

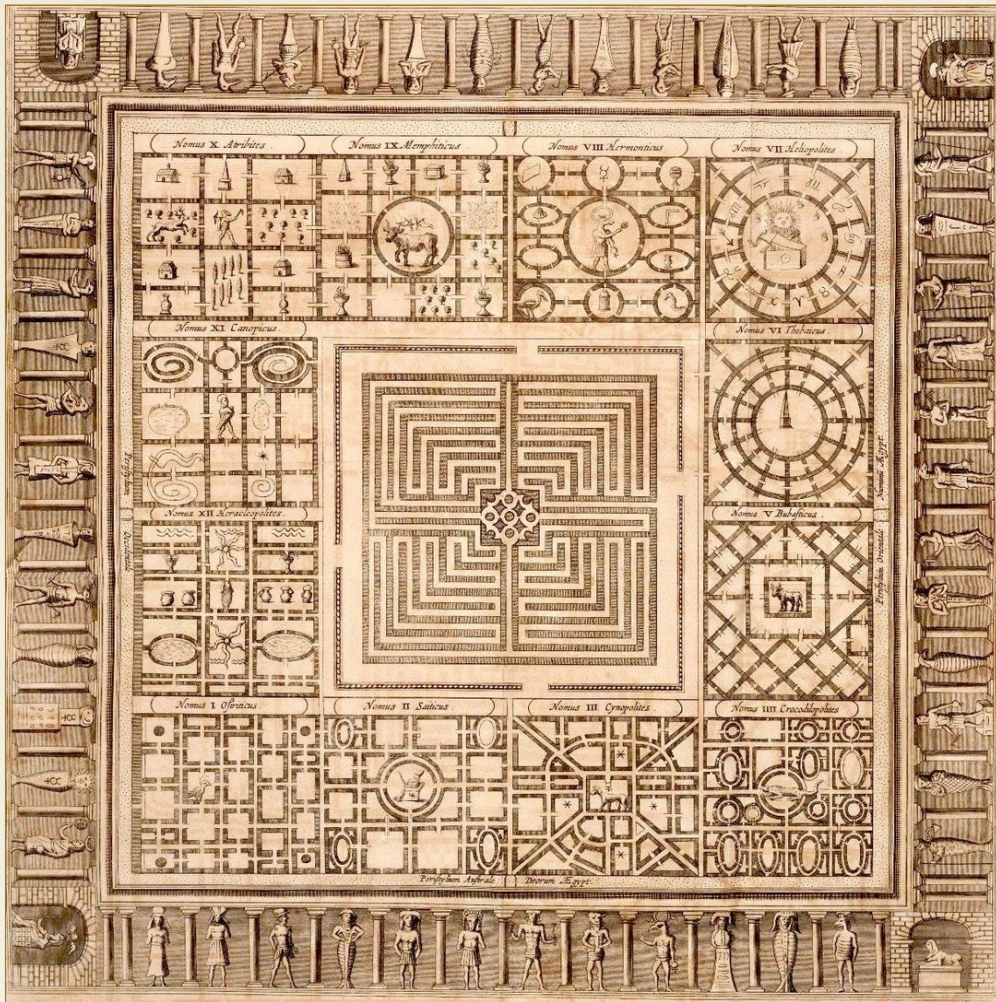
THE LABYRINTH OF HAWARA

A Traveller's Account & Game Master's Compendium

*"I have seen it myself — a work beyond all words.
Even the pyramids are surpassed. Below, where priests bar every passage,
lie the kings of old — and things that should not face the sun."*

ON THE NATURE OF THIS DOCUMENT

What follows is a lightly annotated transcription of accounts left by Greek travellers who visited the Labyrinth of Hawara during the height of its renown. The originals — attributed variously to Herodotus of Halicarnassus, Strabo of Amaseia, and the anonymous *Periplus of the Fayum Shore* — have been rendered here for use at the game table. Names have been preserved; distances converted to a day's march. Marginal notes, added in a later hand, are printed in italics.



The Egyptian Labyrinth, as imagined. Engraving by Athanasius Kircher, Turris Babel (Amsterdam, 1679), p. 78 — the first pictorial reconstruction of Hawara, built almost entirely from Herodotus' words. Twelve nomic courts encircle a central maze; the bordering figures bear invented hieroglyphs. No surveyor ever saw the place like this. It is exactly the map a desperate adventurer would pay a fortune to own — and exactly the map that would get them killed.

ACCOUNT OF HERODOTUS OF HALICARNASSUS

From the Histories, Book II. Composed c. 450 BCE. Herodotus claims personal inspection of the upper levels.

The labyrinth stands a little above the lake of Moiris, near the city men call Crocodilopolis — for here the sacred crocodile is raised in pools of oiled marble and fed the fingers of criminals. This I have seen with my own eyes: a work beyond all power of words. If one were to add together every building raised by the Greeks from the earliest age to this day, the sum of their labour and cost would not equal what lies within this single enclosure. The pyramids themselves are surpassed by it.

It has twelve courts, roofed over, set six to the north and six to the south, so that gate answers gate, the whole enclosed by one outer wall. Within are chambers beyond counting — three thousand in all, I was told, fifteen hundred above the earth and fifteen hundred below. The upper chambers I walked through myself; the lower I know only from report.

For the priests who guard the passage refused utterly to show me the underground levels. They said: "Below lie the burial places of the kings who first raised this labyrinth. Below lie also the tombs of the sacred crocodiles." And they would say no more.

The passages through the courts are artfully bewildering. Each hall gives upon another courtyard, and each courtyard upon further halls — all of polished white stone, columns perfectly joined, roofed with slabs carved in deep panels; I counted forty columns to each side of the inner temple, whose roof is a single stone. Outside, at one corner, a pyramid rises some two hundred and forty feet, reached from within by an underground passage. A man, they say, might enter from below and never see open sky until he emerges, blinking, miles distant in the desert.

— Herodotus, Histories II.148, c. 450 BCE · [later hand: "He does not say whether he tried."]

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTE: STRABO OF AMASEIA

From the Geography, Book XVII. Written c. 20 BCE, some four centuries after Herodotus.

Strabo writes that the Labyrinth held as many halls as there were provinces in all Egypt — each nome its own court, its own altar, its own locked door. When the nome-lords assembled to render account to the king, they gathered here, each in his appointed hall, so that no lord might see the affairs of another. Secrecy was architecture.

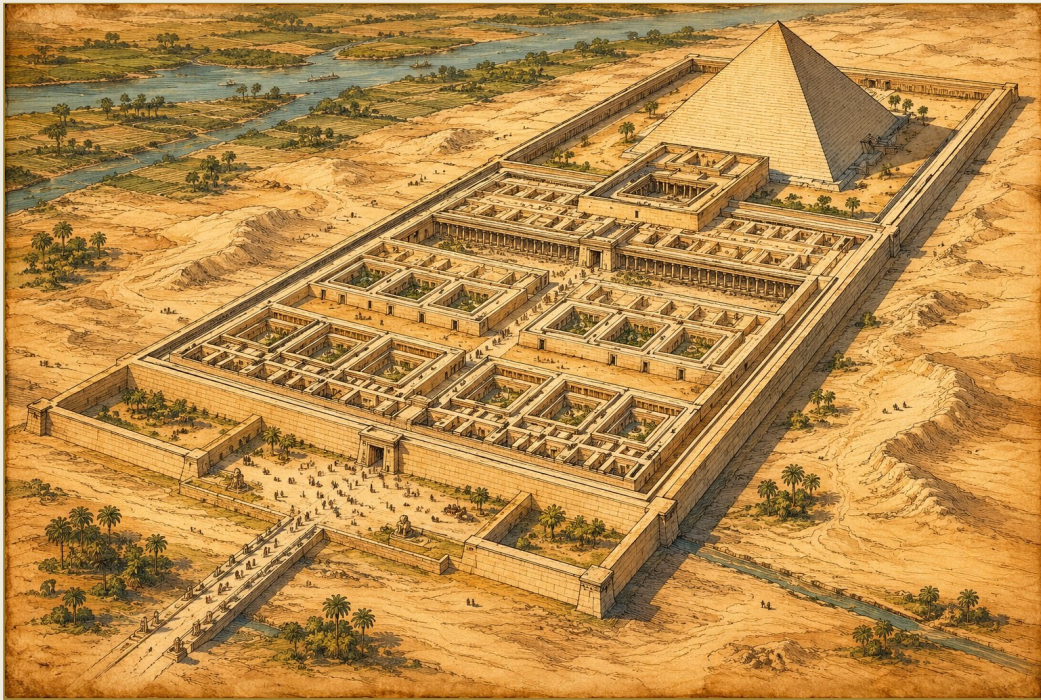
He notes also the lake — vast, clearly artificial — whose surface on windless mornings reflects the pyramid so precisely that fishermen have cast their nets into the image, mistaking reflection for depth. Two colossal statues rise from the lake bed itself, seated, showing above the waterline only from the chest upward. Their names are not recorded.

— Strabo, Geography XVII.1.37, c. 20 BCE



The living god on his platform. *A sacred crocodile of the Sobek cult, gilded and garlanded, basking before the columned hall while offerings smoke at his feet. These were the beasts Herodotus was told slept in the tombs below — and in your Hawara, some never died.*

Note for the Game Master: *The underground level has never been excavated. Modern surveys (1888, 2008) confirm a vast foundation slab beneath the sand – but floodwater from the Nile fills the lower passages each year. What Herodotus was forbidden to see remains, in any age your campaign inhabits, entirely unknown. This is your dungeon.*



Hawara from the air. A bird's-eye reconstruction of the complex – the pyramid of Amenemhat III looming over the labyrinth's courts, the Bahr Yussef canal threading toward the green of the Fayum. The lower fifteen hundred chambers lie unseen, beneath every court the eye can count.

GETTING THERE: HOOKS & REASONS TO JOURNEY TO HAWARA

Hawara lies at the edge of the fertile depression – past the City of Crocodiles, along the canal that smells of black silt and old blood. Below are five hooks, each suggesting a different party composition and tone.

Hook	The Situation	Why the Party Goes
The Lost Cartographer	A guild map-maker vanished after announcing he had found an entrance to the lower levels. His final letter mentions "a door of green basalt, open, and cold air rising."	Rescue mission; the guild pays well. The map, if recovered, would be invaluable – or dangerous beyond measure.
The Crocodile Cult	A Sobek-worshipping sect has built a shrine in the outer courts, sacrificing travellers at the new moon – and something below has begun to answer the offerings.	Local merchants want the route safe. Or a rival sect hires the party. Or one of them received the severed hand of a friend.
The Nome-Lord's Seal	A sealed chamber holds the administrative records of twelve ancient provinces – including proof of a border claim worth a city's weight in gold.	A noble patron needs the documents. So does his enemy. Both fund expeditions; the party is caught between them.
The Drowned King	Flood season recedes early. For the first time in memory a staircase shows at the pyramid's base – the entrance priests guarded for eight hundred years. The priests are dead.	Word spreads fast in port cities. Reach Hawara before the looters, the cultists – or the thing the priests were keeping in.
The Architect's Dream	A master builder wakes screaming nightly from the same blueprint: a corridor with no exits. A sage names it a sub-level of the Labyrinth.	The dreams stop only at the threshold. Entering may be the cure – or the invitation it was always meant to be.

INSIDE THE LABYRINTH: DUNGEON CAMPAIGN FRAMEWORK

The Labyrinth is not one dungeon — it is an entire dungeon *city*: distinct zones, factions, a living ecology.

The Three Tiers

- ◆ **Tier I — The Outer Courts (Above Ground).** Twelve great courts, each aligned to a nome. Partly collapsed; home to cultists, scavengers, and rival expeditions. Social play and exploration. CR 1-5.
- ◆ **Tier II — The Inner Temple & Column Halls.** The administrative core: trapped corridors, stone portcullises, puzzle-locks keyed to provincial symbols. CR 4-9.
- ◆ **Tier III — The Underground (Forbidden Level).** Flooded catacombs, royal tombs, crocodile vaults — and something older than Amenemhat III. Needs boats, underwater light, nerves. CR 8-15+.

Tier III: The Crocodile Vaults

Each vault is a sealed stone chamber, an empty sarcophagus at its centre, the walls recording the crocodile's name, its lineage, and the sins it consumed — linked by flooded tunnels navigable only by crawling, or by swimming in the dark. A disturbed vault smells of hot iron and river mud; its sarcophagus lid, when displaced, is always displaced *from within*.

Faction Encounters

Faction	Goal
Sobek Cultists	Reawaken the sacred crocodiles as divine weapons.
Nome Claimants	Secure provincial records; destroy rivals' evidence.
The Drowned Guild	Salvage and sell. No ideology, maximum profit.
Petrie's Men	Document everything; violently opposed to looting.
The Deep Priests	Unknown. They were never supposed to still be here.

Connection to Lathmar

Hawara is an ancient node of the same corruption that seeps through Lathmar's mines — a wound in geography where the boundary between places has worn thin. A veteran who returns may find Lathmar's doors leading somewhere new.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS OF THE DEEP LEVELS (d8)

d8	The Encounter	Running It · What It Means
1	The Shifting Corridor. A passage mapped last session now ends in a new doorway, or branches where it did not.	The lower geometry is not fixed; corruption bleeds one room into another. Quietly redraw one corridor each rest. A DC 15 Investigation check lets a careful mapper notice <i>before</i> they walk into a trapped or occupied room.
2	The Forty-First Column. Herodotus counted forty columns to each side of the inner temple. The party counts forty-one.	The extra "column" is a guardian — an animated statue or tomb-sentinel — standing motionless and identical to the rest until a floor-glyph is stepped on or a king's name spoken aloud. It strikes first, once, hard, then resumes its pose.
3	The Pale Crocodile. Alabaster-white, blind, enormous and utterly silent — bred in darkness across forty generations of priests.	It hunts by vibration: movement on stone draws it; standing still in water hides you. Killing it enrages the Sobek cult above; freeing it from its vault may earn their worship — or their fury. Never let the players hear it coming.
4	The Rising Flood. Water climbs two inches an hour. The stair the party descended is already gone.	A hard timer. After 6-8 hours the lowest tier floods impassably without water-breathing, forcing the party toward an alternate exit, a higher chamber, or a nome-sluc puzzle that drains one level by flooding another. Track the rising number openly — dread does the work.
5	The Warm Offering. A vault sealed from the outside holds a basket of fresh bread. It is still warm.	The Deep Priests still tend the dark. They are not hostile by default — but they guard the royal tombs absolutely, speak a dead dialect, and centuries below ground have left them not quite human. A first contact, not a fight, unless the party forces one.
6	The Unnamed King. A cartouche names a pharaoh no scholar has ever recorded, reigning between two kings the party knows.	A lore key. A DC 18 History check reveals a deliberately erased dynasty — a campaign secret worth a patron's ransom. Spoken aloud, the lost name may open a sealed door — or wake the guardian of Encounter 2.
7	The Mirrored Court. A flooded court reflects its own ceiling so perfectly that up and down blur and every exit seems to double.	DC 14 Wisdom save on entry or be disoriented: disadvantage on navigation, and a real risk of stepping into deep water in armour. Only one of the doubled doorways is real and descends; the rest are dead ends or drops.
8	The Tithe-Taker. A robed figure waits at a junction with a bronze bowl, asking each traveller for "a single small despair, given freely."	Those who pay pass; those who refuse find every door ahead sealed. Payment costs nothing now — but the Taker remembers every despair it is given, and the debt comes due far deeper in. A thread that ties Hawara to the older powers stirring beneath Lathmar.

Campaign Note: *The Labyrinth of Hawara is designed to sustain 6-12 sessions of dungeon exploration, starting from Level 1+, without exhausting its content. It pairs naturally with Lathmar's guild system — competing guilds may sponsor rival expeditions simultaneously, creating a race-and-sabotage layer atop the dungeon crawl. For more about Lathmar and its own history and lore, visit [Lathmar: The Fallen Depths](#).*