Since antiquity, the image of the labyrinth, a mystical mazelike structure, has been continuously used in European literature, architecture, graphic arts, and garden design. The essential form and characteristics of the labyrinths are most likely derived from the plans of royal tombs and mortuary temples in ancient Egypt dated as early as 3000 BC. The creation of the first European labyrinth modeled on the temple of Amenemhet III, king of Egypt of the 12th dynasty (reigned 1818-1770 BC), is credited to the Athenian architect and inventor Daedalus. He later constructed a maze for King Minos in the palace of Knossos in Crete in order to imprison the terrible Minotaur, a half bull and half man monster that feasted on human flesh.
The etymology of the word "labyrinth," as most scholars suggest, remains obscure. There are those who endeavor to derive it origins from the words "labor" and "intus" which, according to Penelope Doob, can be interpreted to highlight various essential qualities of the maze. There are also attempts to trace it to the Greek "labs" which means cave, to "labrys," the double headed cult axe of the earliest cultures at Knossos and in Mesopotamia, or "place of labrys," as well as to the whole phrase which suggests a game or playing upon [within] a cave. The latter meaning is especially suggestive as it links the word’s denotation to the "geranos" or crane dance of the Delians (the residents of the confederacy of ancient Greek states under the leadership of Athens, with headquarters at Delos) described in many ancient sources. The dance is thought to have been originated by Theseus and the Athenian youths liberated from the Cretan labyrinth following the hero’s slaying of the Minotaur. According to Deeds, the Cretan dance is connected to the Egyptian ritual dancing which played an important part in the Labyrinth rites.

Originally a labyrinth was defined as any large building, entirely or partly subterranean, with a complicated plan, such as the palace of Minos at Knossos. Later, it began to identify a system of caves or buildings, "containing chambers and passages that renders egress difficult" or "the maze occurred in formal gardens, consisting of intricate paths separated by high hedges." A labyrinth may be designed as a single linear or circular path leading to a goal (the so-called "unicursal" labyrinth) or it may have a pattern configuration, a

5. In Egypt, the king and the bull were one. Bull-games occupied a significant position in Egyptian religious rituals. See Deedes, "The Labyrinth," p. 28.
8. The meaning of the name of the dance remains rather vague. Piotr Rypson refers to the hypothesis of the Polish ethnologist Stefan Czarnowski who indicated the role of cranes in divination and navigation See Rypson, "The Labyrinth Poem," p. 73.