', also had another facet, referred to by her other name *Aigle*, 'light'. We can see her even more clearly as a goddess now that this earlier status of the heroine Ariadne ^[29] has been documented and attested. Otto believed that he should emphasise the mortal nature of Minos' daughter, which is how she is effectively portrayed in Homer, as well as in some accounts of her cult and especially in references to Ariadne's tombs. Seen from the Greek tradition, she is, as Otto calls her ^[30]:

"Ariadne is a mortal Aphrodite." However, in this regard, the hypotheses of both Wilamowitz ^[31] and Nilsson ^[32] are also confirmed from Crete, considering her to be a great, more ancient goddess. Her distant relationship with Crete was recognised by Nilsson ^[33].

I have no doubt that Ariadne's thread leads us to the heart of Cretan religion. Gradually, we reach the points of support that allow us to reveal structured mythological contexts of archaic Crete—and not just parts of the central core of mythologems, as happened with the 'divine child'. One of these contexts is *Dionysus' right over Ariadne*, his ancient

intimate relationship that existed before the legend of Theseus was born; a relationship that literature ignored after Homer. Although it is still alive, as shown by the images on vases, especially a Tarentine krater found very recently, in which Theseus, with his sword drawn and in a defensive stance, returns to his ship, while Dionysus touches the chest of the sleeping Ariadne and possesses her again ^[34]. The relationship is older than anything we hear about Ariadne in Greek times, as it is *a prerequisite* for the transmissions, both in terms of her death and her ascension to heaven. The tradition of the myth of Dionysus and Ariadne also shows us the most likely path that the religion of Dionysus followed in its spread from Crete.

The island of Naxos played a very important role in this tradition. As far as we know, the islands of Naxos, Cyprus and Delos had a cult of Ariadne. When Otto adds "and certainly Crete too" ^[35], we can appreciate his keen eye for historical facts. He also claimed that Ariadne's tomb was in Argos, in the 'Cretan' sanctuary of Dionysus of ^[36], which would prove not only her Cretan origin, but also that of the god himself. However, Naxos was the island that in ancient times had the reputation of being the most Dionysian. It was even known by the nickname *Dionysias*, the 'Dionysian', and the story of the people of Naxos was readily accepted, namely that it was there that Dionysus finally reunited with Ariadne and from there took her to heaven. Wilamowitz believed that, on the solid basis of this tradition, it was possible to go even further, and he asserted that the union of Dionysus and Ariadne could only have taken place in Naxos, as there were children there.

males of the couple. It can be agreed that Naxos must have been an important stage in the cult of Dionysus^[37]. The other assertion, that the union of the two deities could only have taken place there, has no basis in tradition. Genealogy—in this case, a list of male children—never precedes the great myth, the core of a complete mythology, but rather the opposite: it is a consequence of it. The core and prerequisite of the mythology full of the vicissitudes of Ariadne and Dionysus was the *divine couple* Dionysus and Ariadne. The list of sons completes the original and intelligent foundation of the transmission—of the mythological and cultic tradition—although it does not necessarily complete it.

Neither the core nor the basic myth are formed through arbitrary links; genealogical lists are what are formed in this way. The two most frequently mentioned sons, Stafilos, 'grape cluster' in its masculine form, and Enopion, whose name, *oinos*, contains wine, seem to be two versions of one and the same, a worthy successor to Dionysus and, in a way, a repetition of the father. It is therefore significant that Stafilos, as an inhabitant of the small island of Peparetos in the Sporades, is Cretan according to tradition. If Wilamowitz intended to see in this a confluence of the 'claims' of Crete and Naxos, he would once again be making a tremendous simplification in the political sense, lacking in historical evidence. However, it should serve to devalue the scant transmission that clearly attests to the spread of Dionysus, his cult and the vine from Crete. Passing through Naxos and Peparetos, it even continued on to Thrace. If Naxos was really populated by Thracians, as Diodorus states of^[38], then it is more likely that they

they brought the southern god with his gifts to their companions in the northern tribes, and not the other way around.

But not all roads were as straight or left such unmistakable traces as the one that led from Crete to Naxos and Peparetos. I would like to mention just *one* more, one more among the countless ones that could be mentioned. On the south-western coast of Attica, near the extreme tip of the mainland, behind a small island that juts out and is pyramid-shaped, lies a harbour that, although small, is also a good harbour. At the apex of the pyramid, facing the open sea, stands a colossal statue from the imperial era, whose identification is still pending. The local people, since time immemorial, have called this deep bay Porto Rafti, the tailor's port, perhaps because of the statue, and in a touching way because of its lack of historical meaning. In ancient times, this was the location of the region of Prasiai, an Attic demos that had special relations with Delos. From here, the shortest route leads to Delos and, continuing along the same line, to Naxos. Behind the port of Prasiai, now Porto Rafti, the interior of the country is a wine-growing area that extends to the Attic Mesogea.

Tradition has preserved the name of the person who popularised wine cultivation in this area. We mainly know the story thanks to a student of Callimachus. In his poem *Erigone*, Eratosthenes recounted it in an elegiac tone. Although the story can be classified as belonging to a type of ancient myth, the myths of the *bearers of culture*, which often, as in this case, are mythologems of the relationship that inform us about primordial times, when the gods still had direct contact with men and showered them with gifts. It was said that

Dionysus had visited these lands and stayed at the home of a man who, like the son of Daedalus, was called Icarius or Icarus. And since the god was welcomed with great hospitality by this just and pious man, he gave his host wine and a vine shoot. He taught him what to do with it and instructed him to spread the word about his gift. Icarus offered wine to the shepherds who populated the area at that time, that is, before the arrival in Attica of the goddess Demeter, who brought grain and agriculture to the country. After drinking excessively, the wine overcame them and, believing that he had tried to poison them, they beat the gift-giver to death.

This tragic feature of the myth of wine cultivation is authentically Dionysian. In it, Icarius represents Dionysus. The disseminator of wine plays the role of the double of the god of wine and, like him, dies in a sacred act linked to viticulture, in the sacrifice of the goat or^[39]. Icarius' daughter, Erigone, wandered around looking for her father, according to the continuation of the story. The dog Mera led her to the corpse. Everything that happened was tragic, in a way like a prelude to Attic tragedy; as narrated in our sources, in the excerpts from Eratosthenes' poem s^[40], Erigone hanged herself. All this had to be atoned for by the people of Athens, ultimately through the introduction of the swing into the festival of Ayora, a festival for swinging and floating in the air. Icarus, Erigone and Mera finally ended up as constellations in the sky: Icarus as Boötes, Erigone as Virgo, the dog as Sirius, the *Canis Major*, or according to others the *Canis Minor*, in whose heat the grapes ripen.

The name Icarus or Icarius is not a Greek name, but one that shows pre-Greek consistency, and which comes from

as far as Asia Minor, in whose direction lies the island of Icarus or Icaria, and even as far as Crete, which indicates the similarity of the name to that of Daedalus' son, Icarus. The island of Icarus is counted among the birthplaces of Dionysus ^[41], and the stories also refer to the god wanting to travel from there to Naxos, but he and the ship fell into the hands of pirates ^[42]. The connection between the name and the god of wine did not occur until it reached Attica. A demos located on the northeast slope of Pentelikon, in Attica, bore the name of Icaria. And Icarius is considered the founding hero. In the inscriptions ^[43], after the name of Dionysus, the name Karios is mentioned, which I do not know if it really refers to Zeus Cario, in Asia Minor, as is supposed, or if it only corresponds to the oldest form of *Ikarios*, a pre-Greek fluctuation of the initial vowel I^[44]. The place still bears the same name as the god of wine, while also being called 'Sto Dionysos', and offers us the wonderful gift of an archaic mask image, the divine representation as the god of the mask a^[45]. In a straight line, the site of Sto Dionysos is closer to Marathon Bay, although it can also be reached from Porto Rafti, a longer but less tiring route.

The cult attests to the fact that Dionysus arrived in Attica by sea. In a specific and, for this reason, very archaic procession, when Dionysus makes his triumphal entry into Athens during one of his great festivals, he does so on a boat-shaped chariot. We know the details from images on vases. The god *is seated* in his boat, which has been fitted with wheels. In an image on a famous vase, Dionysus is seen with his ship at sea. His journey by sea is

It tells the story of the young god and the Tyrrhenian pirates, which is recounted in a Homeric hymn o^[46]. He could also have reached the port of Athens, Piraeus, without wheels, and been welcomed there by the Athenians. But he did not arrive in Athens via the port, but via the villages of the surrounding vineyards, from Eleutherae, in the north-west on the border with Boeotia. A statue of him, carved in wood, was brought from there to Athens, an act that was also repeated during the cult, although, as far as we know, not on a ship on a cart. Furthermore, since Dionysus was worshipped in Icaria as the god of masks, there was also an ancient seated statue of him there^[47]. It has already been suggested that the ship attached to the cart actually belongs to Icaria^[48]. Once Eleutherae has been ruled out, there is hardly any other possibility.

We cannot precisely trace the path of this amazing vehicle through the Attic vineyards. It was undoubtedly ideal for carrying the god through the villages and vineyards of Mesogeia, and it certainly served to attest that the god of wine had come from the sea to his Attic cultivators—meaning both those who cultivated the cult and those who cultivated the land. This conclusion has so far favoured the idea that the Dionysian religion originated in Asia Minor. Otto had quite rightly argued against the idea that the procession of the god's boat also took place in Smyrna, on the coast of Asia Minor, since, if the aim was to preserve the memory of this festive custom of the arrival of the cult of Dionysus from Phrygia or Lydia, this possibility would be completely meaningless. Rather, he had considered that both the *arrival* of the god on the boat, the character of a 'god who arrives', and the kinship with the *wet element*, actually formed

part of Dionysus' way of doing things. He referred to the very ancient traditions according to which Dionysus jumped into the sea ^[49] or sank into Lake Lerna. Consequently, if he made his entrance on a ship on the day of the festival, for Otto this only represented his epiphany of emerging *from* the sea ^[50]. I expressed my reservations as soon as my book on Dionysus was published ^[51]. Since then, my experience has taught me to think about these events in a very concrete way. Boats do not emerge from the depths of the sea, nor did Dionysus come from there when he made his entrance sitting in a boat. Nor did he come from Asia Minor, where the same arrival was celebrated, but rather, after passing through several islands, he came from Crete.

After my trip to Crete, I drove from Aterías to Porto Rafti, as one does nowadays, with no particular intention other than to enjoy the autumn harvest. I expected to find the small port completely empty, as was usually the case, with that magical sense of abandonment that welcomed travellers to the eastern coast of Attica, as it had done in Lord Byron's time. But this time I was disappointed. The port was crowded, and the boats were bumping into each other. It betrayed its destiny, which in these parts had hardly changed since ancient times; the ways of the sea and the needs of simplicity, life reduced to its simplest form, remained identical. Porto Rafti had a destiny: to be the *port of Attica wine*, or at least that of Mesogea. Although I had found no mention of this in literature, the boats carried their sweet cargo of the Attic harvest in large barrels. I asked the men about the must, where were they taking it? They named several ports in northern Greece, such as Kavala and others on the Thracian coast.

the Thracian coast. That is where the must is turned into wine. If Dionysus arrived here from Naxos back then, his gift is still being transported from here to Thrace today. Could this be an ancient wine route and, with it, the route of the Dionysian religion? Surely the reality was much richer, more varied and changeable than we can imagine today r^[52].

Chapter 5

The Lady of the Labyrinth

Since it has been established that in Knossos, the most important site of Cretan palace culture, between 1500 and 1400 BC, Greek was already spoken and written, Hellenists ask themselves with some perplexity: with what text am I now going to introduce my listeners or readers to the spiritual world of the Greeks?

With the heroic line of the first verse of the *Iliad*:
"Sing, O Goddess, of the wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus."
One cannot begin with anything else if one intends to start with the oldest. The manuscripts of Knossos, Mycenae, and the small palace of Pylos predate this verse, or any line from the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, by several centuries. But these inscriptions, which chronologically predate everything Homeric, can in no way be considered spiritual. Spengler's words, who twenty years earlier had already made the following observation, remain valid to this day: 'In all the Cretan finds, there is no trace of historical, political or even biographical consciousness, such as that which dominated the man of Egyptian culture from the earliest days of the ancient kingdom'. The manuscripts that have already been deciphered or interpreted as a whole are relationships of property or belongings, or tributes,

payable to men or also to the gods, or from people obliged to render their services. This observation by Spengler, which was certainly also my own ^[1], was likewise confirmed by the gravestones of the Mycenaean tombs, on which no names are recorded. No traces have been found of any desire to immortalise oneself through writing.

The Homeric form of immortalisation, in essence, did not depend on writing either. It was based on a specific poetic language that emerged as a song of poetic consciousness sustained by a divine source, and was expressed through recitation in a melodious voice, even though writing was soon put at the service of memory to preserve the oral work. However, no oral works have been recovered through the deciphering of Mycenaean writing. In these oldest Greek manuscripts, we can only look for, at most, a linguistic construction or a specific indication; among which we may perhaps hear how some tone of a late oral work, Homeric or post-Homeric, sounds, or elements of spiritual figures (transmitted through oral or plastic works) belonging to our culture emerge. Surely today, with this approach, we can find a manuscript that can be evaluated spiritually. And that is where the first tone of one of the various mythologems sounded, one of those mythological stories that appear in many works of art. A fundamental, simple and objective tone, which can be detected in works of art that were not always music in that same sense; in any case, not like that last version that moves us. They were a motif for dance, as they always contained a danceable figure. The last version, which also had an operatic format, was called *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and was

composed by Richard Strauss and written by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. With the plot of this poem and this musical composition, the Greek spiritual history begins for all of us, always characterised by the poetic —and in the poetic, by the mythological— in its main theme, and only after that came philosophy, history and the beginning of all sciences. Not exactly with *Ariadne in Naxos*, but with some notes on *Ariadne in Crete*. On a tablet from Knossos, a scrupulous and meticulous linguist a^[2], read for the first time, in pre-Homeric Greek, the words that he immediately interpreted linguistically and then made known as one of the most extraordinary discoveries in the field of deciphering. But now we would like to consider the living and spiritual context in which those words were received: 'Honey for the Lady of the Labyrinth' ^[3]. This is the text of a simple instruction for the offering, a text that in no way belongs to the history of literature, but rather to the history of religion. And this is what the other line on the same tablet says: 'Honey for the assembly of the gods'. This is where our European religious history actually begins: an aspect that should not be relevant for now, as we are going to devote ourselves to the Cretan line, the first mythologically transcribed one where Ariadne is mentioned as "Lady of the Labyrinth"; that Ariadne to whom all subsequent poets have also devoted themselves in some way.

Let us say just a few words about the offering of honey, as it also touches on areas of our spiritual history in which Ariadne becomes an important and mysterious symbol not only for poets, but even for a philosopher. "Who, except me, knows what

what Ariadne is?" Nietzsche boasted in his *Ecce Homo* ^[4]. And note that he made his Zarathustra speak to his animals as he climbed a high mountain:

"But make sure that there is honey within reach, yellow, white, good, fresh honeycomb honey. For know that up there I want to make offerings with honey" ^[5]. This offering, which in Nietzsche's Zarathustra is only a simulation — as well as a way to leave behind the purest accessible form of paganism — is one of the oldest offerings. Honey was already a food for humans in the most remote Stone Age. And since then, in the religions of the Mediterranean region (and not only there), it has been considered appropriate for offerings to the gods. The sweetest food corresponded to the essence of the gods as givers of happiness and bliss. Honey was the oldest divine food, even older than ambrosia. The Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* calls it 'the sweet food of the gods' ^[6], and it continued to be so until late antiquity, when it was still said: 'For honey is the food of the gods'. This corresponds to the mythology of the most archaic gods, one of whom, Cronus, was intoxicated with honey, because at that time, before the birth of Dionysus, wine did not yet exist. The Greek word for appeasing the gods is a derivation of the word honey, a form that reveals its use in non-Greek territories ^[7]. The gods of the underworld were considered to be 'honeyed or sweet as honey', and great blessings were expected from them, both in pre-Homeric and Homeric times, and frequently in the archaic religions that survived. This is also evoked, in addition to the figure of Ariadne, heroine of the Greek legend related to the labyrinth, in the indications of the

offerings: "Honey for the Lady of the Labyrinth". With a text like this, or like the other one on the same tablet: "Honey for all the gods", Greek spiritual history begins for us. With this, through a few texts, we have penetrated for the first time into the pre-Homeric world, into the world that spoke Greek. And this had not yet happened in the science of classical antiquity. Above all, it had not happened in this way, when not only names and objects appeared, as on other tablets, but they alluded to a famous theme, whose elements are offered in their oldest and newest forms for comparison. In other words, the new already begins with Homer and reaches as far as Nietzsche and Hofmannsthal.

One element is the labyrinth, and the other is its owner: a goddess who receives honey as an offering. A paradox, and at the same time an absolutely certain deduction, now leads us to a goddess: a container of honey, as stated quite clearly on the tablet, would not have been sufficient as a tribute to an earthly queen, but it was sufficient as an offering to the queen of the underworld. The owner of the labyrinth is a goddess. But what kind of kingdom would the labyrinth be for a goddess, if the word *labyrinthos* only referred to a man-made structure, even if it was the work of an artist like Daedalus? The goddess's kingdom was not a building. What Daedalus had built could only be an image of her domain. Daedalus's work, according to Homer, was a place for dancing and for Ariadne in Knossos; in the post-Homeric legend, it was a building with a floor plan consisting of intricate corridors. There, as this later account tells us, was hidden the shame of the family of Minos, Ariadne's half-brother: the Minotaur, half man, half bull. However, the

labyrinth was only seen in this way in its post-Homeric era. Although in Greek representations and coins from Knossos, its floor plan still retained the shape of a quadruple meander, a simple snail or meander line (an angular spiral) or a labyrinth that developed from it. Originally, this figure could be danced and, according to legend, in Delos it was danced by the young men and maidens of Athens whom Theseus had freed from the labyrinth. And if the labyrinth is imagined as a construction, then it could also be represented as a dancing circle that, from a central point, returned upon itself ^[8].

In the *Iliad*, as already indicated, Daedalus' work for Ariadne was a place for dance: a place that was also—even before the gloomy, underworld building of post-Homeric legend—an image of the true empire of the 'Lady of the Labyrinth'. It was the underworld seen from a special perspective. This aspect represented the spiral line that returns upon itself. In pre-Homeric times, the image of the underworld was conceived as a spiral labyrinth, and the return from there as a grace granted by the queen of the underworld. From down there she reigned as "Lady of the Labyrinth", as *Ariadne*, as "the purest": this is what the name means, the most appropriate from the Greek perspective for the queen of the underworld, also called Persephone, with her pre-Greek name. Not only did she allow those she loved to leave the underworld, but she herself returned to become 'the most pure', the *Aridela* of the sky, as she was called in Crete, with another Greek name. As a pre-Homeric figure, she was the divine maiden of the Cretans, a moon goddess, but not

only of the moon in the sky, but also as the lady of the kingdom of the dead who, full of mercy, brought them back to life.

Since Homer, she had been considered a mortal daughter of the king, daughter of the Cretan king Minos, whose fate took the same path. She felt inclined towards mercy, but only as a maiden in love, and mortal, could feel it: she had helped the young and handsome Athenian Theseus with her advice and her thread, and according to an ancient version, with her crown that shone and illuminated the gloomy passages of the labyrinth. This is how he was able to return from certain death. And yet (also according to an ancient version of the legend already referred to in *the Odyssey*) she was killed by Artemis, at the behest of Dionysus. It happened on the island of Dia: either on that small island opposite the port of Knossos, or on Naxos, which was also formerly called Dia. In her abduction, Theseus could only get as far as there. According to the well-known later variant, also valid for Hofmannsthal, it was not there that she died, but rather that she was abandoned while she was fast asleep. This is how Dionysus found his Ariadne, over whom he exercised an ancient right, and whom he took in his chariot to heaven where, even today, the 'crown of Ariadne' shines.

Later poets no longer knew that he had *found* her again, that he had taken her back. If he had not had an ancient right over her, he would not have been able to demand punishment from Artemis or ^[9]. An image on a Tarentine vase, which has not been published, also shows how Theseus retreats before the god, and how Dionysus possesses the sleeping woman. Each of the stories of Ariadne has as its precondition her mysterious and ancient relationship with the god, whose presence around the world of the "Lady of the Labyrinth" is now

attested to by a *name* alone (and soon others will be heard).
Dionysus' love for Ariadne belongs to the image of ancient
Cretan culture that unfolds before our eyes.

Chapter 6

Sacred Crete

One of my earliest memories of Crete is a secret walk with Walter F. Otto, which we took shortly after the publication of his book on the gods of Greece, which has since become world famous. Our walk was secret because, instead of taking the road from Heraklion to Knossos, at siesta time we separated from our small group—who later found out and were not pleased—to set off along a deep, sunken path, which today is no longer passable along its entire length. What drove us and interested us was not only the palace of Knossos. As soon as we arrived, we realised that we could certainly gain a greater understanding of the different strata and periods of construction of such an amazing building, if our interest had been to progress in that subject, but not greater precision about something that affected us more intensely on a personal level: the relationship between landscape and myth in pre-Greek Crete, about that unique mythical glow that floats over the island thanks to the religion of its ancient inhabitants. The Greeks have captured this perfectly and reflected it in their divine figures, continuing to cherish that ancient sanctity — which we, however, wanted to capture with greater clarity and specificity on the

ground.

When I speak of 'aura', the word does not imply only beauty without the content that enables serious reflection. Similarly, the word 'music', although literary and beautiful, would sound empty to the deaf or to those who lack the most basic musical talent. Otto, in his last lecture on *Language as Myth*, which he never got to deliver, wanted to use the word 'aura', 'that which surrounds a thing', to describe it. In his style, it is rhythm and music. This is the case with speech or ritual dance, when they respond to this aura. Although I am not thinking of anything linguistic, but rather atmospheric, which also contains comprehensibility, that is naturalness, splendour and meaning, all in one. I am not referring to the myths that also spread it. In their mythology, the Greeks embraced Cretan myths, which always provoked a certain strangeness: the story of the iron giant Talos, who walked around the island three times a day and three times a year, or that of the young Glaucus, the 'green sea', who fell into a *pithos* full of honey — a large container, like those found in the pantries of Cretan palaces — and was resurrected by a magician. I have recounted this in my work *The Gods and Heroes of Greece*, within the context of the Cretan myths of the king of the gods, Zeus, also worshipped as Zeus Taleus, somehow related to Talos, but who preferred the figure of the bull for his own appearances. He used this form to kidnap the beautiful Europa from Phoenicia to Crete, and it was also the form in which he irresistibly seduced Queen Pasiphaë; a story that was completed with the others about the Minotaur and the labyrinth, about Ariadne and Dionysus, to form a cycle of famous

Cretan myths. Now I wonder what I could tell my friend, if he were still alive, thirty-four years after that walk and after so many trips to the island, about its holiness, its divine aura, the splendour of myth in the Cretan landscape.

I will not dwell on the names of the Greek gods that appear from the second half of the 2nd century BC onwards. Nor will I dwell on Minoan artworks, not even pictorial representations, whose Dionysian character and the presence of the religion of Dionysus I have been highlighting since 1955. However, it is necessary to learn to understand the language of this art if one wishes to be led to the myth of the Cretan landscape. Minoan artists transport us to a world of plants and animals, of divine epiphanies high in the mountains or under blankets of flowers, of heavenly apparitions. Here, man, in his historical or non-historical magnificence, is not the centre. Even if the proximity of the deity is truly required.

In this overall vision, divinity can appear in the form of a man, a swarm of insects, a bird or sea animal, or a bull, with the corresponding gesture to imitate the model exactly. Because that is where man never lacks gestures, as in the art of the ancient East or Greece with static figures, whether seated or standing. The cultic gesture is also present there. Although it is somewhat different when the gesture appears as an essential element, as a characteristic that art conveys from the general vision of existence. Here we are not talking about one or another cultic gesture, equally characteristic of simple human existence, but rather about the

gesture that, time and again, in the form of different movements, represents the very circumstance of man — his non-central position, which is only understandable when it is 'confronted'.

The inspired gesture elevates man almost to the level of divinity. A goddess appears on a Knossos seal at the top of a mountain, her bust uncovered, her staff firmly held before her, as if it were the staff of a shepherd or mountaineer. Two lions flank the mountain. In the background, a mountain sanctuary can be seen. A male god looks towards her. He raises his hand in greeting or, blinded by the light, brings it to his forehead. There is no archaic Cretan name for the goddess, although her connection with the wild nature of the mountain seems as obvious as that of Rhea, the mother of the gods of Asia Minor and Greece, who as the 'ideal mother' also bore the name of the highest peak in Crete. Who should we consider to be the man making the significant gesture? A male god, or a mortal to whom a god has appeared? Bronze figures from Tiliso, near Knossos, show the same gesture. One of the most impressive represents an old man. Is this the mythical King Minos, stalking the divine maiden of the mountains? The maiden's name was Britomartis, which translated from Cretan means 'sweet maiden'. According to a myth, retold by the Greeks, Minos followed the footsteps of the august huntress for nine months. She then jumped into the sea from the top of the Dikte mountain range. The nine months may represent the great chronological period of eight years (known to the Greeks as the nine-year cycle), after which the sun and moon meet. To make this leap, the moon goddess took the form of the

wild maiden.

The few names we have preserved from the Greek mythology of archaic Crete cannot be attributed with certainty to the figures that remain from Minoan art. However, it is not essential to know the story. If the goddess was greeted with such gestures in her cult, this repeated the myth, whose setting was vast nature, rather than the narrow spaces in which the Minoan cult objects were found. The great palaces from which the processions departed and arrived are, in a way, presented as predecessors of Greek temples. They were equally characteristic of that style of culture and almost as sacred. However, we must search the peaks more frequently for shrines if we want to discover the specific places where divine apparitions occurred in the Cretan landscape. A topography of the divine that accurately covers archaic Crete is a requirement that has not yet been met. But for thirty years now, simply by discovering the sanctuaries on the mountain peaks, we have been able to consider it more clearly.

This clarity will increase through the exploration of the less accessible peaks. Nikolaos Platon, a master of Cretan archaeology, added a description of ten sanctuaries on the peaks of eastern and central Crete to his report on the excavations of the Maza sanctuary near Kalochori Pediados. The tireless Paul Faure, who gained great prestige with his research on three hundred caves in Crete, continued the list, which could hardly be concluded with the discovery, among others, of a ruin that appeared to be of special importance, on a mountain peak above the Greek temple of

Zeus Dicteo, near Palecastro. The striking mountainous landscapes of western Crete are, in this sense, almost unexplored. However, the stone traces of nameless worship are complemented by the image of a Minoan hermitage in the mountains, depicted, as published by Stylianos Alexiou, on a fragment of a vase. The basket with the offering was carried to an incredible height, and the forests were far below. Even if they were innumerable, these places of worship bear witness with their anonymity to the presence of the divine aura on all the peaks. There were probably several deities who shared it: the Zeus of the Greeks had appropriated the brightness of the sky and the sun; the silvery light of the moon belonged to the female goddesses who answered to many names.

The aura also filled the depths of hundreds of caves. Paul Faure has counted them, and the Cretans, since becoming Christians, have installed more than a hundred churches or chapels in their sacred caves. It seems that an imaginary line also crosses the entire island and, as in most of the spaces dedicated to worship in Minoan palaces, divides it mythologically into two parts: those buildings with one floor below and another above imitate the Cretan cosmos in a simplified way, with the upper floor being as sacred as the lower one. It would not do justice to the overall vision of Cretan culture, nor to the religious phenomenon communicated to us through Minoan art and the omnipresent Cretan myth, to deduce that cave worship is nothing more than the product of fantasy or the chance resemblance of human figures to the shapes formed by stalactites and stalagmites. Myth was capable of integrating even stalactites and stalagmites into

a divine cosmos.

It is impossible to say with complete certainty what visitors believed they saw when they went to Ilithyia, to her cave (near Amnisos, the port of Knossos). This was the name given by the Greeks to a goddess who presided over births and everything related to women's lives, and who supposedly had even greater power in pre-Greek times than in Greek times. The name of the goddess suggests that her place of worship was one of the places consecrated to the origin of life. Inside the cave, two circular enclosures had been built. A very low stalagmite, shaped like a navel, could be described as a kind of altar. In the first enclosure, there is a stalagmite in the shape of an enthroned figure, a double goddess joined at the back. In Crete, too, archaic Greek art preserves this duality of venerated goddesses. Inside the second enclosure, the most important one, a stalagmite stands alone. Archaic Cretan religion probably knew of cult phalluses, although they do not appear in artistic representations. Yet there is one, and a very natural one at that. Nature, thus highlighted, demonstrates both knowledge and recognition: a male cult object, unmistakable in form, stands in the centre of the female sanctuary.

The Cretan cult caves seem to have as valid an anonymous relationship with the divine as the mountain top sanctuaries: the latter are as closely linked to the luminous events of the sky as the former are to the origin of life. The similar sense of their anonymous character makes it apparently difficult to relate the birth of Zeus, from among the many archaic sacred caves, to a single, specific one. The 'Zeus Dicteo' attests in

Cretan writing the relationship of the highest-ranking Greek god with a mountain peak in Lasithi, and barely mentions the powerful cave of worship in the same high regions, the stalactite cave of Psicro, which many believe to be the Dictean cave. Homer called

"confidant of the great Zeus" ^[1] to King Minos, who, it seems, later met with the god in a cave, where he would have given him his laws. According to ancient imagination, he visited him more frequently in the heights, like Moses with the Lawgiver on the summit of Mount Sinai.

It seems to have been difficult for the Greeks to understand that the first glimmer of their Zeus, his "birth," was in a cave, and they would probably never have associated him with caves if these, in Crete, had not been considered places where life originated. In Greece itself, the birth of Zeus was recounted in Arcadia, where his mother Rhea had sought out a thicket on the summit of Mount Lycaeon to give birth in the open air. Hesiod, incidentally, has the goddess go to Crete, but in his *Theogony* a^[2] he omits the fact of the birth and only recounts what Rhea did afterwards. According to an older and lesser-known account, this outdoor birth also took place in Crete. Rhea waited for the hour of delivery in the mountains of Ida. When she was there and began to feel contractions, the great goddess leaned both hands on the ground. At that very moment, the mountain that served as her support gave birth to as many spirits or gods as she had fingers. These creatures surrounded her to help her give birth. They would later be called Daktyloi Idaioi, 'Idaeon fingers', after Mount Ida and the fingers with which Rhea helped herself, so skilful that they became magnificent craftsmen and blacksmiths.

For the Cretans, the glow of a cave was something natural. According to a Cretan narrative, a swarm of bees took over the cave where Zeus was born, and with their honey they fed the divine child. It was believed that the god's blood, which had remained inside the cave after the birth, fermented at certain intervals — like the intoxicating honey-based drink of archaic times

— and then the cave would glow as if a great fire were coming from within. The archaic Cretan and Greek myths were combined in the story to say that Rhea had hidden the child Zeus in a cave in order to protect and feed him, and that several caves probably competed, whose cult servants sought to seize the mythical reputation for their own sacred cave. The processions in these caves were like mysterious rituals, of which the uninitiated could only see the light of the torches and the fire from afar. The rites of the elevated Idean caves represent above all an early example of 'syncretism' (the same word means 'Cretan unification'): the syncretism of the religion of Zeus and the religion of Dionysus, which according to all indications existed previously in Crete, and to which the ancient myth of birth in the cave also belongs.

However, in the search for the cave of Zeus, I would recommend making a pilgrimage to Archalochori, twenty-eight kilometres from Knossos, towards the Lasithi Mountains, further south and not east. During the excavation of the Archalochori cave, such a large number of valuable metal objects were found that Spyridon Marinatos, another Greek archaeologist, assumed that he had found the headquarters of the Minoan mining corporation.

blacksmiths. This guild would have venerated their mythical ancestors in the Dactyls, and therefore must have felt very close to the child Zeus. There is yet another reason why I believe that the classical cave of Zeus was located there or nearby: Plato considered it very reasonable that three elders, an Athenian, a Cretan and a Spartan, would discuss the laws — the philosopher's last great work — on the road from Knossos to the

"cave and sanctuary of Zeus" ^[3]. "According to what we hear," explains the Athenian, "the journey is quite long, with places to rest along the way, under leafy trees, as is convenient in this heat, and as might be expected given our age, we will be able to sit down quite often, to console ourselves with our conversation, and thus we will finally reach our goal with some ease." The uphill path to the ideal cave, or perhaps to the nearby cave of Psicro, had certainly not been chosen by our esteemed elders, and even less so during the summer solstice.

Note on the sources

This volume, as we present it to the Spanish reader, exists only in Italian, in no other language, not even German. As is well known, Kerényi used to publish his works (whether they were articles scattered in magazines or books conceived and printed as complete and autonomous research) several times and always in a newly sewn and differently embroidered guise, with intra- and intertextual retouches and recomposing the volumes thus born in their integral meaning.

This testifies above all to his partly literary taste for the unitary 'structure' and 'form' of the work, a taste that was always marked in Kerényi, but more than anything else, on a more fundamental, even epistemological level, the powerful 'permanence' of each of his interventions and the permanent capacity (which in Kerényi was primarily *style*) to 'always look at the centre', saying 'always the same thing', which is reflected, transcribed and tested on different exemplary occasions. In short, it testifies to how tenacious and solid, but at the same time ductile, elastic and malleable, the general theoretical project was that underpinned the specific investigations and Kerényi's investigation as a whole. The characteristic of 'always repeating the same truth' is the peculiar trait of the great masters. And in

few books as in this one does Kerényi show that he is not only a great master but also—to the extent that he is most misunderstood and even misinterpreted—irreplaceable and, to this day, unsurpassed.

This "general theoretical project" functions in his books—and paradoxically with equal vigour in this one, which he never organised as such—as a connector and energy distributor, an entropic stabiliser. It is, in short, the plot of Kerényi's *Book*, in which *all* his *books* ideally converge.

While it is true that Kerényi never wrote the book that the reader now holds in their hands, for reasons unknown to us, it remains equally indisputable that the theme of the labyrinth survives throughout his work, reflecting itself as the supporting framework or skeleton of many problems, and ultimately as a great textual and epistemological metaphor. The labyrinth did not receive from Kerényi himself the honour of a complete book in its own right, bringing together the

"Studies on the Labyrinth" (whose scientific autonomy is also indisputable) and integrating them with his later works, with the various occasions of relaunching and 'variations on the theme' that Kerényi produced in the years after 1941, always articulating in unprecedented ways the themes already present in the background of the main book.

For these reasons, this volume has been conceived, outlined and produced, in part to compensate for a painful absence. Its Italian title, *Nel labirinto*, alludes, on the one hand, to the private existential condition of the author and (hypothetically) of the reader himself, and on the other, to the situation of the problem and the content (since the essays gathered here deal without exception, in different lengths and from

different perspectives, with one aspect and all aspects of the labyrinthine mythologem) and, on yet another, to the situation of the methodology.

In order to enable interested readers to easily access the texts in their original form, the sources of each of the texts that make up the volume are provided below, specifying that the translations have been made in all cases using the latest edition available.

"Labyrinth Studies: Labyrinthos as a Lineal Reflection of a Mythological Idea," in *Albae Vigiliae*, vol. 15 (Pantheon, Amsterdam and Leipzig 1941); 1st ed. in *Albae Vigiliae*, vol. 10, new series (Rhein, Zurich 1950) with a dedication to C. G. Jung on his 75th birthday, and with the addition of a Preface and an Appendix, the latter entitled "Über Schlange und Mäuse im Apollon- und Asklepioskult," translated here as "Appendix to Chapter One." The text was later included in Kerényi, *Humanistische Seelenforschung*, vol. I of the *Werke in Einzelausgaben* (Langen-Müller, Munich and Vienna 1966), pp. 226-273, with slight variations. An early version of the essay had appeared, in abridged form, under the title "Labyrinthos: der Linienreflex einer mythologischen Idee" in AA. VV., *Laureae Aquincenses memoriae Valentini Kuzsinsky dictae, Dissertationes Pannonicae*, 2nd ser., no. 11 (Budapest 1941), pp. 3-29.

"Vom Labyrinthos zu Syrthos: Gedanken über den griechischen Tanz," in *Atlantis*, vol. 35, pp. 627-633 (1963) under the title "Gedanken über den griechischen Tanz"; 2nd expanded edition in Kerényi, *Humanistische Seelenforschung* cit., pp. 274-288.

'Arethusa: über Menschengestalt und

mythologische Idee," introductory text to L. M. Lanckoronski, "Das griechische Antlitz in Meisterwerken der Münzkunst," in *Albae Vigiliae*, vol. 3 (Pantheon, Amsterdam and Leipzig 1940); later reprinted as an introduction to the volume by Kerényi and Lanckoronski, *Der Mythos der Hellenen in Meisterwerken der Munzkunst* (1941), pp. 7–34; and later appeared in Kerényi, *Humanistische Seelenforschung* cit., pp. 203–219.

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"Die Herrin des Labyrinthes," in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 25 October 1956; republished in the volume *Griechische Miniaturen* (Rhein, Zurich 1957), pp. 111–117; and finally included in *Auf Spuren des Mythos*, vol. 2 of the *Werke in Einzelausgaben* (Langen-Müller, Munich and Vienna 1966), pp. 266–270.

"Heiliges Kreta," in *Merian*, vol. 16, pp. 41–46 (1963); later in *Auf Spuren des Mythos* cit., pp. 274–288.

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Warning. Kerényi did not use uniform and consistent bibliographic criteria in any of his works. On the contrary, both in the body of the texts and even in the notes, references to classical authors and references to scientific literature represented for him more of an essential but often overly generic call to referential 'places' than an explicit statement of 'sources' (and therefore a presentation of the 'materials' used during the construction of his own conceptual-demonstrative edifice). Thus, in the bibliography that follows (and in the notes to the texts collected in this volume), the system of bibliographical references has been standardised as far as possible with the intention of making it both agile and effective, as well as intrinsically consistent. For this reason, it has been preferred to bring together in the notes all textual references (both ancient and modern classics), with precise indication of the most important or scientifically authoritative sources in the case of texts that are less familiar to the non-specialist reader or difficult to find (not, therefore, for classics already available in standard editions).

In particular, the following criteria have been followed for the bibliography:

- 1) if a work has appeared in several volumes, and therefore

therefore in several years of publication, only the first year is indicated in the entry (e.g. Hamilton-Tischbein 1791, for the four volumes published in 1791-1795);

2) in the case of articles appearing in journals where the year of publication does not correspond to that indicated in the header, the year of publication is indicated in the entry (e.g. Kerényi 1951a, for the article appearing in *Eranos Jahrbuch*, XIX, 1950);

3) in German and English titles, capital letters are added to common nouns when necessary, for example, for works from the 18th and 19th centuries;

4) As far as possible, especially for Kerényi's own works, editions subsequent to the first (the one mentioned in the bibliographic entry) are indicated if Kerényi refers to them or when the exact location of the source is necessary.

C. B.

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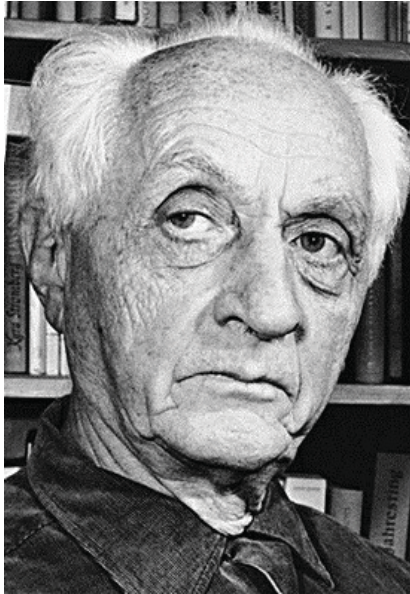
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