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In part 1, which appeared in *Caerdroia* 27 (p.28-54), the known examples of ancient labyrinths from around the shores of the Mediterranean Sea were listed in a catalogue. Part 2, in *Caerdroia* 28 (p.28-34), discussed the methods employed for drawing these labyrinths. This third part of the article treats the evidence for attributing an apotropaic function to one of the labyrinths presented in the catalogue in part 1. Bold numbers (00) refer to catalogue entry no. in part.1 of this article.

The Labyrinth as *Apotropaion*.

The labyrinth, upon which the present study will focus, is found on the mosaic floor in a Roman private building, "Casa de Cantaber", in Conimbriga/Coimbra, Portugal (1)¹. It will here be argued that the context of this labyrinth indicates that it was regarded by the mosaic's commissioner and its contemporary viewer as an *apotropaion* - that is, it was considered to provide protection against different supernatural forces of malign kind, either mischievous demons or the Evil Eye of Envy.² The labyrinth is located inside one of the three entrances to a room in the building, slightly towards the right doorpost (see fig.1). At the second entrance, near the left door-post, is a device comprising of three concentric circles. The circle device's innermost circle is gapped, the second is full, and in the third, outermost (partly damaged) circle the black tesserae alternate with the white 'background' tesserae. Inside the third entrance a trident is depicted lengthways across the doorway, its length roughly equaling that between the door-posts (see fig.2). A mosaic in the middle of the room date the entire mosaic floor to the 2nd or the 3rd century AD.³

The entrance is one of the places where apotropaic symbols are commonly found (other such places are street corners, furnaces and bathing instalments) and the location of labyrinth, circle device and trident immediately inside each of the three entrances to the room thus arise the suspicion that these symbols were placed here to protect from the intrusion of evil influences.

The author would like record his gratitude to John Kraft and Joao Manuel Bairrão Oleiro for photographs of the mosaics in the room of in Casa de Cantaber and permit to publish them. Bairrão Oleiro was also kind enough to supply me with plans of the house and other important material.

¹ A short description and a plan of the building is given in: A. Moutinho Alarcão, F. Mayet, J.S. Nolan, *Ruínas de Conimbriga (Roteiros da arqueologia Portuguesa 2)*, Lisboa 1986, 20-25. On the plan, the room in question is to be found at the peristyle, on the left-hand side of the triclinium. The doorways at which the labyrinth and trident are located lead to this peristyle and the doorway with the circle design connects to the peristyle in an extension of the house, made after the erection of the city wall.

² On the term "Evil Eye of Envy", see: K.W. Slane, M.W. Dickie, "A Knidian phallic vase from Corinth", *Hesperia* 62, 1993, 483-505, 486, n. 15. For earlier literature: J. Engemann, "Zur Verbreitung magischer Übelabwehr in der nichtchristlichen und christlichen Spätantike", *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 18, 1975, 22-48, 24, n.13.

³ Different scholars have suggested slightly different dates. A Blanco Freijeiro, "El laberinto de Mogor", *Archivo Español de Arqueología* 31, 1958, 168-175, 172 dates the floor to the end of the 2nd or the beginning of the 3rd century AC; Moutinho to the 3rd cent. AC; and J. M. Bairrão Oleiro, "O tema do labirinto nos mosaicos portugueses", *6th International Colloquium on Ancient Mosaics*, Palencia-Mérida 1990, 273-278, 276, to the 2nd cent. AC.

Of course, not every sign or symbol located at an entrance is necessarily apotropaic, because the entrance is not only a natural place for apotropaic symbols but also for other kinds of visual signs.⁴ Nevertheless, it seems hard to assign any other purpose than the apotropaic for the labyrinth, circle design and trident on the Conimbriga mosaic. Below it will be seen that, as far as the significance of these symbols can be studied in other contexts, the apotropaic function of the Conimbriga mosaic seems to be confirmed. Admittedly, as to the labyrinth and circle device the evidence is scarce, but as to the trident, on the other hand, it abounds.

Beginning with the labyrinth we find that there are three more renderings of the labyrinth of the cross type in mosaics: Conimbriga (2), St. Côme (7) and Salinas de Rosio (34).⁵ One of these, St Côme, is also located at an entrance but there is no evidence to suggest whether an apotropaic function should be attributed to this or the other mosaic labyrinths of the cross type. Outside the mosaic media there is one labyrinth which is of interest for the present study: the labyrinth incised on a basalt block from Quanawat, Syria (30).⁶ Although the identification of the different figures on the block is problematic, there is no doubt that the main subject, a bird and a spearman attacking a serpent, is a fight against chaos or evil. The context may be taken as a suggestion that the labyrinth is also a benevolent protective symbol.⁷

The circle design has, to the present authors' knowledge, no precise counterpart in mosaics or other visual media. A comparison with other, more or less dissimilar, circular designs does little to clarify the issue: Among the different luck-bringing symbols (double axes, wheels, swastikas) on a 4th century BC mosaic at Olynthos, Greece, are circles appearing either single or multiple concentric.⁸ This may suggest that circles and circle designs were credited with

⁴ For example, the depiction of a pair of sandals in the mosaic at the entrance to a caldarium (hot room) in a Roman bath may be a warning of a heated floor and that upon entry the use of foot wear is recommended, K. M. D. Dunbabin, "*Baiarum grata voluptas. Pleasures and dangers of the baths*", *Papers of the British School at Rome* 57, 1989, 6-46, 41f; *idem*, "*Ipse deae vestigia... Footprints divine and human on Graeco-Roman monuments*", *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 3, 1990, 85-109. Blanco Freijero does not hesitate in stating that the trident in Conimbriga is an *apotropaion* and that the labyrinth has the same significance as the trident. Yet he provides no evidence to support this interpretation, and (therefore?) it has passed rather unnoticed. As will be seen below, there is strong evidence that the trident could have an protective function, which supports the conclusion that all three symbols of the room are apotropaic.

⁵ On the terms "cross labyrinth" and "spoked labyrinth" see part 1, p.28 footnote no.4. With the exception of the examples discussed above all mosaic labyrinths are of the spoked type.

⁶ The other labyrinths which can securely be dated to the Roman period are: nos, 9, 10, 11 (Pompeii) and 20 (Beograd). There is no real evidence for assigning an apotropaic function to any of these labyrinths. The same applies for all pre-Roman labyrinths.

⁷ The Quanawat relief has, in a general sense, a similar motif as the representations of the "much-suffering eye" (on which, see below): the fight against evil or harmful forces. The difference being that, while divine powers battle the evil on the relief, different agencies closer to this world fight the much-suffering Eye. The scorpion and horned snake on the Quanawat relief recalls the scorpions and snakes attacking the much-suffering eye.

⁸ D.M. Robinson, "The villa of good fortune at Olynthos", *American Journal of Archaeology* 38, 1934, 501-510, 510, pl. 31, D. Salzmann, *Untersuchungen zu antiken Kieselmosaiken*, Berlin 1982, 100, no. 83, pl. 8.1, with further references. Two designs with multiple concentric circles on the Olynthos mosaic, may at first glance look a little like labyrinths. (They are referred to as labyrinths in D.M. Robinson, *Excavations at Olynthos* 8. *The Hellenic house* (*The John Hopkins University studies in archaeology* 25), Baltimore

apotropaic qualities, but the distance in time between the Olynthos and Conimbriga mosaics calls for some caution regarding the relevance of one mosaic for the interpretation of another.⁹

The trident, however, occurs in mosaics and other media in specific locations and related to other symbols in such a way that there can be no doubt that it was regarded as a powerful *apotropaion*. Doubtless also apotropaic are the representations of the so-called "much-suffering eye" ¹⁰ - that is, an eye (the Evil Eye) surrounded and attacked by a variety of hostile agencies, like phalloi, different species of animals and pointed implements: pins, nails, swords, daggers, arrows and spears. Not rarely one of the weapons pointing towards the eye is the trident. For example, on a mosaic in the vestibule of a Roman building in Antioch-on-the-Orontes in Syria the eye is shown attacked by different animals (bird, feline, centipede, dog, snake and scorpion). A phallos, belonging to a grotesque dwarf, points towards the eye, which, in addition, is stabbed by a sword and a trident (see fig.3).¹¹ Likewise, the eye on a marble relief in the Bedford/Woburn collection is stabbed with a trident by a gladiator, a *retiarius*. The attackers also include a lion, a snake, a scorpion, a crane (?), a raven (?) and a squatting man exposing his behind to the eye, obviously to defecate on the eye.¹² A further example is a stone relief in Leptis Magna in Libya, where the attackers include an ithyphallic centaur, impaling the eye with a trident.¹³ The trident also occurs in other apotropaic settings: In a house (Maison des travaux d'Hercule) at Volubilis in Morocco, it is included among the different apotropaic symbols (swastikas, drinking cups, branches) scattered on the mosaic which surrounds a basin.¹⁴ M. Thouvenot also mentions a trident found on a basin mosaic in another house (Maison d'Orphée) and a trident, pointed in both ends, depicted in a corridor in front of a room entrance.¹⁵ The location at an entrance, which recalls the placement of the Conimbriga trident, is suggestive of an apotropaic function. The trident's extra points

1938, 127, pl. 102). These designs may possibly be attempts to imitate labyrinths by someone ignorant of the right drawing method.

⁹ It is possible that the Conimbriga circle design is somehow related to the wheel-motif, which has luck-bringing significance (on the wheel motif, see: Dunbabin, 1989, 45f). The resemblance is however slight.

¹⁰ The term is found in a text known as the *Testament of Solomon*, (dated not earlier than the 2nd cent. AC) where it is said that an engraving of the much-suffering eye neutralises the Evil Eye. Slane & Dickie, 490; Engemann 24, n.12, 37, n. 112. Engemann gives numerous examples of the much-suffering eye motif.

¹¹ Slane & Dickie 490, D. Levy "The evil eye and the lucky hunchback " in *Antioch-on-the-Orontes 3, The excavations 1937-1939*, vol. 1, 220-232, 220, pl. 56, fig. 1.

¹² It is likely that this relief was originally placed as a protection on a building. Engemann pl.9a, 1, E. Angelicoussis, *The Woburn Abbey collection of classical antiquities (Monumenta artis romanae 20)* Mainz 1992, no. 79, fig. 356.

¹³ Engemann 27, pl. 8b. Two more examples on gold amulets: *ibid.* 26, pl. 1 lc and Levi 220, n. 8. For the eye pierced by a spear, cf. Engemann 28f, pl. llab; 30, pl. 12e.

¹⁴ Some of the "tridents" are five-pointed. At the entrance to the basin room are two confronted snakes. M. Thouvenot, "La Maison des travaux d'Hercule", *Publications du Service des antiquités du Maroc* 8, 1948, 69-108, 77, 104-106, pl. 3, *idem*, "Mosaiques à motifs prophylactiques en Maurétanie Tingitane" *Actes du soixante-dix-neuvième congrès national des sociétés savantes*, Alger 1954, 187-196; 188, K. M. D. Dunbabin *The mosaics of Roman North Africa. Studies in Iconography and patronage*, Oxford 1978, 164, 277, Dunbabin 1989, 39. The majority of the mosaics in Volubilis seems to belong to the late 2nd or 3rd century AC. Dunbabin 1978, 249.

¹⁵ Thouvenot 1954, 188. Unfortunately Thouvenot provides no more information on this interesting example. It is not made clear in which house the trident is located, nor whether this is the only example.

presumably enhanced its protective qualities.¹⁶ Summing up the trident discussion, the examples given above should suffice to make clear that the trident was credited with protective qualities. This evidence agrees with the interpretation that the trident, labyrinth and circle device on the Conimbriga mosaic were *apotropaia*. There remains one final issue. It seems fairly obvious that the trident was thought to offer protection by virtue of its multiple points, but in which way the labyrinth was believed to defend is less apparent. The question cannot be answered with certainty, but some suggestions may be given. Perhaps the numerous circuits and winding path of the labyrinth was thought to distract or confuse the Evil Eye.¹⁷ A related idea may have been that the labyrinth bound, entangled or imprisoned the Evil. The concept of "binding" or "fixing" is fundamental to magical practice of the Classical world. On the lead curse tablets, known as *defixiones* or *katádesmoi*, often found rolled up and pierced by nails, the inscription commonly refers to the binding of the victim or specified parts of his body.¹⁸ The so-called "voodoo dolls", small figurines used in sympathetic magic are often pierced with one or several nails or needles and bound around the arms, legs or throat with wire.¹⁹ Possibly a related idea of protection against the Evil Eye finds expression on an little-known representation of the much-suffering eye from Hatra in Iraq, where we, among the attackers (scorpion, snake, hound, and two birds), find a man who hammers a nail into the Eye.²⁰ Perhaps the power of the Eye is here broken not only by piercing it but also by fastening it to the ground.

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¹⁶ A lost mosaic from Saint-Roman-en-Gal, France, dated c.150-175 AC, of which a fragment is known from a photograph, depicts a trident with an extra point at the end of the shaft. Behind the trident is a double axe, also a shield on the mosaic. J.Lancha, *Recueil général des mosaïques de la Gaule 3. Province de Narbonnaise 2. Vienne*, Paris 1981, 251f, no 387, pl. 142a. This array of arms may have had a protective significance. I wish to return to the question of arma as *apotropaia* later. For an apotropaic mosaic trident in Maison du Paon/Maison du Trident in Bulla Regia, Tunisia, see: Dunbabin 1978, 164, R.Hanoune, *Recherches archéologiques francotunisiennes Bulla Regia 4. Les mosaïques 1 (Collection de l'Ecole française a Rome 28.4)*, Rome 1980, 75-87. For an early example (2nd cent. BC), see: Dunbabin 1989, 45f.

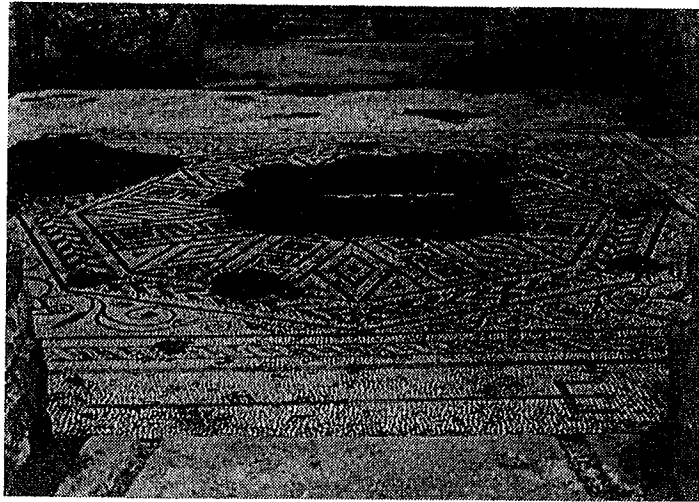
¹⁷ Cf. Plutarch's statement (*Table talks* 5.7.3, 681f, discussed in Slane & Dickie 488, n.34) that apotropaia protects by drawing the eyes of the envious away from the objects needing protection. Hildburgh has collected evidence for indeterminability and confusion as protective elements in 19th and 20th century Italy and Spain. For example, in Tuscany different kinds of interweaving, braiding and interlacing cords were considered protective, because the witches could not count the threads of the interfacing and it bewildered and dazzled their sight. W. Hildburgh, "Indeterminability and confusion as apotropaic elements in Italy and Spain", *Folklore* 55, 1944, 133-149, esp. 143f. The idea that uncertainty about accurate numbers was believed to protect against the Evil Eye finds expression in Catullus 5 and 7, but apart from Conimbriga labyrinth (and, possibly, the multiple circle designs on the Olynthos mosaic) the present author knows no parallels for the use of multiple lines and intertwining patterns as protective devices in antiquity.

¹⁸ The Greek term *katádesmos* is derived from *katadéo* (Attic *katado*), "bind down" or "bind fast", and the late-Latin term *defixio* from *defigo*, "nail down" or "transfix", Ch.A.Faraone, "The agonistic context of early Greek binding spells", in ed. Ch.A.Faraone, *Magika Hiera. Ancient Greek magic and religion*, New York & Oxford 1991, 3-32, esp. 3-5, 21 n.3. A curse mentioning nails and a rope (to fasten around the victims neck), in: ed M.R.Lefkowitz, M.B.Fant, *Women's life in Greece and Rome*, London 1992, 298, n.418

¹⁹ Ch.A. Faraone, "Binding and burying the forces of evil: the defensive use of "voodoo dolls" in ancient Greece", *Classical Antiquity* 10, 1991, 165-220.

²⁰ B. Aggoula, "Hatra. L'héliopolis du désert mésopotamien", *Archeologia. Trésors des âges* 102, 1977, 35-55, 40. Cf. a nail with a representation of the much-suffering eye. Engemann 37. On nails, see Levy 221

fig.1: labyrinth mosaic, Conimbriga. Photo:J.Kraft · fig.2:trident mosaic, Conimbriga. Photo:B.Oleiro



Some further aspects on the apotropaic function of the labyrinths are discussed in H. Kern, *Labyrinthe. Erscheinungsformen und Deutungen 5000 Jahre Gegenwart*, München 1983, 219f, but some of his conclusions, especially regarding the protective function of the *lusus troiae*, rests on little or no evidence. In more recent times the labyrinth has been used as a protective symbol in Southern India. Kern 424f, fig.606f. In the Northern European labyrinth tradition the idea of the labyrinth as a protective device is encountered, although rarely. From Sweden there is some information that labyrinths were constructed to provide protection against wild animals or gnomes.

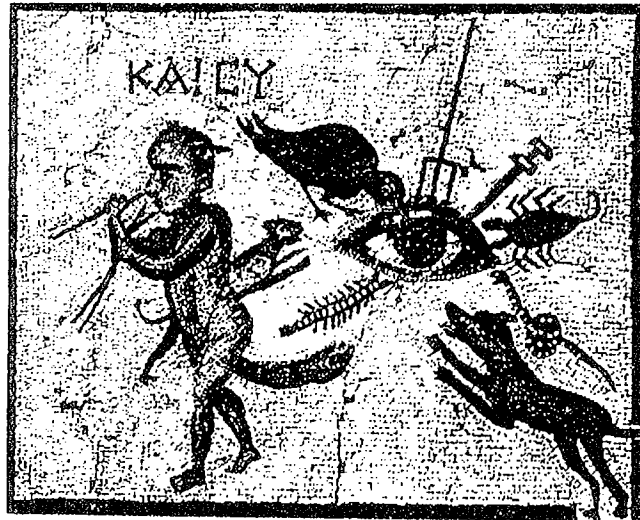


fig.3: the much-suffering eye mosaic, Antioch

In the Ethnological Inquiry of the Nordic Museum (Nordiska museet, Etnologiska undersökningen, EU) a response to the enquiry about labyrinths, relates the following: "In the middle of the forest, at home at Skår, we, my followers and I, last week, found something we assume are labyrinths. But according to what my father related many years ago [Clas Anderson, born 1852 at Skår, died 1929], they were not called labyrinths but magic circles [or troll circles, Sw. "trollcirklar"]. These magic circles were laid out to frighten evil gnomes [Sw. "vättar"]. They were laid out at the turn of the month in different cardinal directions, depending on from where one could expect the gnomes to come. They were thus a defence against "evil". The saying "one should beware of entering the magic circle" may have this origin. The stones were put in rings and circles so that it would not be possible to find the way out of the circle, if one had entered it. One circle we found had the entrance towards the West with a second entrance towards the Northeast. In the centre was a larger stone, presumable put there to confuse even more." (EU 5195, unpublished report, written in 1933 by Eva Bjbörkman at Skår c. 5 km from Alingsås, Västergötland). J. Kraft "Västergötlands trojaborgar", *Från Borås och de sju häradena* 1979/80, 3-36, 11-13, gives the Swedish text. In 1978 John Eliasson in Hedared (c.25 km southeast of Alingsås) informed that, according to his grandfather born in 1832, the labyrinth at Hedared had been made to protect against wolves, which were confused by the paths of the labyrinth, *ibid.* 9-11. According to a 18th century source the labyrinths were used by the Lapps to protect against the wolverine, *ibid.* 22, *idem* "Aldrig vilse i Labyrint", *Norrbottnen 1980-81*, (*Norrbottnens museum, årsbok 1980-81*), 7-32, 13f. Possibly the two small labyrinthine devices next to an inscription above the door of a farmhouse built in 1775 in Sauerland in Westfalen, Germany, were intended as protective devices. The inscription invoking Jesus, Maria and Josef to preserve the house from fire. Of course, the function of the labyrinths in this context is not certain. J.O. Plassman, "Die Trojaburgen als Torzeichen", *Germanien* 1940, 289f.