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Dreamscapes: Topography, Mind, and the Power of Simulacra in Ancient and Traditional Societies

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Dream content can be influenced by external sounds, smells, touch, objects glimpsed with half-open eyes during REM sleep, and somatic signals. This paper suggests that this individual, neurologically-driven process parallels that experienced collectively by pre-industrial tribal and traditional peoples in which the land itself entered into the mental lives of whole societies, forming mythic geographies—*dreamscapes*. This dreamtime perception was particularly evident in the use of simulacra, in which the shapes of certain topographical features allowed them to be presented in anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, or iconic guise to both the individual and the culturally-reinforced gaze of society members. This paper further indicates that this mythologized way of seeing could theoretically, if with some effort and without embarrassment, be adopted periodically and temporarily by archaeologists and used as an investigative tool in the field, and could even have side benefits to modern societies in general.

Keywords: *dreams, dreamtime, myth, perception, topographical simulacra*

The myth is the public dream and the dream is the private myth.

Joseph Campbell, in Konner & Perlmutter, 1988, *The Power of Myth*

Earth and sea are . . . as living books in which the myths are inscribed . . .

A legend is captured in the very outlines of the landscape.

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, 1935/1983, *Primitive Mythology*, p. 45

Dream content can be influenced by external, physical factors (Van de Castle, 1994, pp. 211-214).¹ Somatic signals can also trigger dream and nightmare imagery (Hobson, 1988, p. 212; Van de Castle, 1994, pp. 361-404). For example, P. D. Ouspensky suffered from a recurring unpleasant dream in which he was struggling across a bog. He eventually found that this dream was occasioned by his feet becoming entangled in the folds of the bedclothes (Ouspensky, 1934/1984). Most are familiar with the dream imagery of waterfalls or tinkling streams indicating that one needs to wake up and make a trip to the bathroom! These are minor, individual instances, but there is a long history of the land being so closely associated with the mental life of whole tribes and societies as to form, in effect, *dreamscapes*—mythic geographies. The physical landscape became an agent of the *dreamtime*,² involving somewhat similar basic processes as personal dreams, except writ large on a cultural scale.

Mythic Mapping

The earliest sacred, mythic geographies or mindscapes were mapped on unaltered natural landscapes. Before they improved on nature by building temples and monuments, people venerated specific topographical features because they were considered to be the homes of mythic beings—totemic and nature spirits, culture heroes, ancestors, gods—actually embodying the essence of such beings, or containing supernatural power. Selected topographical features, often unadorned but sometimes slightly modified by subtle walling or rock art, came to be venerated because of certain properties; they were locations rich in materials that could be used for ritual and ceremonial activities, such as herbs for healing, or plants and minerals for dyes or body paints. These sites were also places where culturally important actual or mythical events occurred, possessing a numinous quality or strange sounds, or they were striking visual features and landmarks (Snead & Preucel, 1999; van de Guchte,

1999). Anthropologist Lévy-Bruhl (1935/1983) called such mythologized landscapes “supernature,” which, he wrote, “the natives never separate in their minds from the world they know in dreams and in their myths” (p. 59).

Hilltops and mountain summits tended to be distinctive landmarks. For example, Croagh Patrick, on the west coast of Ireland, resorted to in pagan, prehistoric times, and still the focus of Christian pilgrimage, has a dramatic, near perfect pyramidal form visible from great distances, and is profoundly impressive when viewed from inland with a summer sun setting behind it: the golden edge of the world. Another dramatic example of a venerated landmark is England’s Glastonbury Tor, a solitary conical hill that rises conspicuously from the flat landscape of the Somerset Levels, and was once an island in a shallow sea. Apart from being a visually arresting sight, redolent with numinosity, qualities that still attract Christian and New Age pilgrims as well as tourists, echoes of the Tor’s original perceived sanctity still reverberate through folklore. This folklore states that the singular hill was home to the last King of the Fairies, Gwynn ap Nudd, and that it is the entrance to Annwn, the Celtic underworld (Ashe, 1957/1974). According to long-standing legend, the spirit of King Arthur leading a rowdy retinue of the undead, the Wild Host, rides out at night from Cadbury Castle, a hill reputed by some to have been the historical reality behind the myth of Camelot, twelve miles to the east of the Tor, scooping up the souls of the dying and depositing them at the foot of the Tor. Interestingly, archaeologists found an early Bronze Age burial on Cadbury Castle containing the skeleton of a male in a ritual boat, aligned on Glastonbury Tor, prominent on the horizon (Tabor, 1999, 2008). Taken together, these fragments of lore may provide evidence of a mindscape that once focused on the Glastonbury landmark.



Figure 1. *The distinctive, myth-enshrouded conical hill of Glastonbury Tor, England, on the skyline. (Author)*

In Japan, volcanic Mount Fuji is sacred to both Shinto and Buddhist adherents (Kitagawa, 1992). The Buddhists relate Mount Fuji to the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, while in Shinto tradition it is dedicated to the goddess of flowering trees, Konohana Sakuya Hime.

In the Americas, many mountains have been considered sacred. For example, the distinctive 14,200 foot (4,369 m) Mount Shasta in northern California was venerated by all Indian groups who lived around its base. It was and possibly still is held sacred by today’s Wintu Indians. Traditionally, the body of a newly deceased person would be oriented toward Shasta so the soul would be able to fly there and subsequently ascend to the Milky Way. In the country around the mountain there are subtle markers, like perched boulders on cliff edges, to act as guideposts for the soul on its flight (Theodoratus & LaPena, 1994).

The sacred mountain of Mexico’s Olmec people (c. 1000–600 BCE) was the volcano of San Martin Pajapan, in the Tuxtla Mountains on the Gulf Coast of Veracruz. They considered it to be their place of origin. Again, it is a landmark, towering above surrounding peaks and dominating the area around the sacred lake of Catemaco. In 1897, a life-size statue of a kneeling Olmec ruler was found at the volcano’s crater. In La Venta, one of their major centres, the Olmec built a huge effigy of this volcano out of local clay (Coe, 1994). They fluted the sides of the mound to create a realistic image. This was, in effect, the first of the Mesoamerican pyramids and was part of a ritual complex that was a constructed analogue of a natural venerated landscape.

Almost every ancient society around the world had its examples of sacred hills or mountains, and caves were another typical type of feature acknowledged as places of sanctity by virtually all peoples everywhere. Caves were not only places of shelter, they were the first cathedrals, and even today their numinous power can be felt when descending into them. The cave was traditionally thought of as the gateway to the underworld, realm of the shades and the shaman—a place of visions, of otherworldly silence punctuated by occasional odd sounds, of mind-altering deep darkness. Hints of underworld entities existed in the convoluted forms of stalactites and stalagmites glimpsed in flickering torchlight. This was so from the remotest times, demonstrated by the Palaeolithic painted caves of Spain and southern France, such as Lascaux and Chauvet. These places were where the spirit world was encountered and where the complex phenomenon of human art emerged.

Caves were typically seen in ancient Greece as entrances to the underworld, to Hades, and were often referred to as Plutonia or Charonia, referring to Pluto, lord of the underworld, and Charon, the ferryman of souls across the River Styx. These were also oracles of the dead, *nekuomanteia*, including a famous one at Avernus near Cumae in southern Italy. In the Meander Valley in Asia Minor there were three celebrated *Charonia*—at Hierapolis, at Acharaca, and the Aornum near Magnesia. These oracles were located in an area where noxious vapours rose from the ground. These gases could be dangerous and deadly as well as mind-altering.

For instance, at Hierapolis (modern Pamukkale) there was a deep cave with a narrow opening filled with misty poisonous vapours, which killed every animal entering the cave. Only the eunuch priests of the goddess Cybele were able to enter the cave, either due to their techniques of holding their breath, or antidotes The Plutonium has been identified: it is a deep chamber and a hole, emitting highly poisonous gases. Thus, ancient accounts of gas discharge have been verified by modern scientists and found [to be] precise. (Ustinova, 2009, p. 273)

Different societies gravitated towards caves for varying reasons. The ancient Maya went deep into the cavern systems of Mexico's Yucatan peninsula to obtain virgin water (*zuhuy ha*) for ritual purposes (Thompson, 1954/1966, 1896/1975). Such water lay in subterranean lagoons or dripped from cave roofs. The Mayans also placed stone troughs beneath stalactites to collect drips of the holy water.

Selected trees were another type of landscape feature that became the focus of veneration. Because trees are perishable, unlike topographical features, not a great deal is known about the part trees played—individually or as copses, groves, or forests—in ancient sacred geographies. But enough is known to be sure they were considered important landscape elements in the mindscapes of the past. This is indicated by remarkable evidence, which emerged in 1998 with the discovery of what came to be popularly known as *Sea Henge*—a prehistoric timber circle surrounding the upturned bole of a great tree—emerging from tidal sands off the eroding east coast of England. The central stump was of a giant oak tree that had been placed into the ground with its roots in the air, curiously reminiscent of wooden

idols found in Lapland that had been fashioned from inverted tree stumps. Radiocarbon dating was linked to the tree's annular rings to give the finding that it had been felled in the year 2050 BCE (Brennand & Taylor, 2003).

Vestiges of tree veneration in Europe have survived down into the historical era in a variety of ways. There were special trees at certain locations—Britain's Anglo-Saxon charter of CE 845 mentioned the ash tree which the ignorant call holy at Taunton in Somerset. This was possibly a physical symbol of the cosmological Yggdrasil, the mighty ash tree that linked the worlds of the ancestors, humans, and gods in Norse mythology (and, of course, was the basic model of shamanic consciousness). Some boundary trees were known as Gospel Oaks and became specifically associated with Rogation Day, the Christian festival that was adapted from an ancient pagan observance. The existing maypole and German Maibaum traditions are faint memories of the sanctity of special trees.

Of all the key elements in former sacred geographies, water was perhaps the most ubiquitous. Almost everywhere people worshipped lakes, pools, rivers, springs, and waterfalls. A vestige of this in Christianity is the ritual of baptism. Another memory resides in myth, in which, in the Arthurian Romances the enigmatic and deeply pagan Lady of the Lake gives and reclaims the magical sword Excalibur. Votive offerings, including swords and other weapons, have been recovered from many rivers, even the Thames. The Andean Indians could consider a sacred spot, a *huaca*, in apparently minor features such as a particular bend in a stream or river. In Hinduism the concept of sacred bathing at *tirthas* (fords or crossings), in holy rivers such as the Ganges, is a living act of water veneration. In North America, the Mescalero Apache, like peoples almost everywhere in the pre-modern world, believed springs to be contact points with the spiritual world (Carmichael, 1994).

Apart from these four main types of natural places so often mapped into ancient sacred geographies, there was a range of other features in the landscape that took on significance for early peoples. Almost any feature could be imbued with meaning including rocky outcrops, seams of quartz, isolated boulders, and cliffs. However, a major topographical element that particularly attracted dreamtime attention was the presence of landscape *simulacra*.

*Indeed, there is no lack of places on earth where Nature,
impelled by a kind of intelligent caprice, has carved human shapes*

Antonin Artaud, 1965, *Concerning a Journey to the Land of the Tarahumaras*, p. 71

*The outward shape and form of certain stones awakes in the native intelligence
the reflection that it cannot be merely a stone that confronts him,
but that he has now to deal with a superior being endowed with magical powers . . .
Many of these stones have a markedly unusual look about them.*

Paul Wirz, 1928, as cited in Levy-Bruhl 1935/1983, p. 22

*For double the vision my Eyes do see,
And a double vision is always with me,
With my inward Eye 'tis an old Man grey,
With my outward a Thistle across my way*

William Blake, *To Thomas Butts*, 22 November 1802, 1965/1988, p. 721

Simulacra: Faces and Forms in Places

A *simulacrum* is the chance likeness to a form meaningful to the perceiver seen in the configurations of clouds, the coals of a fire, the bark of a tree, or other surface. The dramatist August Strindberg saw heads as if sculpted out of marble in the creases of bedclothes; Leonardo da Vinci instructed his apprentices to study the exquisite landscapes formed by the mould stains on his studio walls. The French poet and playwright Antonin Artaud, on the edge of madness, repeatedly saw signs, forms, and natural effigies in the plays of light and shadow on crags and rock faces in Mexico. The seeing of simulacra employs the same essential processes made use of by the dreaming mind, or the fluid characteristics of perception available in altered states of consciousness.³

Today many people may treat observations of simulacra, if noticed at all, as inconsequential curiosities. However, seeing a likeness in, say, a topographical feature could be culturally reinforced in the societies of many ancient and traditional peoples, enabling a society to see its mythology emblazoned on its home territory, to see its deities, culture heroes, or some religious, symbolic icon in the very lay of the land—an aspect of what Lévy-Bruhl (1935/1983) called “participation mystique.” It mythologized a countryside, giving it meaning. The land became cognized.

The best-known example of such mythic vision is the Australian Aboriginal perception of the topography as being formed by Dreamtime beings. An example was given early in the 20th Century by Anglo-Australian Olive Pink (1933), who was inducted into her local Dreamtime landscape by an Aborigine elder who helped her to recognise topographic *arumba arunga*

(spirit doubles). Two blue stone rocks, one large, the other smaller, were pointed out to her as the mother and baby blue kangaroo; another was a low hill, the forms of which were said to be the heads of two Dreamtime women who had emerged from and then returned into the ground.

To the spiritually blind eyes of a non-native, this was simply a low hill, though remarkable because of its isolated white limestone cap on the bronze country When one’s spiritual eyes had been opened . . . one could quite well imagine it as the decorated heads of two *altjira* [Dreamtime] women. (Pink, 1933, p. 178)

The scale of simulacra recognized by this dreamtime mode of perception can range from a small boulder to a rock outcrop or to a whole hillside or mountain range. In the Andes, the 17th century Spanish Jesuit Bernabé Cobo noted that the Inca “worshipped the works of nature that were unaltered by human contrivance”; a natural feature, usually a rock, could be seen as a sacred place or *huaca* if it had an “arresting visual characteristic or peculiar feature” (van de Guchte, 1999, p. 163) or had a resemblance to a human being or a creature such as a falcon. Conversely, *huacas* could sometimes function as seats from which specific mountain peaks could be observed. The Inca even worked body parts into their perceptions of landscape, so that various shapes of noses could be read into the forms of mountains and ridges; this was very much tied in with Inca schemes of social hierarchy. In Manitoba, Canada, the Ashinanabe Indians continue to make offerings at Buffalo Rock, a boulder presenting the coincidental

likeness of a buffalo at rest. This boulder is located on the fringe of the boulder mosaic landscape at Tie Creek, Whiteshell Provincial Park, where small rocks laid down perhaps fifteen centuries ago form mysterious patterns (*petroforms*) across table rock exposed in the last Ice Age. While Buffalo Rock is a natural boulder, it is difficult to doubt that the location for the petroform patterns was reinforced because of its presence.

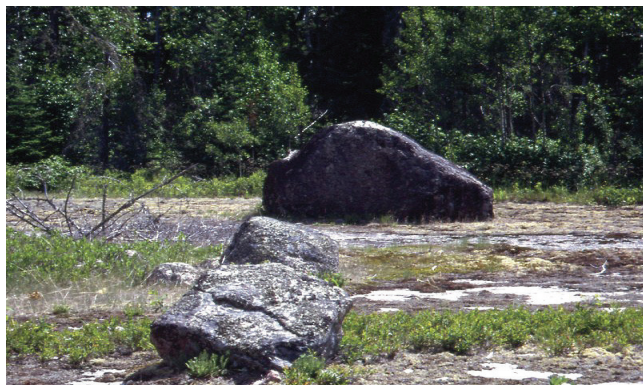


Figure 2. *Buffalo Rock, Tie Creek, Whiteshell Provincial Park, Manitoba, Canada (Author)*

Parts of the Himalayas were conceived of in sacred geographical terms defined by the occurrence of simulacra. Someone who might seem to be simply staring at a group of rocks might actually be in the cognitive process of a somewhat sophisticated landscape interpretation (Huber, 1994).

The area of Karzha, the main town of the Spiti Valley, located in the north-eastern sector of India's Himalayan hill country of Himachal Pradesh, is thought to be especially spiritually charged. Stutchbury (1994) referred to a type of cognitive process in which pilgrims and indigenous inhabitants perceive certain stretches of physical geography as being suffused with sacred meaning.

In the same landscape, a twin-peaked mountain and a glacier facing Kardang temple combine to form the simulacrum of a Buddhist deity that pilgrims come to meditate upon. The face, the eyes, and head of an elephant skin held by the deity are perceivable in the glacier. Another mountain configuration in the region looks like a woman reclining on her back with loose, flowing hair. Indeed, many peaks in the district are perceived as revealing the presence of a sacred being by means of their shapes.

The area of La Phyi in southwest Tibet is an important pilgrimage landscape made up of three mountains containing specific pilgrimage venues. One of these peaks is perceived as the body of the deity Vajravarahi, with a rock outcrop known as Ras chen seen as her head, the Seng khyams rock as her belly, and a rock in front of

the bDud'dul cave as her knee. Samvara is another deity seen elsewhere at La Phyi in the lay of the land. Huber (1994) wrote that when local people were asked to describe the mountain, they indicated rock outcrops which they perceived as representing the deity's head and shoulders, ridges that were seen to be his legs, and the river that flows from the place was conceived by them as being his urine.

A vivid simulacrum in Scotland allows a glimpse into the Neolithic mind. The Kintyre peninsula on the west coast hosts Ballochroy, a group of three standing stones. The central stone has its broadest, flat side aligning towards two rounded peaks on the island of Jura, almost twenty miles offshore. These are known as the Paps of Jura, and the sun sets behind them at the summer solstice when viewed from Ballochroy. *Pap* is an archaic word for breast, and the likeness of the two Jura mountains to a pair of breasts must have been noted for thousands of years and probably were seen as a manifestation of some version of an Earth Mother goddess. This interpretation is reinforced by another Stone Age sightline to the Paps (Devereux, 2010, pp. 34-35). On the island of Islay, which almost touches the southern shore of Jura, there is a lake called Loch Finlaggan, which has the remains of Stone Age monuments around its shores. Especially significant is a standing stone, which archaeological investigation using geophysical surveying techniques has revealed once had a row of stones leading up to it (Channel 4, 1995). Looking along the alignment of this former row to the surviving large standing stone, the eye is led directly to the domed summits of the Paps on the closely adjacent Jura, rising dramatically above an intervening ridge to the northeast.

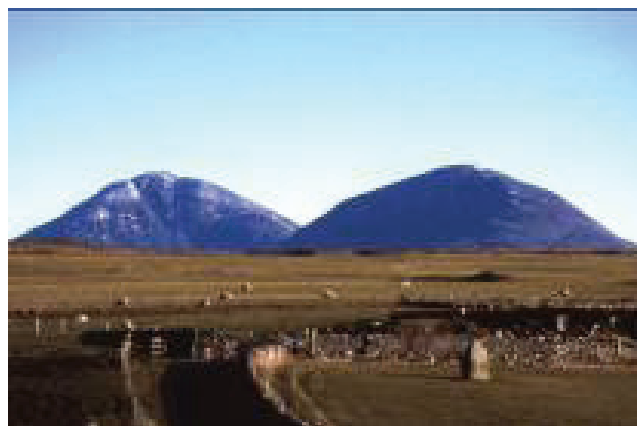


Figure 3. *The Paps of Jura seen from Loch Finlaggan, Islay, Scotland. The standing stone that had a stone row leading up to it aligned on the Paps can be seen in the lower righthand corner of the photograph. (Author)*

Two similar rounded peaks are located near Killarney on the west coast of Ireland. Known as the Paps of Anu, they rise prominently due to their relative isolation and symmetry. In myth, Anu was the mother of the last generation of gods who ruled the Earth, the Tuatha De Danaan. Celtic scholar Anne Ross (1970) suggested that the hills manifest the presence of the goddess embedded in the land. People still gather there during Lughnasa (the pagan Celtic festival held in early August superseded by the Christian harvest-time observance of Lammas) and climb the hills.



Figure 4. *The Paps of Anu, Killarney, Ireland. (Author)*

Another simulacrum of a supine goddess figure in the landscape exists in the Preseli Hills of southwest Wales, the source area of at least some of the Stonehenge bluestones. Here, a natural rocky ridge known as Carn Ingli (Hill of Angels) is locally perceived as the body of a woman lying on her back, her face turned upwards toward the sky. She is either pregnant or has her arms folded across her stomach and her hair flows out behind her. How long this simulacrum has been noted cannot be determined, but if eyes can see it now, one assumes they could see it in ages past. The tor acquired its name of Carn Ingli because of the practice of a 6th-century anchorite, St. Brynach, who had his cell nearby, of climbing the tor to meditate and converse with angels there.



A quite different kind of simulacrum exists at the Externsteine rocks, a group of five tall, weathered fingers of sandstone located in the Teutoburger Wald district near Detmold, Germany. Near the top of the tallest pillar (Tower Rock) is a rock-hewn chapel, either pagan or early Christian, which has a round window through which the midsummer rising sun shines. Near the base of another pillar there is a relief panel carved in the medieval period showing Christ's descent from the cross, confirming the Christianisation of the site. In the 20th Century, the Externsteine became a center for the Nazi SS. The early history of the site is uncertain. There are some claims that the place was a focus for pagan worship until Christianisation by Charlemagne in CE 772. What is certain, though, is that on the side of one of the rock columns there is an overhanging segment that from most angles looks like a huge human figure with its arms raised, as if tied to the rock.

This natural feature has long been the source of speculation, including suggestions that it was seen as being a naturally-occurring depiction of the pagan



Figure 6 (Above). *The rock simulacrum at the Externsteine Rocks, Germany. (Author)*

Figure 5 (left). *The Carn Ingli "goddess". The head is to the right in this view, its facial profile pointing upwards. The "hair" streams out further to the right. The belly indicates pregnancy or else the figure has its arms folded across it. The simulacrum operates from both sides of the rocky ridge. (Author)*

North European god Odin hanging on the Norse version of the primordial World Tree, Yggdrasil, which in myth he did for nine nights in order to gain the secret of the runes. Some commentators have argued that the feature was Christianized by the addition of an artificial hole, representing the spear wound made in Christ's side as he hung on the cross. If this is correct, then it may be the only known case of the Christianization of a simulacrum.

Another good example of a rock resemblance to a human form occurs in southwest England, on the Cornish hill of Carn Brea. On the summit of this are the vestiges of an early Neolithic settlement near a weathered granite outcrop that presents the appearance of a head complete with brow, cheekbones, and lips. Known as the Carn Brea Giant, this natural rocky visage looks out toward St. Agnes's Beacon, a hill six miles (10 km) away. In a legend reminiscent of some Aboriginal Dreamtime myth, it is said that there was also a giant on the beacon, whose name was Bolster. The two giants threw rocks at each other until Bolster ran out of ammunition, so explaining why St Agnes' Beacon is devoid of rocks and Carn Brea is littered with them.



Figure 7. *The Carn Brea Giant, Cornwall, England.* (Author)

There are also iconic, symbolic simulacra in addition to the more usual anthropomorphic ones. A quite startling example is to be found inside the Mayan ritual cave system of Balankanché, in the Yucatán, Mexico, near the ancient Mayan ceremonial city of Chichén Itzá. The natural passageway leads into a large circular cavern with a curiously domed floor rising in the centre. There, linking the cavern's ceiling and the dome's crest is a giant fused stalactite and stalagmite looking

remarkably like a tree trunk, with the impression of foliage created by countless small, spiky stalactites. Stone and wooden figures, pottery incense burners, small pots, and other votive objects surround this tree-like calcite configuration. Carbon-dating of charcoal from a censer and a hearth suggested a 9th-century date for the placing of the objects. This striking tree-like formation was therefore clearly worshipped by the ancient Maya who doubtless would have seen it as a representation of the Mayan World Tree concept, Wakah-Chan (Raised-up-Sky), provided by the Earth itself.

Thus, mythic topography could exist underground as well as above. Indeed, dreamtime perception occurred in the Palaeolithic painted caves of France and Spain (and doubtless elsewhere); it has been widely noted by rock art researchers that bumps, cracks, and odd shapes in rock walls were utilized by the Palaeolithic painters to give their images a bas-relief, three dimensional quality, as well as to indicate that a spirit world existed behind the rock face (e.g., Clottes, 2013).



Figure 8. *The impressive calcite formation in the Balankanché cavern system, Yucatan, surrounded by ancient Mayan censers.* (Author)

These examples are just a few of the countless cases of simulacra that were recognized across the ancient world—topographical features incorporated into the dreamscapes, the mythic mindscapes, of many societies and tribal peoples.

Interactivity?

There is evidence that topographical simulacra represented not only a dreamtime way of seeing, but that such features also directly influenced the religious lives and sensibilities of societies in terms of temple locations, iconography, and shamanic dreaming.

Two Southeast Asian examples illustrate location aspects—Mount Haitang, now a national protected forest park close to Fuxin, Liaoning province, in north-eastern China, and another in Namsan in southeastern Korea. Each consists of complexes of temples built in mountainous terrain punctuated by Buddhist sculptures.

The core sacred spot on Mount Haitang is a cave that was used by a Tantric Buddhist monk. It is said that early in the Qing Dynasty (CE 1644 -1912) a royal surveying party guided by this Mongolian monk, and using various forms of divination including the seeking of rocks of certain shapes, determined the location of the (now defunct) Pu'an Temple. Around this temple are boulders carved and painted with images of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other deities and holy warriors. They are interspersed with unadorned simulacra, such as Mountain Eagle Rock, Toad Rock, Coiled Dragon Rock, Hat Rock, among many others, their names indicating their fortuitous resemblances. The complex as a whole, which evolved over two centuries, covers nearly five hectares of the mountainside and involves twenty-six large buildings, fifteen hundred towers and halls, and five miles (8 km) of preaching paths (Barnes, 1999).

Namsan (Southern Mountain) in Gyeongju Province, South Korea, is an oval-shaped massif, now a protected National Forest and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) World Heritage Site. Riven by many valleys, it was co-opted by Buddhism in the 6th century CE, but it was sacred before then—shamans conducted rain dances there, and megalithic monuments dating to the first millennium BCE have been found. There is evidence that certain places on Namsan were used for making offerings to nature spirits, so it is perhaps not surprising that the Buddhists believed that Namsan harbored many buddhas and bodhisattvas who had descended from heaven to dwell in its rocks and trees. A probable reason that the mountain was such a spiritual focus is the presence of many granite rocks scattered over it resembling animals and objects. They are known by such names as Old Man, Python, Fierce Tiger, Lion, Big Bear, Boar, Cat, and even Dung Rock, and occur

primarily in the Yongjang valley. Namsan is home to over a hundred temples, most of them now archaeological sites, sixty-three pagodas, nearly forty statues, and about ninety sculpted rocks, the largest of which is the thirty-foot (10 m) Buddha Rock in the T'ap Valley (Barnes, 1999).

The suggestive forms of configurations in the landscape were undoubtedly recognized by ancient peoples and incorporated into their dreamtime scenarios, and in some cases may have influenced a society's iconography. The Bronze Age Minoans of Crete had a visual relationship with cleft-peak mountains; their palace temples align to or stand in sight of such distinctive peaks, on which the Minoans constructed shrines. Phaistos, as one example, aligns to the saddle-shaped summit of Mount Psiloritis (Mount Ida), in which are caves that were used even prior to the time of the palaces for goddess worship. The main cave there, Kamares, was where the legendary Cretan shaman-figure, Epimenides, went into trance and became master of enthusiastic wisdom, becoming an expert in the techniques of inducing altered states of consciousness. The palace of Mallia is directed at Mount Dikte, which also has a split peak, and Knossos is overlooked by the cleft peak of Mount Juktas, which has remnants of both Neolithic and Minoan ritual activity on its fissured summit rock. The great archaeologist of Minoan Crete, Sir Arthur Evans, noted that Juktas looked like a man's head gazing skywards when viewed from the direction of Tyllissos—he learned that the locals there called it the Head of Zeus.

But the repeated cleft- or saddle-peak configuration seems to have held a deeper significance for the Minoans. Art historian Vincent Scully (1979) put forward the idea that this shape was originally seen as representing a landscape goddess. He wrote, "these features create a profile which is basically that of a pair of horns, but it may sometimes also suggest raised arms or wings, the female cleft, or even, at some sites, a pair of breasts" (p. 11). There is some evidence for this, such as a depiction on an artefact found at Knossos of a woman standing on a mountain with sacral horns in the background. Did such topographic forms prompt the sacred iconography of the Minoans, visible in such artifacts as their Horns of Consecration and the ritual double-axe or *labrys*, ubiquitous in Minoan temple imagery, as well as the upraised arms salute depicted time and again in Minoan figurines?

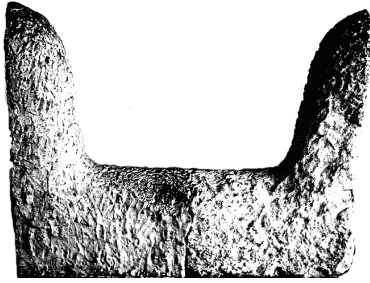


Figure 9. *One example of the ubiquitous Minoan “Horns of Consecration,” Crete. (Author)*

The same open question as to whether shapes in the landscape informed religious imagery or whether such imagery was projected onto landscape features occurs with regard to that powerful icon of ancient Egypt, the pyramid. On the western side of the Nile, opposite present-day Luxor, is the great royal necropolis known as the Valley of the Kings. This exists within the folds of a massif dominated by a peak known as el-Qurn (the Horn). This is of a near perfect pyramidal form, and perhaps inspired the architects of ancient Egypt to create their monumental pyramids. Yet the possible role of simulacra goes further at this place. One bay in the massif, Deir el-Bahri, was sacred to Hathor, the goddess who was Mistress of the West, and often shown as a cow, or a woman with cow's ears and horns. It was believed that she materialized out of the mountain to receive the souls of the dead kings. She was also sometimes depicted as a cobra, the symbol of royal power in ancient Egypt which may have been a throwback to an earlier, pre-dynastic deity called Meresger, She Who Loves Silence, a cobra-goddess who was believed to dwell within the mountain. In Deir el-Bahri is the New Kingdom temple of Queen Hatshepsut. This happens to be positioned at the foot of a rock column that obtrudes from a cliff. No one saw anything special about this cliff-face until 1991, when Egyptologist V. A. Donohue perceived that the forms within the rock column looked like a statue-group in which a cobra with distended hood rears behind a standing anthropomorphic figure who wears the head-dress and beard of a pharaoh (Donohue, 1992). This rock configuration is badly eroded but still discernible, especially when the angle of the sun allows light and shadow to enhance it. (It is perhaps significant to note that Hatshepsut was known for her landscaping skills, and that the main axis of Karnak aligns across the Nile towards her temple.)

Dreamscapes: Simulacra in Traditional Societies

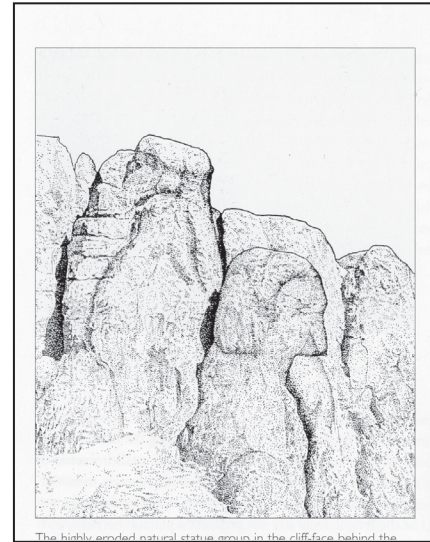


Figure 10. *The pharaoh-cobra simulacrum in the cliff-face behind Hatshepsut's temple, Deir el-Bahri, Egypt. A sculpture showing just this configuration was unearthed in the temple of Luxor, across the Nile from this location. (N. Griffiths, courtesy of V. A. Donohue)*

Donohue has gone on to note that several other temples in Egypt have been located where cliff-face simulacra of various kinds can be identified (Donohue, personal communication, 1993).

Topography could communicate in various ways. It could even speak in people's dreams—take the case of the east Californian Paiute Indian, Jack Stewart (Hoavadunuki). He was a hundred years old when an anthropologist interviewed him in the 1930s, so he came to his maturity before encountering a white man (Stewart, 1934). The old Indian remembered that in early manhood Birch Mountain spoke to him in a dream or vision and asked him to become a doctor, a shaman. It told him in some detail how to cure, but Jack confessed that his soul refused this power because of the dangers involved in being a doctor/shaman. Although Jack never became a shaman officially, he had countless visionary exchanges with Birch Mountain which he felt bestowed supernatural power on him. This perception of physical mountains acting as sentient spiritual entities may be bizarre to many modern thinkers, but it was deeply embedded in American Indian sensibility.

While we will never know the full extent of the interaction between the land and the minds of ancient and pre-modern, pre-industrial peoples, such examples as these indicate that it was rich, varied, and a widespread process.

Toward a Transpersonal Archaeology

By standing at an anciently venerated natural place or monument, one stands within the vestiges of a former way of seeing the physical world, from an epistemology other than the current one. Such a different cognitive framework can impose itself spontaneously on the modern mind in the appropriate circumstances. For example, Philip O'Connor (1963), an articulate vagrant, noted poetic, or perhaps mythic, moods that influenced his perceptions while involved in prolonged acts of what he called unproductive walking, not directed at exercise or destinations. The ego, he felt, "progressively merges its sensible outlines into the environment" (p. 130). O'Connor remarked on "an immense afflatus in the heart and soul towards evening . . . as if one were a prayer winding along a road." He described the "poetic effect" of a rapid "transit between inner state and outer appearance" (pp. 133-134).

Can such a shift of cognitive framework be learned, even if with some difficulty and for only brief moments? While the question applies to everyone, the particular concern of this writer is with the field of archaeology. For too long, archaeologists have studied sacred sites in isolation, trapping each of them inside a narrow perceptual frame. However, from about 1970, archaeologists started to raise their eyes and look at how a site related to its surrounding landscape, and so Landscape Archaeology came into being (Fowler, 1972). In 1994, archaeologist Christopher Tilley provided a deeper dimension to this when he introduced phenomenology into field archaeology, which integrated philosophical approaches into landscape perception. Can archaeologists try to go deeper still by attempting to employ O'Connor's transit between inner state and outer appearance? If so, it will require a trained ability to actively overcome current perceptual habits and to temporarily bypass modern epistemology. The nature writer Barry Lopez (1990) hinted at one way to achieve this, taught to him by Kenyan tribal elders in the stone desert west of Lake Turkana:

When we enter the landscape to learn something, we are obligated, I think, to pay attention rather than constantly pose questions. To approach the land as we would a person, by opening an intelligent conversation. And to stay in one place, to make of that one, long observation a fully-dilated experience. We will always be rewarded if we give the land credit

for more than we can imagine, and if we imagine it as being more complex even than language. (pp. 36-37)

By observing a formerly venerated topographical simulacrum, or fully exploring the relationship of a prehistoric monument with its natural environment, an archaeologist, or any observer, can briefly inhabit the mode of dreamtime perception if able to train oneself to truly feel, however transiently, that there are spirits in rocks, that natural forms self-evidently reveal the presence of dreamtime beings, that mountains can speak in dreams, that the land can hold a dialogue with people. In short, it may be possible to train oneself to observe the landscape through nowadays normally dormant mythic filters in the waking state, which still slot naturally into place in dreams and in various other kinds of altered mind states.

If one looks at, say, the simulacrum of a face in a rock outcrop, is one looking at a face peering out of the landscape (and out of the depths of the mind) back at the observer, or is one simply observing a rock? Where does the one perception end and the other begin? Holding that ambiguity is a way to soften hardened, culturally-entrained perceptions. It is a kind of Necker's cube, but involving the physical environment rather than a diagram on a page.

Over recent years, the present writer has been involved in a project called Landscape and Perception, under the auspices of Britain's Royal College of Art. The project is a pilot study of raw visual and acoustic elements primarily on and around the Carn Menyn ridge, Mynydd Preseli, southwest Wales, the source area of some of the Stonehenge bluestones. The study was conceived to encourage a younger generation of audio-visual practitioners to use direct, natural sensory source material for their digital work, to draw on detailed and fully-dilated sensory perception, and in the process to perhaps derive observations useful to archaeology in an ancient and unspoilt landscape that has been subjected to surprisingly little archaeological study. The project's stated aim is to attempt exploring what Stone Age eyes and ears would have perceived there.

By treating the selected landscape as an active agent in the process, it has transpired that previously undocumented information has indeed been garnered that is useful to archaeology. For example, the project has identified recurring visual relationships between

a certain type of megalithic monument and local topography that have not been noted previously, giving a guide as to how Stone Age eyes might have perceived that landscape. More remarkably, it has been discovered that the Stonehenge bluestones came from an exceptional soundscape, where not only are there extraordinary echo phenomena, but where a significant percentage of the very rocks emit musical or metallic sounds when struck—they are ringing rocks, referred to in certain contexts as lithophones. Such rocks were deemed important around the ancient world for ritual activity. In ancient China, for example, resonant rocks were known as *bayinshi* (Berthier, 1989), and such rocks were widely used in tribal Africa (and still are in some cases), in the Americas, and were developed into a sophisticated musical stone technology in India. This opens the likelihood that their acoustic properties may have been at least one of the reasons the bluestones were felt by Neolithic people to be so important, so sacred, so full of mana or spirits, that they were worth the mighty effort of transporting them over 155 miles (250 km) from Wales to the Salisbury Plain site of Stonehenge. Recent work by the project at Stonehenge itself in July, 2013, further supports this hypothesis (Devereux & Wozencroft, in press).⁴

What may turn out to be one of the most important discoveries concerning Stonehenge will have been gained by treating the landscape as an intelligent interlocutor. It could be said that archaeology does not get more transpersonal than that.

Concluding Remarks

If one enables the experience of deep reflexes between mind and nature that are no longer understood or articulated within the current epistemological framework, the greater will be the understanding that when a tribal or traditional society is removed from its native land it is uprooted from its collective dream, risking mythic amnesia and concomitant cultural erosion. By coming to see the landscape as it was to ancestors, full of mythic imagery, memory, spirits and powers, one reaches back to deep springs of consciousness. It is an effort that can rekindle a valuable, if now unfamiliar, relationship with the natural environment. Dreaming minds and certain other altered states of consciousness report that the filters, even though dormant in standard daily lives, are still in place, but cultural set and setting have to be temporarily transcended by one means or another in order to use them with eyes wide open, so as to perceive supernature.

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Notes

1. The present writer is one of those people who sometimes sleeps with slightly open eyes, so is unusually prone to external visual stimuli affecting his dream content. In one dream, a group of people waving their arms dissolved on awakening to reveal the bedroom curtains blowing in a gentle breeze. In another waking dream, an eagle transformed into the fancy doorknob of the bedroom door.
2. The term “dreamtime” was coined in 1927 by Europeans in Australia, not by the Australian Aborigines themselves. Nevertheless, the Aborigines felt that it well enough described the timeless time of the *tjukuba*, one of its many Aboriginal names.
3. The present writer well remembers an instance under LSD when he witnessed the folds in a handkerchief assume the exactly perfect simulacrum of a dove. Perception is very much a moveable feast, especially when outside the monophasic norm of consciousness of our present-day “Westernized” societies.
4. This is discussed in detail in the highly illustrated forthcoming Devereux and Wozencroft paper, as cited. Interim, a flavor of this work can be read, seen, and heard at: www.landscape-perception.com

About the Author

Paul Devereux, BA, FRSA, is Managing Editor (and a co-founder) of the academic publication, *Time & Mind—The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* (<http://www.tandfonline.com/rtam>), and a research

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