

Could the new tourist route “Sky Paths” in Saxony-Anhalt with its archaeological sites be considered as sacred space?

by Reinhard Mussik

The tourist route ‘Sky Paths’, in Saxony-Anhalt, is a path connecting the world-famous archaeoastronomical sites of Nebra and Goseck, the State Museum of Prehistory in Halle (which houses the Nebra sky disc) and a little known archaeological site at Langeneichstädt. Using the example of this relatively new tourist route this article discusses the question if sacred space is a human construct. A consideration of the character of the ancient sites in the past will try to answer two questions: Can these sites be considered sacred today and can the modern pathway between them be considered a pilgrimage form of sacred site? This article shows that the ‘Sky Paths’ tourist route can be seen not only as a human construct but also as an important factor in a dialectical process in which human forms space and space forms human.

My investigation started with library and internet based studies about the sites and the tourist route ‘Sky Paths’. Since 2004 - before the establishment of the new tourist route – I’ve visited the individual archaeological sites and the Museum in Halle regularly. In 2012 I combined my library and internet based studies with fieldwork in Goseck, Nebra and Langeneichstädt. I took photos from the Goseck and Langeneichstädt and interviewed members of the Gosecker Heimat- und Kulturverein e.V. and the Warteverein Langeneichstädt e.V. In May and December 2012, I took part in an official guided tour of the Goseck site and on the 21st of December 2012, I visited the winter solstice-event in the Goseck circle. Furthermore, I visited the new visitor centre Nebra Ark in 2010 and 2012.

The idea to establish archaeological tourism on a tourist route called ‘Sky Paths’ was first presented in the *Handbook of Tourism* published in 2005 by the tourism-Department of the Ministry of Economics and Work of Saxony-Anhalt.¹ But in an official study about the potential of *spiritual tourism* in Saxony-Anhalt in

¹ Christian Antz, "Handbuch Tourismus in Sachsen-Anhalt," ed. Referat Tourismus (Magdeburg, Wernigerode: Ministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt und Hochschule Harz, Bereich tourismuswirtschaft, 2005), 53.

2006, only Christian pilgrimage and Christian sacred places were considered.² The possibility of establishing pilgrimage routes to Pre-Christian sacred places, or places which could be important for a New Age spirituality, was not even considered.³ The official documents show clearly that a recreation of sacred space on the route, as well as the establishment of a new form of pilgrimage, was never intended by the creators of the new tourist route but that it was exclusively planned as a form of archaeological tourism.⁴

I am going to compare the theories about sacred space from Mircea Eliade, Christopher Tilley, Ernst Cassirer and Emile Durkheim⁵ in my consideration of whether these sites could be seen as sacred today and if the modern pathway between them could be seen as a pilgrimage form of sacred site. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917), in his 1912 published book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, analysed the relationship between religions and “the real.”⁶ A main element of Durkheim’s definition of religion was his sacred/profane dichotomy.⁷ Almost half a century later, in 1957, the Romanian philosopher and historian of religion, Mircea Eliade (1907 – 1986), sharply contrasted these two categories in his book *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion*.⁸ The crucial points in Durkheim’s ideas about sacred space are derived from his differentiation between sacred and profane forces, and from his ideas about the development of categories like “space.” Categories like space come, according to Durkheim, from society and the very things these categories express are social too.⁹ Hence Durkheim claimed that the space society occupied provided

² Karin Berkemann, "Spirituelle Tourismus in Sachsen-Anhalt, Potenzialanalyse Und Handlungsempfehlungen Für Eine Besondere Reiseform," ed. Referat Tourismus, Tourismus-Studien Sachsen Anhalt (Magdeburg, Lutherstadt Wittenberg: Ministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt,, 2006).

³ Berkemann, "Spirituelle Tourismus in Sachsen-Anhalt, Potenzialanalyse Und Handlungsempfehlungen Für Eine Besondere Reiseform."

⁴ Robert Datzler, "Handbuch Kulturtourismus in Sachsen Anhalt," ed. Referat Tourismus (Magdeburg, Potsdam, Köln: Ministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt, 2006), 120-21.

⁵ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*, [1st American ed. (New York,: Harcourt, 1959)]; Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape* (Oxford: Berg, 1994); Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 2., Mythical Thought* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971 [1955]); Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995 [1912]).

⁶ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp.xviii, xxii.

⁷ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp.xxxiii.; Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction* (Oxford Blackwell 2006,), p. 126.

⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*.

⁹ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 442.

the raw material for the category of space.¹⁰ Like Durkheim, Eliade also differentiated between sacred space and profane space. However, for him, the sacredness of space is only important for religious people. Since only for them, the 'spatial nonhomogeneity finds expression in the experience of an opposition between space that is sacred – the only real and really existing space – and all other space, the formless expanse surrounding it.'¹¹ According to Eliade, the revelation of a sacred space possesses existential value for religious men because nothing can begin and nothing can be done, without a previous orientation.¹² Precondition of any orientation is the acquisition of a fixed point. Hence, from Eliade's point of view, the 'religious man has always sought to fix his abode at the "center of the world". If the world is to be lived in, it must be founded – and no world can come to birth in the chaos of the homogeneity and relativity of profane space.'¹³ To act on the assumption of Eliade, people are not free to choose their sacred site. They can only search for it and find it by the help of signs.¹⁴ That means that for Eliade sacred sites are not a result of the forming of a social group or society, as Durkheim assumed. On the contrary, to find their sacred site is the precondition for the existence of this social group or society.

The German philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1874 – 1945) was engaged in the definition of sacred space in his book, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.¹⁵ According to him, the sacred space 'occupies a kind of middle position between the space of sense perception and the space of pure cognition, that is, geometry'.¹⁶ He stated that 'we require a peculiar reversal of perspective, a *negation* of what seems immediately given in sensory perception, before we can arrive at the "logical space" of pure mathematics.'¹⁷ In contrast to the Euclidean space the visual and tactile space are both anisotropic and inhomogeneous.¹⁸ Starting from this comparison, Cassirer doubted that *mythical* space could be closely related to the space of perception and strictly opposed to the logical space of geometry.¹⁹ For Cassirer, mythical space and perceptive space are both 'thoroughly concrete products of consciousness.'²⁰ According to the British archaeologist Christopher

¹⁰ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 442.

¹¹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*, p. 20.

¹² Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*, p. 22.

¹³ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*, p. 22.

¹⁴ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*, p. 28.

¹⁵ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 2., Mythical Thought*.

¹⁶ Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 2., Mythical Thought*, p. 83.

¹⁷ Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 2., Mythical Thought*, p. 83.

¹⁸ Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 2., Mythical Thought*, p. 84.

¹⁹ Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 2., Mythical Thought*, p. 84.

²⁰ Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 2., Mythical Thought*, p. 84.

Tilley the meaning of space always involves a subjective dimension.²¹ He asserted that 'the meaning of space cannot be understood apart from the symbolically constructed life-worlds of social actors.'²² He also stated that space 'has no substantial essence in itself.'²³ According to Tilley, space only 'has a relational significance, created through relations between peoples and places.'²⁴ More aligned to Durkheim than to Eliade, Tilley asserts that, 'Space is created by social relations, natural and cultural objects. It is a production, an achievement, rather than an autonomous reality in which things or people are located or "found."²⁵ But for him, 'space is both constituted and constitutive.'²⁶ Place therefore, according to Tilley, is not only constituted by people, but 'dialectically so as to create the people who are of the place.'²⁷

A helpful operational definition of a sacred site is given by Anthony Thorley and Celia M. Gunn. According to them, 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.'²⁸ Furthermore, a sacred site must also have one or more of nineteen characteristics catalogued by Thorley and Gunn²⁹; according to their definition, the archaeological sites on 'Sky Paths' could be considered to be sacred.

The Nebra sky disc was found at the plateau of the Mittelberg near the little village Wangen. In about 1,600 B.C. the bronze disc was buried there – and not simply lost or forgotten - by people of the Bronze Age. The Nebra sky disc was found 25 km from the Goseck circle. Both had some similar functions and could help to determine the summer- and winter solstices.³⁰ The sky disc was not only buried on the Mittelberg, but it was aligned there. From the Mittelberg the summer solstice sunset can be seen exactly over the Brocken, the highest

²¹ Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, p. 11.

²² Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, p. 11.

²³ Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, p. 11.

²⁴ Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, p. 11.

²⁵ Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, p. 17.

²⁶ Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, p. 17.

²⁷ Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, p. 26.

²⁸ Antony Thorley and Celia M. Gunn, "Sacred Sites : An Overview. A Report for the Gaia Foundation 2007," (The Gaia Foundation 2007), p. 76.

²⁹ Thorley and Gunn, "Sacred Sites : An Overview. A Report for the Gaia Foundation 2007," p. 76.

³⁰ Wolfhard Schlosser, "Astronomische Analyse Der Himmelscheibe Von Nebra Und Des Kreisgrabens Von Goseck - Gemeinsamkeiten Und Unterschiede," in *Acta Praehistorica Et Archaeologica*, ed. Wilfried Menghin (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 2008).

Mountain in the region.³¹ That means this place in the landscape was especially revered by a people, culture or cultural group as a focus for spiritual belief and practice and likely religious observance, according to Thorley and Gunn's stem definition.³² Furthermore, it has the following characteristics from the list of Thorley and Gunn: It is a natural topographical feature; a mountain, and it is embellished with man-made symbols or artefacts; in this case the burial place of holy or religious objects.³³ Since June 2007 a multimedia visitors' centre has been situated on the Mittelberg (Figure 1). This building takes the form of a floating golden barque, drawn from the ship element in the image on the sky disc. In the building the history of the sky disc and changing special presentations are shown



Figure 1, Wangen, The Nebra Ark, visitor centre

(Figure 2). Furthermore, there is a planetarium where the visitor can learn about the function of the sky disc. On the plateau of the Mittelberg a colossal 31m-high peaked sundial was erected. At the exact location of the disc's discovery the

³¹ Schlosser, "Astronomische Analyse Der Himmelscheibe Von Nebra Und Des Kreisgrabens Von Goseck - Gemeinsamkeiten Und Unterschiede," p. 59.

³² Thorley and Gunn, "Sacred Sites : An Overview. A Report for the Gaia Foundation 2007," p. 76.

³³ Thorley and Gunn, "Sacred Sites : An Overview. A Report for the Gaia Foundation 2007," pp. 76-77.



Figure 2, Wangen, The Nebra Ark, visitor centre

"Celestial Eye", a round mirror in which the sky could be seen, was built. The sight-axes fixed in the design of the sky disc become visible too on this place.³⁴

The next site on the 'Sky Paths' route is Goseck. Near the little village and the Goseck Castle was a Middle Neolithic circular ditch enclosure uncovered entirely from 2002-2004. The complex measured 75m in diameter. The wooden construction of two palisades was encircled by a V-shaped ditch and a wall. In the north, southeast and southwest three gates were found. These gates were clearly related to astronomical aspects.³⁵ By observing the course of the sun on the horizon three important points for the farming year could be determined; the winter solstice, the summer solstice and the time at the end on April/beginning of

³⁴ Saale-Unstrut-Tourismus e.V., "The Nebra Ark," http://saale-unstrut-tourismus.de/web/en/content/content.php?areaID=9&menuID=34&contentID=447&active_menu=0&vhm=

³⁵ Official Guided Tour, 27.05. and 21.12. 2012; Francois Bertemes, "Die Kreisgrabenanlage Von Goseck: Ein Beispiel Für Frühe Himmelsbeobachtungen," in *Acta Praehistorica Et Archaeologica*, ed. Wilfried Menghin (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 2008); Wolfhard Schlosser, "Astronomische Analyse Der Himmelscheibe Von Nebra Und Des Kreisgrabens Von Goseck - Gemeinsamkeiten Und Unterschiede; Rahlf; Rink Hansen, Christine, "Himmelscheibe, Sonnenwagen Und Kalenderhüte - Ein Versuch Zur Bronzezeitlichen Astronomie," in *Acta Praehistorica Et Archaeologica*, ed. Wilfried Menghin (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 2008).

May.³⁶ Interestingly, the sunrise and sunset at the winter solstice, the most important events observed in this construction, are observable without the construction over landmarks too. This suggests the site was first discovered as a special place before the construction was built.³⁷ On the basis of the archaeological material, the complex was assigned to the "Stichbandkeramik", meaning the site dates back 7,000 years and was used for an estimated 250-300 years. This makes it the oldest known observatory in Europe. ³⁸ But, as the archaeologist François Bertemes pointed out, the construction in Goseck should not only be interpreted as a sun observatory.³⁹ According to him, the archaeological findings suggest that the circular ditch enclosure in Goseck was a multifunctional monument which was primarily planned and used as a cult place and sanctuary.⁴⁰ It was not only used to find the most important calendar dates



Figure 3, Goseck circle, the reconstructed ditch and palisades

³⁶ Wolfhard Schlosser, "Astronomische Analyse Der Himmelscheibe Von Nebra Und Des Kreisgrabens Von Goseck - Gemeinsamkeiten Und Unterschiede."

³⁷ Official Guided Tour.

³⁸ Francois Bertemes, "Die Kreisgrabenanlage Von Goseck: Ein Beispiel Für Frühe Himmelsbeobachtungen," p. 37.

³⁹ Bertemes, "Die Kreisgrabenanlage Von Goseck: Ein Beispiel Für Frühe Himmelsbeobachtungen," p. 42.

⁴⁰ Bertemes, "Die Kreisgrabenanlage Von Goseck: Ein Beispiel Für Frühe Himmelsbeobachtungen," p. 42.

but also a place for feasts and rituals⁴¹ with the site forming the cultural and/or religious centre for villages in a radius of 8km.⁴² The important role of the demarcation demonstrated, according to Bertemes, a sharply pronounced dualism between 'the inside' and 'the outside' and respectively 'the sacred' and 'the profane.'⁴³ Now this place has been reconstructed (Figure 3) using 1,675 oak trunks to rebuild the circular complex. Since the winter solstice of 2005, the site has been open to visitors and guided tours are offered on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays.⁴⁴ Every year the winter solstice is celebrated in the reconstructed circle. During my visit at the Winter solstice sunset 2012 there were approximately 150 visitors (Figure 4).



Figure 4, Goseck, winter solstice 2012



Figure 5, Goseck, winter solstice 2012, procession between the palisades

A drummer and dancers simulated a "prehistoric" ritual in the centre of the construction round a bonfire (Figure 5).⁴⁵ The drummer in the centre of the construction (Figure 6) could be heard all over the construction.⁴⁶ The brilliant

⁴¹ Bertemes, "Die Kreisgrabenanlage Von Goseck: Ein Beispiel Für Frühe Himmelsbeobachtungen," pp. 42-43.

⁴² Official Guided Tour.

⁴³ Bertemes, "Die Kreisgrabenanlage Von Goseck: Ein Beispiel Für Frühe Himmelsbeobachtungen," p. 43.

⁴⁴ Saale-Unstrut-Tourismus e.V., "Goseck – Go 7,000 Years Back in Time," http://saale-unstrut-tourismus.de/web/en/content/content.php?areaID=9&menuID=34&contentID=448&active_menu=0&vhm=

⁴⁵ Klaus-Dieter Kunick, "Sonnenobservatorium. Trommelklänge Im Dunkeln," *mz-web.de Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, 23.12.2012 2012.; and my own observation.

⁴⁶ A video that I made at the 21st December in Goseck to demonstrate the sound effects in the palisade circle: <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=505903889431346&set=o.176867495700661&type=2&theater>



Figure 6, Goseck, winter solstice 2012, drummer and dancers

acoustic works only on behalf of the double-structure of the palisade.⁴⁷ The visitors were merely families, interested in archaeology or history, no adherents of a pagan religion.⁴⁸ This is an important distinction to sites in Great Britain like Stonehenge or Avebury where visitors come for entirely different reasons including the spiritual tourism of the “new-age”, Goddess tours and where Druids can be archetypal worshippers.⁴⁹ But at some level the German solstice archaeo-tourists are engaging in a spiritual/religious activity too. They are memorialising a past tradition. In this sense, the participants of the winter solstice event are part of a living museum. They are carrying a sacred quality, even if barely acknowledged by themselves. Therefore, their visit could be seen as spiritual-religious observance too. Therefore, the circular structure in Goseck is, according to the above cited stem definition of Thorley and Gunn, a sacred place.⁵⁰ Furthermore, it has the following descriptive characteristics from the list of Thorley and Gunn: It is founded upon a natural topographical feature, which means around a place where the sunrise as well the sunset at winter solstice could

⁴⁷ Official Guided Tour.

⁴⁸ My own observation and interviews with visitors and members of the Gosecker Sonnenobservatorium e. V.

⁴⁹ Robert J. Wallis and Jenny Blain, "Sites, Sacredness, and Stories: Interactions of Archaeology and Contemporary Paganism," *Folklore* 114, no. 3 (2003): p. 309.

⁵⁰ Thorley and Gunn, "Sacred Sites : An Overview. A Report for the Gaia Foundation 2007," p. 76.

be observed over prominent features in the landscape and it is embellished with a man-made construction.⁵¹

The next site on the 'Sky Paths' tour is the archaeological site Langeneichstädt. This extraordinary burial site from the Middle Neolithic period was discovered and excavated there in 1987.⁵² The tomb sheltered a menhir with a dolmen goddess carved into it, along with a number of pieces of jewellery⁵³. The condition of the stele allows certain conclusions concerning magical rituals of that time⁵⁴. The dolmen goddess is a fertility-goddess mainly found in Western and South-Eastern Europe and is very rare in the central German Middle Neolithic⁵⁵. The menhir with the dolmen-goddess carved into it was re-used as material at the burial site.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the menhir was not simply used as construction material, but it was placed in such a manner that allowed a contact between the dead and the dolmen goddess.⁵⁷ The archaeologist Detlef W. Müller who excavated the site asserted that the menhir with the dolmen goddess obviously should appreciate, venerate and magically enforce the buried.⁵⁸ The menhir with the fertility goddess in the burial site should bring to mind that the chthonic powers were at the same time powers of fertility.⁵⁹ Since the reconstruction in 1982 it is possible to visit the burial site and a replica of the menhir with the dolmen goddess which formed a historical ensemble with the

⁵¹ Thorley and Gunn, "Sacred Sites : An Overview. A Report for the Gaia Foundation 2007," pp. 76-77.

⁵² Detlef W. Müller, "Grabkammer Vom Mitteldeutschen Typ Mit Menhir Von Langeneichstädt, Kr. Querfurt," *Ausgrabungen und Funde* 33, no. 4 (1988): p. 194.

⁵³ Detlef Müller, "Die Göttin Mit Dem Stechenden Blick," in *Schönheit, Macht Und Tod. 120 Funde Aus 120 Jahren Landesmuseum Für Vorgeschichte Halle. Begleitband Zur Sonderausstellung Im Landesmuseum Für Vorgeschichte Halle (Saale) Vom 11.12.2001 Bis 28.04.2002*, ed. Harald Meller (Halle (Saale): Landesamt für Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt, 2001); Halle - Saale-Unstrut-Tourismus e.V., "A Small Place with Great Archaeological Significance," http://saale-unstrut-tourismus.de/web/en/content/content.php?areaID=9&menuID=34&contentID=449&active_menu=0&vhm=.

⁵⁴ Detlef Müller, "Die Göttin Mit Dem Stechenden Blick; Halle - Saale-Unstrut-Tourismus e.V., "A Small Place with Great Archaeological Significance."

⁵⁵ Detlef W. Müller, "Grabkammer Vom Mitteldeutschen Typ Mit Menhir Von Langeneichstädt, Kr. Querfurt," p. 194.

⁵⁶ Müller, "Grabkammer Vom Mitteldeutschen Typ Mit Menhir Von Langeneichstädt, Kr. Querfurt," pp. 194-97.

⁵⁷ Müller, "Grabkammer Vom Mitteldeutschen Typ Mit Menhir Von Langeneichstädt, Kr. Querfurt," p. 198.

⁵⁸ Müller, "Grabkammer Vom Mitteldeutschen Typ Mit Menhir Von Langeneichstädt, Kr. Querfurt," p. 198.

⁵⁹ Müller, "Grabkammer Vom Mitteldeutschen Typ Mit Menhir Von Langeneichstädt, Kr. Querfurt," p. 198.

Eichstädter Warte, a medieval look-out.⁶⁰ Every year on Whitsunday two birch



Figure 7, Langeneichstädt, Whitsunday 2012, two birches on the tower

trees are placed on the top of the watchtower (Figure 7). According to a member of the "Warteverein E.V. Langeneichstädt" - the association organising events and the guided tours at this place two times a year – this tradition is very old and nobody knows when in history it started.⁶¹ The tradition to place two birches on a tower at Whitsunday is only local but birches are a symbol of fertility throughout the region. That means that this place could have a special quality, a relationship to fertility which has transferred over the times. I visited Langeneichstädt twice, in December 2011 and in May 2012. It is the only place on the 'Sky Paths' tour which is not considered to have an archaeoastronomical meaning and the only site which is used for rituals up to this day. This site, according to the stem definition of Thorley and Gunn cited above, is a sacred place too.⁶² The additional characteristics from the list of Thorley and Gunn are the following: It is founded upon a natural topographical feature, on the top of

⁶⁰ Müller, "Grabkammer Vom Mitteldeutschen Typ Mit Menhir Von Langeneichstädt, Kr. Querfurt," p. 192.

⁶¹ "Warteverein E.V. Langeneichstädt", "Official Guided Tour," (2011, 2012).

⁶² Thorley and Gunn, "Sacred Sites : An Overview. A Report for the Gaia Foundation 2007," p. 76.

one of the rare mountains in the region. The dolmen with the menhir are wholly man-made (Figure 8), and are recognised as having a palpable and special energy or power which is clearly discernible from that of a similar landscape or surrounding.⁶³ Also, From time immemorial, only on this place, the local people could feast and celebrate the “Whitsundays” as a fertility-ritual, which means the site has a significant relationship with a calendrical phenomenon; with a seasonal



Figure 8, Langeneichstädt, menhir with dolmen goddess and burial site

festival at Whitsunday.⁶⁴

The last site on ‘Sky Paths’ is the State Museum of Prehistory in Halle. It shelters one of the most important archaeological collections in Europe and is the oldest building dedicated to prehistoric archaeology in Germany.⁶⁵ Displayed there, amongst other findings, are the genuine dolmen goddess from Langeneichstädt and the Sky Disc of Nebra. The place where the museum is situated was probably never known as a sacred place, according to the Thorley

⁶³ Thorley and Gunn, "Sacred Sites : An Overview. A Report for the Gaia Foundation 2007," pp. 76-77.

⁶⁴ Thorley and Gunn, "Sacred Sites : An Overview. A Report for the Gaia Foundation 2007," p. 77.

⁶⁵ Halle - Saale-Unstrut-Tourismus e.V., "State Museum of Prehistory," [http://saale-unstrut-tourismus.de/web/en/content/content.php?areaID=9&menuID=34&contentID=446&active_menu=0&vhm=.](http://saale-unstrut-tourismus.de/web/en/content/content.php?areaID=9&menuID=34&contentID=446&active_menu=0&vhm=)

and Gunn stem definition, but a museum can be considered as sacred space too.⁶⁶ According to David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal 'Museums are ritualized sites of memory, places that preserve, commemorate, and recreate the past, that "foreign Country," in the present.'⁶⁷ Following Chidester and Linenthal, a museum can be classified under the Thorley/Gunn Definition as 'a place especially associated with resource gathering and other key cultural activities' and as 'a memorial or mnemonic to a key recent or past event in history, legend of myth.'⁶⁸ Simon Coleman and J. Elsner state that the museum is 'a more conventional goal for the secular pilgrim' because many museums 'are traditionally designed as if they were Greek temples, imbued with a classical rather than Christian sanctity, a holiness vested in the distant past.'⁶⁹ According to them, the 'objects in a museum are enclosed within a series of frames which add to their sanctity like the relics in the treasury of a medieval cathedral.'⁷⁰ Symbols like the Nebra sky disc and the dolmen goddess from Langeneichstädt could be felt, according to Victor and Edith Turner 'to possess ritual efficacy' that means that they could be 'believed to be charged with power from unknown sources, and to be capable of acting on person and groups in such a way as to change them for the better.'⁷¹ Like the bodies of saints at a Christian pilgrimage site, these symbols could make the museum in Halle a sacred place too.⁷²

All the four sites on the tourist route 'Sky Paths' could be considered sacred sites. This now raises the question of whether the modern pathway between them could be considered a pilgrimage form of sacred site. According to Simon Coleman and J. Elsner 'Pilgrimage in a context of secularisation or pluralism is a radically different phenomenon from religious travel in an age when atheism was virtually inconceivable.'⁷³ As Simon Coleman and John Eade asserted the most influential text in the anthropology of pilgrimage is possibly *Image and Pilgrimage*

⁶⁶ Thorley and Gunn, "Sacred Sites : An Overview. A Report for the Gaia Foundation 2007," p. 76.

⁶⁷ David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, eds., *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 40.

⁶⁸ Thorley and Gunn, "Sacred Sites : An Overview. A Report for the Gaia Foundation 2007," p. 76.

⁶⁹ Simon Coleman and J. Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), p. 216.

⁷⁰ Coleman and Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions*, p. 216.

⁷¹ Victor Turner and Edith L. B. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 247.

⁷² J. Stopford, "Some Approaches to the Archaeology of Christian Pilgrimage," *World Archaeology* 26, no. 1 (1994): p. 60.

⁷³ Coleman and Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions*, p. 198.

in *Christian Culture* by Victor and Edith Turner.⁷⁴ For the Turners, pilgrimage is characterised by attributes like the release from mundane structure, the homogenization of status, the simplicity of dress and behaviour and *communitas*.⁷⁵ Other important factors are renewal, ordeal, reflection on the meaning of religious and cultural core-values, and a ritualized re-enactment of correspondence between a religious paradigm and shared human experience.⁷⁶ According to the Turners, individuality posed against the institutionalized milieu during pilgrimage.⁷⁷ The tourists on the 'Sky Path' could be seen as pilgrims too. According to David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal the idea that tourism itself could be a form of pilgrimage, and tourist attractions modern pilgrim sites, was first expressed by Dean MacCannell in 1976.⁷⁸ But, according to Erik Cohen pilgrimage and tourism differ in terms of the direction of the journey undertaken. The "pilgrim" and the "pilgrim-tourist" peregrinate toward their socio-cultural centre, while the "traveller" and the "traveller-tourist" move in the opposite direction.⁷⁹

One guide book, in two volumes, about the modern tourist route 'Sky Paths' has been published so far.⁸⁰ It describes hiking and cycling tours around Querfurt and includes trips to Goseck, Langeneichstädt and Nebra. This book does not describe a pilgrimage from site to site on 'Sky Paths'. But on the 15th of June 2013 the 'Sky Paths-Run' featuring different routes will start.⁸¹ The hardest route, The Run of the Heroes, will connect all the sites on the 'Sky Path' with a 120

⁷⁴ Simon Coleman and John Eade, *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

⁷⁵ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. Anthropological Perspectives*, pp. 34-35, 254-55.

⁷⁶ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. Anthropological Perspectives*, pp. 34-35, 254-55.

⁷⁷ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. Anthropological Perspectives*, pp. 34-35, 254-55.

⁷⁸ David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, eds., *American Sacred Space*, p. 40.; Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theorie of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1976).

⁷⁹ Erik Cohen, "Pilgrimage Centers: Central and Excentric," *Annals of Tourism Research* 19, no. 1 (1992): p. 37.

⁸⁰ Ulrich Erdmann, *Himmelswege Um Querfurt. Zum Fundort Der Himmelscheibe, Zu Dorfidyllen Und Burgruinen*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2007);

Erdmann, *Himmelswege Um Querfurt. Zwischen Schlössern, Dolmengöttin Und Sonnenobservatorium*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2008).

⁸¹ Himmelswegelauf e. V., "Himmelswegelauf. Wettlauf Zu Den Sternen," <http://www.himmelswegelauf.de/>.

km triple-marathon on the 16th of June 2013.⁸² According to a broad definition from Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis, pilgrimage should be seen ‘primarily as a journey undertaken for religious reasons, but also including nonreligious journeys motivated by a strong personal desire.’⁸³ The Run of the Heroes clearly should be seen as modern form of pilgrimage. Another hint that the ‘Sky Paths’ tourist route could be seen as a modern form of pilgrimage is the fact that this route includes museums and visitor centres in which the visitor will be confronted with a specially constructed and idealised version of the identity of a community or society.⁸⁴ There, like in parochial pilgrimage centres, the visitor can often find an idealised picture of a society presented, which corresponds to the particular vision of its powerful donors and its dominant clientele.⁸⁵ According to Coleman and Elsner, this ‘picture, in both museums and places of pilgrimage, is defined by its particular construction of a mythical past, a “squeamish” selection of “ancestors.”’⁸⁶ The shop in one visitor centre in Goseck or Wangen or at the museum in Halle certainly would be connected the purchase of some souvenirs: postcards picturing the monuments, replicas of the sky disc, watches encompassing the sky disc and books about prehistory. These objects represent a particular selection of that which is most significant about the site. According to Coleman and Elsner these souvenirs are similar to Pilgrim Tokens.⁸⁷

The ‘Sky Paths’ route in Saxony-Anhalt is a path connecting sites which could be clearly defined as sacred. Even if we do not have written record from the time when the structures in Langeneichstädt, and Goseck and the Nebra sky disc were built, the archaeological findings suggest that the sites and the objects found there were constructed as sacred sites and objects in the Neolithic and the Bronze Age. All of these sites could be seen as sacred sites today and as sacred sites they should be protected, conserved and maintained. The modern pathway, or ‘Sky Path’, between them is not really used for pilgrimage from site to site but it helps to make the site public and to lure more “Modern Pilgrims” – tourists – to the sites. The sacred sites and the pilgrimage route are constructed by humans but a visit of this site and a trip on the ‘Sky Paths’ tour can also help to change the

⁸² Himmelswegelauf, "1. Hwl - Dreifachmarathon," http://www.himmelswegelauf.de/disziplinen/dreifachmarathon/7054?details_suffix=%20orange.

⁸³ Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis, "Narratives of Transformation: Pilgrimage Patterns and Authorial Self-Presentation in Three Pilgrimage Texts," in *Pilgrim Voices: Narrative and Authorship in Christian Pilgrimage*, ed. Simon Coleman and J. Elsner (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), p. 85.

⁸⁴ Coleman and Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions*, p. 220.

⁸⁵ Coleman and Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions*, p. 220.

⁸⁶ Coleman and Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions*, p. 217.

⁸⁷ Coleman and Elsner, *Pilgrimage Past and Present in the World Religions*, p. 220.

human consciousness. Hence the sacred space on the 'Sky Paths' tour should not only be seen as a human construct but as an important factor in a dialectical process in which human forms space and space forms human.

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