Sacred Geography: a conceptual work in progress

Methodology in Sacred Geography

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Science and scripture in the determination of the qibla

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Is the Skirrid Mountain in Wales sacred?

Does sacred space influence the experience of meditation?

Sacred places in Switzerland as portals to the spiritual realm

Contributing editors: Anthony Thorley and Bernadette Brady

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I am thrilled to present the first Special Edition of Spica. This double edition focusses on the work of students in the Sacred Geography module, and I am honoured to invite the tutors in that module, Anthony Thorley and Bernadette Brady, to take the reins of Spica for this edition to introduce this specialised area of study in the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology and the extraordinary papers which they have selected.

Rod Suskin

Anthony Thorley is a retired psychiatrist who gained an MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology in 2006 and is currently pursuing a PhD at the Sophia Centre on the Landscape Zodiac phenomenon. He is a Tutor on the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology and teaches on the Sacred Geography module. When not unravelling the intricacies of the Iron Age Coligny Calendar, most recently he can be found investigating the archaeoastronomy of the Temple of Sulis at Bath, UK.

Bernadette Brady has a PhD in Anthropology (2012) and MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology (2005). She is a tutor in the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology. She lectures in the Sacred Geography module and brings to this module her skills in anthropological research methodologies. Her personal focus in this area is the notion of landscape agency and in particular as it applies to the Welsh sky and landscapes and their relationship to mythology.
Sacred Geography: a conceptual work in progress

by Anthony Thorley

A couple of years ago in the course of an email exchange with a North American academic I was asked ‘What exactly is Sacred Geography?’ I had to pause and take stock but in replying one thing became clear to me, Sacred Geography if nothing else, was a conceptual work in progress. This editorial is not the place to share the definitional challenge and detail of my own enquiries into that fundamental question, but it is useful to explore a number of important themes which clarify and enlarge our understanding of the subject.

If we start with early modern history we find the term first used in the nineteenth century by Thomas Tucker Smiley in 1824.1 He wrote a 12 page pamphlet to explain to students of the Bible the relationship between the scriptures, their Biblical place-names and their geography. As the geography of the Holy Land, this was most simply: Sacred Geography. A more extended and detailed account of the same was published by Elijah Porter Barrows in 1872.2 However Barrows’ text, although championing the term Sacred Geography, made no attempt to explain or elaborate it further than a plain adjectival use of the word sacred.

A similar adjectival use can be found in early writings in what in Britain is termed ‘Earth Mysteries’.3 For example in 1937, Renee Guenon, the French esotericist writing about the complex zodiacal effigies of the Glastonbury landscape zodiac stated: ‘But in these very confusions there may be found certain rational thoughts, and not wholly without interest from the viewpoint

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1 Smiley, Thomas T, Sacred Geography, or, A Description of the Places mentioned in the Old and New Testaments: intended to promote a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures: adapted to the use of Schools and private families, (Philadelphia: Clarke and Raser, 1824).
3 See for example, Stout, Adam, What’s Real and What is not: Reflections upon Archaeology and Earth Mysteries in Britain. (Frome: Runetree Press, 2006).
of what is termed “sacred geography”...’⁴ A year later, Dr J Heinsch, a German town planner, presented a paper to the 1938 International Congress of Geography, titled: Principles of Prehistoric Sacred Geography, describing the alleged value to modern town planning of fitting in with alignments identified as being between ancient sites.⁵

It is an important intellectual development to move from an adjectival use of ‘Sacred’ with ‘Geography’ to the exploration of the term Sacred Geography as a conceptual idea. There are two clearly identifiable conceptual streams we can follow here and both derive from religious and spiritual traditions which are acknowledged as being intimately related to geography and landscape. Neither of these streams is exclusive and deeper enquiry reveals many more similar sources of ‘land based spirituality’, but each repays close attention.⁶

Anthropological studies of Native North American Indian cultures soon exposed how those cultures intimately related to the specific lands where people lived and died, and as early as 1908 there were published papers describing Indian ‘Ethnogeography’.⁷ As Deward Walker puts it, ‘In addition to being vital to ritual practice, sacred geography in Native North America is a source of religious meaning in group identity and group cohesion. Sacred sites in Native North America are invested through ritual with complex layers of religious meaning.’⁸ Most significantly, the classic Durkheimian distinction between sacred and profane, in which the sacred is designated as forbidden and set aside does not apply here. Rather, the sacred ‘is an embedded, intrinsic attribute lying behind the external, empirical aspect of all things...’⁹ So rather

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⁶ See for example, Carmichael, David L, Hubert, Jane, Reeves, Brian and Schanche, Audhild, Eds., Sacred Sites, Sacred Places, (London: Routledge, 1994).
⁹ Walker, Sacred Geography, p.1449.
than using ritual to create sacred space, North American Indians more often use ceremonies, visions and dream-states to access ‘an embedded sacredness in nature and to locate geographical points that permit direct access to it in order to experience it on a local level’.10 The geographical location and timing of ritual is therefore emphasised as being vital to its effectiveness, thus placing sacred geography centre stage in Native Indian spiritual culture. Coeval to this land-based spiritual tradition and its dialogical richness is the prominence played by interaction with animistic forces emanating from inert and living forms, what Irving Hallowell has so eloquently termed: ‘Persons other than human’ leading beyond human singularity and so creating ‘a larger cosmic society’.11

The second great religious and spiritual tradition which has spawned a natural sense of Sacred Geography, is India and its related subcontinent, especially through Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies. The idea of a Cosmic Centre, or Sacred Mountain connecting heaven and earth, a concept so central to Eliade’s basic thinking, leads to the emanation of sacred power from that source through the flow of water from glacial springs to become mighty sacred rivers like the Ganges.12 The key Sanskrit word tirtha, means confluence, and every confluence is a sacred place, a form of crossing point between the earthly and the heavenly. Moreover, the confluences go beyond physical geography to create a virtual geography of interconnectedness which binds all India together and facilitates the rich tradition of religious pilgrimage between key sacred sites in the landscape.13 As Diana L Eck has so clearly put it, ‘In this wider network of pilgrimage, nothing...stands alone, but rather everything is part of a living, storied, and intricately connected landscape.’14 Moreover, there is an

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10 Walker, Sacred Geography, p.1449.
14 Eck, India, p.2.
acknowledged dual dynamic between the influence and authority of the Gods in their mountain fastness feeding down, like the rivers, to the simplest village shrines and holy sites, and those same shrines and local cultic centres feeding back up to strengthen and ultimately nourish and enable the gods themselves. This dual spiritual flow, institutionalised and paralleled in the material interplay of palace-based kingship and village serfdom, is again another part of a profound sacred geography.\(^{15}\)

Modern academics studying Indian culture cannot therefore avoid the importance of this sacred geographical totality and have sought to define it for better academic discourse. F K Lehman defines it as ‘a conceptual system in which certain places are of central ritual importance because it is there that one accesses cosmic currents of ritual purity and power.’\(^{16}\) More recently, Catherine Allerton has sought to define what she calls Spiritual Landscape. ‘This concept is meant to draw attention both to the ways in which people imagine spirit forces and energies to emerge from or be connected to places, \textit{and} to the attitudes that people may have to the ‘hidden’ or mysterious realms lying beyond, behind or immanent within the visible earth.’\(^{17}\) What is perhaps surprising about these definitions is how much they acknowledge the importance of spiritual forces and the numinous, ideas pioneered by Otto’s classic work of 1924.\(^{18}\)

What therefore can we learn from Sacred Geography as we have taught it on our MA module? The module was founded by pagan scholar of the study of religions, Michael York. York told me how he sought to better understand the night sky ‘but in the process I discovered a lovely culture of central Californian Indians, and I learned through them the magical-sacred nuance of landscape – islands, rocks, mountains etc.’ Later, he studied in India and ‘India itself allowed a more magnified perspective on spiritual practice and its connections


\(^{16}\) Lehman, Sacred Places, p. xvi.


with the terrestrial contours of *tirtha*: rivers, trees, rocks, springs and wells as well as temples and shrines'. So it appears as if our founding father became directly influenced by both central traditions of Sacred Geography that we have already considered. York established the course around 2002, and, as evidenced by the current selection of papers, and other distinguished Sacred Geography student papers published in Spica, it has been a popular and expanding influence in our MA ever since.

The variety of material that is creatively considered by our students points to the need for a simple definition of Sacred Geography which allows for expressions of sacred and secular activities which are nonetheless deeply felt and contribute to cultural, and, dare I say it, spiritual enrichment. Such a simple definition might be: Sacred Geography is the study of qualities of the sacred and related cultural activities found in certain places and expressed in a spatial context. But if I was allowed to be more adventurous in my conceptual journey and taking my cue from Hallowell’s seminal idea of a Cosmic Society, I would say that Sacred Geography is part of the important post-enlightenment academic rediscovery of an animistic worldview relevant to Western Culture.

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The Sacred Geography papers and their methodologies

by Bernadette Brady

The seven papers in this special edition of Spica have been selected from the Sacred Geography MA module, by Anthony Thorley and myself for their diversity of methodology and subject matter. Hence as a collection they may contribute towards an academic understanding of the nature of sacred geography. The papers ask questions concerning the nature of the sacredness of a place or landscape. At its heart these questions are focused on the idea of sacredness, whether it is contained in the place itself, implying that the place holds agency, or whether the sacredness is allocated by humanity. This is largely an exploration of the views of Mircea Eliade, who argued that sacredness is a feature of place, and those of Émile Durkheim, who stressed humanity’s role in attributing sacredness.\(^1\) Four of these papers use a phenomenological approach to explore this question; the other remaining papers use different methodologies.

In considering the phenomenological papers, Chris Layser stepped into the shoes of a young Mayan initiate by following what a Mayan shaman would have done as he paddled along a sacred river that lead to the depth of a cave. The particular cave is Barton Creek Cave, Cayo District, Belize, which has cultural evidence of such Mayan activity. Layser aimed to gain an appreciation of the ancient Mayan use of caves as sacred places. He struggled, however, to bridge the gap between his own world and that of the ancient Mayan. It was not until he drew closer to the cave exit at the end of his journey when, still in his canoe, the value of phenomenology came to the fore and he found his perspective shifting, enabled him to sense something he had never noticed before.

In contrast to the dark caves of the Mayan cosmology, Stevi Gaydon focused on the role of art and its capacity to attribute sacredness in an art gallery. Gaydon followed Belden Lane’s approach to a place by considering the

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multi-layered dimensions of ontological, cultural, and phenomenological information around a site.² Lane’s argument is that all of these dimensions influence our sense of place and they cannot be split apart from each other. Gaydon visited three works of art all located at different times in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, London. This journey gave her insights into the different roles taken by the artist and the observer and found that somewhere between these two points of view, sacredness was generated.

Two of the papers utilised Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s argument that the human body is an instrument of mediation that can be used to feel and explore a place or landscape.³ These papers thus took the research approach of extraordinary anthropology which engages with embodied knowledge.⁴ Anya Marco, an experienced meditator, used her own body as an instrument for measuring the impact that place had on her meditation. Marco wanted to sense how place changed her normal meditation equanimity. This approach was similar to that taken by Madeleine Marchand, who gave an insider view of mediumship when she visited places already identified by Blanche Merz, another medium, as sites of high spiritual activity. Marchand’s experiences in these places confirmed for her that a place holds agency. Both Marco’s and Marchand’s work push the edge of sacred geography as both chose not to explore sacredness per se but rather the power within a landscape that can affect an individual. Their views are framed within their own spiritual beliefs but show the reader a particularly personal view of sacredness, one which cannot be generalised, yet nevertheless is a powerful part of the human experience of place.

In turning to the other papers Caroline Ormrod looked at multiple threads woven together to form the sacred — humanity, place, art, history, and ritual. Ormrod considered how the instillation Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red and the Tower of London created sacredness generated from the cultural need for ritual and remembrance. She noted the contested nature of the place as commercial interests clashed with the desire for respect, a feature of sacredness. She did her research from the distance of Canada and revealed how the sacred geographer

can successfully achieve virtual research, as long as he or she accepts the limitations.

Oral history was the subject of Natalie Niblett’s paper. She returned to the Welsh mountains of her childhood and went seeking the stories of the landscape that were told to her by her father. Her methodology was very much in keeping with that of Alan Garner who used his own family’s oral histories as an aid to archaeological work. Niblett, however, used these stories to reflect the nature of the sacred mountain, both for herself as well as for the community around The Skirrid, Ysgyryd Fawr, near Abergavenny in country Monmouthshire, Wales. She concluded that the mountain’s sacredness was local, rather than national, yet the size of the domain of the sacredness did not distract from its local appreciation. The final paper, although not the last in the order of this special edition, is that of Mai Lootah who presented historical research to indicate how sacredness once allocated can be a powerful agent in the science of cartography. Her work focused on the mystical need for someone raised in Islam to direct oneself to a sacred place, Makkah, and the intellectual struggle in locating the qibla, the direction of that sacred place, for any place on the globe. In this regard Lootah shows another dimension to the sacred geographer, that of researching the historical trails left by sacred places.

It can be argued that a subject can be defined in part by the methodologies employed in its study. In the case of these eight papers, the methodologies are largely anthropological, varying from ethnography, phenomenology, and the embodied knowledge that extraordinary anthropology embraces. In contrast, however, the sacred geographer can also be a researcher of current or historical texts and thus never tread upon sacred soil. With the researchers locating themselves near or far, all of these papers are focused on the sacredness encountered when humanity engages with a site. Whether one creates the other is a shifting argument. Nevertheless, this fluid nature implies it is the union itself which creates the sacredness, at least from the human perspective.

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Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red
and The Tower of London: Contested sacred space or renewal of a historical landmark?

by Caroline Ormrod

The subject of this paper is the Armistice Day Poppy installation, Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red, at the Tower of London. This is a contemporary cultural project, a human-made, temporary construction on a previously constructed monument. The installation will be examined from the perspective of sacred space, asking the following questions:

a) can the Tower and the Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red be considered sacred? If so, have they been built intentionally as such or have they become sacred because of their use by humans? b) If they are sacred, are they ‘divine’ or ‘horrendous’ or both (Thorley)? c) Assuming sacrality, is Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red itself a contested sacred space because it is temporary and on the sacred site of the Tower of London or is this an example of the renewal of sacred space? The research is of interest because it will compare the definition of sacred space in a contemporary, temporary, intentionally-built site to the historical, permanent, intentionally-built site. Also, in comparing contested sacred space with the renewal of sacred space, it may become apparent that sacred space can be renovated and rejuvenated through intentional human interaction.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the idea of sacred space as a human construct. By examining the theoretical arguments proposed by academics and applying them to the practical experience of participants in a sacred space, it may be possible to determine how sacred space is defined through both mental concepts and practical interaction. By analysing the theories related to sacred space as a human construct and proceeding to evaluate how those theories apply to the actual lived experience of academically-determined sacred space, it may be possible to decide if the understanding of sacred truly is a human construct or if it can be seen to be inherent to human experience. The terms sacred and sacred space will be investigated with reference to the ideas of Emile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade, and Anthony Thorley and Celia Gunn, as well as the idea of contested space as presented by Barbara Bender. Phenomenological theory, as viewed by Christopher Tilley and Tim Ingold, will be examined to arrive at an idea of how to evaluate the lived experiences of others. In order to
apply the terms effectively, a real-life example, the Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red memorial at the Tower of London (figure 1), will be investigated theoretically and compared to others’ personal experiences of the site. It is suggested that these interactive exchanges may encourage a rejuvenating and renewing effect on sacred space. It is considered that, academically, sacred space is a human construct, however, sensory, on-site experience may reveal something different.

Figure 1: The Tower of London and Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red, November 11, 2014. Courtesy of SplashNews.

An analysis of sacred space can be approached, initially, through the works of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Mircea Eliade (1907-1986). Both Durkheim and Eliade consider the sacred to be an experience of heterogeneity which differentiates it from the profane. Durkheim posits that ‘there is nothing left with which to characterize the sacred in its relation to the profane except their heterogeneity...it is absolute.’1 Eliade also remarks on the dichotomy of

sacred and profane and extends it by explaining that the sacred becomes known through its ‘hierophany’ or manifestation of the sacred.² Eliade elaborates further when he describes the conditions necessary to identify a sacred place which include a heterogeneous interruption of space, creating a connection between worlds identified by a central symbol (axis mundi) and representing the ‘navel of the earth...the Center of the World’.³ The purpose of generating sacred space is to experience the original manifestation of the cosmos as the gods fashioned it and to conquer the forces of chaos.⁴ This vanquishing and reclaiming is a repetitive event which maintains the safety of the world and keeps chaos at bay.⁵ According to Karen Fields, one of Durkheim’s translators, Durkheim also posits that the sacred needs to be consecrated regularly as ‘it is inherently impermanent and so must be added to the object again and again, just as it was originally: by collective human doing.’⁶ Durkheim suggests that it is by ‘collective human doing’ that the sacred becomes and remains sacred because ‘religion is something eminently social’.⁷ Religions create social arenas, rules and structures within whose boundaries people feel safe and accepted and, therefore, feel encouraged to cooperate with the group in order to maintain the structure of the sacred.⁸

While Durkheim’s and Eliade’s definitions intertwine, there are two significant differences between their views which affect the application of sacred space to the Tower of London and the Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red. In Durkheim’s view, time and space are both categories of understanding.⁹ These categories relate to a universal idea of consciousness, underlie perceptions of the world and are the ‘skeleton of thought’ which influence and are influenced by religion.¹⁰ The individual in society is dependent upon the community for safety and security and, therefore, these categories of

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³ Eliade, Sacred, p. 37.
⁴ Eliade, Sacred, p. 47-8.
⁵ Eliade, Sacred, p. 49.
⁷ Durkheim, Forms, Swain, p.10.
⁹ Durkheim, Forms, Fields, p. 8.
¹⁰ Durkheim, Forms, Fields, p. 9.
understanding are accepted and adhered to by all. Eliade, however, views sacred time as similar to sacred space, both of which are heterogeneous experiences.\(^1\) Just as sacred space is a repetition of the creation of the world by the gods, sacred time is circular ‘a primordial mythical time made present’.\(^2\) It is always available to religious man and may express itself through festivals, rituals and services.\(^3\) As sacred space is renewed through repetition of the acts of the gods, sacred time is renewed through similar acts.\(^4\) For Eliade, whether considering sacred time or sacred space, ‘the sacred is equivalent to a power, and, in the last analysis, to reality’.\(^5\) This power of which Eliade speaks can also be applied to objects which are considered sacred. Eliade considers that ‘By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu’.\(^6\) Eliade points out that a sacred rock is only sacred to one who recognizes it as such and, to that person, it holds power and meaning.\(^7\) To anyone else, the rock remains profane and meaningless. Durkheim, on the other hand, believes that ‘The impressions produced in us by the physical world can, by definition, contain nothing that surpasses this world.’\(^8\) A rock is merely a rock, regardless of what is done to it unless it is divided ‘into an ideal and transcendental world, while the material world is left in full possession of the others.’\(^9\) While Durkheim and Eliade approach the sacred from different perspectives, each underscores a value which can be applied to sacred spaces in its own way.

According to these theories, both the Tower of London and Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red can be viewed as sacred, using either or both Durkheim’s and Eliade’s definitions. The Tower of London was built primarily as a fortress by William, Duke of Normandy, in the 1070s after he conquered England.\(^10\) It

\(^1\) Eliade, Sacred, p.
\(^2\) Eliade, Sacred, p. 68.
\(^3\) Eliade, Sacred, p. 71-72.
\(^4\) Eliade, Sacred, p. 77.
\(^5\) Eliade, Sacred, p. 12.
\(^6\) Eliade, Sacred, p. 12.
\(^7\) Eliade, Sacred, p. 12.
\(^8\) Durkheim, Forms, Swain, p 225.
\(^9\) Durkheim, Forms, Swain, p. 39.
has had many uses over the centuries, including royal residence, menagerie, home of the Crown Jewels and Royal Mint, prison, executioner’s grounds, and tourist attraction.\(^{21}\) In 1988, the Tower of London was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its ‘outstanding universal value’.\(^{22}\) In relation to Durkheim’s and Eliade’s definitions of sacred, the Tower of London satisfies their requirements. The Tower is a heterogeneous break in space and was the tallest building on the landscape when it was built, a ‘navel’ and central point.\(^{23}\)

According to The Tower of London History ‘The Normans’, ‘the Tower’s primary function was as a fortress-stronghold, a role that remained unchanged right up until the late 19th century’ indicating that it had been intentionally built to keep out intruders, to protect the cosmos from chaos (in Eliadian terms) and to declare itself and its order on the landscape and, hence, on the population.\(^{24}\) It represents a social site which is revered, attracting more than two million visitors per year and hosting public and private meetings and conferences.\(^{25}\) It symbolizes a unique strata of society, the Royalty, the Monarch being God’s earthly representative, and, therefore, is the highest connection to the gods, reflecting aspects of both Durkheim’s social and Eliade’s esoteric sacredness.

In comparison, the *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* is both temporary and intentional, created in 2014, by ceramic artist, Paul Cummins, and theatre set designer, Tom Piper, to honour the British and Commonwealth soldiers who died in World War I on the 100\(^{th}\) anniversary of Britain joining the war in 1914.\(^{26}\) It was designed to represent a connection between those who died in World War I, and, implicitly their spirits, in order to commune with them and honour


\(^{24}\) Historic Royal Palaces, ‘The Normans’, [accessed August 12, 2016].


The poppies themselves, arranged in the hundreds of thousands throughout the Tower of London’s moat, are symbols of the soldiers. The object, Eliade’s ‘rock’ – the poppies – have become the sacred dead. The memorial creates a hierophany because it stands out as something unique in the Tower’s moat. It occupies heterogeneous time and space because it is temporary and, therefore, interrupts the regular flow of time and the normal aspect of space within the Tower grounds. While the poppy installation is present, here and now, it symbolizes the eternal qualities of time and space and re-creates the time of victory over chaos (World War I). This victory was celebrated every evening of the Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red installation by the reading of a roll of 180 dead soldiers recited by a Yeoman (Figure 2). This ritual symbolizes the repetition of sanctification. Both the Tower of London and the Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red satisfy the theoretical definitions of sacred according to Durkheim and Eliade.

Another consideration is the definition of sacred itself. Anthony Thorley and Celia Gunn explore its etymology and comment that sacred ‘carries a fascinating admixture of meanings which make up its derivation: rite, custom, safe, whole, accursed, horrible, divine destruction, divine presence’.

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28 Historic Royal Palaces, ‘The Installation’[accessed August 12, 2016].
29 Eliade, Sacred, p. 17.
30 Thorley and Gunn, Sacred Sites, p. 22.
According to Thorley and Gunn, sacred sites can be natural sites already present in the landscape, sites which have been adapted in some ways by human interaction and/or sites which have been purposefully built by human beings to serve a particular function.\textsuperscript{31} The two sites in question, The Tower of London and \textit{Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red}, both fit the definition presented and can also considered divine and accursed. The Tower, as divine presence, has housed the Crown Jewels and, as divine destruction, has housed prisoners who were tortured and, sometimes, executed. The \textit{Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red} is repugnant as it commemorates the history of a brutal and blood-filled war and it is also divine presence because it honours those who sacrificed themselves. Both sites satisfy the sacred dichotomy presented by Thorley and Gunn and, therefore, theoretically, can be considered sacred. In these examples, the actions of human beings have made the space sacred and it can be hypothesized that, in this particular definition and application, therefore, sacred space is a human construct, as suggested by Durkheim. However, it can also be theorized that Eliade is correct because, in their horror, it is evident that both sites have battled to combat chaos by creating an \textit{axis mundi} from which the divine can communicate.

The theory of contested space relates to the topic of sacred space as a human construct because it reflects the uses of the space by various people. Barbara Bender uses this term to define a site that is subject to opposition by different parties.\textsuperscript{32} Bender explores the history of Stonehenge, commenting on the influences the site has experienced through different agencies since medieval times. As she points out, these influences have been expressed through ‘a multitude of voices and landscapes’.\textsuperscript{33} Each voice represents a different perspective on Stonehenge and each competes with the others. They interact although, often, they disagree. As such, the voices interpret the site in different ways, some believing the area to be sacred, others not. The landscape becomes the site of expressions of power and reflections on the influence, or lack thereof, of various societal groups.\textsuperscript{34} As such, the place becomes an important echo of voices, past and present.

\textsuperscript{31} Thorley and Gunn, Sacred Sites, p. 76-77.
\textsuperscript{33} Bender, ‘Landscapes’, p. 131.
\textsuperscript{34} Bender, ‘Landscapes’, p. 131.
There can be little doubt that the *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* is a contested sacred space as is the Tower of London itself. The Tower of London is traditionally one of the Royal palaces, closely associated with the monarchy of England, and is one of five sites managed by ‘Historic Royal Palaces’ which is an independent charity under the domain of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, although it receives neither governmental nor Crown funding. On January 6, 2015, *The Independent* newspaper ran a headline reading ‘The “crass insensitivity” of Tower’s luxury dinner for arms dealers, days after poppy display’. In considering the situation of the Tower of London as a central meeting place and conference centre, as well as an independent charity, regardless of the other voices who may be involved with it, it remains a charity which needs to make money. The £240 per person (£3000 per table) dinner provided funds which are necessary to support the charity. However, the irony of the situation of arms being sold while a memorial for dead soldiers is in place is obvious. This is an indication of how voices conflict and places become contested spaces.

Conflicting voices can also be heard at the *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red*. The parties involved include Historic Royal Palaces who manage the Tower, the British government, the creators of *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red*, the shareholders, volunteers, visitors, charities receiving funds and more. 888,246 ceramic poppies were created, each representing one dead soldier (Figure 3). They were planted by 17,500 volunteers from July 17th to November 11th, 2014 in the moat of the Tower. The estimated cost of creating

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each poppy was £2-3. While admission to the installation was free, the poppies were sold individually for £25 with 10% of each sale and of the total net proceeds going to six different service charities. In September 2014, The Daily Mail newspaper reported that £8.75 per poppy will be divided amongst the charities, leaving £12.08 for overhead and costs. It was suggested that a financial investor, who supplied one million pounds sterling as capital, will receive well over a million pounds sterling from the memorial, above and beyond the amount loaned. At the same time, the British government suspended VAT payment on the individual sale of the poppies, amounting to approximately £1.1 million. While the government seemed to be expressing support for the instalment, as were the charities involved and the volunteers who freely donated their time, there were also voices in the background demanding financial compensation. It is questionable that those receiving profit from the installation consider the site to be sacred. From the examples cited above, it is evident that both the Tower of London and the Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red are contested sacred spaces and that the voices are conflicting and, potentially, contentious. These voices affect the impact of the site and may create the impression that this sacred space is a human construct, at least partially, in this case, created to profit some people.

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42 Greenhill, ‘Cash’.

43 Greenhill, ‘Cash’.

Figure 3: Individual poppies at the temporary art installation Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red at the Tower of London. Photograph by Oosoom, September 24, 2014. With permission from Wikimedia Commons.

In application, however, sacred space may be an experience of an event or place that is conditional on the lived interaction of the individual and, therefore, it is actually a human experience and interpretation.\textsuperscript{45} To investigate this idea, the voices of those who interact with the site personally must be heard. As Christopher Tilley explains, much academic literature is thought about rather than acted out.\textsuperscript{46} Implying that sites cannot be fully understood and experienced unless physically interacted with, he says ‘Bodies remain at the desk rather than in the field’.\textsuperscript{47} Since I live in Canada and cannot visit the Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red personally, I must rely upon Internet reports to interpret the data. I am like one of Tilley’s academics, stuck behind my desk, thinking and examining others’ words and images. However, images are static and frozen in time so I cannot experience the full sensory effect of the real life instalment. Instead, I must rely upon the reported personal experience of others, and even that is not reliable for my personal interpretation because I, as an individual, am not them. However, I can present their reflections here as an example of the impact the memorial has had. By listening to the reactions of these people, an idea can be garnered about whether sacredness is inherent or whether it has been created through human action. In applying the ideas of others to a particular site, the Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red for example, the theoretical models can be tested and a conclusion can be arrived at which indicates that sacred space is, or is not, a human construct since the theories were created by people. However, by examining the installation from a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Tilley, Stone, p.27.
\item Tilley, Stone, p.27.
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phenomenological perspective, and taking into account the on-site experiences of others, a different perspective may be revealed.

According to Tilley, phenomenology approaches the subject of experience through sensation. As he points out, 'first-person experiences can be used to gain access to the experiences of other persons because of the incarnate and sensuous opening out of the 'primal' embodied subject to the world'. Phenomenology, by definition, examines the activity of living, being, and experiencing from a fully physical and human perspective. In discussing their reactions to Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red, people are expressing their phenomenological experiences. They derive meaning by taking part in the site and, through this, they understand both themselves and the landscape in different ways. Therefore, the lived experience of an event or site is what constitutes its meaning and impact on individuals. If the memorial at the Tower of London created spontaneous, emotional reactions in participants, it can be considered inherently sacred and independent of human construction.

Temporality is an important aspect to consider when applying phenomenological insights onto the sites of the Tower of London and the Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red. Tim Ingold explains that the landscape provides an opportunity to interact with and to remember which ‘is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past.’ Ingold points out that the past, present, and future merge within the experience of the participant and that all combine to create understanding, similar to the eternality of time according to Eliade. People interact with their mutually shared environments and their experience and perceptions are affected by these interactions. In his article, 'The Temporality of the Landscape', Ingold examines the painting The Harvesters, created in 1565 by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Within this image, there is a church which, for Ingold, represents the present and the historical experience of the image, not only for those viewing it, but also for the figures

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48 Tilley, Stone, p. 29-31.
49 Tilley, Stone, p. 30.
50 Tilley, Stone, p29-31.
51 Tilley, Stone, p. 24.
within it. The church represents the past, present, and future and emphasizes the continuity of history. This is temporality resonating through time and space and indicates that human construct does not, in and of itself, create sacred space, but that the experience is subject to personal interpretation. In this particular instance, *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* is to the Tower of London what the church is to the complete ‘taskscape’ of Bruegel the Elder’s *The Harvesters*.

Referring to *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* from my desk in Canada, it is evident that the installation was not originally considered sacred. Tom Piper, one of the creators, said

When it got to a point where it started to become a sort of pilgrimage, it felt familiar in a way that I was not comfortable with…[I was] slightly perturbed by the frenetic, obsessive surge of emotionalism that the installation invoked.  

The idea of pilgrimage, that people were making a special and intentional journey to *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red*, indicates that the site evoked and invoked an emotional response in many people’s encounters with it, although it had not been intentionally planned to do so, because they purposefully travelled to see the installation. Elizabeth II, Queen of England, during her visit, commented that ‘the only possible reaction to walking among them [the poppies] was silence.’  

In the image below, the Queen appears reverential and reflective (figure 4). Her reaction is reminiscent of the effect of a sacred service. She is taking part in Ingold’s ‘taskscape’, interacting mutually with the landscape and all that it contains, including other beings.  

It seems reasonable to suggest that the Queen was interrelating personally with *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red*, in her memories, thoughts, physical reactions, and interpretations and that she was having a spontaneous sacred experience.

Another indication that the site had a powerful impact on people was the demand that the installation remains *in situ* even after its scheduled run. While the installation was scheduled from July 17 to November 11, 2015, it was extended until the end of November and, following its dismantling, two significant pieces, ‘The Wave’ and ‘The Weeping Window’ (figures 5 and 6, respectively), will tour the U.K. until 2018 after which they will be installed at the Imperial War Museums in London and Manchester.59 There are several Facebook pages dedicated to *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* in which people share their reactions and interactions with the site. Even eBay has become involved on because it will not allow people to sell the ceramic poppies on its website.60 According to eBay spokespeople, this decision was made in order to

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60 Georgia Graham and Peter Dominiczak, ‘Key sections of poppy memorial to stay at Tower of London for three weeks’ in The Independent, 07-11-14
honour the ‘significance of each individual poppy as a memorial to an individual British military fatality’. The public input regarding the installation indicates that people recognized something special and unique at the *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red*, a spontaneous hierophany and heterogeneous experience of time and place, as Eliade suggested.

![Figure 5: “The Wave” from Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red, November, 2014. Courtesy of Tom Piper.](image)

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61 Graham, ‘Sections’.
The similarity between Eliade’s eternality and Ingold’s temporality is evident in the Tower of London itself and in *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red*. The experience and interaction of temporality is evidenced by the perpetuity of The Tower which is similar to Bruegel the Elder’s church. All three landmarks, the church, The Tower of London, and the installation represent the past, present, and future and the enduring influence and impact of place. The Tower of London is a reminder, potent with history, emphasized by the installation which is also reminiscent of the past. Together, the Tower and the *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* represent an experience of past, present, and future and the old is rejuvenated in the present, reflecting Eliade’s position of the eternal qualities of space and time. *Blood Swept Lands and Sea of Red* recreates the memory of World War I which repeats the history of the Tower as a dungeon and fortress and the resonance is felt, bringing the past and the future (as World War I would have been to those who built the Tower) into the present moment. This is a renewal of the Tower as sacred space, its history echoing through time to this current moment. As Thorley and Gunn point out ‘it is possible for new narratives in modern times to generate new stories, history and legend leading

![Figure 6: “The Weeping Window”. Photograph by M J Mercer, October 14, 2014. With permission from WikimediaCommons](image-url)
to new consecration and the creation or adoption of new sacred space and sacred sites’. This seems to be exactly what the Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red has done for the Tower of London, allowing its history to be relived and renewed.

In conclusion, academic theory leads to thoughtful insights which can be applied, in practice, to personal experience. While theoretical work is valuable and promotes deeper contemplations about the world, practical hands-on experience leads to a holistic experience that consumes the whole being. The theory is the story, the interpretation, of the event, while the phenomenological experience is the detail and meaning underlying the story, something like Ingold’s examination of Bruegel the Elder’s painting, The Harvesters. By analysing the theory related to sacred space through the works of Durkheim, Eliade, Thorley and Gunn, and Bender in relation to the Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red, it has become evident that sacred space is a human construct which can be defined and employed by people and related to specific sites as posited by Durkheim, and, it is also eternal and differs from the profane through its hierophany as Eliade indicated. Sacred space is both intentionally and implicitly evocative. Phenomenology, as expressed by Tilley and Ingold, supports this evaluation by demonstrating that sacred space is independent of human construction because it is manifest in the world through experience and collaboration. This interpretation can be applied to sacred space to demonstrate that the human experience of the sacred is internal and natural, fully resonating with the whole person. The interactions of the people and the place influence each other, communicating a powerful and intense experience. While the sites investigated, the Tower of London and the Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red, were constructed intentionally, they were not necessarily designed to be considered sacred, merely functional and creative. The true measure of sacredness is in the interactions of site and people as Ingold asserts, to perceive the landscape is therefore to carry out an act of remembrance, and remembering is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perceptually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past. To be sure, the rules and methods of engagement employed respectively by the native dweller and the archaeologist will differ, as will the stories they

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62 Thorley and Gunn, Sacred Sites, p. 28.
tell, nevertheless - in so far as both seek the past in the landscape - they are engaged in projects of fundamentally the same kind.\textsuperscript{63}

\textit{Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red} on the Tower of London site has activated the emotions, interpretations and perceptions – the engagement – of people from all walks of life through its connections with the eternal nature of time and space in the sacred, phenomenologically activating unexpected and unpredicted reactions. When this is taken into account, it can be seen that sacred space is potentially identifiable anywhere and to anyone in the world, if one is open and willing to holistically experience the full impact of their environment. This interchange resonates throughout the \textit{Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red} through the participants’ interactions and reactions and, thus, renews and rejuvenates the whole landscape, the Tower of London. In whichever way sacred space is created, the Tower of London and the \textit{Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red} together represent an impressive example of the sacred in the mundane and suggest that sacred space is a complex and powerful inspiration.

\textsuperscript{63} Ingold, ‘Temporality’, pp. 152-153.


Greenhill, Sam, ‘Just a third of Tower poppy cash is going to help our heroes: So who will be pocketing the rest?’ in The Daily Mail, 13-09-14, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/


Science and scripture: How did faith influence cartographic methods used to determine the qibla, the sacred direction of Islam?

By Mai Lootah

This paper explores the metaphysical principles that shaped the geographical and astronomical methods used to determine the qibla in Makkah, the Islamic orientation point crucial for the five daily prayers, focusing on how the revered scriptures of Qur’ān and prophetic hadith influenced Islamic sacred geography. Part one of this paper explores the spiritual value of Makkah as a sacred space and direction, addressing the concepts of sanctity and centredness in the Islamic tradition, and drawing upon the relevant theories proposed by western philosophers and scholars. Part two of this paper then investigates how the mystical need to define the orientation towards Makkah in an expanding Islamic empire had propelled and contributed to Islamic cartography. This is done by assessing Makkah-centred cartography in two-dimensional maps that reflect a flat-earth perception, and comparing it to globular projections that rely on complex spherical geography.

Introduction

David A. King wrote that with the expansion of the Islamic empire, Muslim scholars applied astronomy, mathematics and spherical trigonometry in their attempts to calculate the qibla; the orientation point crucial for the five daily prayers. Despite his numerous contributions to the subject, King pointed out that his ‘positivist’ approach and focus on the technicalities of qibla calculation, led to the criticism of the Islamic scholar Muzzafar Iqbal, who as cited by King, believed that the latter’s work was devoid of the ‘metaphysical

doctrines’ that propelled Islamic scientific tradition. This ‘positivist’ approach is similarly noticed in the works of modern Muslim geographers and topographers. The aim of this paper therefore is to explore the historical and philosophical contexts that shaped the cartographic methods used to determine the qibla, focusing on the revered scriptures of Qur’ān and prophetic hadīth. After briefly looking at the lexicography and geography of Makkah and the qibla, this paper explores their metaphysical significance as a sacred space and direction, investigating the concepts of sanctity and centredness in Islamic theology. This paper then considers the resultant medieval and modern cartographical depictions of Makkah as the centre of the world, comparing two geographical approaches in determining the qibla; one that perceives the earth as flat in opposition to complex spherical geography. The works studied are placed into the context of relevant western theoretical literature on sacredness and lines, allowing the discussion to fluidly unfold with the logical sequence of the topics addressed.

Background Issues in the Literature Review

In addition to exploring the mystical value of Makkah and qibla in Qur’ān and hadīth, this paper will focus on the works of Qur’ān commentators, lexicographers, historians and geographers, comparing and analysing their different approaches and opinions in relation to the meaning of qibla and its determination. The aforementioned shall be studied within the theoretical frameworks of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) and Tim

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2 David A. King, ‘Reflections on some New Studies on Applied Science in Islamic Societies (8th - 19th Centuries)’, Islam & Science, 1 (Summer 2004), [hereafter King, Reflections on some New Studies]: p.45
Ingold. While Eliade dealt extensively with the concept of the ‘axis mundi’ relevant to the \textit{qibla} as an orientation point for daily rituals, Durkheim studied how these rituals provide a sense of unity to the members of society; the main purpose of religion in his opinion. Furthermore, Ingold’s study of the concept of lines will be useful in analysing the \textit{qibla} as a ‘terminus’ of many ‘invisible’ lines that connect the Muslim to his or her sacred point. This paper will also explore how Makkah’s theological centredness is reflected in both medieval cartography and modern ‘positivist’ \textit{qibla} studies.

**Part I: Exploring the Metaphysical and Theological Significance of Makkah**

**The Sacred Space: Lexicography and Geography**

The sacred city of Islam has been mentioned in the Qur’ān by the two names Makkah and Bakkah. Historian Mahmūd Shukrī al-Alūsī (1856-1924) wrote that Makkah refers to the whole city and Bakkah refers to the ‘house’, specifically the cubic shrine at the centre of the Mosque. This house, Geographer Yaqūt al-Hamawī (1179–1229 CE) elaborated, is also known as the Ka’ba which literally translates to ‘square house’ or ‘cube’; perceived by Eliade as a representation of the ‘imago mundi’. The direction of prayer towards the Ka’ba, lexicographer ibn Manẓūr (1233-1312 CE) noted, is called \textit{qibla}; a word

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5 Eliade, pp.36-42; Durkheim, p.375
6 Ingold, pp.49-50; pp.75-77; p.96
7 The Qur’ān, 48:24; 3:96
derived from the verb *qabila* which indicates that which is coming, approaching and facing.\(^{10}\) According to al-Ḥamawī, Makkah was mentioned in Claudius Ptolemy’s (c.90-168 CE) *Geography* with the coordinates of 78 degrees west and 23 or 21 degrees ‘below the point of Cancer,’ apparently referring to what is presently known as the ‘Tropic of Cancer.’\(^{11}\) Stephen M. Fabian stated that this tropic defines a geographical circle of latitude that falls on approximately 23.5 degrees north of the equator, which is the degree that marks the farthest northern limit from which the sun appears directly overhead at its culmination on the June summer solstice.\(^{12}\) The coordinates referred to by al-Ḥamawī hence seem to be 23 or 21 degrees above the equator, and two or half a degree below the Tropic of Cancer. Although no city with the name Makkah or the aforesaid coordinates is found in Ptolemy’s *Geography*, a city called Macoraba is mentioned with the coordinates of 73 degree longitude and 22 degree latitude in his list of Arabian Felix cities (fig. 1).\(^{13}\) Relying on the *The Times Atlas of the World*, Ahmad S. Massasati pointed out that the modern coordinates of Makkah are 21N25 and 39E47.\(^{14}\)

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\(^{10}\) Abū al-Fadl Jamāl al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān Al-ʿArab*, vol.11 (Beirut: Dār Sāder, 1994), [hereafter ibn Manẓūr]: p.537

\(^{11}\) al-Ḥamawī, vol.5, p.181

\(^{12}\) Stephen M. Fabian, *Patterns in the Sky: An Introduction to Ethnoastronomy* (Long Grove: Waveland Press): pp.13-14; p.113


According to the two Sahīhs also known as the Sahīh of al-Bukhārī (810-870 CE) and Muslim (821-875 CE), the most trusted compilations of prophetic sayings, early Muslims prayed towards Jerusalem for seventeen months after hijra, the latter referring to the key date of the migration of the Prophet Muḥammad in 622 CE from Makkah to al-Madīnah after years of persecution.
by his tribe Quraish.\textsuperscript{15} Around that time, Qur’ān commentator al-Tabarī (839-923 CE) wrote, the Prophet consistently looked up after each prayer towards the heavens as if anticipating an order from God.\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, the order did come through divine revelation in the Qur’ānic verse:

\begin{quote}
We have certainly seen the turning of your face, [O Muhammad], toward the heaven, and We will surely turn you to a qiblah with which you will be pleased. So turn your face toward al-Masjid al-Haram (the Sacred Mosque). And wherever you [believers] are, turn your faces toward it [in prayer].\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

This revelation was the ‘theophany’ that defined the new point of orientation, the ‘absolute fixed point’ and the ‘axis mundi’ that Eliade associated with sacred places.\textsuperscript{18} Makkah and the Ka’ba were instantly ‘cosmicized’ into a sacred direction and transformed into what Eliade described as an open portal to heavenly communication, putting an end to the Prophet’s disorientation.\textsuperscript{19} Yet when no sign manifests, Eliade observed, it is deliberately provoked to define the requisite point of orientation that breaks the relativity of profane space.\textsuperscript{20} Likewise, the revelation of the new qibla was not spontaneous, al-Tabarī opined, but deliberately sought and provoked by the Prophet who desired Makkah to be his orientation point.\textsuperscript{21} As stated by theologian and philosopher al-Rāzī (1149-1209 CE), Arabs were naturally inclined to revere Makkah more than Jerusalem, since the ‘state of the Arabs’ emerged and


\textsuperscript{17} The Qur’ān, trans. Saheeh International (Birmingham: Maktabah Booksellers and Publishers, 2010), [hereafter The Qur’ān]: 2:144

\textsuperscript{18} Eliade, p.21; p.36

\textsuperscript{19} Eliade, pp.26-30

\textsuperscript{20} Eliade, p.27

\textsuperscript{21} al-Tabarī, vol.2, pp.656-657
flourished after the erection of the Ka’ba.\textsuperscript{22} Therefore, as al-Rāzī suggested, the Prophet desired and prayed for this change of qibla to appeal to pagan Arabs who were resisting the new religion.\textsuperscript{23} Al-Rāzī also opined that veneration for the city of birth and origin of Prophet subsequently entails respect and reverence for the Prophet himself.\textsuperscript{24} Furthermore, both al-Tabarī and al-Rāzī wrote that early Muslims were initially directed to face Jerusalem in order to be distinguished from the pagans, and after their migration to al-Madīnah, the qibla was changed to Makkah to set them apart from the Jews of al-Madīnah who prayed towards Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{25} Hence it is apparent in this case that society organizes the space which it occupies in order to avoid potential ‘collision’ between incompatible social groups as Durkheim proposed.\textsuperscript{26}

However, ninth century historian and commentator al-Azruqī suggested that the ‘cosmicization’ of Makkah began with Creation.\textsuperscript{27} In his book \textit{Akbār Makkah} or History of Makkah; based extensively on prophetic hadīth; al-Azruqī wrote that God created the ‘sacred house’ for the first man and prophet Ādam, who felt forsaken after his fall from the Garden of Eden.\textsuperscript{28} This ‘house’ was meant to bring Ādam solace, al-Azruqī continued, serving as a mirror image of what Ādam was accustomed to in the world above.\textsuperscript{29} God then said, ‘Ādam, I am sending with you My House to be circumambulated as My Throne is circumambulated, and to be prayed towards like My Throne,’ al-Azruqī narrated.\textsuperscript{30} This paradigmatic model which the Ka’ba replicates, al-Azruqī elaborated, is known as \textit{al-Bayt al-Ma’mūr}, or the ‘Much-frequented House,’ located in the seventh firmament.\textsuperscript{31} The foundations of the Ka’ba on the other

\textsuperscript{22} Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, \textit{Al-Tafsīr Al-Kabīr} or The Great Commentary, vol.4 (Beirut: Dār Iḥiā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1999), [hereafter al-Rāzī]: p.83
\textsuperscript{23} al-Rāzī, vol.4, pp.94-95
\textsuperscript{24} al-Rāzī, vol.4, p.83
\textsuperscript{25} al-Tabarī, vol.2, pp.657-658; al-Rāzī, vol.4, p.83
\textsuperscript{26} Durkheim, p.443
\textsuperscript{27} Muḥammad bin ‘Abdulla al-Azruqī, \textit{Akbār Makkah W Ma Jā’ Fiḥa Min Al-Āthār Or the History of Makkah} (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1983), [hereafter al-Azruqī]: pp.66-82
\textsuperscript{28} al-Azruqī, p.77
\textsuperscript{29} al-Azruqī, p.77
\textsuperscript{30} al-Azruqī, p.112
\textsuperscript{31} al-Azruqī, p.71
hand, al-Azruqī added, stretch down to the seventh earth. Hence, divine intervention saved Ādam from the ‘foreign’ and ‘unknown’ profane world, providing him with what Eliade perceived as ‘cosmicized’ space; a microcosmic replica of the macrocosmic universal model and celestial order. With the ‘descent’ of the Ka’ba, Ādam was able to access Eliade’s ‘axis mundi’; an open portal to divine communication that connects the three realms of heaven, earth and the underworld.

The ‘house’ was then ‘lifted’ at the time of the Genesis flood of Noah, al-Azruqī wrote, and its location was revealed centuries later to prophet Ibrahīm or Abraham through Archangel Gabriel. After his son prophet Isma‘īl grew into adulthood, al-Azruqī continued, Ibrahīm was ordered to return to the ‘sacred land’ to build the ‘House of God’ on the already existing foundations; thence becoming a symbol of Abrahamic monotheism. The incident was perpetuated in the Qur’ānic verse; ‘And [mention] when Abraham was raising the foundations of the House and [with him] Ishmael, [saying], "Our Lord, accept [this] from us. Indeed You are the Hearing, the Knowing".’ The exact location of the primordial foundations of the Ka’ba, al-Azruqī added, was shown to Ibrahīm through a ‘floating cloud’; the mysterious sign mentioned by Eliade, for ‘men are not free to choose the sacred site.’

The qibla hence serves to commemorate what Durkheim described as the ‘mythical history’ of an ancestor; in this case prophets Ādam, Ibrahīm and Muḥammad. According to al-Rāzī, ‘believers faced the Ka’ba because it is the qibla of Khalīl Allah (God’s close companion) and the birth place of Habīb Allah (God’s beloved)’; referring to prophets Ibrahīm and Muhammad respectively. Thus, as Durkheim proposed, the five daily prayers perpetuate a system of beliefs that maintain the unity of Muslims around the globe.

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32 al-Azruqī, p.68
33 Eliade, p.29; p.30-32
34 Eliade, pp.36-37
35 al-Azruqī, p.97
36 al-Azruqī, pp.104-105
37 Al-Azruqī, p.108; The Qur’ān, 2:127
38 al-Azruqī, pp.104-110; Eliade, p.28
39 Durkheim, pp.371-372
40 al-Rāzī, vol.4, pp.82-83
reviving their connection every day to the founder of their religion, Prophet Muḥammad, for as al-Rāzī wrote, Muslims face ‘the ascension place of the Master of Light, Muḥammad peace be upon him, for from his light all light was created.’

**Al-Harām: The Sacred and its Threshold**

As stated by Durkheim, the categories of understanding consist of essential spatial and temporal contexts that enable the mind to understand experience. These categories are constructed by the ‘collective consciousness,’ Durkheim added, which is transcendental social intelligence. Both spatial and temporal differentiations are crucial components in the Islamic concept of ḥarām. Makkah is referred to in many verses of the Qur’ān as al-Masjid al-Ḥarām.

According to ibn Manẓūr, al-Masjid al-Ḥarām is also known as Haram of Makkah and Haram of Allah. The words ḥaram, ḥarām and ḥarem, and all of their derivatives, indicate that which is forbidden and taboo, ibn Manẓūr explained. For instance, the word mahram, he continued, signifies close blood relatives to which marriage is banned, such as the father, uncle, son and nephew. Clearly therefore, the ḥaram refers to the sacred which Durkheim described as ‘that which the profane should not touch, and cannot touch with impunity.’ It is also the ‘taboo’ realm that mandates the ‘avoidance of certain places, objects or people,’ as Fiona Bowie clarified. Thus, the verb aḥrama, ibn Manẓūr added, denotes the act of entering into a state of sanctity that mandates the observation.

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41 Durkheim, p.375, al-Razī, vol.4, p.82
42 Durkheim, p.9
43 Durkheim, pp.442-443
45 ibn Manẓūr, vol.12, p.120
46 ibn Manẓūr, vol.12, p.129
47 ibn Manẓūr, vol.12, p.123
48 Durkheim, p.40
of restrictions which include a severe ban on hunting, killing game and cutting trees.\textsuperscript{50} In \textit{Sahih al-Bukhārī}, the Prophet is narrated to have said:

So, it [Makkah] is a sanctuary by Allah's Decree till the Day of Resurrection. Its thorny bushes should not be cut, and its game should not be chased, its fallen property should not be picked up except by one who will announce it publicly; and its grass should not be uprooted.\textsuperscript{51}

The ‘irruption’ of any sacred space, Eliade proposed, entails the formation of a ‘threshold’ that surrounds and separates it from the profane.\textsuperscript{52} The \textit{haram}, ibn Manẓūr stated, is a large territory that extends beyond the Sacred Mosque with distinguished boundaries since Pagan Arabia.\textsuperscript{53} These borders are defined by physical markers called \textit{manār}, ibn Manẓūr added, which are believed to have been placed by prophet Ibrahīm.\textsuperscript{54} While the \textit{manār} are visible, the ‘taut strings’ of boundaries between them are ‘imaginary’ yet consequential, as Ingold suggested, segregating and partitioning space.\textsuperscript{55} These ‘ghostly’ lines are so seriously delineated that in \textit{Sahih Muslim} one reads that the Prophet said, ‘Allah cursed him who changed the \textit{manār}.’\textsuperscript{56} Such invisible lines in general, were perceived by Ingold as demarcating and differentiating time as well.\textsuperscript{57}

Truly, the ‘threshold’ of sacredness and sanctity is not confined to the limits of space and geography in Islam, but encompasses time as well, for as revealed in the Qur’ān; ‘Allah has made the Ka’ba, the Sacred House, standing for the people and [has sanctified] the sacred months.’\textsuperscript{58} The sacred months according to \textit{Sahih al-Bukhārī} are \textit{Dhul-Qa’da}, \textit{Dhul-Ḥijja}, \textit{Muḥarram}, and \textit{Rajab}.\textsuperscript{59} Ibn Manẓūr pointed out that these months were called the \textit{ḥurum} or sacred months since Pagan Arabia.\textsuperscript{60} Hence, the word \textit{muhrim}, ibn Manẓūr concluded,
also refers to a person entering the sanctity of a sacred month, which mandates a ban on raiding, hunting and bloodshed.\textsuperscript{61} This ban was further emphasized in the Qur‘ān; ‘forbidden to you is game from the land as long as you are in the state of ihram.’\textsuperscript{62} Serious consequences follow the desecration of the sanctity of these months, for ‘whoever returns [to violation], then Allah will take retribution from him.’\textsuperscript{63}

Hence, in Islam exists a perpetual spatial \textit{ihrām} within the precincts of \textit{al-Masjid al-Ḥarām}, and a temporal \textit{ihrām} independent of space. According to \textit{ḥadīth} compiler Abu Dawūd (817-889 CE), the Prophet said that the devout Muslim enters into a state of temporal \textit{ihrām} five times a day through \textit{takbīrat al-iḥrām}; the inaugural part of the prayer that involves the recitation of the phrase ‘Allāhu Akbar’ or ‘God is Great’ after which the worshipper refrains from external activities.\textsuperscript{64} Clearly, \textit{takbīrat al-iḥrām} serves as Durkheim’s ‘initiation rite,’ transporting worshippers into the realm of \textit{ḥarām}, and signalling their withdrawal from the profane to the sacred.\textsuperscript{65} The ‘threshold’ of \textit{ihrām} could be accessed from any place, for as mentioned in the Qur‘ān, ‘to Allah belongs the east and the west. So wherever you [might] turn, there is the Face of Allah.’\textsuperscript{66} Although all directions are equal since all have been created by God, al-Rāzī elucidated, some are holier than others, the \textit{qibla} being the holiest of all.\textsuperscript{67}

Ingold opined that any line of transport carries the traveller ‘across’ to the desired ‘terminus’; the point that marks the moment of completion.\textsuperscript{68} Likewise, at the moment of \textit{takbīrat al-iḥrām}, the worshipper travels ‘across’ an invisible line beyond space and time to the \textit{qibla}, the ‘terminus’ of the \textit{ḥarām}; the point and destination to which all worshippers globally face. This imperceptible straight line that connects every Muslim to the \textit{qibla} facilitates the process of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{61} ibn Manẓūr, vol,12, p.122
\bibitem{62} The Qur‘ān, 5:96
\bibitem{63} The Qur‘ān, 5:95
\bibitem{64} Abu Dawūd Sulaīmān ibn al-Ash‘ath al-Sijistānī, Sunan abī Dawūd, vol.1, book 1 of Purification (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-‘Asrīyah, n.d.), hadīth no. 61
\bibitem{65} Durkheim, pp.38-40
\bibitem{66} The Qur‘ān, 2:115
\bibitem{67} al-Rāzī, vol.4, p.83
\bibitem{68} Ingold, pp.75-77
\end{thebibliography}
guided sanctity, for ‘To Allah belongs the east and the west. He guides whom He wills to a straight path.’\textsuperscript{69} Unlike the terms ‘crooked’ and ‘twisted,’ which according to Ingold became linguistically synonymous to mental and ethical perversion, the straightness of the line here clearly represents what Ingold perceived as a symbolisation of morality and virtue.\textsuperscript{70}

Thus, the metaphysical value of Makkah as a divinely consecrated space and direction defined the ‘axis mundi’ towards which every Muslim is initiated daily into a sacred realm which is both temporal and spatial. Makkah’s spiritual, and subsequently liturgical, centrality clearly serves a crucial psychosocial role. In addition to commemorating the history of key paradigmatic figures in Islamic theology, the qibla, or the terminus that connects worshipping Muslims around the globe, sustains a sense of unity among believers, revitalising their societal identity and differentiating them from others. With the expansion of the Islamic empire, the vital mystical and ritualistic need to define the Makkan point of orientation fundamentally shaped the Islamic geographical perception of the world propelling a rich tradition of Makkah-centred cartography.

\textbf{Part II: Locating the qibla in the Expanding Islamic Empire}

\textbf{Islamic Sacred Geography: Examining Makkah-Centred Cartography}

Eliade proposed that sacred space is perceived as the centre and the ‘navel’ from which the universe is born and spreads out to the four cardinal points which are represented by the square, or in this case the Ka’ba.\textsuperscript{71} This view is evident in the work of al-Ḥamawī who suggested that Makkah was described in the Qur’ān as \textit{Umm al-Qurā} or the ‘Mother of Cities’ because it is the origin, centre and ‘navel of the earth.’\textsuperscript{72} Al-Azruqī similarly wrote that Makkah is the primordial point that preceded the Genesis and from which all lands stretched

\textsuperscript{69} The Qur’ān, 2:142
\textsuperscript{70} Ingold, pp.152-153
\textsuperscript{71} Eliade, pp.44-45
\textsuperscript{72} The Qur’ān, 42:7; al-Ḥamawī, vol.1, pp.254-255
out. Moreover, al-Rāzī opined that the word *shaṭra* in the verse, ‘turn your face (*shaṭra*) toward al-Masjid al-Ḥarām,’ denotes the ‘centre,’ and since the Ka’ba is located at the centre of the Mosque, he continued, it therefore becomes the *qibla*. It is also reported that the Prophet said, al-Rāzī added, that ‘The Ka’ba is the *qibla* of the people of the Mosque, and the Mosque is the *qibla* of the people of the *haram*, and the *haram* is the *qibla* of the people of the east and west.’ In the Qur’ān, the concepts of *qibla* and *waṣaṭ*, or centre, are linked:

And thus we have made you a just (*waṣaṭan*) community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you. And We did not make the qiblah which you used to face except that We might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his heels.

Since the Ka’ba is the centre and ‘navel’ of the earth, al-Rāzī concluded, God naturally ordered all his creation to face this centre in prayer, for God is just and loves ‘centredness’ and moderation in everything. Hence, the concept of Makkah’s centredness reflects the Islamic concept of *waṣaṭīah*; moderation coupled with righteousness. This led to the development of what King termed as the ‘sacred geography’ of Islam, in which the whole world is divided into sectors around the Ka’ba. While the geographer al-Idrīsī (1099-1161 CE) depicted Makkah as the centre of a circular world surrounded by sea (fig. 2), fourteenth century historian ibn al-Wardī (fig. 3) and sixteenth century cartographer al-Sifāqṣī (fig. 4) divided the world into segments around the edifice of the Ka’ba as a locational aid for the worshiper anywhere on the

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73 al-Azruqī, p.67  
74 al-Rāzī, vol.4, p.97; The Qur’ān, 2:144  
75 al-Rāzī, vol.4, pp.98-99  
76 The Qur’ān, 2:143  
77 al-Rāzī, vol.4, pp.82-84  
Comparable to Ingold's segments resulting from connecting yet segregating lines, the linear sectors of these Makkah-centred maps merge together into a complete and holistic pattern of 'a higher order'.


80 Ingold, p.74
Figure 2  Makkah-centred map depicting the classical world with the north placed at the bottom by eleventh century geographer al-Idrisi. Manuscript, 1154 CE. From Bibliothèque nationale de France, Arabe 2221, fols.3v-4r. Reproduced with permission
Figure 3 The world arranged around the Ka'ba in an eleven sector scheme of sacred geography by ibn al-Wardi. Manuscript, 1800s. From Islamic Manuscripts Collection, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Garret no. 267B, fol.43b. Reproduced with permission.
Figure 4. Forty sector scheme of sacred geography with the Ka’ba edifice located at the centre by sixteenth century cartographer al-Sifāqī. Manuscript, 1551 CE. From Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Arabe 2278, fol.2v. Reproduced with permission.
As stated by King, Muslim scholars who attempted to locate the *qibla* belonged to two distinct traditions; mathematical astronomy and folkloric legislative astronomy.\textsuperscript{81} The scheme of ‘sacred geography,’ King explained, was devised by the ‘legislators’ who sought simple and practical methods to determine the *qibla*.\textsuperscript{82} The ‘scientists’ on the other hand, King elaborated, determined the direction of the *qibla* along great circles of the terrestrial sphere, applying complex trigonometric and geometric methods.\textsuperscript{83} The methodical dichotomy between the two traditions still exists, King observed, for in North America the ‘scientists’ maintain that the *qibla* is located to the north of east, whereas the ‘legislators’ believe that the *qibla* is south of east.\textsuperscript{84} S. Kamal Abdali wrote that the faulty judgement of the ‘legislators’ resulted from viewing the earth as a flat map; labelled by King as ‘naïve folk geography.’\textsuperscript{85} Apparently, legislative scholars favoured the ‘straight’ path and flat map over the ‘curves of nature’, since as Ingold wrote, linear lines were always associated with superior morality.\textsuperscript{86}

Alternatively, King noticed that beginning from the eighth century Muslim ‘scientists’ developed different projections to help them determine the *qibla*.\textsuperscript{87} A map projection, according to John P. Snyder, is a representation of a portion of a spherical earth on a two dimensional plane.\textsuperscript{88} The popular Mercator projection, Snyder wrote, is a two dimensional flat map intended mainly as a navigational map to be used with rhumb lines; paths with a constant bearing.

\textsuperscript{81} King, Reflections on some New Studies, p.44; King, Astronomy for Landlubbers, pp.212-213
\textsuperscript{82} David A. King, 'Two Iranian World Maps for Finding the Direction and Distance to Mecca', Imago Mundi, 49 (1997), [hereafter King, ‘Two Iranian World Maps’]: p.64
\textsuperscript{83} David A. King, 'Two Iranian World Maps', p.64
\textsuperscript{84} King, Reflections on some New Studies, p44; Abdali, p.1; Massasati, 'Mapping the Direction to Makkah', p.93
\textsuperscript{85} Abdali, p.1; King, Reflections on some New Studies, pp.44-45
\textsuperscript{86} Ingold, pp.152-153
\textsuperscript{87} David A. King, World Maps for Finding the Direction and Distance of Mecca: Examples of Innovation and Tradition in Islamic Science (Leiden: Brill, 1999): p.56
\textsuperscript{88} John P. Snyder, Flattening the Earth: Two Thousand Years of Map Projections (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), [hereafter Snyder]: p.1
relative to the magnetic north. Yet the rhumb lines favoured by ‘legislators’ do not give directions accurately, Abdali observed, since meridians in reality are not parallel, but converge at the North Pole. In contrast, globular map projections which include azimuthal projections, Snyder noted, were first developed by the illustrious Muslim ‘scientist’ al-Biruni (973-1048 CE) in his attempt locate the qibla. The word azimuth is actually derived from the Arabic al-sumūt which translates to ‘directions’ according to Snyder and ibn Manẓūr. Thus as Snyder stated, azimuthal projections provide accurate directions from the centre point of the projection. An important feature of this map, Abdali noted, is its use of great circles to determine direction. Abdali pointed out that any two points on the globe are connected through a great circle that runs across the surface of a sphere dividing it into two equal sections. When it comes to qibla computation, Abdali added, the shortest path between the two is taken. Therefore, the line of the great circle becomes synonymous to Ingold’s line of ‘transport,’ in which the destination and the point mark the ‘moment of completion.’

One of the best known azimuthal projections, Snyder pointed out, is the ‘Mecca projection’ (fig. 5) developed in 1909 by James I. Craig (1865-1952). In this projection, Abdali observed, the angle of the qibla is found by drawing a straight line from any location to Makkah. Although this projection works well for locations close to Mecca, Snyder and Abdali commented, its distortion

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89 Snyder, p.96; pp.156-157; Abdali, p.12
90 Abdali, pp.12-13
92 Snyder, p.16; ibn Manẓūr, vol.2, p.46
93 Snyder, p.16
94 Abdali, pp.21-23
95 Abdali, p.11
96 Abdali, p.11
97 Abdali, p.77
98 Snyder, p.227
99 Abdali, pp.22-23
increases in distant locations rendering it is useless for the Americas.\textsuperscript{100} Egyptian Topographer Ḥussaīn Kamāl al-Dīn (1913-1987) addressed this problem by developing an azimuthal projection that encompasses the seven continents, enhancing it with an outer ring of azimuthal degrees (fig. 6).\textsuperscript{101} Makkah, which is represented with the letter ‘M,’ Kamāl al-Dīn wrote, is located at the centre.\textsuperscript{102} Thus, connecting any point on this projection to the point ‘M’ and extending the line to the outer ring gives the direction of Mecca, he explained.\textsuperscript{103} Kamāl al-Dīn also designed another solution that innovatively combines the Mercator projection with great circles, resulting in curved lines that converge at Makkah (fig. 7).\textsuperscript{104} The worshipper should identify the closest line to his location, he clarified, and then pray towards the angle specified next to that line.\textsuperscript{105} The two other points in which the lines converge on either side of this projection fall on the pacific island of Muroroa, Kamāl al-Dīn added, the point exactly opposite Makkah on the other side of the globe; also known as its antipode.\textsuperscript{106} A person living on Muroroa could pray towards any direction, Kamāl al-Dīn and Massassati opined.\textsuperscript{107} Another unique projection was developed by Massassati who envisioned ‘Prayer Circles’ that start from around Makka, increasing in size till 90 degrees away from Makkah, and then decreasing and stopping at Makkah’s antipode (fig. 8).\textsuperscript{108} To face the Ka’ba, Massasati explained, the worshipper should follow the ‘Prayer Direction Circles,’ which are lines perpendicular to the ‘Prayer Circles.’\textsuperscript{109}

\textsuperscript{100} Snyder, p.228; Abdali, p23
\textsuperscript{101} Kamāl al-Dīn, pp.315-317
\textsuperscript{102} Kamāl al-Dīn, p.315
\textsuperscript{103} Kamāl al-Dīn, p.315
\textsuperscript{104} Kamāl al-Dīn, p.326
\textsuperscript{105} Kamāl al-Dīn, p.327
\textsuperscript{106} Kamāl al-Dīn, p.325
\textsuperscript{107} Kamāl al-Dīn, p.301; Massasati,‘Developing a Prayer Circles’, p.13
\textsuperscript{108} Massasati,‘Developing a Prayer Circles’, p.13
\textsuperscript{109} Masassati,‘Developing a Prayer Circles’, p.13
Figure 5 The Mecca Projection centred on Makkah. Illustration in John P. Snyder, Flattening the Earth: Two Thousand Years of Map Projections (University of Chicago Press, 1997), p.228. Image courtesy of The University of Chicago Press. © 1993 by The University of Chicago
Figure 6. Makkah-centred azimuthal projection surrounded with an outer ring of azimuthal degrees by Ḥussaɪn Kamāl al-Dīn. Illustration in Ḥussaɪn Kamāl al-Dīn, 'Makkah-Based Earth Projection and the Determination of the Qibla', Islamic Research Journal, 2 (Shawāl 1395 – Rabī’ al-Awwal 1396 hijrī), p.316. Image courtesy of Portal for the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta'
Figure 7. Makkah-centred Mercator projection combined with the arcs of great circles by Ḥussaīn Kamāl al-Dīn. Illustration in Ḥussain Kamāl al-Dīn, 'Makkah-Based Earth Projection and the Determination of the Qibla', Islamic Research Journal, 2 (Shawāl 1395 – Rabī’ al-Awwal 1396 hijrī), p.326. Image courtesy of Portal for the General Presidency of Scholarly Research and Ifta'.

It is evident hence that both the medieval and modern, legislative and scientific, perception of the world was significantly influenced, if not modelled, by the Islamic faith as epitomised by the centrality of Makkah in the Muslim’s life. The House of Allah, or the Ka’ba in Makkah, was clearly the navel of the flat earth of the unsophisticated legislative scholar, cartographer, historian and
geographer, from which the rest of the world extended into segmented sectors arranged around this 'axis mundi'. Similarly, Makkah maintained its locational supremacy in the complex spherical geography of the mathematician and scientist. In contemporary Islamic azimuthal cartography, Makkah acquired a polar position that reflected its centrality, becoming the merging points of the 'Prayer Direction Circles' that guided the worshipper to his or her qibla.

Conclusion

Supplemented by the theories of Eliade, Durkheim and Ingold, part one of this paper first explored the metaphysical and theological significance of Makkah, looking at the historical accounts of its ‘cosmicization.’ This section also addressed the concepts of al-ḥarām; the spatial and temporal realm of sacredness and the ‘threshold’ that encompasses it; and the role of the qibla as an ‘axis mundi’ and ubiquitous portal to al-ḥarām. Part two of this paper then presented how the subsequent need to locate the qibla in an expanding Islamic empire contributed to modern day geography, starting with azimuthal projections which were developed by al-Bīrūnī for that purpose. In addition to considering the qibla debates between what King classified as the ‘scientific’ and ‘legislative’ traditions, this paper examined how Makkah’s centredness was reflected in two-dimensional maps and globular projections in medieval and modern times. The metaphysical centrality Makkah symbolised is clearly reflected in the variety of innovative Makkah-centered cartographical solutions, in which the modern geographical coordinates of parallels and meridians were superseded and replaced with lines and arcs that connected the Muslim to his or her spiritual terminus, the qibla.

110 King, Reflections on some New Studies, p.44; King, Astronomy for Landlubbers, pp.212-213
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Can some art installations be considered to generate sacred place?  
Three installations in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern.

By Stevi Gaydon

This paper considers the question of whether art installations can generate sacred space. It draws on the work of a number of theorists, including, Belden C. Lane, Mircea Eliade, Émile Durkheim, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and David Abram. It also reports on research conducted into the potential of art installations to generate scared space which focuses on personal experience of three installations in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern; Louise Bourgeois’s Maman, Olafur Eliasson’s The Weather Project and Ai Weiwei’s Sunflower Seeds. Definitions of sacred place are diverse: they include an experience of the numinous, a sense spirit and/or connectedness, story, symbol and ritual. In different ways, each of the three installations was experienced as a sacred space. As the artists themselves do not seem to have intentionally set out to create a sacred place this suggests these experiences were, at least in part, a personal construct. However, this only seems to explain one ingredient of the experience and the paper concludes that sacred place is more than a human construct alone.

Introduction

This paper considers the question of whether art installations can generate sacred space. It draws on the work of a number of theorists, including, Belden C. Lane, Mircea Eliade, Émile Durkheim, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and David Abram and also reports on research conducted into the potential of art installations to generate scared space.

The artist, Wassily Kandinsky argued that the spiritual was an essential part of an artist’s work; he thought if inner meaning was neglected, the result
was a ‘vain squandering of artistic power.’¹ He argued that an artwork was born of the artist in a mysterious and secret way and ‘good art’ had a material and spiritual ‘purposeful strength’ that had the power to create a spiritual atmosphere.² He believed the *Stimmung*, which Michael Sadler translated as ‘sentiment,’ ‘feeling’ or ‘essential spirit’, of an artwork, could deepen and purify the *Stimmung* of the spectator.³ Artists may have a variety of different intentions for their art but Tim Ingold argued that some art is able to invite the viewer to join the artist on an unfolding journey in which neither is bound to the artist’s original intention.⁴ This journey therefore, based on Sadler’s arguments, has the potential to be sacred. This paper investigates whether, on those occasions, the exhibitions/installations could be described as sacred places. This notion will be discussed with reference to literature about sacred space, art reviews and the research into experience of three installations in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern; Louise Bourgeois’s *Maman*⁵, Olafur Eliasson’s *The Weather Project*⁶ and Ai Weiwei’s *Sunflower Seeds*.⁷ The first part of this paper is concerned with the methodology followed, the use of ‘place’ rather than ‘space’, defining sacred place and an introduction to some theorists’ views of sacred place. The second section reports on the research into personal experience of the three installations.

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Methodology

The research will be experiential. This necessitates moving between an objective perspective and a description of my own experience. In the latter, I intend to take the work of David Abram and Tim Ingold as the basis for my approach to ensure that my subjective observations are honest, relevant and concise. As I am basing some of my arguments on my own experience, complete objectivity is impossible which means, as Jo Pearson said, ‘it is necessary to apply a rigorous self-reflexivity in order to bracket off personal beliefs and values.’ Pearson argued that the ‘insider’ researcher can maintain a deep understanding and be both ‘distant’ and ‘involved’ as a researcher, by using correct methodology and constant reflexivity. This is the approach I have adopted.

My background is relevant as I am using phenomenology and being self-reflective in this research. I am a woman, born in the UK of Irish parents in 1953, I have been visiting art galleries fairly regularly (about a dozen times a year) for more than thirty years. Although I have never studied art and make no claims to be any kind of critic, I enjoy the whole experience of going to an exhibition or installation, often finding that the art moves me emotionally and in some cases it prompts me to change my perspective, to see something differently. My visits to these three exhibitions took place between 1999 and 2010 when I was between the ages of forty six and fifty seven.

Sacred Place

The word place, rather than space, has been used in this paper. In Tilley’s opinion, ‘space is a far more abstract construct than place,’ he argued that space

10 Pearson, ‘Going Native in Reverse: The Insider as Researcher in British Wicca’, p. 109
derives its meaning from places for which it provided the context.\footnote{Christopher Tilley, A Phenomenology of Landscape, (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p.15.} According to Yi-Fu Tuan ‘space lies open ... it is like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed. Enclosed and humanized space is place.’\footnote{Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p.54.} Aristotle (c. 384 – 322 BCE) and Plato (c. 428 – 348 BCE) had differing views of place. Aristotle saw place as \emph{topos}, a neutral container which remained the same across space and time and geography. He said place was necessary for things to exist, that ‘the innermost motionless boundary of what contains is place.’\footnote{Aristotle, Physics, (The Internet Classics Archive, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/physics.html 4.1 208a 27 – 209a 31; 212a 20-2, accessed 31 December, 2013.} In contrast, Plato considered place to be \emph{chora}, energetic and powerful, he described it as ‘the nurse of all Becoming.’\footnote{Plato, Timaeus, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/, http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/timaeus.1b.txt, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plat.+Tim.+49a&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0180, 49a, accessed 31 December, 2013.} Tilley agreed, arguing that knowledge of place arises from human experiences, feelings and thought and that the meaning of place comes from that lived experience or from existential human consciousness of it.\footnote{Tilley, A Phenomenology of Landscape, p. 15.} Hence it is human consciousness that creates the limits (or otherwise) of place. Place, he concluded, can have ‘distinctive meanings and values’ for people.\footnote{Tilley, A Phenomenology of Landscape, p. 15.}

In turning to the notion of the sacred, Rudolf Otto described the holy as \textit{numinous} (from Latin, \textit{numen}, Deity or Divine). He said it presented itself as something ‘wholly other’ in which the experiencer felt ‘utterly abashed,’ he argued the experience was both terrifying and fascinating.\footnote{Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. John Harvey, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958 [1923]), p. 15.} For J. Donald Hughes and Jim Swan sacred space is ‘a place where human beings find a manifestation of divine power, where they experience a sense of connectedness to the universe. There, in some special way, spirit is present to them.’\footnote{Hughes, 'How Much of the Earth Is Sacred Space?,’ Environmental Review: ER 10, no. 4 (1986), p. 247.} Hughes argued that people were aware of a sacred place’s power and they experienced
it as ‘healing, meaning, transformation, strength or connectedness with nature; though sometimes as threat, risk, or ordeal.’ In contrast, David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal regarded sacred space as ‘ritual space,’ a location for formalized and, repeatable symbolic performances’ which is what made them sacred. Whilst Belden C. Lane suggested that sacred places are seen as such ‘because of the symbol-making process by which humans make sense of the world around them’ but, ‘above all else’ he said, sacred place is ‘storied place.’ It is always ‘rich in story’. In terms of this research, the installations will be considered sacred places if the experience of them, pleasant or not, can be considered powerful and outside the ‘norm’, Otto’s ‘wholly other’ and, those experiences are felt to have meaning, value and story.

Belden C. Lane argued that academics defined and described sacred space in three different and usually mutually exclusive ways; ontological, cultural and phenomenological. These three approaches are discussed below with reference to the work of Mircea Eliade, Émile Durkheim and Merleau-Ponty.

Mircea Eliade’s was an ontological approach. He said every sacred place implied a hierophany, a point where ‘something sacred shows itself’ and which created a ‘qualitatively different territory.’ He claimed that sacred places had power, ‘were saturated with being’ and, in them, communication with the gods was possible. He argued that for religious man, sacred space could be anywhere.

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24 Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, pp. 20-29; 12.
In contrast, Émile Durkheim asserted that culture was most significant, he viewed the distinction between the sacred and profane as essentially social.\(^{25}\) He argued that man and nature were not inherently sacred and that the religious idea came from ‘effervescence’ - a special kind of energy that developed in groups and created a sense of transformation and connection between people and the gods.\(^{26}\) \textit{In Ernest} Wallwork’s assessment, Durkheim saw society as a force, superior to the individual and ‘the true source of the experience of transcendent authority.’\(^{27}\) David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal argued that sacred space is ‘entangled’ with cultural ‘profane’ forces including the entrepreneurial, social and political; they proposed sacred space was most readily described as contested space.\(^{28}\) They criticised the ontological approach because it assumed sacred places were ‘given or revealed’ by ‘gods and spirits’ and took no account of all the human effort and ritual involved in making them sacred.\(^{29}\)

On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty proposed taking a phenomenological approach, saying phenomenology aimed to give ‘a direct description of our experience as it is’ without considering its psychological origin or causal explanations.\(^{30}\) According to Christopher Tilley, Merleau-Ponty argued that ‘the human body provides the fundamental mediation point between thought and the world,’ so the body is involved in perceiving, understanding and relating to the world.\(^{31}\) Abram said phenomenology challenges the assumption that there is ‘a single, wholly determinable, objective reality,’ aiming for a description of sensory experience rather than an explanation of the world.\(^{32}\) He thought there were two regions of phenomena, one occurs just for the individual, being internal and subjective, the other is still subjective but is

\(^{26}\) Durkheim, Elementary Forms, pp. 76; 164.
\(^{28}\) Chidester & Linenthal, 'Introduction', p. 17.
\(^{29}\) Chidester & Linenthal, 'Introduction', p. 17.
\(^{31}\) Tilley, A Phenomenology of Landscape, p. 14.
\(^{32}\) Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous, pp. 30-35.
clearly also experienced by others as well, called, ‘intersubjective’ phenomena, by Edmund Husserl.33 The phenomenological approach suggests that places participate with humans, according to Abram said ‘each place [has] its own mind, its own psyche’ and to be fully present in a place is to experience a ‘reciprocal exchange between the living body and the animate world that surrounds it.’34

In Lane’s view each of these approaches had both value and disadvantages.35 He reasoned that the ontological perspective helps to understand a believer’s experience, its inner impact and the involvement of the imagination.36 However, he also argued that ‘sacred and profane, religion and culture are overlapping dimensions of human experience’, not completely distinct entities and that needed to be acknowledged.37 Although Lane thought the impact of social and cultural influences on sacred places needed to be considered, he argued that a purely cultural approach missed the significance of ‘place’ itself ‘as a participant in the formation of experience.’38 With regard to the phenomenological approach, Lane maintained that, although it considered the integrity of a sacred place, it did not take into account the roles the transcendent and cultural played in its identification.39 Having considered the relevance and drawbacks of each method he proposed using the three together so that they could be ‘mutually self-correcting.’40

Lane argued that all three approaches, ontological, cultural and phenomenological, are needed to give a ‘multidimensional understanding of how sacred place functions within the human imagination’ because the individual’s perception of a sacred place is ‘inescapably mediated by culture’ as well as the place.41 This paper will follow his method in exploring each

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33 Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous, p. 38.
34 Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous, pp.262; 73..
35 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, pp.42-46.
36 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, p. 43.
37 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, p. 43.
38 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, pp. 43-44.
39 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, p. 44.
40 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, pp.42-46.
41 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, p.45.
installation in terms of the ‘presence of the sacred,’ its cultural and social themes and ‘listening’ to the place/artwork itself.\textsuperscript{42}

Three Installations at the Turbine Hall, Tate Modern

Tate Modern is gallery for international modern and contemporary art in London. A former Power Station, the building was redeveloped and opened in 2000. It has a dramatic entrance and display area 35 metres high and 152 metres long which was created from the original turbine hall.\textsuperscript{43} From 2000-2012 the Unilever group sponsored, The Unilever Series, an annual commission that invited an artist to make a work of art especially for the Turbine Hall.\textsuperscript{44} Three of the installations are discussed below.

Maman by Louise Bourgeois

\textit{Maman} is a massive steel spider, it is nine metres high and has a ten metre leg span which the viewer can walk around and under.\textsuperscript{45} Each of the eight legs ends in a sharp point, underneath the spider’s body there is a meshed sac containing seventeen white and grey marble eggs that hang above the viewer’s head; there is also a cell that looks like a web of imprisoned prey.\textsuperscript{46} In fact, the cell contains items that were significant to Bourgeois, part of her life story, these included fragments of antique tapestries (her mother was a tapestry restorer and as a child Bourgeois helped her) and a bottle of her favourite perfume.\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, pp.44 -45; 57.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Tate Modern,’http://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern, accessed 12 December, 2013.
\item \textsuperscript{44} http://www.tate.org.uk/about/who-we-are/history-of-tate#modern, accessed 18 November, 2013.
\item \textsuperscript{46} http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bourgeois-maman-t12625/text-summary, accessed 14 November, 2013.
\item \textsuperscript{47} http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bourgeois-maman-t12625/text-summary, accessed 14 November, 2013.
\end{itemize}
Maman or ‘Mummy,’ is ambiguous, her size and pointed feet are threatening but her balance seems precarious and so she also appears fragile.\textsuperscript{48} For Bourgeois, the spider represented ‘a universal symbol for the endless story of life, whose principle is continual renewal’, the cycle of birth and death and the ability to mend.\textsuperscript{49} Bourgeois’ tapestry restoration experience also seems to have worked on a psychological level, she said, ‘things that have broken down or have been ripped apart can be joined and mended. My art is a form of restoration in terms of my feelings to myself and to others.’\textsuperscript{50} In an interview with Frances Morris, Bourgeois said ‘I transform nasty work into good work. I transform hate into love … that’s what makes me tick.’\textsuperscript{51} Ingold argued that artists do not project from their imagination when they create but rather that they ‘gather,’ which seems to describe Bourgeois’s approach.\textsuperscript{52} Ingold viewed artists as wayfarers and said ‘as they make things they … bind their own pathways or lines of becoming into the texture of the world.’\textsuperscript{53} He thought art can open the mind to inner truths and ‘directly touch the soul and set it in motion.’\textsuperscript{54}

My response to Maman was dramatic. I felt compelled to look at her and I was frightened. I am not afraid of spiders but Maman was towering, cold, menacing and blind, instinctively I felt that made her both stupid and very dangerous. Maman almost took my breath away. I could not move. I stood by a leg and looked in, feeling unable to go underneath. Partly because, like Trisha McCrea, I felt that I was ‘waiting … as if on the outside of a sacred space and

\textsuperscript{52} Ingold, Being Alive,, p. 178.
\textsuperscript{53} Ingold, Being Alive, pp. 12;178.
\textsuperscript{54} Ingold, Being Alive,, p. 206.
prohibited entry’ and partly because ‘going in’ felt physically risky. After a few moments I picked up my courage and went underneath the spider. The eggs in the sack were delicate and beautiful, I understood Maman’s ferocity now, she was protecting her young but I was still extremely anxious, I felt I could be crushed, I did not linger. In contrast, McCrea said she ‘felt a strong, safe, maternal presence, a positive energy directed on me like a moment’s revelation.’

McCrea affirmed that spiders have a strong effect on people. Lane suggested something similar about them, writing that the spider is a ‘multivalent symbol, admired and loathed at the same time’, we approve of the spider’s hard work and beauty but are ‘repulsed by their venom’ and the ways they catch their prey. McCrea thought that Maman tapped powerfully into a maternal collective unconscious, where mother is seen as both ‘indispensable supporter and deadly enemy of the human-self.’ McCrea argued that Maman was full of meanings that were both personal and existed outside her, she said, Maman was ‘informed by social, historical and psychical factors’ that belonged to both Bourgeois and the viewer and that ‘power, strength, predatoriness and control were palpable in Maman’s space.’ Durkheim asserted that the sacred inspires respect and admiration; it keeps us at a distance whilst simultaneously arousing love and aspiration. In my experience, Maman’s was a sacred place, storied, powerful and intimidating. I felt both fear and respect, as Lane said,

58 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, p. 232.
59 McCrea, 'Louise Bourgeois Maman: From the Outside In', Gesturing towards her mother in her transitional space, accessed, 14 November, 2013.
60 McCrea, 'Louise Bourgeois Maman: From the Outside In', Entering the installation-space, accessed 14 November, 2013.
Otto’s ‘mysterium tremendum and fascinans, are contained in this one image of the spider.’

The Weather Project by Olafur Eliasson

The Weather Project was a representation of the sun and sky which was concerned with the climate and its social effects. It was a huge optical illusion consisting of a giant semi-circular form made up of hundreds of mono-frequency lamps that emitted light at a narrow frequency so that only yellow and black were visible. This arc was reflected in a mirrored ceiling so the ‘real’ and reflected semi-circles ‘linked’ to produce the ‘sun.’ A fine mist was emitted from haze machines which

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62 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, p. 233.
accumulated into faint, cloud-like formations and then dissipated.\textsuperscript{66} Eliasson asserted that the weather has fundamentally shaped society and impacted every aspect of life because humanity has needed to withstand it in order to survive.\textsuperscript{67}

As Meredith Malone and other critics have noted, Eliasson is influenced by phenomenological philosophy and apparently he often returns to the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Henri Bergson, and Edmund Husserl.\textsuperscript{68} According to Malone, Eliasson is convinced that perception involves the whole body, not just vision and that what one perceives is dependent on what one is physically present to in that moment, hence unfolding circumstances determine how and what one perceives.\textsuperscript{69}

In The Weather Project, Eliasson, invited the visitor to reflect on their perception of the physical world; he refers to the moment, when the visitor paused to consider what they were experiencing, as 'seeing yourself seeing'.\textsuperscript{70} Sasha Engelmann argued that Eliasson’s work changes the way the viewer sees the environment and introduces them to ‘a “being in common” where they absorb a sense of unity along with sensory data.’\textsuperscript{71} It is through shared experience, according to Merleau-Ponty, that we realise ‘we are all one light and participate in the One without destroying its unity.’\textsuperscript{72} Carolyne Quinn explained

\textsuperscript{69} Malone, 'Olafur Eliasson', p.2.
\textsuperscript{71} Engelmann, 'Breaking the Frame: Olafur Eliasson’s Art, Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology, and the Rhetoric of Eco-Activism'.
\textsuperscript{72} Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, p. xiii.
that Merleau-Ponty thought art could ‘reveal the world to the viewer in a new way’ and that an artwork’s meaning was as dependent on the viewer as the artist. Merleau-Ponty thought art was embedded in pre-reflexive experience on which artists expanded, so artists accessed ‘a fundamental realm of human experience’ that was not available to others.’

I found the installation exhilarating. As I walked down the ramp, I became charged with energy, my heart beat faster, I walked more quickly, I was excited. I began to understand why ancient peoples, among others had worshipped the sun, it was magnificent and I was being drawn to it. I seemed to be aware of everything, other people’s enthusiasm, the hum of the generator and most of all that wonderful light, I was spellbound. I wanted to sit down, lie down, to see myself in the overhead mirror, I wanted to play. I was joyful and overwhelmed with love for the earth and for humanity.

The sun is a powerful image, Barbara Weightman said ‘the sun is the supreme cosmic power; denoting centrality of existence, it is the heart of being,’ and ‘light symbolises holiness.’ In her review of the installation, Rachel Cooke seems to support that view, she said the viewers were ‘like pilgrims’ and reflected that the installation was ‘strangely humbling’ because ‘the ordinary had been rendered extraordinary - numinous, even.’ Lane observed that the sacred is often overlooked because it is hidden by the ordinary which makes things seem dull and predictable. He argued that artists and storytellers are most effective at drawing the holy out from behind the mask of the ordinary. In Quinn’s opinion, the artist makes visible what most people do not see and an artist’s work gains meaning from the intersubjective world when the image comes to life for others.

76 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, p. 68.
77 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, p. 68.
78 Quinn, 'Perception and Painting in Merleau-Ponty's Thought', p. 15.
For Richard Dorment, the visitors made *The Weather Project* ‘unforgettable.’\(^{79}\) Their reactions as they moved around and made shapes trying to see themselves in the overhead mirror added more meaning to it.\(^{80}\) He argued that, ‘paradoxically, the less we look like individuals, the more aware we become that we share a common humanity, that we are all members of the same species.’\(^{81}\) He said *The Weather Project* literally held up a mirror and showed us who we are.\(^{82}\) *The Weather Project* was a sacred place for me, a celebration of the miracle of our universe and life.

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Sunflower Seeds by Ai Weiwei

*Sunflower Seeds* consisted of more than one hundred million, individually hand-sculpted and hand-painted porcelain sunflower seed husks which covered one thousand square meters to a depth of ten centimetres, it took sixteen hundred skilled artisans and over two years to make them. This complex work had many themes. For example, John Jarvis maintained that Ai Weiwei is motivated to encourage freedom of thought and has a strong belief in ‘the transformative possibilities of society.’ The internet was a significant part of the installation, Ai used it to respond to the public’s questions about the show and its prominence highlighted the new possibilities for the Chinese people now that hundreds of

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millions of them have internet access.\textsuperscript{85}

The seeds themselves were symbols of a number of things.\textsuperscript{86} Firstly, the manufacture of the seeds, combined mass production and traditional craftsmanship which encouraged examination of the ‘Made in China’ phenomenon and the global economy that drives the manufacture of what Ai described as ‘useless’ things.\textsuperscript{87} Sunflower seeds also symbolised human compassion and friendship for Ai, they were a street snack he shared with friends when he and his family were poor and exiled during his childhood.\textsuperscript{88} The seeds were also potent symbols of Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution (1966–76) when Mao was depicted as the sun and the people as sunflowers turning towards him.\textsuperscript{89}

Initially viewers could walk on and play in the installation but the ceramic dust that created caused health concerns and the installation was roped off to the public after three days. Durkheim said ‘sacred things are those things protected and isolated by prohibitions; profane things … must keep their distance from what is sacred.’\textsuperscript{90} The prohibition attracted huge media coverage and perhaps increased visitor numbers and maybe, in Durkheim’s terms, it increased the sacredness of the seeds and identified the visitors as profane.

My first reaction to the exhibition was shock, the whole area was very grey and quiet which was unexpected. I then became fascinated by the seeds and

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\textsuperscript{90} Durkheim, Elementary Forms, p. 40.
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wanted to jump into them, to run and make a noise; that it was prohibited by then was very disappointing, the seeds seemed to call out for interaction. Looking at the seeds I became confused, trying to grasp the sheer number of them. I picked one up and was surprised by its weight and size, it was much bigger and heavier than a real sunflower but the work was exquisite. I could 'feel' the love and skill involved its painstaking manufacture. I was deeply moved, I wanted to cry. I imagined the artisans working; I felt I was one of them, focused, precise, and careful; they were somehow communicating with me through a small piece of porcelain and I experienced a sense of unity with them and all humanity. The Turbine Hall disappeared for a time. When I read Ai’s explanation of the installation and by implication, the suffering he and others had endured, his story seemed to become embedded deep within me.

Abram argued that human-made artefacts inevitably retain an ‘element of more-than-human otherness’ usually from the materials they are made from, ‘they still carry, like our bodies, the textures and rhythms of a pattern that we ourselves did not devise, and their quiet dynamism responds directly to our senses’ so the materials ‘contribute their more-than-human resonances to human culture.’

Lane concurred, he said ‘one begins to suspect that the contemplation of any ordinary thing, made extraordinary by attention and love, can become an occasion for glimpsing the profound.’

Sunflower Seeds constituted a sacred place for me. As Weightman suggested, ‘in sacred places, material phenomena are dematerialised and worldly substance becomes diaphanous as spirituality pervades.’

Conclusion

The definitions of sacred place above included an experience of the numinous, a sense spirit and/or connectedness, story, symbol and ritual. In different ways, each of the three installations became a sacred space for me. I experienced awe, terror, excitement, joy, and the connectedness of everyone on the planet. From contemporaneous reports, the installations seem to have

91 Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous, pp. 64; 278 note 22
92 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, p. 68.
caused similar responses in others, although it is impossible to assess whether or not they viewed the installations as sacred places and assuredly, some people had very different experiences to mine. The artists themselves do not seem to have set out intentionally to create a sacred place. This implies that my experiences, at least in part, were connected to a personal construct. As Lane suggested, perhaps a sacred place ... ‘is transformed by the imagination to that which is awe-inspiring and grand.’

Is sacred space a human construct? From a cultural perspective it is, undoubtedly. Chidester and Linenthal argued that every human attribution of sacredness is always a social construction of reality and that ‘virtually any place can become sacred’ because of the human activity involved in its ‘sacralisation.’ However, Lane argued that the idea of sacred place is more complicated, it can be ‘ephemeral, subjective, and hard to define,’ he said, it shared the ‘ultimate impenetrability of all spiritual experience.’

From phenomenological and ontological perspectives it is more difficult to be certain. The unexpected, phenomenological experience of place as ‘chora,’ in which, like Abram, we find the world ‘speaks,’ seems to involve something other than an individual’s idea of the world and their imagination. All experiences of the numinous seem to originate in something ‘other,’ as Otto described and to attempt to categorise that as a human construct is counter-intuitive. Lane thought sacred place ‘was more than a construction of the human imagination alone.’ This paper is in agreement with him and asserts that some art installations do generate scared space.

94 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, pp. 29.
96 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, pp. 217-218.
97 Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous, pp. 81.
98 Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, pp. 4.
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Can phenomenological fieldwork yield a richer understanding of the role of sacred caves in ancient Maya cosmology?

by Christopher Layser

Based upon a prevalent opinion that caves represent one of the best contexts for the investigation of ancient Mesoamerican religion, fieldwork at Barton Creek Cave, Cayo District, Belize is used, in conjunction with ontological and cultural evidence, to evaluate whether a phenomenological methodology could improve our understanding of the role of caves as sacred space within Maya cosmology. A canoe excursion into the cave, retracing the path of shamanic pilgrimage, provides a framework for the discussion of whether this portal to the underworld exists as a true hierophany as defined by Eliade or as a purely cultural construct. Comparisons are then drawn between this experience and astronomical iconography to argue for the existence of the belief in a sky-cave duality which may have represented a form of cosmological totality.

Introduction

The aim of this research is to determine whether a deeper perspective into the ancient Maya perception of caves as sacred space can be gained through phenomenological investigation and to ascertain how reflexive inquiry may shed light on facets of their cosmology. Brian Fagan notes that for thousands of years ‘the cave functioned as a primordial sacred place, with its passages leading to the dark unknown- to the very bowels of the earth.’¹ As such, according to Holley Moyes and her colleagues, archaeological, iconographic, and epigraphic studies of ancient Mesoamerican cave sites have led to the ‘establishment of caves as sacred space and their use as ritual venues by pre-

Columbian people’. In this study, ontological and cultural consideration, in conjunction with phenomenological fieldwork at Barton Creek Cave, Cayo District, Belize, is used to explore the following topics: whether the cave as portal to the underworld presents itself as a true hierophany in the Eliadean sense or rather as a human/cultural construct, whether a re-creation (in part) of the pilgrimage to the underworld can provide insight as to the possible mood and motivation of the participants, and lastly to speculate whether connections can be drawn between the spatial opposition of the cave journey experience and the movement of the night sky.

Fieldwork Methodology

Three approaches to the further understanding of sacred space have been put forth by Belden Lane – the ontological, cultural, and phenomenological- all of which can be applied here to the study of Maya cave use. The ontological approach has at its core ethnographical investigations into indigenous examples of Mircea Eliade’s notion that ‘every sacred space implies a hierophany, an eruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different.’ An example of this approach is illustrated in Linda Schele’s description of a shamanistic ritual ceremony which she had witnessed by candlelight in a deep narrow cave near Uatlatan, Guatemala, wherein she relays that the local K’iche Maya understand the cave to be ‘alive with the most powerful energies of the Otherworld.’ A cultural approach, Lane explains, considers the inter-relationship between religion and the culture to which it pertains, and is therefore able to anchor the analysis of sacred space ‘within the critical

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discourse of social science methodology’.\(^6\) This opposing approach—founded in Emile Durkheim’s notion of sacred space as a ‘social’ construct— is included in this research by way of examination of select iconographic and epigraphic examples as well as a review of secondary literary sources concerning the role of caves in ancient Maya cosmology.\(^7\) Lastly, a phenomenological approach, Lane argues, gives voice to the landscape itself and stresses the importance of ‘embodiment in the human experience of place’.\(^8\)

Keith M. Prufer and James E. Brady argue that since ‘archaeological remains found in caves unequivocally represent the remains of ritualized actions of a religious nature, caves represent the single best context for the archaeological investigation of Maya religion.’\(^9\) In lieu of archaeological survey and excavation, which was beyond the scope of this research, a phenomenological methodology, reinforced with iconographic and epigraphic evaluation, was applied to the investigation of this site. A phenomenological approach to archaeology stresses the personal experiences of the individual on ‘the way in which encounters with the [material culture] shape our understanding of the world’.\(^10\) Mark Vagle notes that the ‘primary purpose of phenomenology as a research methodology, stemming from its philosophical roots, is to study what it is like as we find-ourselves-being-in-relation-with others… and other things.’\(^11\) Academic rational for this approach is supported by the assertion of Daniel Montello and Holley Moyes that phenomenology can

\(^6\) Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, p.43
\(^7\) Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, (New York: The Free Press, 1995 [1912]) p. 441
\(^8\) Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, p.44
\(^11\) Mark D. Vagle, Crafting Phenomenological Research, (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2014) p.20
suggest ‘the shared human experience of the cave is a major factor establishing and maintaining typological designations and meanings.’

The original subject of this research was to be Actun Tunichil Muknal, or ATM Cave, but a tropical storm and subsequent flooding resulted in the temporary closure of the site, which afforded the opportunity to explore the nearby Barton Creek Cave site until the flooding had subsided. Water flowing from the mouths of both caves—each located in the Cayo District of western Belize near the towns of San Ignacio and Santa Elena—feeds tributaries of the Belize River Valley (see figure 1). In the course of this fieldwork both Barton Creek and ATM cave were visited through coordination with Cayo Adventure Tours, but ultimately the decision was made to change focus to Barton Creek Cave, the smaller of the two sites. One reason for this decision was the exclusivity of experience afforded by the low volume of tourists in relation to ATM. Another was the means of motion through the watery cave, in this case by canoe. In times past Maya shaman would have undertaken such a pilgrimage in dugout canoes, or jukuub, by fire-lit torches. Similarly, our excursion would be made in an aluminum canoe by electric torchlight. Christopher Tilley notes that a journey such as this, taken along a prescribed path, can be claimed to be a ‘paradigmatic cultural act, since it is following in the steps inscribed by others whose steps [or in this case paddle strokes] have worn a conduit for movement which becomes the correct [way to go]’. This conduit of movement would take me, accompanied by my certified Cayo tour guide, against the slow current of the wide stream flowing from the maw of Barton Creek Cave.

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14 Christopher Tilley, A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments, (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997) p.31
As a modern English-speaking, middle-aged American of European descent- a cultural outsider from the perspective of the ancient Maya to be sure- of primary consideration is the objectivity and reflexivity in experiencing the phenomena of this pilgrimage in the wake of the shaman of old. As a reflexive tool to place myself within the experience and to further establish relation-with-place, I imagine myself as a spiritual initiate of a different age accompanying the shaman/guide, armed with a life-time of experience, on my first pilgrimage of discovery to the underworld. This phenomenological exercise-the act of moving through the cave in this manner and mindset- is the primary approach used in this research, though it should be noted that constraints did not allow for multiple visits to the cave, extended periods of quiet reflection within the cave, or exiting the canoe to closer investigate the cultural remains deposited on the ledges.
Author’s field journal excerpt 1 (edited): My guide and I- one paddling at stern, the other holding the light at prow- put into the clear water which flowed from the mouth of the cave and began our slow progression towards the open maw of the mountain. We soon crossed the threshold of the cave’s mouth- the demarcation between the outside world and the karstic opening into the earth.

Figure 2: Barton Creek Cave mouth, Cayo District, Belize, with the reflection of the daytime sky. Photo by author, 2015
Thresholds such as this, according to Linda Schele and David Freidel, whether between night and day, the sea and the shore, or ‘the surface of the earth and the underground as in a cave... were intrinsically powerful and ambiguous’ for the ancient Maya.\(^\text{15}\) Eliade expresses this concept of threshold as ‘the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds—and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.’\(^\text{16}\) Perspective on this threshold is added by Moyes, who explains that the Maya ‘envisioned the vertical axis of the cosmos as consisting of the sky, the middle world or earth, and the underworld’, and therefore caves, as literal geographic entrances into the earth, were ‘one of the most salient features of the sacred landscape because they reify the cosmology of this three-tiered universe representing a conduit between the middle world of humans and the underworld.’\(^\text{17}\)

Residing at this threshold was the rain god Chaak, whose realm was associated with the area from the mouth of the cave to the edge of the twilight-zone.\(^\text{18}\) Figure 3, an illustration from the Dresden Codex, shows Chaak seated in the mouth of the cave, where the walls themselves depict two important

\(^{16}\) Eliade, The Sacred and The Profane, p.25
\(^{17}\) Holley Moyes, ‘Constructing the Underworld: The Built Environment in Ancient Mesoamerican Caves’, Association for Mexican Cave Studies Bulletin, No. 23, (2012), p.8
\(^{18}\) Moyes, ‘Constructing the Underworld’, p.13
iconographic cave characteristics—earth, or kàab and water, ha. This zone was often used for public rituals and ceremonies, though Keith Prufer notes a ‘widespread distinction between twilight-zone public-ritual activities and activities in more restricted dark zone areas’. The latter was restricted to ritual specialists. This is supported by Moyes’ study of man-made architectural modifications at a cave located near Las Cuevas, Belize, wherein she demonstrates that constructed cave architecture ‘materializes cosmology and creates narratives predicated on mythological concepts’ which ‘create a framework that guides participants in their journeys through the Maya underworld.’

Author’s field journal excerpt 2 (edited): On our journey, the clear fresh stream shaded by the cave mouth—juxtaposed to the midday heat of the jungle outside— is cool and inviting. Though saddled with the responsibility illuminating our path, I attempt to open myself to the experience, feeling the rippling water beneath the oar emanating, perhaps, a sense of the sacred.

But does this sense of sacred represent a true hierophany, an Eliadean portal to the Otherworld discernible only to the ‘religious man’? Or is it primarily a human construct, as Durkheim contends— that it is made sacred by being ‘set apart and forbidden’, and remains sacred only as long as culture continues to consider it so? Moyes and Brady, experts in the field, clearly feel that across Mesoamerica, caves as sacred space are indeed ‘culturally constructed’. Phenomenological and reflexive consideration and evaluation was brought to bear on addressing this sacred/profane dichotomy— whether this portal to the underworld held intrinsic spiritual power in and of itself, or whether it maintained the cultural designations and meanings attributed to it—

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20 Moyes, ‘Constructing the Underworld’, p.7
21 Eliade, The Sacred and The Profane, p.20
22 Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, p. xivi
but ultimately no incontrovertable evidence of hierophany presented itself during this feildwork. Though clearly my surroundings had dramatically changed, as I passed through the threshold of the cave mouth there was no definitive feeling that I had crossed cosmic dimensions and no longer remained in the earthly realm. There remains the distinct possibility that, as an outsider, this observer was not sufficiently attuned to the spiritual world to be able to detect, discern, or recognize such a phenomena—perhaps a limitation of both the observer and the methodology. The methodology and scope, for instance, did not allow for the type of continued repetition of visitation that Tilley suggests may be required to ultimately experience the sense of sacredness.24 Perhaps the opening of the portal did indeed require, as the Maya believed, the letting of blood—a cultural act clearly beyond the scope of this work.25 Or perhaps the lack of any clear evidence for the existence of hierophany, making the cave qualitatively different from the profane space surrounding it, serves as a testament to the nature of sacred space as a human construct.

A Pilgrimage to Xibalba

Author’s field journal excerpt 3 (edited): With the twilight-zone of public ceremony, and the relatively safety of the realm of Chaak astern, I am struck by how tenuous is our source of illumination surrounded by so much water. The last vestiges of sunlight vanish behind us, and only the light of the flashlight now dances across the awe-inspiring cavern ceiling and across the rippled water, much as the shaman’s torch of wood and fire would have a millennia before. As we progress further into the cave, the only sound is that of the oar dipping into water. Beyond is darkness and apprehension. It is not hard to imagine a forboding sense of dread felt by successive pilgrims—accumulating over the centuries of the cave’s use as a ritual circuit.

24 Tilley, A Phenomenology of Landscape, pp. 74-75
25 Schele and Freidel, A Forest of Kings, p. 70
Though the Maya three-tiered worldview was comprised of the underworld, earth and sky, the sky was further subdivided into thirteen levels, six ascending levels from the eastern horizon to the Zenith— which is the seventh, and six descending towards the western horizon. Likewise, the underworld, which the Kʻiche Maya called Xibalba, was subdivided into nine levels, four descending levels down the western horizon to the Nadir— the fifth level, and another four ascending levels to the eastern horizon.

The cave was portrayed in iconography as the Maw of the Underworld, to which the Maya undertook pilgrimages in order to ‘renew their ties with the

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26 Moyes, ‘Constructing the Underworld’, p.11
27 Schele and Freidel, A Forest of Kings, p.66
sources of sacred power.’ Pilgrimages, as explained by Simon Coleman and J. Elsner, involve ‘not only movement through space but also an active process of response as the pilgrim encounters both the journey and the goal.’ This is similar in concept to what Mayanist Kathryn Reese-Taylor refers to as ritual circuits. She defines a ritual circuit as ‘movement from one location to another during the course of a political or religious ceremony...punctuated by stops to perform ritual acts at stations, specific locales along the circuit’. Phenomenological recreation (to the extent possible), in conjunction with the archaeological evidence, suggests that the Barton Creek Cave site was used as such a ritual circuit, representing- and becoming- pilgrimage to underworld. Participants likely stopped to climb from their canoes at one or more of the rock ledges which flank the central watercourse, or on to one of the flowstone bridges that cross it, as is evidenced by the cultural remains of ritualized actions discovered resting directly on the surface of the ledges. Archaeological investigations conducted in the late nineties by the Western Belize Regional Cave Project determined that of the 10 kilometers of the cave that had been surveyed cultural material was found only in the first 450 meters, deposited on these ten ledges (Figure 5).

Among the ceramic and lithic artifacts, human remains were discovered on six of the ten ledges (Figures 6 and 7). Analysis of the skeletal, contextual, and mortuary data by Vanessa Owens suggests that ‘the majority of the internments were victims of sacrifice.’ Though hints can be gleaned from epigraphic and iconographic references throughout Mesoamerica, it remains a mystery and matter of debate as to whether these are the remains of willing sacrifices—perhaps even loved ones from the community—or unwilling captives from a rival polity. In the role of one who may be required to take the life of these human sacrifices, I imagine the task, though deemed necessary, to be nevertheless a disagreeable and uneasy one. Furthermore, I surmise this

33 Owens, ‘A Question of Sacrifice’, p. 336
journey into the realm of the dark gods, stripped of it’s twenty-first century safeguards of electric light, moderate traffic, and government-sanctioned tour guides would only serve to escalate unease to dread.

Figure 6: Surface deposit of Ceramic cultural material on one of the many ledges in Barton Creek Cave, Belize. Photo by author, 2015
Author’s field journal excerpt 4 (edited): The light of the electric torch catches the tiny droplets of water forming on the cavern ceiling causing their reflection to twinkle like starlight. Before long we are again ducking our heads as the canoe passes beneath another natural stone bridge connecting ledges. My guide breaks the silence and informs that during a recent training session with archaeologist Holley Moyes, it was suggested that each of these nine ledges—with their evidence of activity and sacrifice—represented one of the nine levels of Xibalba. Furthermore…

Moyes suggests that there is an underworld deity associated with each level, and the deeper one progresses into the cave, the increasingly more malevolent they become.34 The *Popol Vuh* gives names to these Lords of Xibalba in order of dominance: One Death, Seven Death, Blood Gatherer, Scab Stripper, Demon of Pus, Demon of Jaundice, Bone Scepter, Skull Scepter, Demon of Filth, Demon of Woe, Wing, and Packstrap.35 These pilgrimages through the cave had

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34 Moyes, ‘Constructing the Underworld’ p.11

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*Figure 7: Human sacrificial remains on one of the many ledges in Barton Creek Cave, Belize. Photo by author, 2015*
as their goal ‘communion, supplication, and offering to the deities of the underworld’, where the cave was ‘not just representing, but existing as the underworld’.\textsuperscript{36} Elements such as encounters with dangerous gods from the realm of death, the watery blackness where the accidental dousing of a torch could mean being lost in the dark, the storied remains of past human sacrifice amid the likelihood of additional human sacrifice on each new procession- all combine to create an overwhelming sense of foreboding. There seems little similarity to pilgrimages undertaken in brighter settings, such as journeys to Jerusalem to experience proximity to holy lands or Buddhist quests to Bodhgaya for the attainment of enlightenment.\textsuperscript{37} These appear to be pilgrimages of dread, seemingly taken in desperation- a supplication to dangerous powers to keep the evil at bay.

\textbf{Connecting the Cave and Sky}

It is important to note that the Maya three-tiered cosmological model consisting of the underworld, earth and sky is inter-connected, and any discussion of one realm would be incomplete without relating it to the others. It has already been demonstrated that caves represented a threshold between the earth and the underworld. I contend that the much of the iconography pertaining to the cave has its antecedents in the night sky. Consider Evon Vogt and David Stuart’s statement, in discussing the epigraphic qualities of the cave glyph \textit{ch’een}, that

An important and recurring ritual term in the inscriptions is \textit{chan ch’een}, ‘sky-cave’…the combination of the terms is curious, and we know of no direct parallel in historical Mayan languages. Nonetheless, it is interesting to entertain

\textsuperscript{37} Coleman and Elsner, Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions, p. 196
the possibility that ‘sky-cave’ presents a spatial opposition that indicates some universal totality...\textsuperscript{38}

\textit{Figure 8: chan ch’een, "sky-cave" (Thompson number T561. 571:23), redrawn by author, 2015}

Although a concrete interpretation of the concept of sky-cave is still lacking, it is interesting to compare to observations of Dennis Tedlock, commenting on a passage from the \textit{Popol Vuh} in which the Hero Twins journey to Xibalba, wherein he notes that

they come to a Crossroads, where each of the four roads has a different color corresponding to a different direction. They choose the Black Road, which means, at a terrestrial level, that their journey through the underworld will take them from east to west. At a celestial level, it means that they were last seen in the black cleft of the Milky Way when they descended below the eastern horizon: to this day the cleft is called the Road to Xibalba.\textsuperscript{39}

Harvey and Victoria Bricker point out epigraphic verification of the Milky Way represented as the \textit{Road to Xibalba} in a Cholan-Mayan reading of a Dresden Codex eclipse table augury caption (see Figure 8) as \textit{ah chamal u bib chan}, or ‘death is the road of the sky’.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{40} Harvey M. Bricker and Victoria R. Bricker, Astronomy in the Maya Codices, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2011), pp. 835
Key to this particular phenomenological fieldwork was the necessary means of motion through the cave—specifically, the paddling of a canoe. This mode of transportation has parallels in Maya iconography in the form of two Paddlers Gods whose canoeing is transformational as it involves the crossing of cosmic realms.\(^\text{41}\) Susan Milbrath suggests that ‘the notion of the two traveling in a canoe suggests a trip through the watery underworld’—a position further supported by a depiction on one ceramic vessel which shows the Paddlers in separate canoes ‘positioned in quatrefoil designs that may represent a cave-like entry into the underworld’.\(^\text{42}\) Figure 10 depicts an image of the paddlers ferrying the Maize god—Jaguar Paddler at prow and Stingray Paddler at stern—which comes from an incised bone recovered from the tomb of HaSaw Chaan K’awil at Tikal, Guatemala.\(^\text{43}\) Karen Bassie-Sweet notes that the text accompanying this image ‘uses the “Venus over the cab cave” glyph as a verb indicating that the location of the water is a cave’ and that these deities are therefore ‘travelling across the water of the cave that separates the world from the Underworld.’\(^\text{44}\) But the Paddler gods are primarily oppositional astronomical figures—the Stingray Paddler’s k’\textit{in} insignia associating him to the daytime sun, and the Jaguar Paddler’s ak’\textit{ab} insignia relating to night/darkness, associating him with the nocturnal aspect of the sun.\(^\text{45}\) Furthermore, the Paddler Gods appear to be closely tied to the Milky Way, which Milbrath suggests ‘may

\(^{41}\) Stone and Zender, Reading Maya Art, p. 51

\(^{42}\) Susan Milbrath, Star Gods of the Maya: Astronomy in Art, Folklore, and Calendars, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), pp. 127-129

\(^{43}\) Stone and Zender, Reading Maya Art, p. 51


\(^{45}\) Stone and Zender, Reading Maya Art, p. 51
be a divine river in some contexts, and a canoe is required for the crossing.\textsuperscript{46} In fact, the image in figure 10 has been interpreted as a depiction of the Paddler Gods, accompanied by four zoomorphic creatures with their own astrological significance, ferrying the Maize God along the watery road from Xibalba, along the Milky Way, in participation in the act of creation of the current cosmos.\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure10.png}
\caption{Jaguar Paddler at prow and Stingray Paddler at stern, part of assembly of seven gods on incised bones (MT38a) from tomb of HaSaw Chaan K’awil (Burial 116 at Tikal) image: Freidel, David A., Linda Schele, and Joy Parker. Maya Cosmos: Three Thou Thousand Years on the Shaman’s Path (New York: W. Morrow, 1993), p. 90}
\end{figure}

In the hope of better illustrating, visually, the relationship of these various canoe voyages - the ferrying of the Maize God by the Paddler Gods, the cave pilgrimage of the ancient Maya shaman, and my own phenomenological fieldwork retracing their path - I wish to superimpose these concepts onto an indigenous depiction of the Classic Maya worldview - an elaborately portrayed cosmogram painted on a tripod plate which was ‘intended to hold the blood that helped open a portal to the Otherworld.’\textsuperscript{48} The Maw of the Underworld, the opened cave-portal, is illustrated in this painting as a skeletal-jawed-serpent out of which flow the pure life bearing waters of the Underworld. This serpent representing the underworld is depicted along the lower half of the plate rim, to which I have added numerical identifiers to what I interpret as symmetrical representations of the different levels of the underworld (Figure 11). Conversely, the two-headed Cosmic Monster which represents the Milky Way, adorns the upper half of the rim.\textsuperscript{49} Though no labels have been added here, the

\textsuperscript{46} Milbrath, Star Gods of the Maya, p.127  
\textsuperscript{47} Freidel, Schele and Parker, Maya Cosmos, pp.89-92  
\textsuperscript{48} Schele and Freidel, A Forest of Kings, p.69  
\textsuperscript{49} Milbrath, Star Gods of the Maya, p 275-282
eastern horizon would represent the first level of the sky, the Zenith the seventh, and the western horizon the thirteenth level. These two zoomorphic serpentine representations circumscribe a whole body of cosmological iconography, including: Chaak as the rising Evening-star, the World Tree as axis mundi, inverted Xibalbans mirroring the middle world, and figures from the Popol Vuh.

Against this backdrop I have inserted two additional images- the cave map of Barton Creek and the depiction of the Paddler Gods, in their correct position and orientation in relation to the Cosmogram/plate, in order to provide a visual representation of the spatial opposition of the sky-cave concept as hinted at by Vogt and Stuart and to connect the cave and sky as reciprocal components of the same Cultural Astronomy. Counter-clockwise motion around the Cosmogram traces out not only the path of pilgrims and paddlers, but that of the Sun, Moon, and Venus as well. More precisely, Schele and Freidel explain that the Maya believed that ‘at sundown Xibalba rotated above the earth to become the night sky’.50

50 Schele and Freidel, A Forest of Kings, p.66
Author’s field journal excerpt 5 (edited): As we approached approximately a quarter mile from the cave’s mouth, the once-high cavern ceiling was now mere feet above our heads, and my guide informed that although the cave stretched on for over five more miles,
it would soon be too dangerous to proceed any further by canoe. Having passed the furtherest extent of ancient Maya cultural remains and known activity, we turned and headed back the way we came, ascending from deep within the Underworld. If indeed there was a sense of traversing between realms, it was surely strongest as we approached the threshold of the cave mouth from the direction of deep within the bowls of the earth, as eyes adjusted to the brilliant sunlight around the bend.

As a final thought, here phenomenology can perhaps yield a new perspective on the development of such beliefs not directly accessible from examination of the archaeological record. As I emerged from the cave, for instance, I could picture participants gathered at the cave mouth engaged in organized public ritual- the threshold where sky (air), earth (stone), and underworld (water) meet. After sundown, perhaps the night sky could be seen reflected in the clear dark water at the mouth of the cave (refer to figure 2). Perhaps even a portion of the Milky Way would be visible, creating that sense of dualism and opposition so integral to Maya Cosmology. I could envision the religious specialists, the paddlers, progressing into the darkness of the cave, with their bound sacrificial captives in tow, the stars disappearing beneath and behind them as they descend into the underworld on their pilgrimage along the Road to Xibalba. Torchlight then catches the droplets of water on the cavern ceiling, reflecting much like the twinkle of stars in the night sky. Cosmic realms have been crossed; the sky, the cave and the Underworld have become one.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the aim of this research was to determine whether phenomenological fieldwork at Barton Creek Cave could yield a deeper understanding of the role of sacred caves and their place within ancient Maya Cosmology. Reflexive considerations were compared to cultural primary and secondary sources to suggest support of Durkheim’s position that the cave’s function as a portal to the underworld was a cultural construct of the Maya society. Partial re-creation of the experience of a presumed shamanic journey to the underworld suggested that these processions were pilgrimages of dread born of necessity and sacrifice. Connections were drawn between the motion through the cave (the pilgrimage) and the motion of the night sky (the Milky Way) in order to suggest a conceptual spatial opposition- which possibly
encapsulates some Maya concept of universal totality. Lastly, new lines of speculation were opened in consideration of the development and adoption of a sky-cave duality. This fieldwork has sought to demonstrate that phenomenological methodologies- completely independent of empirical survey, excavation, or disruption of the cultural remains at archaeological sites- can provide, through the experience of the researcher, new insight to the nature of sacred landscapes and their cultural significance.

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Is the Skirrid Mountain sacred? An exploration of myth in Welsh landscape

by Natalie Niblett

This paper discussed the idea of the sacred and explores the idea of a sacred mountain using the Skirrid Mountain in South Wales as an example. I’ve heard stories of the Skirrid from my father from a young age and was able to explore the landscape once again while completing this work looking for evidence of the stories I have known and the effect they have had on the local peoples. The mythology of the mountain has created an idea of sacredness in the local community and this suggests that sacred space may not be exclusively a national or international phenomenon but may exist at a local, community level.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore myth in Welsh landscape and to explore the meaning of sacred space and landscape using the Skirrid mountain as an example. The questions to be answered by this paper are; is sacred space a human construct? Is the Skirrid a sacred landscape? If so how and when did the Skirrid become sacred and who is it sacred to? These questions are important to this project and I will be researching local myths and legends in order to determine if it is a sacred place and why it has become known as the ‘Holy Mountain’\(^1\). The Skirrid mountain is located outside of Abergavenny in South Wales and is well-known to local people in Wales and around the UK. The methodology used to answer the proposed questions will include a field trip to the landscape itself to find any evidence of the various myths and stories surrounding the location. This project will use material that will include works by theorists such as Christopher Tilley and Belden C. Lane in regards to defining what sacred landscape is and how it became sacred. The work of Mircea Eliade will be utilised to suggest a definition of sacred space. These books and articles will compare the meaning of sacred mountains as Belden C

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\(^{1}\) Palmer, R. The Folklore of (old) Monmouthshire, (Chippenham, Logaston Press, 1998) p. 105
Lane suggests that ‘mountains have power—however one perceives it’.

This study will suggest that the Skirrid mountain is an example of a sacred mountain and that it fits as an exemplar location. I will then draw upon the arguments as to why the Skirrid has become a sacred landscape. Does humankind make it sacred?

**Methodology**

This paper is going to contain several phases of research: a literature based examination of the study of both sacred space and sacred mountains specifically, as well as the history of this area of Wales. It also contains an ethnographical element as I will be recounting the stories told to me by my father as well as reflexive work as I walk the landscape. Being born and bred in Wales all of my life for 34 years I have grown up with Welsh legends and myths of the countryside and landscape. Living in Wales and not being a Welsh speaker it is fascinating understanding about the stories behind the Welsh names of places.

In order to explore if the Skirrid was a sacred landscape I took a field trip and walked the route from the base of the mountain to the summit. During this expedition I studied in details the landscape looking out for evidence of and the features described in the stories that I have been told of the location. I also examined the local area to see what impact, if any, the landscape has had on the local peoples.

I took my camera with me and recorded the mountain and other evidence by way of photographs to document the surroundings.

**Academic Rationale and Reflexive Consideration**

In order to study sacred space it must first be defined. This has been discussed by academics over many years. It has been observed by Eliade that sacred can be described as ‘the opposite of the profane.’ He goes on to note that the sacred ‘always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from

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“natural” realities. This is not a universal definition as it suggests a duality that something can either be sacred or not which does not take into account that some people may differ on whether or not a location is sacred. The majority of studies examine sites of religious importance meaning that, as Spicer argued, sacred space may only become so only through this religious connection. For the purpose of this paper sacred space will be considered an area of difference where that difference is described in myth. There are numerous examples of sacred space around the world and mountains are frequently represented. One of the most famous would be Mount Sinai, where allegedly Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. (New Revised Standard Version, Exodus 19)

Mircea Eliade explores the idea that mountains have always been the primal place of divine encounter by describing the religious significance of high places and their proximity to holy beings that live in the sky. Belden Lane goes on to say that ‘Mountains have always absorbed the imagination in one way or another’. Here Eliade and Lane suggest that the mountains themselves are sacred landscapes. As Eliade notes:

Mountains are the nearest thing to the sky, and are thence endowed with a twofold holiness: on one hand they share in the spatial symbolism of transcendence-they are high ... and ... they are the especial domain of all hierophanies of atmosphere, and therefore, the dwelling of the gods.

As a young girl growing up in South Wales in the late 80s and early 90s, I was drawn to the concept of mountains being sacred and having grown up in Wales, I am used to this mountainous region. I used to spend a lot of time when I was young walking with my father around these mountains without taking the time to marvel at the beauty, I just took it for granted that these mountains have always been here and were made the way they are. I decided to choose

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7 Lane, p. 96
8 Eliade, M. Patterns In Comparative Religion, p. 99
this as my research project as the myths and legends that my father told me of this area fascinated me and made the mountains feel more magical.

The familiarity that I have with this landscape is going to have an impact on my study as I seek to find evidence to back up the stories that I know. I was drawn to the idea of a sacred landscape, particularly a mountainous landscape, as Tilley and Lane both describe the religious significance that mountains have. I have chosen this as my research project as I believe that mountains may be sacred both in a religious context and as part of local mythology, but I have chosen the Skirrid intentionally as it does not have a high profile as examples such as Mount Sinai. However, it holds many myths and has a religious connection that many are not aware of. As Lane states, ‘the holy mountain is one of the most ancient and appealing of all sacred sites – from the thunderous cliffs of Sinai to the Delectable Mountains of Bunyan’s dream’.

The Skirrid

The Skirrid, Ysgyryd Fawr (Big Rough) in Welsh, mountain is located in the area around Abergavenny in the county of Monmouthshire which is in South Wales and has a height of 486m above sea level. This area and mountain is part of the Brecon Beacons national park, and is well known and used by keen walkers as part of the three peaks challenge which includes the Sugarloaf and Blorenege mountains. Abergavenny is surrounded by seven hills, Skirrid Fawr (Big Skirrid), Ysgyryd Fach (small), Blorenege, Deri, Rholeen, Llanwnerth Brest and Sugarloaf. As a challenge mountain walkers aim to climb all seven in one day. These mountains dominate the landscape of Monmouthshire. The Skirrid and its neighbours all have an interconnected mythology. The location of the Skirrid in the local landscape is shown in figure one.

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10 Lane, p. 96
11 Abergavenny, Gateway To Wales, Skirrid Fawr, (Abergavenny)
http://www.abergavenny.org.uk/skirrid.htm [accessed 3.01.2016]
12 Palmer, p. 103-106
The writer and scholar Alan Garner has written extensively about his childhood and stories that he was told growing up. He has said that ‘it was imperative that I should know my place. That can be achieved only by inheriting one’s childhood landscape.’ In his 2010 article, *By Seven Firs And Goldenstone*, Garner describes his exploration of the landscape where he grew up in the context of a story he was told by his grandfather. This is similar to this study in that I am examining a landscape local to my childhood in the context of the stories that I grew up hearing. In this way I am completing a complementary study into a different location using a similar methodology which may reinforce Garner’s study and find ‘my answer in the land, because the land itself is a narrative, paths and waymarkers its stories.’

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15 Garner, p. 19
Literature Review

In order to discuss whether the Skirrid is a sacred space there must be an agreed ‘general theoretical perspective on the significance of spaces, places and landscapes.’ Mircea Eliade has suggested that for persons of a religious leaning the world itself is sacred due to belief in a religious origin. However, it has been observed that for the religious and non-religious space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others. If true then that poses the question as to what, or who, makes these places sacred. Bokser suggests an answer: ‘Although these places are not inherently holy and cannot become holy on their own, they may yet become holy or sacred through human action’. Tilley builds on this by suggesting that ‘A social space, rather than being uniform and forever the same, is constituted by differential densities of human experience, attachment and involvement’. According to this statement landscapes only become sacred because of human sentiment and attachment with that particular landscape. Tilley discusses the idea of landscape utilising an argument from Cosgrove:

landscape is a uniquely valuable concept for a human geography. Unlike place it reminds us of our position in the scheme of nature. Unlike environment or space it reminds us that only through human consciousness and reason is that scheme known to us, and only through technique can we participate as humans in it. At the same time landscape reminds us that geography is everywhere, that it is a

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16 Tilley, pp 7-34
20 Tilley, p. 11
constant source of beauty and ugliness, of right, and wrong and joy and suffering, as much as it is of profit and loss’.\(^{21}\)

Lane makes a brief discussion of mountains in Christianity and various other religions. He suggests that there are ‘mythical mountains assuming far more grandeur than any found on map or chart.’\(^{22}\) He goes on to describe examples from Christian literature such as the following from Revelations ‘and he carried me away in the spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.’\(^{23}\) As Eliade states, ‘the sacred mountain is an *axis mundi* connecting earth with heaven.’\(^{24}\) This suggests that mountains themselves are holy in the Christian faith.

Bender describes landscapes of Britain and suggests three types: London, the English countryside and upland areas of Britain which includes Wales.\(^{25}\) The landscape surrounding the Skirrid matches her description of the third type. As Bender states ‘it is here that the monuments and symbols of ‘ancient’ Britons are located…areas to be preserved rather than protected’\(^{26}\) Bender goes on to describe the ‘brutish and bestial’ peoples that are to be found in this upland landscape, of which the Welsh peoples could be considered an example.\(^{27}\) If this stereotypical and negative view of the residents is true then it calls into question the stories that these persons tell of their surroundings. This then poses the question of just who are these landscapes sacred to. If the myths surrounding upland regions are stories told by brutish residents then are these areas only sacred to these peoples? Does the sacredness only go as far as the story?

**Mythology of the Skirrid**

The stories of the Skirrid are those told to me by my father whilst out walking the mountain and its surroundings as a young girl. These stories were

\(^{21}\) Tilley, p. 25  
\(^{22}\) Lane, p. 98  
\(^{23}\) Lane, p. 98 referencing Revelations 21:10  
\(^{24}\) Eliade, p. 38  
\(^{25}\) Bender, p. 299  
\(^{26}\) Bender, p. 299  
\(^{27}\) Bender, p. 299
an attempt to explain our surroundings. I had no idea that these stories had their origin in the past.

The most famous legend surrounding the Skirrid and the origin of its reputation as the ‘Holy Mountain’ is that of the fissure found at the summit. The story goes that this fissure opened at the same time that Jesus Christ was crucified. A bolt of lightning allegedly impacted the top and cracked the mountain creating a fissure which is the main focal point of the landscape which we see today. At the same time, a spring of holy, healing water sprang forth from the mountain.\(^\text{28}\)

As Garner states, ‘the technical definition of a legend is: “a fanciful story associated with a place and believed to be true by the people that live there”’,\(^\text{29}\)

This legend has been believed by local people as Palmer reports that ‘people set great store by earth from the Skirrid.’\(^\text{30}\) This earth was used for many reasons, some religious, such as the foundations of local churches and funeral rites and others were for good fortune, such as farmers to scatter on their fields.\(^\text{31}\) The local people would, and still do, make pilgrimages to the mountain on September 29\(^\text{th}\), Michaelmas Eve. All of this led to or was reflected in the construction of St. Michael’s Chapel at the summit of the mountain, around the start of the 17\(^\text{th}\) century, although the exact date is unknown.\(^\text{32}\)

This proximity to heaven associated with mountainous regions may account for the story of St. Michael the Archangel appearing at the summit to St. Dyfrig at what later became the site of a chapel.\(^\text{33}\) St. Dyfrig was a late 6\(^\text{th}\) century priest and later archbishop who is known in Welsh and English mythology as the man who crowned King Arthur in Silchester.\(^\text{34}\) This appearance reinforces the idea that the Skirrid is a holy place in the Christian

\(^{28}\) Palmer, p. 105

\(^{29}\) Garner, p. 6

\(^{30}\) Palmer, p. 105

\(^{31}\) Palmer, p. 105

\(^{32}\) The Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Historical Environment Record, St. Michael’s Chapel, (Swansea) [Accessed 13/08/16]

\(^{33}\) Palmer, p. 9

\(^{34}\) Palmer, p. 9
faith. It also suggests that mountainous terrain may be more susceptible to appearances from figures from heaven, similar to Mount Sinai.

A local tale tells of a giant known as Jack O’Kent. The giant had a disagreement with the Devil over which was bigger, the Sugarloaf or the Malvern Hills in England. Jack’s argument was that Sugarloaf was bigger and this proved to be right. In anger the Devil collected an apron of soil to tip over the Malvern Hills in order to make them the higher. As he was crossing the Skirrid the apron strings broke, forming the lump on the northern end of the mountain.

![Image](https://example.com/image.jpg)

*Figure 2: Bowring, Alan, View from landslip on Ysgyryd Fawr towards Sugarloaf, 2007, Digital Photograph, Image:Creative Commons Licence*

The devil appears again in another story of the Skirrid, that of the Devil’s table. The story goes that this outcropping of rock, see figure 2, played a part in
another story of Jack O’Giant. According to the legend, the Devil and Jack made a bet playing cards on the table. The bet was that the giant Jack would not be able to jump from the top of the Sugarloaf to the Skirrid. In attempting it, he made the jump and his foot created the landslide fissure. This is an alternative story to the fissure being caused by a reaction to the crucifixion of Christ. These stories are an example of an oral tradition that is neither true nor false, rather than a reporting of fact and are a good example of how conflicting mythologies can exist surrounding the same location. The use of the devil in describing a strange landscape is not abnormal: ‘Devil’ is used frequently in the naming of strangeness, especially of early works in the landscape. The sense is that they are ‘other’: unsafe things from long ago and a different form of time.\(^{35}\)

The mythology is the Skirrid is noteworthy in many ways. Of the three mountains surrounding the town of Abergavenny it is not the highest, which may mean that its connection to the religious aspect of height is not the only reasoning for its significance. Figure 3 shows its position in the surrounding countryside north east of Abergavenny. The mountain itself sits on the eastern edge of the Brecon Beacons national park and stands slightly alone in comparison to others. Due to its position it can be seen from a great distance from several directions. It may be that this visibility is what has caused its significance as more people are influenced by the presence of this singular mountain.

\[\text{Figure 3: Google Maps, NP7/@51.8414584,-3.0411773,12.75z (Earth View), 2016, Digital Image, Image: Google Maps/Google Earth Terms Of Service}\]

\[^{35}\text{Garner p. 11}\]
Fieldwork Results

On October 13\textsuperscript{th} 2015 I completed my own pilgrimage to the Skirrid in order to examine the site for evidence of the stories that I have been told. The mountain itself is a National Trust site and there is a marked walking route to climb it, see figure 4. On the day I embarked on this trek the weather was clear giving a good view of the landscape surrounding the Skirrid, putting it in context.

\textit{Figure 4: Image by Natalie Niblett taken on 13.10.2015 at the bottom of the Skirrid}
When approaching the summit the peak is at the northern end and the footpath travels across a plateau before reaching it. On a clear day, such as the one in which I travelled, it gives a clear view of the surrounding mountains. Figure 5 shows a view of Sugarloaf which, taller than the Skirrid, dominates the skyline to the west. Sugarloaf itself features in the mythology of the Skirrid and with its size and proximity it is understandable that the two will be irrevocably linked, both through its location and the story of Jack O’Kent.

Figure 6 shows the fissure at the top of the mountain. This fracture has caused a rockslide down the mountain and has left a permanent scar. It is clear from observation that this feature has been present for a great deal of time. However, there is no evidence that the mountain cracked at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus. Garner explained the idea of a legend developing to explain a natural feature when he said that ‘Legend, I have found, can be, in its origins, an attempt to retain perhaps to explain, a reality: news that time has warped: a game of Chinese Whispers passed from generation to generation, until the
meaning may be lost.\textsuperscript{36} Like many geographical features, as no human being was around to witness its formation, a legend has developed surrounding its origin.

The summit of the Skirrid is rocky and flat. The site of St. Michael’s chapel has all but gone. There is no indication that the chapel was on the site if you did not know that it was there. The summit itself has a view of both the English and Welsh countryside. Once there you cannot help but consider the journey that you have taken to reach the top and the stories that surround where you are. With my Welsh upbringing, this site is sacred and puts oneself in a contemplative mood, considering my position amongst the landscape. Figure 7 shows me enjoying the summit.

\textsuperscript{36} Garner, p. 8
Figure 7: Image by Natalie Niblett taken on 13.10.2015 at the top of the Skirrid

Figure 8: Image by Natalie Niblett taken on 13.10.2015 at the top of the Skirrid
The Devil's Table was more difficult to identify. The landscape of the Skirrid is strewn with rocks, many of which have the flat platform associated with a table. Figure 8 shows an object that resembles the description and location of the Devil’s Table but may or may not be the feature.

This difficulty shows the drawback of fieldwork of this type. Figure 9 shows another feature, found at the top of the mountain, that could be described as a table. These features are plentiful in this landscape. The story of the Devil’s Table, could be describing any of these features and depending on who is present it may be a different example at different times. Due to the extensive human activity surrounding the summit, such as ramblers exploring the National Trust site and the previously present chapel, the geography of this landscape changes over time and makes it difficult to study as what may provoke a story or myth one day may be gone or altered in years to come.

After the trip up the mountain I examined the local area to see what effect the mountain had. Figure 10 is the sign of The Skirrid Inn, which claims to be Wales’ Oldest Inn. The sign shows the image of the lightning striking the
summit of the mountain and creating the story that the mountain cracked at the
time of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. If it were not well known in the local area,
and believed by some, then this sign would not have been used here. This shows
how the mythology has had an impact on local people.

Figure 10: Image by Natalie Niblett taken on 13.10.2015 at the Skirrid Inn

Discussion

In the introduction I proposed several questions on the landscape
surrounding the Skirrid. Is the Skirrid a sacred landscape? How and when did
the Skirrid become sacred and who is it sacred to? Garner describes Alderley
Edge, a hill in Cheshire, as ‘liminal, a temenos if you will, a special, a holy or
haunted place…dependent on the historical view of the observer’. Garner describes Alderley
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Edge, a hill in Cheshire, as ‘liminal, a temenos if you will, a special, a holy or
haunted place…dependent on the historical view of the observer’.

This is similar to my feelings on the Skirrid. To myself, and other observers, the Skirrid
is itself a holy place, a place of myth and a sacred landscape.

37 Garner, p.17
Some of the features of the Skirrid described in the mythology are easily found, such as the fissure at the summit and the mound on the northern end of the mountain, whereas others, such as the Devil’s table, are more difficult to find even though they are identifiable geographical features. Although these features are in the landscape there is no evidence present to support the stories of their origins. The Skirrid has become sacred in order to explain some of the geographical features of the mountain. These stories have endured through many years even as the scientific understanding of the mountain has increased.

In this way the local peoples surrounding the Skirrid have created a sacred landscape to explain their surroundings, making the Skirrid a sacred landscape created by human action. The sacred nature of the mountain has not extended beyond the local region. These stories have formed a mythology surrounding the mountain that will linger long after the reasons for their origins have been explained and passed. These stories will be told from father to daughter, in the same way that my father told them to me, and beyond maintaining the Skirrid’s status as a sacred landscape in years to come. In this way the Skirrid can be seen to have an oral history in a similar manner to Alan Garner’s experience with Alderley Edge.\(^{38}\)

As an ethnographic study it is difficult to generalise from this work. The fieldwork I undertook was in order to find evidence of the stories that I had already been told. These tales have formed and evolved over a long period of time, whereas my fieldwork occurred on an individual day. Geographical features change over time; meaning the fieldwork may have different results at different time periods. As these features evolve over time, it may be that evidence of mythology on the Skirrid may be lost, leaving the stories themselves without any evidence. The same is true of any human-made objects as well, such as St. Michael’s Chapel.

It has been concluded that the Skirrid is an example of the sacred mountain and the idea that less well known examples of sacred mountains exist in local communities throughout the world. The study of sacred mountains in a religious context tends to focus on those with a higher profile which has given this paper a different focus than those referenced here. This has led to an understanding of sacredness that has come to include a community or local

\(^{38}\) Garner, p. 7
level rather than the national or international recognition of higher profile locations.

**Conclusion**

The aim of my work was to examine the position of the Skirrid in the context of sacred landscape in order to propose whether or not it fitted into the category of a sacred mountain. In order to do this several questions have been proposed and subsequently answered.

The Skirrid itself does fit the definition of a sacred landscape as suggested by the work of Lane, Tilley and others. It does not, however, have the same profile of other sacred mountains as the stories surrounding it have not had as widespread a cultural impact, only spreading to the surrounding area. It has been suggested that the mythology and stories have arisen in order to explain certain geographical features of the mountain. These stories have become so widespread in the local area that they have become a mythology that has endured, even as the scientific knowledge available has managed to explain the physical features of the mountain.

The Skirrid fits into the definition of a sacred mountain and the stories that make it to have arisen to explain the physical features of the mountain and their changes over time. These stories have been believed by local people for a great many years and have meant that the mountain has become sacred to them. Being as these stories have not spread beyond the local surroundings this sense of sacredness has not spread beyond those people who live in the surrounding landscape or know it well, but this does not diminish its sacredness. This shows how a sacred landscape is made so by the persons whom consider it sacred, creating a local, rather than national, sacredness.

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If sacred space is a human construct, does the power of a sacred space influence an individual’s experience of meditation compared with other mundane spaces?

by Anya Marco

Christopher Tilley argues that landscape possess powers drawn from use throughout the ages that can influence human experiences of the space. Tilley explains how an individual may experience the spirit of a place through a range of physical and emotional responses that can only be understood through the lens of phenomenology. This paper is a phenomenological enquiry into the power of place and whether or not a sacred space influences non-rational personal experiences. The research is based on reflexive personal meditations undertaken in three defined spaces; one, a defined sacred space, The Sanctuary in Avebury, the other two personal spaces in my own home. Each meditation differed significantly. Meditating in The Sanctuary was a potent experience, which impacted me through physical sensations and mental stillness, compared with the other two meditations, which were less impactful. Being in The Sanctuary significantly influenced my meditation and thus I feel that sacred space can heighten non-rational personal experiences.

Introduction

This phenomenological enquiry explores the idea that a sacred space influences non-rational personal experiences in that space by reflexively evaluating my personal experience of the quality of meditations in three separate spaces: one, a public megalithic site, the other two personal spaces in my own home. The paper aims to review the results of these meditations with particular focus on The Sanctuary using three key themes: the role of attachment and memory to an experience within a sacred space, the role of history as an influence, and whether the place does indeed possess power.
Academic Rationale

Christopher Tilley argues, ‘Precisely because locales and their landscapes are drawn on in the day-to-day lives and encounters of individuals, they possess powers. The spirit of a place may be held to reside in a landscape.’ Thus landscapes can influence human participants and their experiences of the place, within the place. The challenge is that spirit is a reflection of human encounters with that space, which are by definition phenomenological and thus vary from one individual to the next. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, (1908—1961) defines phenomenology as;

the study of essences and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy, which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their “facticity”.

Merleau-Ponty explains that experience cannot necessarily be understood or described in simple terms, but that the intractable conditions of existence include experiences that are difficult to explain.

Tilley, in conversation with Barbara Bender during a walking interview about his approach to Stonehenge, says

Doing a phenomenology of the landscape involves the intimacy of the body in all its senses. What I mean is that it’s synaesthetic, an affair of the whole body moving and sensing – a visionscape but also a soundscape, a touchscape, even a smellscape, a multi-sensory experience.

Therefore, an individual may experience the spirit of a place through a range of physical and emotional responses that can only be understood through the lens of phenomenology.

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Reflexive Considerations

A possible weakness with this project is my own reflexivity, which is described by Charlotte Aull Davies as ‘In its most transparent guise, reflexivity expresses researchers’ awareness of their necessary connection to the research situation and hence their effects upon it, what is sometimes called reactivity.’ However, Aull Davies advocates that in order to undertake any research, we must have a connection to it and that inevitable reflexivity means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference. In the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research.

Susan Greenwood explored the concept of magical consciousness. When writing about experiences she feels that the experience itself writes through you rather than writing about the experience. She recognises that this approach would be considered too subjective for academic anthropological fieldwork. However, she goes on to say

It does not matter how the experience is labelled, it is the experience itself that is important. This is another aspect of magical thinking that is important to remember: only the analytical mode is occupied by a quest for “objective” truth.

As a study of my own reaction to a space, this project will involve auto-ethnographic reflexivity and as such will mean the ‘blurred nature of subjective and objective’ as Greenwood describes it may be revealed in the results.

I am also biased to The Sanctuary, which must be acknowledged. This space has special significance for me and I have experienced phenomena while meditating there in the past. Meditation clears the mind aiming to simply observe thoughts and emotions without attachment. By taking this approach

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5 Aull Davies, Reflexive Ethnography: pp.14-17
7 Greenwood, Magical Consciousness, p.109
8 Greenwood, Magical Consciousness, p.109
and acknowledging potential bias I hope to be able to overcome and release any expectations that previously arise.

**Methodology**

The core approach of my research is a phenomenological enquiry, an attempt to investigate the phenomena I experience being in a specific place and based on a desire to understand my own experience of the space and, in particular, the influence The Sanctuary may or may not have on that experience. As Alan Bryam explains, phenomenology allows the research to explore peoples’ points of view and the meanings they attribute to their behaviour. In this case I am exploring my own point of view as a 45-year-old caucasian woman, living in London, and the meaning attributed to the experience. Christopher Tilley states that ‘Phenomenology involves the understanding and description of things as they are experienced by a subject. It is about the relationship between Being and Being-in-the-world’ which I want to achieve through meditation.

Buddhist author Steve Hagen describes mindful meditation as ‘simply about learning to be here – to be present in each moment and to notice what is going on’. I follow a Buddhist approach to meditation, which is better described as mindfulness. The aim is not to clear the mind, but rather to bring awareness to oneself and one’s environment and allow the mind to become calm. In this way one can open the mind, without any aim to achieve a specific outcome. By using meditation I hope to allow myself to become more open to any phenomena that may arise from being in a sacred space compared with a profane or mundane space. The practice of mindful meditation brings the mind to the present through focus on the breath. It allows thoughts to come and go without forceful expulsion or blanking the mind. Through this intention to simply be, the mind is allowed to reach a state of stillness and calm, through which awareness is heightened. Essentially a meditative state is one, which may allow phenomena to occur and be experienced without attachment.

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10 Tilley, Landscape, p.11
Prominent Buddhist Monk Thich Naht Hahn describes the experience of meditation as a ‘serene encounter with reality.’\textsuperscript{12} Jan Van der Lans defines meditation as ‘a technique for the activation of religious experience’.\textsuperscript{13} Rudolph Otto (1869-1937) coined the term ‘numinous’ in order to explain non-rational religious experiences, including inexplicable feelings in a place of fear or awe.\textsuperscript{14} It could be argued therefore that meditation in a sacred space may lead to the experience of numinous feelings or a religious or serene experience, which might otherwise be described as imagination. However, imagination is also valid in encapsulating phenomena, which may arise during meditation. Henry Corbin (1903-1978) describes a world of the imagination, which is very close to that experienced in meditation. Of his ideas, he says ‘the world of the image, the mundus imaginalis: a world that is ontologically as real as the world of the senses and that of the intellect. This world requires its own faculty of perception, namely, imaginative power, a faculty with a cognitive function, a noetic value which is as real as that of sense perception or intellectual intuition.’\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, often it is with images or a ‘visionscape’ as Tilley describes it, that a phenomenon is most easily described.\textsuperscript{16}

My fieldwork took place in three locations: within the circle of The Sanctuary in Avebury, my living room and my kitchen. The Sanctuary in Avebury is an important site to me and one in which I have had phenomenological experiences, making it somewhat sacred. The other two locations are chosen as to me are more mundane; my front room is the place I regularly meditate and a good place to establish a base line to compare with a meditation in The Sanctuary and in the kitchen. My kitchen is a functional

\textsuperscript{13} J. Van Der Lans, The Value of Sundén’s Role-Theory Demonstrated and Tested with Respect to Religious Experiences in Meditation, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 26, No. 3 (September 1987), p. 401
\textsuperscript{15} H. Corbin, Mundus Imaginalis, or The Imaginary and the Imaginal, paper delivered at the Colloquium on Symbolism, Paris June 1964 and in Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme 6, (Brussels 1964), p.5
\textsuperscript{16} Bender, Stonehenge, p.81
space, with little comfort and I feel a good place to experience a meditation in completely opposing circumstances to that of The Sanctuary or the front room.

By recording my meditation and comparing this with meditation experiences in the place I usually meditate in and a mundane space in my own house where I never meditate (the kitchen), I have been able to explore whether or not place as a human construct possesses the type of human energy or ‘power’ Tilley describes. After each meditation I recorded the experience using a voice recorder on my phone in the field in order to capture my immediate response. The fieldwork is supported by a photographic journal of The Sanctuary.

**Literature Review**

Belden C. Lane states that ‘the sacredness of a place may be highly ephemeral, subjective and hard to define.’ He explores the relationship of place and human interaction in his description of the three approaches to understanding the medicine wheel as a sacred place. Lane references Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) view that place is too easily explained without recognising the importance of participation, highlighting the significance of phenomenological views that ‘human perceptions of landscape is relentlessly interactive.’ Lane goes on to say that ‘one’s’ actual embodied experience in encountering a place perceived as sacred is crucial, then, to the sense of magic or awe that one finally attributes to it. The importance of participation within sacred space to truly evaluate it is central to my examination of The Sanctuary and whether as a human construct, a history of human interactions in a place creates its spirit.

When talking about the ephemerality of a sacred space, Lane describes the transitory nature of experience, stating that usually any special experience is unrepeatable and further that ‘going back to the site never guarantees one’s being able to return to the experience.’ However, architect Robert Riley

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17 Tilley, Landscape, p.26
19 Lane, Landscapes, p.53
20 Lane, Landscapes, p.53
21 Lane, Landscapes, p.217
questions whether ‘the greater power of place lies not in inhabiting it but in remembering it’.  

Lane asks whether our attachment to a place invests it with its powers and recognises that given how our minds work, the potential for body memory (smells, sights, sounds invoking a reaction) and how ephemeral an experience is, that arriving at meaning is ‘a tangled skein.’

To define a sacred space one can turn to the work of Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) who stated ‘Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane.’ Eliade further described the specific conditions required to identify a sacred space which constituted a ‘break in the homogeneity of space,’ enabling the connection between worlds identified by a symbol or ‘axis mundi’, around which lies our world. He postulated that experience of a place is conditioned by culture and the history of the place. Eliade also stated that when we experience a sacred space ‘the sacred manifests itself in space, the real unveils itself, the world comes into existence.’ A meditation in a sacred space may either enable an experience exactly as Eliade describes and contribute to defining that space as sacred or profane or will highlight the influence of other people’s energy within that space influencing human participants as though the place possesses power, as Tilley postulates.

Anthony Thorley and Celia Gunn explore the etymology of the word sacred exploring its complexity and state:

Thus although sacred may seem a relatively simple word in our use of it today, it actually carries a fascinating admixture of meanings which make up its derivation: rite, custom, safe, whole, accursed, horrible, divine destruction, divine presence.

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22 R. Riley, Attachment to the Ordinary Landscape, Place Attachment, eds. Low, S.M and Altman, I (New York, Plenum Press, 1992), pp.20-21
23 Lane, Landscapes, p.218
25 Eliade, Sacred, p.37
26 Eliade, Sacred, p.16
27 Eliade, Sacred, p.63
This raises questions regarding how to apply the word sacred to a specific place and what type of place can be classified as sacred. Thorley and Gunn explore this in their journey towards a definition and state that sacred sites can be natural sites already present in the landscape, sites which have been adapted in some way(s) by human interaction and/or sites which have been purposefully built by human beings to serve a particular function.\textsuperscript{29} The Thorley/Gunn operational definition is

A sacred site is a place in the landscape, occasionally over or under water, which is especially revered by a people, culture or cultural group as a focus for spiritual belief and practice and likely religious observance.\textsuperscript{30}

In addition, Thorley and Gunn state that a site must have one or more of nineteen defined characteristics (see Appendix). Using these definitions, The Sanctuary in Avebury can be defined as sacred as it is ‘within a wider... sacred landscape’, ‘partly or wholly man made’, ‘is recognised as having a palpable and special energy’, is part of ‘a specific pathway’ and ‘has a significant relationship with astronomical order’.\textsuperscript{31}

**Fieldwork**

The Sanctuary (figure 1), sits between The Ridgeway and the A4. Standing in the centre and looking West, Silbury Hill is positioned to the NW, Avebury is North and West Kennet Avenue is thought to terminate (or start there).\textsuperscript{32} It currently consists of a series of concentric circle markers indicating placement of stones (rectangular blue concrete blocks) and wood posts (round red posts) in a henge or stone/wood circle. According to Joshua Pollard and Andrew Reynolds The Sanctuary was constructed c. 3000-2200 BC and the National

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{29} Thorley and Gunn, Sacred Sites, p. 76-77. \\
\textsuperscript{30} Thorley and Gunn, Sacred Sites, p. 76 \\
\textsuperscript{31} Thorley and Gunn, Sacred Sites, pp. 76-77 \\
\end{flushleft}
Trust describes it on boards on the site as a ceremonial site probably built around 4,500 years ago (figures 2-4).  

According to dowser Hamish Miller and ancient landscape researcher Paul Broadhurst, Avebury falls on a powerful alignment known as the St Michael Line a relatively straight line that runs 100 miles from the ‘furthest Western tip of Cornwall through England to the extreme Eastern part of East Anglia’ crossing through the entrance to Avebury. Along this alignment are several sacred sites throughout Britain with two currents of dowsable energy winding alongside The Sanctuary, known as Michael and Mary currents have been detected by dowsers. At The Sanctuary, Miller and Broadhurst detected both currents of dowsable energy crossing at the center of the circle during their research into this phenomena. Miller and Broadhurst, liken the two energies to the universal symbol of the Caduceus, an ancient emblem of healing and suggest that this similarity reflects ancient views that it is the representation of the subtle energies in the human body, also referred to as chakras. It may be this connection between the energy currents detected in the earth and the possible energy centres detected in the body that influence the ‘subtle phenomena operating at these sites’. Thus the area has a level of significance for others, whether this is due to the presence of the stone markers or the believed alignment. In addition, Nicholas Mann claims The Sanctuary is significant as a believed astronomical marker suggesting that during the centuries of its use, observers could have used the stones and posts to track the changes in the time of year ‘relative to the movement of the Sun over the two crossroads of the galaxy’.
Figure 1: Photographed by Anya Marco, The Sanctuary facing SW, December 2015

Figure 2 - Photographed by Anya Marco, Sign at The Sanctuary, December 2015
Figure 3 - Photographed by Anya Marco, National Trust Sign (part 1) at The Sanctuary, December 2015

Figure 4 - Photographed by Anya Marco, National Trust Sign (part 2) at The Sanctuary, December 2015, iPhone Photo
Discussion

Comparatively speaking there was a distinct difference between the meditations. During my base-line meditation (which I do every night in the living room), the meditative state happened quickly, with little mind chatter interference but with no physical or synaesthetic sensations and I remained in meditation for 20 minutes, the same length of time as the Sanctuary meditation. On the occasion I meditated for the purpose of the research, I was aware that this meditation had a purpose. However, I was able to enter a state of calm within a normative number of breath counts (twice times ten breaths). As a result I was satisfied that this meditation was a normal meditation and no unusual phenomena occurred, my mind simply became still and I became wholly present as far as I am aware.

The kitchen meditation took longer to enter stillness, the space felt uncomfortable and ‘wrong’ and mind chatter kept appearing. While I was able to observe the chatter, the space was neither congruent to a satisfactory meditation nor did meditating in it deliver any significant experience, other than discomfort.

I feared that The Sanctuary mediation would be potentially doomed due to a clay pigeon shoot happening nearby, so I worried the noise would be a distraction. However, becoming still seemed to happen faster than my base-line meditation and within ten breaths I felt calmness, stillness. I also felt two opposing sensations at the same time; my feet felt firmly grounded, as though rooted and yet my arms felt as though they were floating. No significant thoughts entered my head other than observations of my body response to the meditative state. It transpired after the meditation that throughout my partner had been taking close up photographs of me, none of which I noticed (see Figures 5-7). During the meditation, which lasted 20 minutes, I seemed to feel a repeated strong sense of energy and another feeling was that of two opposing sensations: I felt both strongly grounded on the spot and a strong sense of freedom or of rising upwards.
Figure 5 - Photographed by Peter Harris, Anya Marco meditating in the centre of The Sanctuary circle, December 2015

Figure 6 - Photographed by Peter Harris, Anya Marco meditating in the centre of The Sanctuary circle, December 2015
Influence of attachment, memory and the unlikelihood of repeated experience

My experiences of meditating in The Sanctuary compared with my living room or kitchen, bears out the complexity that is inherent in phenomenological enquiry and supports the theory that one must participate fully in order to experience the energy or sacredness of a place. I have visited The Sanctuary every year for fifteen years, I still recall my first visit where I experienced a strong feeling of energy in the circle and when I closed my eyes I could clearly

40 Lane, Landscapes, p.16
see a vortex before me. While this exact experience was not repeated on this visit, I have had this same experience on previous visits. While the vortex not being re-experienced supports Lane’s claim that experience is transitory and hard to repeat exactly, I did have a distinct physical experience of energy as far as I could tell and this was a repeat of past experiences, despite Lane’s claims that special experiences are unrepeatable.41 As far as I am aware my experience felt as though it was as much a corporeal response as a cerebral one and I do not believe it was just a memory, contrary to Lane’s claim that ‘Our attachment to any place arises from what we experienced there and subsequently from what we retain of it in our memories’.42 Tilley discusses the importance of revisiting spaces, in order to fully experience them:

After a while, through revisiting these places, through a process of ‘dwelling’ in them, one hopefully achieves a feeling and sensibility for place, of repetitive elements and individual and unique features, which permits one to compare and contrast and deepen an interpretative understanding of the significance of these places for prehistoric populations.43

I believe that my experience of meditating in The Sanctuary has deepened my connection with this sacred place and revisiting it in the past did contribute to my ongoing understanding of its significance and contributed to the experience.

**History of place influencing experience**

In consideration of Eliade’s claim that the place’s history conditions the participant within it, it is hard to tell whether knowledge of academic history of the place had an affect on me since I have no real historical evidence of similar experiences to compare with.44 Nevertheless, the age of the site and the association with a henge may well have influenced every experience I have had there, including the one for this research, especially since it felt to be ‘something wholly different to the profane’.45 In addition, the continued use of this space,

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41 Lane, Landscapes, p.217
42 Lane, Landscapes, p.218
44 Eliade, Sacred, p.16
45 Eliade, Sacred, pp.10-11
the significance claimed relating to its alignment and my own history connected with the site may have added potency to the place for me.

My own house, where I undertook the other two meditations is a cottage built in the 1880’s. Interestingly the kitchen area is a recent extension (built in 1980) and may support Eliade’s view into consideration the building’s history may be a contributor to the experiences therein. In addition this house has personal history of past owners together with my own history of living in the house. However, I have never experienced any specific phenomena associated with the house as far as I am aware.

The power of place

I have no personal experience of dowsing or the alignments described by Miller and Broadhurst, having discovered this historical information about The Sanctuary after the meditation but I did feel an energy while meditating, particularly a sensation of opposing forces. In addition, I did feel as though energy had manifested itself in space just as Eliade described, ‘the real unveils itself, the world comes into existence.’

I certainly felt at ease meditating in The Sanctuary. This is also true of my living room, where I meditate regularly and given the discomfort and struggle to meditate in the kitchen, one could argue that this opposite experience also supports this general finding about meditation places or because I am used to meditating there. This could apply to the kitchen, were I to meditate there often enough and establish it as a place for meditation, anchoring my meditations to personal place. However, this seems not to be the case with The Sanctuary since I have not meditated there with enough repeated frequency to anchor my own personal experiences there. Therefore, it seems to me that Tilley’s claim that the spirit of a place resides in the landscape is true for The Sanctuary is a valid claim for my experience.

By being present in the site through meditation, I did feel that I was being in the space and possibly leaving my own energy there. I do not know whether I had a fully ‘synaesthetic’ experience in terms of an altered conscious response to the place. However, I could feel the energy of the place

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46 Miller and Broadhurst, Sun, p.115
47 Eliade, Sacred, p.63
48 Tilley, Landscape, p.11 and p.26
49 Tilley, Landscape, p.11
exerting a power over me, which I did not experience in the other meditations and could only be described in terms of physical sensations and could therefore be termed as synaesthetic.

**Final thoughts**

The experience of meditating in The Sanctuary was similar to previous experiences although it can be argued that the experience was not exactly the same, it still felt extraordinary. My knowledge about the academic history of The Sanctuary is limited and I do not feel that the little knowledge I have, influenced my experience there as far as I know. While I have since learnt about the alignment of the place along believed energy lines, I did not possess that information prior to my visit. However, my own history with the site may have contributed to the added potency of the place. The experience within the circle felt altogether different to any other meditative experience I have had anywhere else. What is clear for me is that place does have an influence, or as Tilley calls it, a power, inherited from its peopling throughout history which did, in my case, assault my senses. 50 Thus a key question raised by this research is whether this power is projected into the landscape by people or imposed upon them from the landscape, or perhaps a combination of the two.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this research was to analyse the idea of a sacred space as influential on human experiences and whether they reflect or echo historical human experience. My approach was to take a phenomenological enquiry using meditation in a defined sacred space, The Sanctuary, and comparing that experience with meditation in other places. From my anecdotal results The Sanctuary did have a significant impact on my meditative experience and that my experience within the sacred space repeatedly impacts on me especially with a distinct sense of the energy. It remains unclear whether the landscape, its believed position on the crossing energy lines or believed astronomical significance, or the believed lingering power from its inhabitants and visitors across history influenced me, it felt to me that the place possessed power and this did influence my experience compared with that experienced elsewhere.

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50 Tilley, Landscape, p.26
Thus the sacred space explored in this paper did affect me and thus supports the argument that humanity experiences the sacredness of space.

Appendix

**Sacred site: an operational definition**

A sacred site is a place in the landscape, occasionally over or under water, which is especially revered by a people, culture or cultural group as a focus for spiritual belief and practice and likely religious observance.

In addition, to satisfy this stem definition and reflect its wide and rich variety, a sacred site must also have one or more of the following nineteen characteristics found under the headings: Descriptive, Spiritual, Functional and Other. Having more or less of these characteristics does not imply that the site is more or less sacred but it may usefully reflect the complexity and rich variety of its sacred qualities.

1. **Descriptive**

   It is a specific focus within a wider and possibly dynamically interconnected sacred landscape.

   It is, or is founded upon, a natural topographical feature, e.g., a mountain, mound, rock, cave, tree, grove, forest, spring, well, river, lake, the sea, an island, etc.

   It is recognised as carrying special manifestation of wildlife, natural phenomena and ecological balance.

   It is embellished with man-made symbols or artefacts, e.g., rock-carvings, painting, holy or religious objects.

   It is partially or wholly man-made, e.g., menhir, temple, church, wayside shrine.

   It is a memorial or mnemonic to a key recent or past event in history, legend or myth, e.g., a battle site, creation or origin myth.

2. **Spiritual**

   It is recognised as having a palpable and special energy or power which is clearly discernible from that of a similar landscape or surrounding.

   It is recognised as a special place which acts as a portal or cross-over to the spirit world.

   It is recognised as the dwelling place of guardian or ‘owner’ spirits which care for and oversee the site and possibly its wider environs.
Its spiritual forces or ‘owner’ spirits are in a mutually respectful dialogue with local people with specialist knowledge acting as guardians or custodians, who play important roles as mediators, negotiators or healers between the human, natural and spiritual dimensions.

It is identified as a place where the ancestors are present and especially respected, e.g., burial grounds.

It is a place of spiritual transformation for individual persons or the community, e.g., healing, baptism, initiation, religious conversion, rite of passage, funeral, vision quest.

3. Functional

It is a special place where relationships, both interpersonal and throughout the whole community, can be expressed and affirmed, often through a specific form of observance, e.g., prayer, songs, chants, dance, ritual or ceremony.

It is a place especially associated with resource-gathering or other key cultural activities, e.g., gathering medicinal plants or material for sacred or ritual ceremony or objects, fishing, hunting, cultivation, burial of ritual objects, giving birth.

It is a specific pathway or route between significant or sacred places, e.g., songline, sacred pathway, pilgrimage route.

It is a focus of past or present special visits of religious observance or pilgrimage.

It is a cultural sacred-secret, with its location and/or specific religious function only known to a limited number of people.

It has a significant relationship with astronomical order and/or calendrical phenomena, e.g., astronomical alignment, celestial-Earth correspondence, seasonal ritual or festival.

4. Other

a. It clearly satisfies the stem definition but has unique cultural features that are not represented in the previous eighteen characteristics.

Thorley and Gunn 2008
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Can sacred places of high cosmo-terrestrial energy in Switzerland act as a portals to the spiritual realm?  
An auto-ethnographic study.

by Madeleine Marchand

The belief in a metaphysical spiritual world in addition to our material world is shared by many scholars, and sacred places which are said to emanate special energies and be connected with this spiritual dimension are found all over the world. The aim of this research project was to investigate if such sacred places may act as portals to this spiritual realm. Four sacred Swiss sites which, according to the geologist Blanche Merz, are said to have a high cosmos-terrestrial energy were investigated in this auto-ethnographic study by obtaining a self-reflexive research approach using my body and physical and metaphysical senses. In line with Merz's measurements, I experienced those places at different levels of intensity, and it seemed to me that, in my experience, the point of highest cosmo-terrestrial energy of each selected place may indeed act as sort of a gateway to some form of spiritual realm.

Introduction

Blanche Merz claims that the earth is a living creature and that there are special places of power all over the world.¹ According to her, those sites are located on clearly identifiable locations and are specific sources of energy.² She explains that in these places there is an exchange of cosmic and terrestrial forces and that there is a connection between heaven and earth.³ In Merz's view, old sacred sanctuaries, such as temples, cathedrals, tombs or menhirs provide an indication where such places of cosmo-terrestrial interaction can be found and

² Blanche Merz, Orte der Kraft, Stätten höchster kosmo-terrestrischer Energie, p. 10.
argues that there are holy places emanating a particular high energy which may act as thresholds to the spiritual world.\textsuperscript{4} The aim of my research project was to explore if such sacred places of considered high cosmo-terrestrial energy in Switzerland can indeed be sensed as acting as portals to the spiritual realm. An auto-ethnographic approach has been chosen to engage with this research question. The findings are based on the personal visits and dwelling in four such places by applying particular self-awareness techniques.

**Literature review**

Anthony Thorley and Celia Gunn define a sacred site as 'a place in the landscape which is especially revered by a people, culture or cultural group as a focus for spiritual belief and practice and likely religious observance.' In addition, they define a number of characteristics to satisfy this stem definition, one of which is, that 'the site is recognized as having a palpable and special energy or power which is clearly discernible from that of a similar landscape or surrounding' and another that 'it is recognized as a special place which acts as a portal or cross-over to the spirit world'.\textsuperscript{5} Blanche Merz detected power places all over the world that mostly agree with this form of Thorley's and Gunn's definition of a sacred site. According to Merz, those places are natural energy zones where humans can revitalize themselves.\textsuperscript{6} She argues that in these places there is an exchange of earthly and cosmic powers.\textsuperscript{7} Merz discovered those sites with the aid of a biometer scale and a subjective biophysical method where the vibration of a place, the intensity of cosmic and terrestrial exchange, is measured with a radionic pendulum.\textsuperscript{8} Merz explains that in radiesthesia a person's sensitive perception about an object is indicated and amplified by the

\textsuperscript{4} Blanche Merz, Orte der Kraft, Stätten höchster kosmo-terrestrischer Energie, p. 10-25.
\textsuperscript{7} Merz, Orte der Kraft, Stätten höchster kosmo-terrestrischer Energie, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{8} Merz, Orte der Kraft in der Schweiz, 12-13.
use and movement of a pendulum which is made out of cut stone, crystal or brass or any other material to which the person doing the measurement has a relationship.  

By holding the pendulum over the biometer scale at the place to be investigated the quality of a physically non ascertainable vitality or the qualitative vibration of a place in numbers or Bovis units (BU) as perceived by an individual is measured.  

Merz argues that if she found with her radionics pendulum a measurement of 6,500 BU then a place has a neutral value and claims that, whereas places with lower values withdraw vitality from a person, places with higher values energize a person.  

According to Rudolph Steiner, the human body is made up of several dimensions including the visible physical body and the subtle energetic bodies, one of which is the etheric body which surrounds and percolates the physical one and is a subtle double of the latter. 

Merz explains that locations up to 10'000 BU have an influence on the physical body of a person, locations with 10'000 - 13'000 BU on the etheric body, and, as of 13'000 BU, there is an influence on the metaphysical, spiritual dimension.  

According to Merz, a connection to the cosmos and the divine, and even enlightenment is possible in the latter places.  

Although I am aware that there may be value in critically questioning Merz’s ideas and methodology, it is not my intention in this paper to do so as my fieldwork specifically derives from accepting her techniques as a form of indicator of cosmo-terrestrial energy at a number of selected Swiss locations. 

The idea that particular places are a threshold to another world, a divine realm, is shared by many other scholars. Mircea Eliade, for example, holds a similar view. He believes that there is a difference between sacred space and all other spaces.  

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9 Blanche Merz, Die Seele des Ortes (The Soul of a Place), (Aarau: AT Verlag, 2000), p. 20.
10 Merz, Orte der Kraft in der Schweiz, 12 - 15.
11 Merz, Orte der Kraft, Stätten höchster kosmo-terrestrischer Energie, p. 24
the gods is made possible...Hence there must be a door to the world above, by which the gods can descent to earth and man can symbolically ascend to heaven'.\(^{16}\) The belief in a divine realm is also shared by Henry Corbin. As described by Tom Cheetham, in Corbin's view, there is a divine world of angels in the heavens.\(^{17}\) Corbin invented the term 'Mundus Imaginalis' and claims that this 'is a world that is ontologically as real as the world of the senses and that of the intellect'.\(^{18}\) Moreover, Lynne Hume also proposes that there are separate realities of the spiritual and the divine.\(^{19}\) She explains that certain mystery cults perceived physical locations, such as caves, as magical places allowing entrances and exits to other dimensions.\(^{20}\)

Hume argues that these other worlds can be accessed by certain aids, such as symbols, drumming or psychedelic drugs, that stimulate the senses and alter consciousness.\(^{21}\) As a means to explore these other realities she also introduces a technique called autonomous imagination which can be defined as 'the existence in the mind of a continuous stream of imaginary thought that operates mostly outside consciousness'.\(^{22}\) Hume claims that through certain practices, such as trance, the images can be brought to consciousness.\(^{23}\) Similarly Corbin claims that the 'Mundus Imaginalis' requires its own faculty of perception, namely, imaginative power'.\(^{24}\) Susan Greenwood is an anthropologist interested in investigating those other worlds through personal experience. Her chosen approach is participant-observation where she combines her personal experiences of magical consciousness with existing academic theories of magic from scholars such as Lucien Lévy-Bruhl or James Frazer.\(^{25}\) According to her,

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\(^{17}\) Tom Cheetham, All the World an Icon, (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books 2012), p. 165.
\(^{19}\) Lynne Hume, Portals: Opening Doorways to Other Realities Through the Senses, (Oxford: Berg 2007).
\(^{20}\) Hume, Portals, p. 7 - 8.
\(^{21}\) Hume, Portals, p. 11 - 12.
\(^{22}\) Hume, Portals, p. 148 - 151.
\(^{23}\) Hume, Portals, p. 148 - 149.
\(^{24}\) Henry Corbin, ‘Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal’, p. 5.
magical consciousness is shaped through self-awareness and includes emotions, intuition, and, again, imagination.\textsuperscript{26} She claims that imagination 'is an important tool for expanding the awareness' and working with it means opening the heart to creative possibilities.\textsuperscript{27} In Greenwood's view, participation is the basis of magical consciousness, and she believes, that this approach allows one to discover the wholeness of nature.\textsuperscript{28} She argues that by obtaining her approach communication links between the spiritual non-material and material domains may be established, which would not be possible by using conventional social science methods.\textsuperscript{29}

**Methodology**

As already argued, Corbin, Hume and Greenwood all indicate that non-material realities are best explored through imagination. Hence conventional research frameworks might not be appropriate to study metaphysical worlds. As the aim of my research project was to find out if sacred places determined by Merz to have high cosmo-terrestrial energy act as portals to the non-material spiritual realm, I decided to approach my research by using self-awareness and imaginative techniques as suggested by the scholars above. I chose an auto-ethnographical self-reflexive approach and worked with personal perception and experiences and their recording and analysis in order to understand the places under investigation.\textsuperscript{30} My own body and its physical and metaphysical senses served me as my research tool. Greenwood claims that magical consciousness is a 'whole body participatory experience' and working with

\textsuperscript{26} Susan Greenwood, 'The Dragon and Me: Anthropology and the Paranormal', Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal, Vol. 6 No. 1, p. 8, p. 4-24.
\textsuperscript{27} Susan Greenwood, The Anthropology of Magic, p. 141, 68 - 69.
\textsuperscript{29} Greenwood, 'The Dragon and Me', p. 8-25.
imagination is 'a doorway into an expanded participatory awareness'. Also, Maurice Merleau-Ponty is an advocate of the use of the body in research. According to him, perception is an essentially bodily process, the subject of perception is the body. He believes that 'the body is better informed than we are about the world' and therefore is a valid research tool. It is obvious that when working with the body, it is difficult to verify the results as perception is individual and not easily comparable. However, it is nevertheless possible to train bodily perception. I am a 37-year-old woman from Switzerland and besides my work in the commercial area, I attended workshops in parapsychology at different psychic institutes in Switzerland and the United Kingdom in my free time over several years where I acquired the knowledge of how to work with such methods. Through various practical exercises I learned how to use my body as an instrument to enhance my awareness and how to develop my extrasensory perception and imagination in order to perceive and interpret intangible energies of objects, people and places and receive knowledge about them.

Application and Technique

There are no standard guidelines on how to work with imaginative self-awareness techniques, nor are there standard definitions of terms and practices. Working in this way is a highly individual matter. Each person has his or her methods, abilities and strengths which can be identified and developed through exercises and training. I am aware that it is not directly possible to verify my findings about the places studied. However, I have practiced these techniques with people as the object of study before and they, in contrast to places, can give you direct feedback regarding the information you perceived about them. The idea of this kind of work is to not actively enforce and influence results and create the information yourself, but open yourself up and make yourself receptive like a radio antenna and then passively wait for information to flow.

33 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 277.
I decided to conduct my reflexive research by using a combination of techniques I learned and practiced in workshops over the course of several years and which, in my case, proved to be successful and deliver valid results. The chosen techniques suited my research objective and my abilities and allowed me to holistically perceive the places studied. First of all, I decided to work with closed eyes so that I was able to fully concentrate on the selected locations, and did not get distracted by the surroundings. In order to fully arrive at the place, I first perceived the location with the senses of my physical body, mainly touch (eg, a finding in this condition could be: it is cold and noisy in here). I then slowly shifted my focus from outer perception into inner perception by checking if the place had an effect on my physical body and then on my inner mental state (eg, a finding in this condition could be: my head is heavy and I feel confused). I then completely moved towards inner perception, by working with my inner, metaphysical senses and applied techniques of perception that activated and enhanced my imaginative awareness (eg, a finding in this condition could be: I see an inner image of a growing tree). In order to become as receptive as possible, I decided to perform my research in a slightly altered state of consciousness (half-trance) and, as part of the process, took the actions that for me would expand what I believe is my aura.\(^34\) The aura can be defined as the human energy field that is in immediate contact with the physical body.\(^35\) In this state, I consciously activated what I think of as my ‘third eye’ to heighten my imaginative perception even more. According to Indian traditions, the third eye is an inner, invisible eye providing perception beyond ordinary sight.\(^36\) This inner eye lies between the eye brows and it is there where the imagination creates images and where clairvoyance, a form of extrasensory perception, takes place. This third eye also belongs to the chakra system, the seven vortices of energy that are part of the human etheric body located on the

\(^{36}\) Stefan Schmitz, Transpersonale Psychologie (Transpersonal psychology), (Marburg: Tectum Verlag 2010), p. 80 - 83.
spine from the tailbone to the crown of the head.\textsuperscript{37} It is argued that chakras are bridges between the material and the non-material world and, as the findings will show later, they played a role in my study.\textsuperscript{38}

In summary, I followed the following step-by-step procedure at all of the chosen places:

I sat down and closed my eyes.
I then explored the characteristics of the location with the senses of my physical body.
After that, I checked if the place's energy had an effect on my physical body and on my mental state.
I then tuned into the place by centering first while focusing on my heart region, expanding my aura into all directions and then going into a half-trance state.
Finally, I waited and passively observed the inner pictures and other expressions that would appear.
After each session I immediately recorded my experiences with my phone. Back home I wrote down my spoken comments, in order to be able to compare and contrast them.

The chosen research procedure as performed from A - Z allowed me to study each location individually and neutrally, but made a comparison possible.

With my chosen body-focused techniques I was able to fully engage with the places I studied. Hence, my research approach may be considered as a special form of phenomenology. It allowed me to connect myself with my chosen spots and not study them detached as an external object. According to Christopher Tilley, phenomenology involves 'the understanding and description of things as they are experienced by a subject'. He explains that humans perceive the world by 'setting themselves apart from it' resulting 'in the creation of a gap', but, at the same time, connecting themselves with it.\textsuperscript{39} In line with my chosen methods, Tilley claims that, the gap between the self and what

\textsuperscript{37} Stefan Schmitz, Transpersonale Psychologie (Transpersonal psychology), (Marburg: Tectum Verlag 2010), p. 80 - 83.
lies beyond, can be overcome by the means of perception using the senses, bodily actions, emotion and awareness. The somehow extraordinary nature of my research project and the objects studied called for more that only visual observation or measurements, and the chosen approach proved to be suitable.

It is obvious that my chosen subjective research method and its analysis might have been subject to bias. There is no guarantee that my experiences were not more than personal fantasies with an unreal character instead of 'imaginatio vera', which Corbin explained the alchemist called the true imaginations stemming from the imaginal world. However, according to Corbin, one can learn to distinguish between the imaginary and the imaginal by developing his imaginal perception. Also, Greenwood believes that the development of the third eye helps to improve imagination. As I have trained my psychic senses and clairvoyance in various workshops over several years, I am confident that my experiences were not only mere fantasies. Also, I tried to approach the task unconditionally and without expectations. Nonetheless, my experiences might have been influenced by my preliminary knowledge about the chosen places, mainly derived from Merz' books, and unconscious expectations I had no control over.

Field Work Approach

As it was impossible for me to investigate sacred places world-wide for this particular research project, I decided to select and explore four places in the area where I live. The four chosen locations are taken from Merz's book *Power places in Switzerland*. She found that there is a place in a village near Zurich called 'Aesch bei Forch' that has a very high amount of cosmo-terrestrial energy in its central point (750'000 BU). It is not a clearly defined site as it is not in an enclosed building but its centre is said to lay in a garden surrounded by fields and trees. It is believed by Merz that several geomantic energy lines lead into all geographic directions from this place. One of those lines connects Aesch to

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41 Corbin, 'Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal', p. 10 - 11.
43 Merz, Orte der Kraft in der Schweiz, p. 237.
44 Merz, Orte der Kraft in der Schweiz, p. 246.
45 Merz, Orte der Kraft in der Schweiz, p. 242 - 243.
Zurich’s main landmark the 'Grossmünster', a Romanesque-style Protestant church in the old town of Zurich built in the 12th century and dedicated to Charles the Great and Zurich’s patron saints. The line stretches further on to the monastery 'Königsfelden', a former Franciscan double monastery in the municipality of Windisch founded in 1308 by the Habsburgs and built where King Albert I of Austria was murdered. In between, almost on that same line, Merz located another special place ‘the Emma Kunz cave’, situated in an old Roman quarry in a village called Würenlos. Emma Kunz, the discoverer of the grotto, claimed that the rocks of this quarry are ancient and have healing properties. Merz measured the BU’s in and around those four sacred sites and detected that the energy level is not consistent within those places. She found that there is usually an area of low or normal energy (3000-9500 BU) and one

46 Merz, Orte der Kraft in der Schweiz, p. 233.
47 Merz, Orte der Kraft in der Schweiz, p. 233.
48 Merz, Orte der Kraft in der Schweiz, p. 31 - 34.
point of highest cosmos-terrestrial energy (22000-750000 BU) in each site. It is those four places, Aesch, the Grossmünster, the Emma Kunz cave and the monastery Königsfelden, that provided the basis for my research project.

I personally paid a visit to all the four sites between December 18, 2015 and January 4, 2016. In order to establish a contrast, I decided to select and explore two points at each site: the position with the lowest and the one with the highest BU’s according to the maps provided by Merz (example see fig. 1). Hence, in total I explored eight spots with the above described step-by-step procedure. The findings of my research at the chosen locations are summarized and discussed in the following paragraphs.

**Findings and Discussion**

Not least because it was winter time, common to the experiences in all eight spots was, that it was cold and I could feel the cold on my face and hands. This was usually the first thing I noticed when I underwent the procedure described above. Also, with the exception of one spot, my eyes started flickering when entering trance state. Even though each experience was unique, it seemed to me that there was a clear difference between the high- and low-energy points of the selected places.

a) Low-energy points

The general topics of my experiences and perceptions at the selected points with lower cosmo-terrestrial energy as defined by Merz concerned rather earthly and mundane issues. The body part that was affected in most of those spots was my lower belly region including the sexual organs, and sometimes legs and arms. According to the yogic theories, this part of the body inhabits the root and sacral chakra which stand for 'instinctual need for survival' and 'sexuality.' At the Forch WWII memorial, which, according to Merz' measurements, is a low-energy point in the Aesch area, the latter topic was intensified by the appearance of an inner picture symbolizing excess, party and lust. At Merz’s low-energy points of the Emma Kunz cave and the Grossmünster I received an inner picture of me on a spring meadow

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52 Merz, Orte der Kraft in der Schweiz, p. 245.
symbolizing satisfaction and being at ease with the world. In Königsfelden at the low-energy spot a picture of a street accompanied by street noise from the outside appeared. There, I also got the clear inner message of 'BE HERE', meaning 'be here on this planet earth'.

One special mentionable encounter I had at the entrance of the Emma Kunz cave, which I selected as my low-energy point in line with Merz's measurements (see fig. 1). Merz called the selected spot a 'telluric threshold', and it was in fact the only real physical entrance that was part of my chosen points. An extract of my notes says that there 'I received an inner picture of a black creature in a futuristic armament. It was not really hostile but it looked like this creature wanted me to get up and away from this spot. Only then it began to dawn on me that this was probably the guardian of the cave and I was sitting at his doorstep.' Even though this guardian is probably not perceived by all visitors, his appearance suggested that this grotto might indeed be a sacred site and a door to another world. One of Thorley’s and Gunn’s additional characteristic of a sacred site is, that it is ‘a dwelling place of guardian or 'owner' spirits which care for and oversee the site’. Moreover, Hume claims that passing from one world to another can be dangerous as the thresholds are guarded by frightening creatures. She further explains that in Hinduism, Ganesh is the armed guardian of the threshold deciding whom to grant access.

b) high-energy points

My experiences and perceptions at the selected points with high cosmic-terrestrial energy as defined by Merz clearly differed from the lower ones. In my experience the energy at these points was generally very dense and heavy and physically sensible. I experienced it as being dynamic and, more than once, I had the feeling of being energetically ' lulled' from all sides. Consequently, my personal perception indicated that these might indeed be special locations agreeing with Merz’s description of power places as sites with a particular energizing power where one can ‘recharge his batteries’. My experiences are also in accordance with Thorley’s and Gunn’s additional description of a sacred site as a site possessing a palpable energy which is clearly discernible. However, does this make these places a door to the spiritual realm?

53 Merz, Orte der Kraft in der Schweiz, p. 33.
54 Hume, Portals, p. 6-7.
55 Merz, Orte der Kraft, Stätten höchster kosmo-terrestrischer Energie, p. 10.
A topic in relation to energy which would arise often at what Merz considered as high-energy points was the dynamics of the energy and the merging with everything. In the Grossmünster I described it as follows 'When I opened my eyes again I thought that everything around me, including the physical church walls, were moving, the material was bending, everything was flowing into each other. When I got up, I realized that the energy was moving me too, I was moved back and forth. This place was simply overwhelming.' In the Emma Kunz cave this energy flow was illustrated by a giant chakra in my imagination. I noted 'Then, everything started turning anti-clockwise like a huge chakra and all became one, dynamic and malleable energy. It got so intense that it physically moved me.' This experience is comparable with an incident described by Hume.\(^56\) She writes that one night when outside in Bali, a friend of hers encountered 'a whirling world, the sensation of falling through space.' Also, the Dervishes, members of a Muslim religious order, use whirling to reach a transcendental state and the gift of enlightenment.\(^57\)

In two of my selected high-energy spots as determined by Merz I felt like I was growing and expanding. The picture of Alice in Wonderland crossed my mind, who, before, she gets access to Wonderland eats a cake and grows to a giant.\(^58\) At Aesch I described my experience as follows '…they (the eyes) would flicker heavily and it was not only my eyes, but my whole body started shaking. At the same time, I got the feeling of me being pulled apart in all directions and growing bigger and it felt like I was expanding extremely. I had the desire to lay down and to melt, to melt with everything, because everything and all is one.' Greenwood once conducted an experiment to investigate deeper meanings of mythical tales by using imaginative techniques. The recordings of her field work regarding the goddess Freyja going into trance state to perform her divination, describe a process similar to my experience. She noted 'The warmth of the sun filled her being as she felt herself expanding outswards. She lost sense of herself into the greater cosmos.'\(^59\)

\(^{56}\) Hume, Portals, p. 3.
\(^{57}\) Hume, Portals, p. 67.
\(^{58}\) Lewis Caroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1869), p. 16.
A central theme of my experiences at the selected high-energy points was the upward direction, which was not only symbolized by a sense of growing. In Königsfelden 'it felt like I was drawn into an upward direction, to the sky and it got lighter and brighter. I received an inner picture symbolizing the 'view towards the gods'. In the Emma Kunz cave at the point of highest cosmos-terrestrial energy as defined by Merz 'I felt like I was growing and a picture of 'hands up', clapping the hands upward and jumping upwards, where the light is coming from, appeared in front of my inner eye. It tore me upward in a 'pointed' way through several layers. I also received a picture of me being a pointed rocket and the hands and feet were my exhaust pipe. Dense energy collected around my lower body, like it wanted me to transport upwards' (see fig. 2). Finally, in the Grossmünster at Merz's high-energy point, an inner picture showing some divine beings calling me from above, asking me to lift my hands up and get up, appeared in front of my inner eye. Not only in the Old Testament it is claimed that the heaven above is the home of the divine, the angels and god, also, according to Eliade, the world of gods is the world above.60

In two cases I had the feeling of being overwhelmed while dwelling in what Merz defined spots of high cosmos-terrestrial energy. I was almost frightened, but at the same time fascinated and attracted. I particularly experienced this ambivalent feeling at the high-energy point in the Grossmünster. My notes in relation to this experience say: 'This place was formidable, somehow angst-inducing and at the same time so holy. I felt very

humble and emotional and tears almost came into my eyes.' My experience seems to be in line with Rudolph Otto’s description of the holy. He defines it as that which is numinous.\textsuperscript{61} The numinous is irrational and, according to Otto, it has, on the one hand, a 'tremendous' character, causing fear and trembling, and appears as a 'mysterium tremendum'.\textsuperscript{62} However, on the other hand, it has a quality of 'fascinans', it attracts, fascinates and enchants, appearing as a 'mysterious fascinans'.\textsuperscript{63}

Moreover, in two occasions at what Merz considered as high-energy points, I received the inner picture of a pyramid. In the Emma Kunz cave there was a focus on the pointedness, the upward direction again, whereas in the Grossmünster, a shiny light on the top of the pyramid was shown. The triangle shape is a symbol for trinity and the number three has been recognized as a holy number throughout history.\textsuperscript{64} The latter picture reminded me of the Rosicrucian pyramid with the shining eye on top symbolizing God’s eye.\textsuperscript{65} Whereas the body focus was rather on the lower body parts at the low-energy points as defined by Merz, it was rather on the upper at the high-energy points, namely heart, throat and head. I twice recorded that I somehow felt a bit sick in the throat or bronchia area. The topics love, truth and intuition are attributed to the chakras located in these areas.\textsuperscript{66}

Finally, at Merz’s high-energy spot at Königsfelden I received the clear inner message of 'YOU ARE', 'you are with you and with yourself'. Almost four weeks later, not having consciously in mind what happened there, Gloria Gaynor's song 'I am what I am' starts playing in my inner ear while sitting at the high-energy point in the Grossmünster. The experience in Königsfelden was accompanied by a centering heart focus. Carl Gustave Jung describes the Self in

\textsuperscript{62} Otto, Das Heilige, p. 13 - 18.
\textsuperscript{63} Otto, Das Heilige, p. 42 - 43.
\textsuperscript{64} Dieter A. Binder, Die diskrete Gesellschaft, Geschichte und Symbolik der Freimaurer (The discrete society, history and symbolism of the Freemason), (Graz: Styria Verlag 1988), p. 215.
\textsuperscript{65} Binder, Die diskrete Gesellschaft, Geschichte und Symbolik der Freimaurer, p. 215.
his theories and claims that self-actualization is the final goal of individuation, and that anyone who has mastered the Self becomes like God.67

Greenwood claims that working with imagination 'brings a different, often surprising, perspective.'68 As suggested by her, I was able to obtain very rich data with my chosen research method. It seemed to me that I was granted access to the non-material dimensions, which, I believe, would not have been possible through a more traditional approach. Some of my experiences included rather bizarre elements. Even though trance is not exactly the same as sleep, the two states are comparable, and experimental dream research undertaken at sacred sites in England showed that bizarre contents are part of most dreams.69 However, do my experiences provide evidence that places considered by Merz to emanate high cosmo-terrestrial energy are indeed a portal to the spiritual realms?

The symbolic meanings of the inner pictures that appeared, the whirling of the energy and the melting of the non-material with the material, the upward focus and the appearance of divine beings, the experience of the tremendous and the fascination and finally, the emphasis of the Self, might all be an indication that those places of high cosmos-terrestrial energy as determined by Merz may indeed somehow be connected to the spiritual world. According to Corbin, active imagination itself is a door to the divine realms assuming that physical places are not needed in addition.70 I do not doubt that for the ones who mastered this technique and have 'real imaginative power' it might allow direct and quick access. However, based on my experiences and perceptions at the selected high cosmo-terrestrial energy points as defined by Merz, I have grounds to believe that these may provide a means of enhancing and enforcing transition to these other realms. At least, those points might allow an insight or, if nothing else, a feeling of the other world. During my stay at the four chosen high-energy spots it felt like the curtain lifted and the portals opened, but I believe that I would have needed more dwelling time, privacy and practice to

70 Corbin,'Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginary and the Imaginal', p. 9.
actually pass through those doors and metaphysically fully enter the spiritual world.

As already mentioned above, it is evident that the findings and the interpretation of my research are subjective and might have been influenced by unconscious expectations and knowledge about the places studied. In addition, all the sites under investigation were public and, with one exception, I was not alone but felt observed and often under time-pressure. There were many distractions that might have had an impact on my experiences and findings described above. Finally, a fact not to be forgotten is, that, according to Emma Kunz, human beings first have to deal with the cosmic terrestrial energies and learn how to engage with them before they can actually use and work with them.\(^7\)

**Conclusion**

The aim of this research project was to explore if sacred places considered to emanate high cosmo-terrestrial energy according to Merz can act as portals to the spiritual realm. Four sacred sites in Switzerland were selected and at each place one low- and one high-energy point identified by Merz was experienced. An auto-ethnographic approach, including self-awareness techniques enhancing imaginative perception, was chosen to explore those sites. As proposed by Hume inner images were brought to consciousness and rich, sometimes extraordinary, data was collected. The findings of my personal experience in these selected places indicated that, in line with Merz’s measurements, for me sacred sites are not homogeneous, but consist of various energetic areas which seemed to have different effects on me while dwelling there. My stay at the investigated points of lower cosmos-terrestrial energy produced personal perceptions and inner images which appeared to refer to rather secular affairs. In the chosen areas designated as high-energy points, my experiences seemed to be in line with Thorley’s and Gunn’s and Merz’s definition of a sacred site as there I generally experienced a clearly discernible energy. In addition, several personal perceptions and inner images that may be associated with the spiritual dimension were evoked at these high-energy points. I therefore conclude that my personal experience at high cosmos-

\(^7\) Meier, Emma Kunz, p. 46.
terrestrial energy spots of selected sacred Swiss places seemed to suggest to me that these locations might indeed provide a possible means to come into touch with some form of spiritual realm.

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