

Sacred Places: The Living Landscape

The modern interpretation of what constitutes a 'sacred' site is far removed from that of our earliest ancestors who lived in a world without cars, houses and motorways. Here was a natural landscape in which the rivers, rocks and mountains were all seen as components of a larger, living earth-mother-earth. Remnants of the way our prehistoric ancestors perceived their landscape are still visible in their monuments and art and also through ourselves, if we look deeply enough.

Sacred Spaces: Some of the earliest examples of 'sacred spaces' are found deep in the heart of underground cave systems, in which the living Earth itself was both symbolically and physically penetrated. It was within these deep, confined and distant spaces over 30,000 years ago, that the relationship between Palaeolithic people and the 'spirits' of the earth can be first seen to have become physically ritualized. It is currently believed that the painters of these primitive, archetypal images were [Shaman](#) attempting to connect themselves to the spirit world in order to influence the outcome of issues such as fertility, hunting and death. These early examples of sacred spaces were confined and private, and were presumably intended to stay so. Although some were used for long periods of time, they show no evidence of habitation and most, including examples such as **Lascaux** and **Chauvet**, have remained unseen for millennia until relatively recently.

This private, internal communication within the Earth can be seen as the tap-root of what makes a place sacred. Even today at the world's most sacred locations such as **Allahabad**, **Jerusalem** or **Mecca**, each attracting several million people a year, it is from within each individual that the interpretation of what makes a place sacred occurs. In contrast to the early enclosed private spaces of the Palaeolithic, sacred sites over the course of history can be seen to have become progressively more communal and public, arguably reinforcing the sensation of the moment. It was during the great Neolithic construction phase c. 3,500 – 3,000 BC that the first examples of public sacred places begin to appear. During this time several civil-scale constructions were built along Western Europe and the Atlantic coastline, some of which were built over existing structures revealing a pattern of re-use over thousands of years.

The continued use of the same sacred sites and associated rituals would

seem an obvious means of reinforcing the sacred nature of a site or belief system. The development of Palaeolithic rock-art in caves is also associated with the deposition of bone fragments and other items forced into cracks and fissures in the walls of the caves, an act which can be seen to have occurred for over 20,000 years in different cave systems across Europe. In contrast however, the exact spot where **Stonehenge** was built has been in use for 9,000 years now and has likely served several different purposes in its time, so that while the design and location proposes an astronomical origin, the extensive funerary landscape surrounding it is suggestive of a different cultural influence. It has recently being dubbed the 'Lourdes of Prehistory', following the discovery of several foreign remains and artefacts in the region. Julius Caesar in the first century BC wrote that at his time Stonehenge was a Druid sanctuary and today the same majestic, half-ruined monument serves as little more than a tourist pilgrimage for most people. Perhaps in this we can identify that it is not just the interpretation of what is sacred, but that we carry within us an unconscious urge to identify sacred places and be in their presence, in order that we may extract a portion of it into ourselves.

The Living Earth: Ancestral memories of a time when the Earth was seen as 'alive' are still present in our mythologies. In Greek myth for example; following the great flood Deucalion and his wife are instructed by Zeus to throw stones over their shoulders, each of which transforms into a new man or woman thus repopulating the earth with life. A recent discovery in Turkey confirms the idea that stone was thought capable of possessing a soul. It comes in the shape of a funerary stela of a high official burial at around 800 AD, and on its face an inscription saying that the entombed man had made an offering which he considered a '...ram for my soul that is in this stone...'.

Fragments of the intimate relationship between the living and the dead, animate and inanimate can also be seen in the commonly found Simulacrum at megalithic sites. As well as the numerous examples of anthropomorphic megaliths, many structures are now realized to have been placed in view of 'sleeping giants' and other anthropomorphic features in the profiles of the background hills, again reinforcing the sacred quality of the location. The '**Goats' cave in Swansea**, is a vaguely anthropomorphically shaped mountain which has an entrance at the

approximate location of the reproductive organs, giving it female gender. The cave revealed a ritual burial from the Palaeolithic period and was used through the Neolithic and even into Roman times, leaving little question that the 'human' shape of the Hill and the location of the cave were influential in this.

Aubrey Burl argued that in the Neolithic mind both death and fertility were integrated so that:

"The fertility of the ground, the fecundity of women, the spirits of forebears that interceded with nature on behalf of the living, the cold winter sunset and the joyful summer sunrise..."

Seen this way, the natural human cycles, the seasonal and the celestial cycles can be seen to merge together, creating a single unified belief system. This single tapestry of landscape unites everything together in such a way that the earth and the sky, the living and the dead all became one. The ritualizing and restructuring of our environment to conform with these cycles endow us with a higher purpose, in effect entering us into communication with the higher universal spirit of all things, through which we can become more sacred ourselves.

Linear Landscapes: An important aspect in the consideration of sacred places is how they are viewed in terms of their relationship to each other. While this might seem an alien idea to us, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that it was utmost in the minds of our ancestors. The deliberate transportation of stone from one sacred site to another sacred site demonstrates this attempt at connectivity as 'parts of places' were brought together to integrate and enhance sacred locations. We know for example, that the '**Bluestones**' at **Stonehenge** were shipped from the **Gors Fawr region of Wales** which itself appears to have been an important (sacred) area. Perhaps significantly, the Gors Fawr stone circle, built in plain view of the source of the bluestones was constructed using smaller glacial erratics for half of its stones, an act which reminds us that what appears 'sacred' to one person is invisible to another.

Whatever the original significance of such specific selectivity, the presence of the Bluestones and the solitary 21ft mica '**slaughter stone**' was clearly of greater significance than the energy required to quarry, transport and cut

such hard stone instead of the softer and more readily available sarsen stone which was used at both **Stonehenge** and **Avebury** and found in abundance not more than 20 miles to the north. It seems then, that these additional connections between sites reflect a conscious effort at 'sewing' the component parts of the landscape together into the larger living tapestry. Alignments of sacred and prominent places can be seen to reinforce each other like synapses as the spatial perception of the ritual landscape developed. Although today this vision is almost lost, the remnants of these once 'living' arteries are still found in the orientation and alignment of ancient and sacred places along with prominent hill-tops, significant moments in the solar and lunar cycles, and other sacred sites in the form of linear and geometric alignments.

This deliberate placement of sacred sites into alignments is yet to be understood fully; but that such alignments existed around the ancient world is no longer in dispute. Remnants of our ancestor's linear mentality are still clearly visible today in the shape of the **Peruvian Ceques** radiating from **Cuzco** and the extensive network of Roman roads that criss-cross Europe. While in contrast, the **Chinese Dragon lines**, **Irish Fairy paths**, **aboriginal turingas** and the **English Ley-lines**, which are not necessarily physically visible still conform to the same linear insistence.

Alfred Watkins was the first modern man to pioneer studies into [leylines](#) following his imaginative revelation of a connected landscape in 1921. The UK alignments include both natural and man-made features, they were orientated astronomically, geometrically, along funerary (spirit paths) and simply between significant locations. Watkins concluded that a large number were remnants of trade routes, while other people such as the famed antiquarian William Stukeley had already hinted at the existence of an integrated sacred landscape as far back as 1700 AD. So ambiguous is the definition of a leyline that hundreds are claimed for and there is still no single theory can yet be said to satisfactorily represent them definitively.

One of the most contentious aspects in the leyline debate is determining what exactly they are in the first place. Unlike the Peruvian Ceques for example, ley-lines are not always visible, and arguably few were ever designed to be walked or seen. Herein lies the 'marrow of the bone' so to speak, as an alignment of ancient sites is not in itself enough to constitute a

leyline. Watkins considered their length, the number of ley-markers and any associated local traditions or myths related to them. Recent research is opening the door for new (old) ways of measuring such alignments, as it appears that the evolution of the prehistoric linear mentality did not stop at simple alignments.

Divining the Earth: Recognizing the path of this linear evolution makes it easier to understand how such a cultural force could develop into an art or a science (or both), which is exactly what appears to have happened in all the corners of the ancient world. What might be best described as a natural progression occurred, in which the role we developed with the earth evolved into something new and profoundly sophisticated. Having 'sewn' the landscape together, two sets of specialized skills emerged, one an art and the other a science – The twin fields of Geomancy and Geodesy were born. Both of these fields ultimately leading to the same place: **Sacred Geometry**, through which it became possible to unite both geometric design and natural cycles together in harmony.

The **field of Geodesy has its roots in earthly measurements**, as the name suggests. The placement of **all the great Egyptian temple complexes** on significant latitudes is one of the strongest evidences of such a science operating at a civil level in prehistoric times, but the same fingerprint can be found running around the Mediterranean and along the Western European coastline. The preference for **building on the 30th latitude** was not restricted to **Egypt**, but is also found in the **Sumerian cities of Larsa, Eridu and Ur, Persepolis** and even **Lahsa in Tibet**, which was placed exactly 30° east of **Giza (Heliopolis)**. It has become apparent that other sacred Middle-eastern cities such as **Baalbek, Nippur, Korsabad** and sacred Greek cities such as **Delphi, Knossos, Delos, Dodona and Eleusis** are related to the **Egyptian anchor at Giza**. In Europe, **Avebury sits exactly ¼ of a degree north of Stonehenge, and along with Glastonbury, the three form a perfect right-angled triangle**. The Geodetic network reaches out from England to both Ireland and Scotland then to France and beyond. **Silbury hill in England also shares a geometric relationship with the Great pyramid** in that they both have the others latitude as their exterior angle of slope. We are now able to see that in fact, many of the prehistoric sites were being located in accordance with a universal geometric system based on a 360° division of the earth

which was not only encoded into the design, orientation and location of sacred places but also into the mythology, text, art and song that surrounded them.

Whilst ancient texts concerning the rituals of design for Egyptian temples reveal a geometric basis, other ancient cultures demonstrate a different means based on earth energies. **Chinese Dragon lines, aboriginal Turingas and certain British Leylines are alignments that fall into the contrasting category of Geomancy.** These alignments show a stronger dependence on dynamic factors such as astronomy, topography (water and hills), and the human element in the role of the shaman. **The art of geomancy is concerned with the harmonic balance of yin and yang – positive and negative earth energy.** Chinese geomancy is still very much alive and practiced for the placement of all important buildings or tombs and although it is little understood to the western mind, a common understanding exists between the people and the geomancers that the living landscape is fed by negative and positive currents of energy which are connected to us and can affect the outcome of our lives. **Exhaustive studies on the largest known Dragon line in Europe, the St. Michael's ley, led by Hamish Miller have resulted in the proposition that it is composed of two energies, one flowing directly and the other coiling around it along its length.** The similarities with eastern philosophy are striking.

Recent research is beginning to open new avenues to the past such as the recognition of geo-magnetic forces by pigeons, fish and other animals; Paul Deveraux's 'Dragon project' (researching the connection between earth energies) and perhaps relevant, the discovery of several finely carved **Pre-Olmec statues found in Guatemala** which testify to a definite ability in the past to detect earth energies, having been carved so that the naturally magnetic areas of the rock became the temple and navel of animals and people (such as the famous 'fat boy'), and one turtle which was found to contain both positive and negative magnetized rock in its nose and tail. We are left today looking at fragments of a dream time when the universe itself was considered a sacred place from which we ourselves stepped into the light.

Be aware of the Light within you that connects us to each other and to the

earth- Visit Sacred Sites!

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Visit our website at <http://ShiftYourLife.com> to learn more about specific Sacred Sites in the world!