

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

by Anya Marco

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

Introduction

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

Academic Rationale

Christopher Tilley argues, ‘Precisely because locales and their landscapes are drawn on in the day-to-day lives and encounters of individuals, they possess powers. The spirit of a place may be held to reside in a landscape.’¹ Thus landscapes can influence human participants and their experiences of the place, within the place. The challenge is that spirit is a reflection of human encounters with that space, which are by definition phenomenological and thus vary from one individual to the next. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, (1908–1961) defines phenomenology as;

the study of essences and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy, which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their “facticity”.²

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

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

Doing a phenomenology of the landscape involves the intimacy of the body in all its senses. What I mean is that it’s synaesthetic, an affair of the whole body moving and sensing – a visionscape but also a soundscape, a touchscape, even a smellscape, a multi-sensory experience.³

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

¹ C. Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p.26

² M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Translated by D. A. Landes, (Oxon: Routledge, 2012). p.iv

³ B. Bender, *Stonehenge, Making Space*, (Oxford: Berg, 1998), p.81

Reflexive Considerations

A possible weakness with this project is my own reflexivity, which is described by Charlotte Aull Davies as ‘In its most transparent guise, reflexivity expresses researchers’ awareness of their necessary connection to the research situation and hence their effects upon it, what is sometimes called reactivity.’⁴ However, Aull Davies advocates that in order to undertake any research, we must have a connection to it and that inevitable reflexivity

means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference. In the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research.⁵

Susan Greenwood explored the concept of magical consciousness. When writing about experiences she feels that the experience itself writes through you rather than writing about the experience. She recognises that this approach would be considered too subjective for academic anthropological fieldwork.⁶ However, she goes on to say

It does not matter how the experience is labelled, it is the experience itself that is important. This is another aspect of magical thinking that is important to remember: only the analytical mode is occupied by a quest for “objective” truth.⁷

As a study of my own reaction to a space, this project will involve auto-ethnographic reflexivity and as such will mean the ‘blurred nature of subjective and objective’ as Greenwood describes it may be revealed in the results.⁸

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

⁴ C. Aull Davies *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, Edition 2, (Routledge, 2012), pp.14-17

⁵ Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*: pp.14-17

⁶ S. Greenwood and E.D Goodwyn *Magical Consciousness: An Anthropological and Neurobiological Approach*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), p.108

⁷ Greenwood, *Magical Consciousness*, p.109

⁸ Greenwood, *Magical Consciousness*, p.109

and acknowledging potential bias I hope to be able to overcome and release any expectations that previously arise.

Methodology

The core approach of my research is a phenomenological enquiry, an attempt to investigate the phenomena I experience being in a specific place and based on a desire to understand my own experience of the space and, in particular, the influence The Sanctuary may or may not have on that experience. As Alan Bryman explains, phenomenology allows the research to explore peoples' points of view and the meanings they attribute to their behaviour.⁹ In this case I am exploring my own point of view as a 45-year-old caucasian woman, living in London, and the meaning attributed to the experience. Christopher Tilley states that 'Phenomenology involves the understanding and description of things as they are experienced by a subject. It is about the relationship between Being and Being-in-the-world' which I want to achieve through meditation.¹⁰

Buddhist author Steve Hagen describes mindful meditation as 'simply about learning to be here – to be present in each moment and to notice what is going on'.¹¹ I follow a Buddhist approach to meditation, which is better described as mindfulness. The aim is not to clear the mind, but rather to bring awareness to oneself and ones environment and allow the mind to become calm. In this way one can open the mind, without any aim to achieve a specific outcome. By using meditation I hope to allow myself to become more open to any phenomena that may arise from being in a sacred space compared with a profane or mundane space. The practice of mindful meditation brings the mind to the present through focus on the breath. It allows thoughts to come and go without forceful expulsion or blanking the mind. Through this intention to simply be, the mind is allowed to reach a state of stillness and calm, through which awareness is heightened. Essentially a meditative state is one, which may allow phenomena to occur and be experienced without attachment.

⁹ A. Bryman, *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p53

¹⁰ Tilley, *Landscape*, p.11

¹¹ S. Hagen, *Buddhism Plain and Simple*, (London: Penguin 1997) p.25

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

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

¹² T.N. Hạnh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*, trans. Mobi Ho, (Boston: Ebury Press, 2008 [1975]), Ebook. Loc 631

¹³ J. Van Der Lans, *The Value of Sundén's Role-Theory Demonstrated and Tested with Respect to Religious Experiences in Meditation*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (September 1987), p. 401

¹⁴ R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans JW Harvey, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923, (1971)), pp 126-127

¹⁵ H. Corbin, *Mundus Imaginalis, or The Imaginary and the Imagenal*, paper delivered at the Colloquium on Symbolism, Paris June 1964 and in *Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme* 6, (Brussels 1964), p.5

¹⁶ Bender, *Stonehenge*, p.81

space, with little comfort and I feel a good place to experience a meditation in completely opposing circumstances to that of The Sanctuary or the front room.

By recording my meditation and comparing this with meditation experiences in the place I usually meditate in and a mundane space in my own house where I never meditate (the kitchen), I have been able to explore whether or not place as a human construct possesses the type of human energy or 'power' Tilley describes.¹⁷ After each meditation I recorded the experience using a voice recorder on my phone in the field in order to capture my immediate response. The fieldwork is supported by a photographic journal of The Sanctuary.

Literature Review

Belden C. Lane states that 'the sacredness of a place may be highly ephemeral, subjective and hard to define.'¹⁸ He explores the relationship of place and human interaction in his description of the three approaches to understanding the medicine wheel as a sacred place. Lane references Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) view that place is too easily explained without recognising the importance of participation, highlighting the significance of phenomenological views that 'human perceptions of landscape is relentlessly interactive.'¹⁹ Lane goes on to say that 'one's' actual embodied experience in encountering a place perceived as sacred is crucial, then, to the sense of magic or awe that one finally attributes to it.'²⁰ The importance of participation within sacred space to truly evaluate it is central to my examination of The Sanctuary and whether as a human construct, a history of human interactions in a place creates its spirit.

When talking about the ephemerality of a sacred space, Lane describes the transitory nature of experience, stating that usually any special experience is unrepeatable and further that 'going back to the site never guarantees one's being able to return to the experience.'²¹ However, architect Robert Riley

¹⁷ Tilley, Landscape, p.26

¹⁸ B. Lane, Landscapes of the Sacred, (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), p.217

¹⁹ Lane, Landscapes, p.53

²⁰ Lane, Landscapes, p.53

²¹ Lane, Landscapes, p.217

questions whether 'the greater power of place lies not in inhabiting it but in remembering it'.²² Lane asks whether our attachment to a place invests it with its powers and recognises that given how our minds work, the potential for body memory (smells, sights, sounds invoking a reaction) and how ephemeral an experience is, that arriving at meaning is 'a tangled skein.'²³

To define a sacred space one can turn to the work of Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) who stated 'Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane.'²⁴ Eliade further described the specific conditions required to identify a sacred space which constituted a 'break in the homogeneity of space,' enabling the connection between worlds identified by a symbol or 'axis mundi', around which lies our world.²⁵ He postulated that experience of a place is conditioned by culture and the history of the place.²⁶ Eliade also stated that when we experience a sacred space 'the sacred manifests itself in space, the real unveils itself, the world comes into existence.'²⁷ A meditation in a sacred space may either enable an experience exactly as Eliade describes and contribute to defining that space as sacred or profane or will highlight the influence of other people's energy within that space influencing human participants as though the place possesses power, as Tilley postulates.

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

Thus although sacred may seem a relatively simple word in our use of it today, it actually carries a fascinating admixture of meanings which make up its derivation: rite, custom, safe, whole, accursed, horrible, divine destruction, divine presence.²⁸

²² R. Riley, *Attachment to the Ordinary Landscape, Place Attachment*, eds. Low, S.M and Altman, I (New York, Plenum Press, 1992), pp.20-21

²³ Lane, *Landscapes*, p.218

²⁴ M. Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask, (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1987[1957]), pp. 10-11

²⁵ Eliade, *Sacred*, p.37

²⁶ Eliade, *Sacred*, p.16

²⁷ Eliade, *Sacred*, p.63

²⁸ A.Thorley and C.M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview*, (Gaia Foundation, 2007) p. 22.

This raises questions regarding how to apply the word sacred to a specific place and what type of place can be classified as sacred. Thorley and Gunn explore this in their journey towards a definition and state that sacred sites can be natural sites already present in the landscape, sites which have been adapted in some way(s) by human interaction and/or sites which have been purposefully built by human beings to serve a particular function.²⁹ The Thorley/Gunn operational definition is

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

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

Fieldwork

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

²⁹ Thorley and Gunn, *Sacred Sites*, p. 76-77.

³⁰ Thorley and Gunn, *Sacred Sites*, p. 76

³¹ Thorley and Gunn, *Sacred Sites*, pp. 76-77

³² J. Pollard and A.Reynolds, *Avebury, The biography of a landscape*, (Gloucs: Tempus Publishing, 2002), p.106

Trust describes it on boards on the site as a ceremonial site probably built around 4,500 years ago (figures 2-4).³³

According to dowser Hamish Miller and ancient landscape researcher Paul Broadhurst, Avebury falls on a powerful alignment known as the St Michael Line a relatively straight line that runs 100 miles from the 'furthest Western tip of Cornwall through England to the extreme Eastern part of East Anglia' crossing through the entrance to Avebury.³⁴ Along this alignment are several sacred sites throughout Britain with two currents of dowsable energy winding alongside The Sanctuary, known as Michael and Mary currents have been detected by dowsers.³⁵ At The Sanctuary, Miller and Broadhurst detected both currents of dowsable energy crossing at the center of the circle during their research into this phenomena.³⁶ Miller and Broadhurst, liken the two energies to the universal symbol of the Caduceus, an ancient emblem of healing and suggest that this similarity reflects ancient views that it is the representation of the subtle energies in the human body, also referred to as chakras.³⁷ It may be this connection between the energy currents detected in the earth and the possible energy centres detected in the body that influence the 'subtle phenomena operating at these sites.'³⁸ Thus the area has a level of significance for others, whether this is due to the presence of the stone markers or the believed alignment. In addition, Nicholas Mann claims The Sanctuary is significant as a believed astronomical marker suggesting that during the centuries of its use, observers could have used the stones and posts to track the changes in the time of year 'relative to the movement of the Sun over the two crossroads of the galaxy'.³⁹

³³ Pollard and Reynolds Avebury, p.81

³⁴ H. Miller and P. Broadhurst, *The Sun and the Serpent*, (Cornwall: Pendragon Press, 1989), p.22

³⁵ Miller and Broadhurst, *Sun*, p.115

³⁶ Miller and Broadhurst, *Sun*, p.108

³⁷ Miller and Broadhurst, *Sun*, p.117

³⁸ Miller and Broadhurst, *Sun*, p.118

³⁹ N.R. Mann, *Avebury Cosmos*, (Winchester: O'Books, 2011), p.206



Figure 1: Photographed by Anya Marco, The Sanctuary facing SW, December 2015



Figure 2 - Photographed by Anya Marco, Sign at The Sanctuary, December 2015



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



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

Discussion

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

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

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



Figure 5 - Photographed by Peter Harris, Anya Marco meditating in the centre of The Sanctuary circle, December 2015



Figure 6 - Photographed by Peter Harris, Anya Marco meditating in the centre of The Sanctuary circle, December 2015



Figure 3 Figure 7 - Photographed by Peter Harris, Anya Marco meditating in the centre of The Sanctuary circle, December 2015

Influence of attachment, memory and the unlikelihood of repeated experience

My experiences of meditating in The Sanctuary compared with my living room or kitchen, bears out the complexity that is inherent in phenomenological enquiry and supports the theory that one must participate fully in order to experience the energy or sacredness of a place.⁴⁰ I have visited The Sanctuary every year for fifteen years, I still recall my first visit where I experienced a strong feeling of energy in the circle and when I closed my eyes I could clearly

⁴⁰ Lane, Landscapes, p.16

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

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

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

History of place influencing experience

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

⁴¹ Lane, Landscapes, p.217

⁴² Lane, Landscapes, p.218

⁴³ C. Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone*, (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p.219

⁴⁴ Eliade, *Sacred*, p.16

⁴⁵ Eliade, *Sacred*, pp.10-11

the significance claimed relating to its alignment and my own history connected with the site may have added potency to the place for me.

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

The power of place

I have no personal experience of dowsing or the alignments described by Miller and Broadhurst, having discovered this historical information about The Sanctuary after the meditation but I did feel an energy while meditating, particularly a sensation of opposing forces.⁴⁶ In addition, I did feel as though energy had manifested itself in space just as Eliade described, 'the real unveils itself, the world comes into existence.'⁴⁷

I certainly felt at ease meditating in The Sanctuary. This is also true of my living room, where I meditate regularly and given the discomfort and struggle to meditate in the kitchen, one could argue that this opposite experience also supports this general finding about meditation places or because I am used to meditating there. This could apply to the kitchen, were I to meditate there often enough and establish it as a place for meditation, anchoring my meditations to personal place. However, this seems not to be the case with The Sanctuary since I have not meditated there with enough repeated frequency to anchor my own personal experiences there. Therefore, it seems to me that Tilley's claim that the spirit of a place resides in the landscape is true for The Sanctuary is a valid claim for my experience.⁴⁸ By being present in the site through meditation, I did feel that I was being in the space and possibly leaving my own energy there. I do not know whether I had a fully 'synaesthetic' experience in terms of an altered conscious response to the place.⁴⁹ However, I could feel the energy of the place

⁴⁶ Miller and Broadhurst, Sun, p.115

⁴⁷ Eliade, Sacred, p.63

⁴⁸ Tilley, Landscape, p.11 and p.26

⁴⁹ Tilley, Landscape, p.11

exerting a power over me, which I did not experience in the other meditations and could only be described in terms of physical sensations and could therefore be termed as synaesthetic.

Final thoughts

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

Conclusion

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

⁵⁰ Tilley, Landscape, p.26

Thus the sacred space explored in this paper did affect me and thus supports the argument that humanity experiences the sacredness of space.

Appendix

Sacred site: an operational definition

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

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

1. Descriptive

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Spiritual

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

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

It is recognised as the dwelling place of guardian or 'owner' spirits which care for and oversee the site and possibly its wider environs.

Its spiritual forces or 'owner' spirits are in a mutually respectful dialogue with local people with specialist knowledge acting as guardians or custodians, who play important roles as mediators, negotiators or healers between the human, natural and spiritual dimensions.

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

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

3. Functional

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Other

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

Thorley and Gunn 2008

Bibliography

- Aull Davies, C. *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, Edition 2, (Routledge, 2012)
- Bender, B. *Stonehenge, Making Space*, (Oxford: Berg, 1998)
- Bryman, A. *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988)
- Corbin, H. *Mudus Imaginalis, or The Imaginary and the Imaginal*, Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme Vol 6, Brussels (1964)
- Eliade, M. *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask, (New York: Harcourt Inc 1987[1957])
- Greenwood, S and Goodwyn E,D. *Magical Consciousness: An Anthropological and Neurobiological Approach*, (New York: Routledge, 2015)
- Greenwood, S. *The Nature of Magic: An Anthropology of Consciousness*. (Oxford: Berg, 2005)
- Greenwood, S, *The Dragon and Me*, *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal* Vol. 6 No. 1 (January 2015)
- Hagen, S. *Buddhism Plain and Simple*, (London: Penguin, 1997)
- Hanh, T N. *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*, trans. Mobi Ho, (Boston: Ebury Press, 2008 [1975])
- Ingold, T. *Lines, A Brief History*, (London: Routledge, 2007)
- Ingold, T. *Conceptions of Time and Ancient Society: The Temporality of the Landscape*, *World Archaeology*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Oct.,(1993)
- Lane, B.C., *Landscapes of the Sacred*, (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002)
- Mann, N, R *Avebury Cosmos*, (Winchester and Washington: O-Books, 2011)
- Miller, H and Broadhurst, P. *The Sun and the Serpent*, (Cornwall: Pendragon Press, 1989)
- Otto, R. *The Idea of the Holy*, trans J W Harvey, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923 [1971])
- Pollard J & Reynolds, A. *Avebury, The biography of a landscape*, (Glocs: The History Press, 2010)

- Riley, R. Attachment to the Ordinary Landscape, Place Attachment, eds. Low, S.M and Altman, I (New York, Plenum Press, 1992)
- Thorley, A and Gunn, C.M, Sacred Sites: An Overview, (Gaia Foundation, 2007)
- Tilley, C, Keane, W, Kuchler, S, Rowlands, M & Spyer, P. Ed. Handbook of Material Culture, (Sage, 2006)
- Tilley, C. A Phenomenology of Landscape, (Oxford: Berg, 1994)
- Tilley, C. The Materiality of Stone, Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology: 1, (Oxford: Berg, 2004)
- Van Der Lans, J, The Value of Sundén's Role-Theory Demonstrated and Tested with Respect to Religious Experiences in Meditation, Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Sep., 1987), pp. 401-412
- Wheatley, M & Taylor B. Avebury, Sun, Moon and Earth Energies, (Wilts: Celestial Songs Press, 2011)