



# *Religion, Culture, and Sacred Space*

MARTYN SMITH



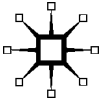
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*To Emily and Aurora*

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Most of all I want to thank my lovely wife Emily for her emotional support and intellectual challenge throughout this project. The research for this book took me to the ends of the earth, but Emily gave me a home.

Finally it is necessary to provide a note on the translations used here. Since a major plank in this work has been the importance of correlating words with landscapes, I felt it important to work from the original language whenever possible. By providing my own translation of the central texts under consideration, I could more easily highlight the subtle

ways texts make reference to landscapes. The translations for primary texts in Arabic, Greek, Latin, and Middle Egyptian are my own. Exceptions to this general rule are passages that refer back explicitly to an English source. The two most significant examples of this are the quotations from the Life of Hilarion from the Penguin edition *Early Christian Lives* and those from the Pyramid Texts as translated by R.O. Faulkner.

## CHAPTER ONE

### HOW TO BUILD PLACES WITH WORDS

One feature of Google Earth is a layer that consists of books that spread out over the world. Zoom in on the satellite image of an American city and concentric rings of small yellow books arrange themselves around it. Click on any of those yellow books and a bibliographic reference appears, letting you know that this city was mentioned in a certain digitized book or journal. This layer of books is not yet as useful as it could be, being filled mainly with incidental references, but the image of a map covered with books is useful to contemplate.

It is tempting to hail this image as something possible to imagine only with the advent of our information age. It is more accurate to understand this layer of books as a visual manifestation of an ancient and constant way that human beings have of mentally processing places. Places have always been experienced by means of texts. Whether those texts are oral tales, written histories, or modern films makes no difference. The physical world that we perceive and inhabit is covered by a rich layer of shared cultural references. Different cultures will perceive the world through their own references and stories. People in Ethiopia do not understand their significant places by means of the texts that Google Earth, dominated by English texts from American libraries, projects over their country. But all cultures share the human process of creating meaningful places through the association of culturally significant texts with those places.

Walden Pond can be easily located on Google Earth, along with its exact latitude and longitude coordinates. But we understand that the importance of Walden Pond lies beyond any fact concerning its physical placement on a map. Henry David Thoreau himself downplayed the effect of the pond: "The scenery of Walden is on a humble scale, and, though very beautiful, does not approach to grandeur, nor can it much concern one who has not long frequented it or lived by its shore" (463). Neither was Walden Pond unique; Thoreau mentions Flint's Pond, Goose Pond, White Pond—all nearby. Yet Walden has become something of a modern

pilgrimage site, attracting many thousands of visitors each year, some simply day-trippers from the Boston area, but others with a serious interest in Thoreau. In a book on the history of Walden Pond, some comments left by visitors are sampled: "I'm on a transcendentalist pilgrimage" or "It took over forty years but we are not too late" or "I wonder what fraction of the many that visit understand even a little of this place's significance?" (Maynard 6).

I once drove out to Walden Pond from Boston. It was as Thoreau described it: though beautiful, it had no particular grandeur, nothing to recommend it over many other such scenes. But it was more than a pond to me. I admired the reconstruction of Thoreau's small cabin, and started walking around the trail that skirted the pond. I came across train tracks laid through the woods—and then it struck me: this is *the* train line that Thoreau mentioned, although it seemed closer to the pond than I had ever imagined it. The train passing along this track stirred up his meditations on technology and modern life:

The whistle of the locomotive penetrates my woods summer and winter, sounding like the scream of a hawk sailing over some farmer's yard. (414)

And there I was looking at that rail line, although I am sure the actual tracks have been changed many times and that the engines that now rumble and whistle along this line bear little resemblance to the ones Thoreau knew.

Thoreau's extended passage about the train is no trivial detail in the history of American letters. It is a key text for discussions about the environment and technology. The American critic Leo Marx takes up this passage and makes the following comment:

The image of the railroad on the shore of the pond figures an ambiguity at the heart of *Walden*. Man-made power, the machine with its fire, smoke, and thunder, is juxtaposed to the waters of Walden, remarkable for their depth and purity and a matchless, indescribable color... (251)

The smoke-belching train running tangentially along the corner of Walden Pond had become an image of the basic juxtaposition of technology and nature that, Marx argues, is at the heart of American responses to industrialism.

I did not have Marx's book in mind as I looked at the rail line, but out of my surprise at just how close the line must have been to Thoreau's cabin, and just how often the noises of this "iron horse" must have rumbled through the quiet woods beside Walden Pond, I pondered the fact that no retreat quite manages to get away from the world. Right there, in

those thoughts, I was contemplating something larger than any objective estimate of the pond could allow. This place, thanks to its use by Thoreau, had become tied to a larger narrative, unresolved, which underlay a great deal in American thought and life.

At Old Cairo in Egypt, at the Coptic church known as the Hanging Church, is a display, about two and a half feet high, framed with metal and covered by glass. Since the display is in English and not Arabic, it is clearly set up for the benefit of foreign tourists who make their way to Old Cairo to see the several Christian churches and monasteries located there, along with the Jewish synagogue. The subject of the display is a map of the route taken by the Holy Family during their stay in Egypt. The zigzagged line, made up of green lights punctuated by red light major stops, moves from the Sinai on the right to a succession of places in the Delta and then far down into Upper Egypt. Each major stop marked on the display, if visited, has something to show from this ancient visit. It may be merely a damp cellar, but there will be a place where the holy family stayed, something consecrated by an action of the baby Jesus.

The *History of Abu al-Makarim* is an Arabic survey of the churches and monasteries in Egypt during the twelfth century. At one point, Abu al-Makarim reviews some of the places reputed to have been visited by the Holy Family during their course through Egypt. When he mentions a church located at Jabal al-Tayr, he also describes the chief attraction:

...in the rock is a trace of a hand print of our Lord the Messiah, to him be the glory, from when he touched the rock as the mountain worshiped him at the time of his arrival from Syria. He grasped the mountain at the time of its approach to him, bowing down and pushed it back up with his hand. The trace of his handprint became impressed in that mountain to our own day. (98–99)

The same story is connected to Jabal al-Tayr today. A Web site dedicated to “The Holy Family in Egypt” provides the following information about this stop: “The Holy Family rested in the cave which is now located inside the ancient church there...Coptic tradition maintains that, as the Holy Family rested in the shade of the Mountain, Jesus stretched His little hand to hold back a rock that was about to detach itself from the mountain-side and fall upon them. The imprint of His palm is still visible.” The story has been somewhat naturalized in this account—the rock is about to fall, not attempting to worship Jesus—but its relation to the earlier story is clear.

The origin of this journey by the Holy Family can be found in the New Testament. The narrator of the Gospel of Matthew, after noting Herod’s

machinations against the prophesied baby king, gets the baby Jesus out of the way of Herod's wrath:

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." (Matt. 2.13–15)

Jesus spoke about the mustard seed—the smallest seed—and noted the way it grows into the greatest of all shrubs. The story about the journey of the Holy Family began with a similarly tiny seed, but as centuries passed the story grew to encompass much of Egypt. The framed display, by means of a bright red citation of the prophecy "Out of Egypt have I called my son," connects itself with the biblical tradition.

The tangible result of this expanding story is a country whose map is dotted with red lights signaling stops by the Holy Family. The geographical extent of the trip is notable. It moves through the Delta, has several major stops in and around what is today Cairo, and then descends far into Upper Egypt. The importance of this journey is evidenced by the immense number of popular books on the topic for sale in Coptic bookstores throughout Egypt. The trail represents the effort of a religious minority to create a sacred land tied together by a common sacred story.

The itinerary of the Holy Family was confirmed by revelation. The previously cited Web site connects this revelation to Pope Theophilus, twenty-third Patriarch of Alexandria (384–412 AD): "... after long prayer, the Holy Virgin revealed herself to him and, after relating the details of the Holy Family's journey to, in, and from Egypt, bade him record what he had seen and heard. It is a source which no Christian believer would question." This "Vision of Theophilus" is a pseudepigraphic work that still survives. The gradual expansion of the trail is thus connected to texts—texts that narrated visions and official versions of the Holy Journey. These texts have left their mark on the landscape of Egypt; they are the catalysts for the creation of a sacred landscape.

I am of course not the first traveler to note the connection between narrative and place. I expect that everyone who reads this book will be able to supplement these examples with a handful of his or her own. There are few travel experiences more common than the excitement that comes from visiting a site that has been encountered in a favorite book or that is the site for an important historical event. We all know the sense of satisfaction that comes from finally getting to a long imagined place. This book offers a

way to theorize this common travel experience and connect it to the larger phenomenon of pilgrimage and the visitation of sacred places. It is perhaps easiest to understand places as somehow containing in themselves an importance or a sense of sacredness, but with this study I hope to demonstrate that every place is a palimpsest, one layer of meaning and association making eternal claims, but always hiding previous layers of meaning. If this way of thinking about place is correct, then there is nothing permanent about ground zeroes or pilgrimage centers. The sites that hold such emotional power for us are given this status by means of culturally central texts. Every culture can be conceptualized as spreading out over its shared landscapes a layer of associations and narratives that assign meaning to otherwise insignificant spots on our earth. Our personal experience as travelers is a reflection of our participation in a shared culture.

### Context, Culture, and Memory

The title of this chapter references J.L. Austin's collection of lectures, *How to Do Things with Words*. At the start of his second lecture, Austin states briefly the place of his work:

This topic is one development—there are many others—in the recent movement towards questioning an age-old assumption in philosophy—the assumption that to say something, at least in all cases worth considering, i.e. all cases considered, is always and simply to *state* something. (12)

Austin's insight here is that some verbal constructions do not state anything that can be analyzed as true or false, instead they *do* something. Examples given by Austin include the naming of a ship or saying "I do" at a wedding. Such constructions cannot be true or false, and if they are to be judged one must think of them as felicitous or infelicitous depending on whether they have been performed in the proper context. This inevitably shifts analysis of certain statements from their internal veracity to the external context of their utterance. As Austin notes:

...for some years we have been realizing more and more clearly that the occasion of an utterance matters seriously, and that the words used are to some extent to be "explained" by the "context" in which they are designed to be or have actually been spoken in a linguistic interchange. (100)

An attraction of Austin's theory is its ability to shift our attention from *what* is being said to the *context* of what is said.

The tendency in the academic study of texts—here defined broadly to include cultural products as diverse as a work of visual art or performed



oral poetry—is to analyze them as wholes and to arrive at their meaning through a process of careful reading, accepting internal standards as the parameters within which interpretation must take place. Austin’s work on language points to a different approach if we translate his notions about language into the realm of texts. Just as a statement is analyzable both in terms of its own internal meaning as well as its contextual meaning, so texts can be interpreted with attention to internal meaning alone, or by looking at the way they create meaning through their reading or performance or use within a specific cultural context. One could say that texts, like statements, have both a connotative and performative aspect, and in this study we will be concerned with the way these texts are *doing* things in the world. We will break with the tendency to examine texts for their own nestled internal meaning, or for their interaction with other texts, and instead pay attention to their cultural and physical context, noting how words and gestures often literally reach off the page or out of their performance space to affect the way individuals perceive the world.

The attention to context aligns this study with New Historicism, as explicated by Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt in *Practicing New Historicism*. The notion of culture as text allows them to step out from the confines of canonical works as self-contained works, separate from culture. A benefit of this approach is a willingness to carefully examine texts that had previously been outside the purview of literary scholars, and this is the first result that Gallagher and Greenblatt list as stemming from their New Historicist stance: “Works that have been hitherto denigrated or ignored can be treated as major achievements . . .” The second result follows logically: “The newly discovered authors are of interest in themselves, but they also inevitably change the account of those authors long treated as canonical” (10). In other words, a new understanding of noncanonical texts is bound to change the way standard canonical texts are understood, as interpreters come to realize that “literary” texts were not hermetically sealed and impervious to the ephemeral and popular texts that surrounded them in a culture.

This study differs from New Historicism in several ways. First, there is a difference of emphasis in relation to figure and ground. Gallagher and Greenblatt note:

In our scholarship, the relative positions of text and context often shift, so that what has been the mere background makes a claim for attention that has hitherto been given only to the foregrounded and privileged work of art, yet we wished to know how the foregrounding came about. (16)

In the work of Stephen Greenblatt, notably his work on Shakespeare, interest has indeed shifted to the cultural background, but this interest inevitably

flows back to illuminate the texts of the major figure. The movement is from ground (context) to figure (canonical text). In this study, that emphasis will generally be reversed, and the movement will be from figure to ground. That is, we are examining not so much how context governs the final shape of a text, but rather how a text moves out into its culture and shapes that culture, or, rather, the individuals who make up a culture.

A second difference lies in the level of skepticism aimed at texts. This antagonistic tendency is expressed by Gallagher and Greenblatt:

... new historicist readings are more often skeptical, wary, demystifying, critical, and even adversarial. This hermeneutical aggression was initially reinforced for many of us by the ideology critique that played a central role in the Marxist theories in which we were steeped... (9)

This characteristic suspicion directed at the role played by texts is mirrored by the work of Edward Said. His *Orientalism* is a classic study of the post-Enlightenment creation of the “Orient” on the part of European and American cultures:

... ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied. To believe that the Orient was created—or, as I call it, “Orientalized”—and to believe that such things happen simply as a necessity of the imagination, is to be disingenuous. The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, or domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony... (5)

Nothing presented in this study will contradict this conviction about the importance of power in the act of creating places—chapter three on Delos will explore this political side of texts more fully. Said is keenly aware of the fact that knowledge is hardly contained by the pages of a text, but that it forms the lens through which peoples and their political struggles are viewed, and becomes a tool for repression. Thus, his commentary on the texts written by the wielders of ideas are often antagonistic, and something of this same spirit continues in the work of New Historicists, by their own admission.

This study approaches meaning creation as a central task of every culture, indeed as a fundamental cognitive act of the human being, whether oppressor or oppressed. In some cases, a reader may feel repugnance at naked cultural aggression, and in other cases be inclined toward celebration of native triumphs. Yet the point of this study is in no wise to assail wrongs or celebrate liberation. There will be nothing of “hermeneutical aggression” here, rather, but an attempt to examine how texts come to shape the perceptions of a culture. Our contention is that every

human culture socializes the scene of its common life, mapping significant narratives upon physical landscapes. The result of this socialization of place is that individuals within a culture feel themselves connected to places freighted with meaning and associations. This socialization of place will be explored in chapter four as we examine Ibn Jubayr's narrative of a trip to Mecca, and discover that the events he sees and describes were formed by earlier texts.

Another layer of complexity intrudes itself at this point. Although cultures actively work to attach significant narratives to landscapes, these cultures are themselves constantly changing, and the perceptions of places that those cultures generate likewise shift. A colorful example of this phenomenon is located by the English historian Adam Fox, who identifies the Danes as a major source for Early Modern English narratives about the landscape:

One of the most potent themes in the popular memories of the past in early modern England was a strong sense of the ravages and atrocities committed by the Danish armies during their occupation from the ninth century . . . Place names and buildings, barrows and natural features of all sorts were explained in these terms. (243)

These were not, as Fox notes, traditions that had been carefully passed down from generation to generation, but rather a product of the fifteenth century and perhaps even traceable to the work of an individual—John Rous in his *Historia Regum Angliae* (243). A little later, Fox shows how the seventeenth century brought about a shift in the narrative that was used to explain the English landscape:

. . . events such as the Civil War were instrumental in creating a new series of battle grounds and symbolic sites which helped to supplant some of the old landmarks in the mental map of the past . . . The 1640s and 1650s may have been instrumental, for example, in helping to replace the Danes as the great evil responsible for the ruin of buildings with other bogey figures, such as Oliver Cromwell. (255)

Here we see the pliability of the relationship between landscape and narrative. One constellation of stories has replaced another as an explanatory key for the physical landscape. As we will have many occasions to note, there is nothing irrevocable about the connection of a particular story to a particular landscape. As cultures change over time, their significant narratives also shift, and these narratives create new cognitive lenses through which the landscape is perceived. Our analysis must center not only on how an English person understood the landscape, but how

an Early Modern or Victorian English person understood the landscape. Those two questions will generate two different answers.

A landscape that exemplifies both the continuity and changeability of landscape is Jerusalem, a city filled with sites that carry a weighty claim: this is the place where such and such an event from the Bible occurred. A bronze plaque outside a small garden with hoary-looking olive trees reads: "Gethsemane." Beneath the inscribed name is an historical brief of references to this place, beginning with the Gospel of John: "Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered." There follows another quotation: "Gethsemane, a place where the Saviour prayed before the passion. It is at the foot of the Mount of Olives, and today the faithful eagerly go to pray there." Although it is not labeled, that is a quotation from Eusebius' *Onomasticon*, a dictionary of biblical place names in Palestine and beyond. Eusebius' goals were simple enough: "So, from the whole of divinely inspired Scripture I shall collect the names that are sought, and set each one down in alphabetical order, for easy retrieval of names when they happen to occur here and there in readings" (11).

On some of the narrow stone streets of Jerusalem leading to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher a visitor comes across circular metal markers with a Roman numeral impressed upon it. These markers enumerate the Stations of the Cross, the places where events recounted in the passion of Christ are said to have occurred. Within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher itself the visitor finds the cave where Jesus was buried, now covered with an ornate kiosk, and an upstairs room located atop Golgotha where Jesus was crucified. Upon the ground level there is a polished reddish rectangular stone known as the Stone of Unction, the very place where Jesus body was laid to be prepared for burial after being taken down from the cross. Today pilgrims from many nations set pictures or candles upon the stone to sanctify them.

At first glance these examples appear to set out a strong case for continuity. After all, a single narrative appears to have descended from the New Testament to our own time. The sites where specific events occurred are confidently marked. Such continuity begins to look suspect, however, as one realizes that the "Stations of the Cross" have no long antiquity, but were instead a creation of the Jesuits in the seventeenth century as they brought the landscape of Jerusalem into conformity with their devotional practices. Other confident assertions about the whereabouts of certain events begin to pale as one considers the destructive history of Jerusalem—its layers and layers of reconstruction reflecting new emphases and religious shifts. This is to say nothing of the interreligiously contested versions of Jerusalem. There is no doubt that Jews, Muslims,

and Christians perceive very different cities, with quite different sites of passionate interest.

Jerusalem, with its layers of meanings and narratives, makes an excellent test case for a discussion about collective memory, and the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs used it as such. In his study *The Legendary Topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land* he writes: “Let us therefore try to conjecture and to imagine what might have been the first Christian memory of where these events occurred” (193). At a later point he drifts into a counterfactual conjecture: “Let us suppose that Christianity was never propagated beyond its place of origin” (203). Halbwachs does not set himself up as an historian with every answer to the development of historic Christianity, but rather as scholar who, within the broad outline of historic events, wants to theorize about how place was remembered and re-remembered by early Christian communities.

A first question for Halbwachs is just how “collective memory” works in a community made up of individuals. Some person must have first written down the Gospel story, and even if individual stories have their beginning in oral reports, some individual obviously first told the stories. Halbwachs’ discussion of the value of a witness is instructive:

What value do the statements or even the impressions of these witnesses have when, as members of a group, they were ready—before the fact and above all after it—to reconstruct the event according to their beliefs and desires? At the moment when they report what they have seen, they are likely to exclude some details they think are of no interest to their communities. (194)

Memory must go back to individual witnesses, but he reminds us that those witnesses were formed by the beliefs and desires of a group. What events are important? What does the group want to hear? What actions are significant? One thinks, for example, of the story from the Gospels of Jesus and his disciples picking and eating grain on the Sabbath. It is hardly a point that a contemporary American would notice about someone’s behavior, but given the Jewish legal codes—culturally central texts—it is an action worth mentioning and debating, and striking enough to record in a written account. From the start, therefore, every recollection is a communal recollection.

Early believers found a theologically driven narrative for the life of Jesus: “We do not know for what reasons and under what influences this enlarged community interpreted his life as a preparation for his death and saw in that death a supernatural event in preparation for his resurrection” (198). Memory became naturally subservient to that theological narrative. Halbwachs ponders: “Of what importance, then, was the testimony of men

who had known Jesus only when alive, most of whom had not been present at his death, who had not even been allowed to verify his resurrection?" (198). Specific memories were coalescing around a theologically based narrative, while the thousands of individual memories of Jesus and his life were fading as they found no toehold in that narrative. This theological construction of Jesus' life comes to be the force that causes certain places to become "sacred":

As the events came to be more and more distant, dogma profoundly modified the story of Jesus. It is not astonishing that the image constructed of Jerusalem was also transformed. The holy places became not only those that were the theater for the essential activities of Jesus but also sites consecrated by the fact that the essential truths of Christianity focused the thought of believers upon them. (201)

It was not events as such that mattered, but the collective beliefs and ideas that raised certain events into prominence. Those chosen events were then attached to particular places.

Halbwachs understands the Christian history of the Holy Land as a series of waves: the immediate generation of people who had followed the living Jesus, the dispersed community busy determining its theological stances, a victorious Christianity recognized by Constantine coming back to Jerusalem to find its sacred places, and later the Crusaders replanting themselves in the Holy Land. The problem with each of these successive waves is that they encounter a Jerusalem that bears little or no resemblance to the Jerusalem of Jesus's time. In 70 AD came the great divide: Jerusalem totally destroyed. Josephus provides our view: "... Caesar ordered the whole city and the Temple to be razed to the ground, leaving only the loftiest towers... All the rest of the wall encompassing the city was so completely leveled to the ground as to leave future visitors to the spot no ground for believing that it had ever been inhabited" (Peters 1985, 121). One can add to this first destruction many more examples of complete transformation, from the Bar Kokhba Revolt to the capture of the city by Muslims and Crusaders. What is surprising is the supreme confidence with which each succeeding wave could locate the sacred sites: "The Crusaders behaved as if this land and these stones recognized them, as if they had only to stoop down in order suddenly to hear voices that had remained silent..." (Halbwachs 232). Jerusalem and its long history becomes a monument to human meaning creation, a living laboratory to the readings and rereading that can be laid over a physical site, a physical representation of collective memory.

A work attributed to a woman named Egeria, who recounted her pilgrimage to sacred places throughout the Holy Land and even into

Egypt, helps us see what can be learned about collective memory from texts—which are largely ignored in the methodology of Halbwachs. The exact dating of her work is debated, but it most likely falls in the late fourth century or early fifth century (Gingras 12–15). The text is fragmentary, lacking, among other things, the original opening. It begins with an oddly fitting fragment: *ostendebantur iuxta Scripturas*, “[such things] were shown according to the Scriptures” (I.1). The concern evidenced by Egeria throughout her narrative is to see the places mentioned in Scripture.

Having climbed to the top of Mt. Sinai—referred to as the Mountain of God—Egeria narrates her encounter with an important biblical site:

... then coming down from the Mountain of God we arrived at the bush at around the tenth hour. Moreover this is the bush, which I mentioned earlier, from which the Lord spoke to Moses in the fire. It is in this place where there are many cells and a church at the head of that valley. In front of that church there is a pleasing garden, having much abundant water. In this garden is that bush (*rubus*). A place is shown near there where Saint Moses stood when God said to him: “loosen the tie of your shoe” and so on... Prayer was made in the church and also in the garden near the bush; also that place was read from the book of Moses according to our custom. (IV. 6–8)

At the site of a group of cells and a garden—which we now recognize as an early stage of St. Catherine’s Monastery—there was a major attraction: a *rubus*, or bush. Readers of the Latin Bible would undoubtedly recognize this as the very *rubus* mentioned in Exodus 3.2: “The Lord appeared to [Moses] in flames of fire from the middle of the bush (*de medio rubi*).”

Illuminating for us is the practice of reading the passages from scripture associated with a particular site. She notes that the reading of the appropriate scripture was “according to custom.” A little earlier she had expanded on this formula: “...I greatly desired this for us always, that whenever we would arrive, always that place (*ipse locus*) from a book would be read” (IV.3). We see from the above passage that her goal was to reach “sacred places” (*loca sacra*), and it is notable that when she arrives at the sacred place, the reading is from “that place” (*locus ipse*) in the Book of Moses—meaning that “passage.” *Locus* thus refers to both the place on the ground as well as the place in scripture. Each *locus sanctus* has a *locus* in some sacred narrative.

This is not a one time construction, but one recurring constantly. A little before the above passage we find the same construction, this time in reference to her experience at the cave where Elijah hid: “So we made there the sacrifice and most earnest prayers, and the reading is that place from the Book of Kings” (IV.2). Although it would be useless to catalog all the occurrences of

this construction, it is notable that it is not just scripture that gets read at sites. Near Tarsus, in present day Turkey, Egeria visits the shrine of Saint Thecla. Given her practice at so many other sites, we are not surprised to find that a narrative of the saint is read out: "...a prayer having been made at the shrine as well as a reading from the Acts of Saint Thecla..." (XXIII.5).

The tendency seems to have been to discover every locatable detail present in the source text. Seemingly any place in the narrative where a character touched the ground was fair game for localization. This tendency becomes even more pronounced as Egeria recounts her next day:

And so the other places, as we progressed from the bush, they in sequence began to show to us. They also pointed out the place where the encampments of the Sons of Israel were on those days when Moses was on the mountain. They pointed out also the place where that calf was made, since in that place even today there is a great rock. (V.3)

Egeria uses a series of passive constructions to describe what is shown to her as she follows the valley, leaving us to assume that she has guides from among the monks. This passage serves as a warning that books are not the whole story. Local guides appear to have joined her party and are busy pointing out the important places where a portion of the biblical story unfolded. Egeria is interested in experiencing every place mentioned in scripture, but she never presents herself as a discoverer of sacred places. She is no sleuth of rocks and bushes; rather she is everywhere listening to connections that have already been made. The Bible is the central text responsible for creating Mount Sinai as a repository for sacred events, but between Egeria and the Bible is a second stage of social memory: that of the guides who worked to find plausible sites for the events and then passed on this body of knowledge to each other as well as to visitors.

In the foreword to their book *Social Memory*, James Fentress and Chris Wickham offer the following critique of Halbwachs:

... an important problem facing anyone who wants to follow Halbwachs in this field is how to elaborate a conception of memory which, while doing full justice to the collective side of one's conscious life, does not render the individual a sort of automaton, passively obeying the interiorized collective will. (ix)

The authors go on to clarify how social and individual memory can be interrelated:

How does one make individual memory "social," then? Essentially by talking about it. The sorts of memories one shares with others are those



which are relevant to them, in the context of a social group of a particular kind... (ix-x)

Mention of “talking about it” as a means of communicating social memory offers a different way for us to conceptualize the process of social memory. The phrase calls to mind the image of a group of people sitting at a restaurant and talking about an event. But we might enquire just how people in a culture “talk about” an event. People may tell oral stories in an informal dinner setting, but they also may publish a novel or journalistic essay about the event. An artist may paint a mural on a public wall in order to commemorate an event; a musician may record a song describing it. These too are ways of “talking about it.” Why not also a portrayal of the event on a television program or in a movie? When we step back and look at these different cultural forms of “talking about it,” we see that each is a text—the oral tale at dinner as much as the novel. The texts will vary depending on the material and geographical context of a specific human culture, but the work of those texts will be similar: they represent ways that a specific culture has developed to “talk about” important events.

Our brief look at Egeria and her pilgrimage narrative provides a sense of what textual analysis adds to the topic of social memory. Her detailed account of the sites she visited and her actions at those sites provide us with a glimpse into the way specific texts act as agents in the experience of place. Certainly, if we could have asked Egeria about the significance of a site, she would have responded that it is important because this is the very place where God spoke from the burning bush, or the very place of some other sacred narrative. From our comparative vantage point we can see that the experience of sacred places is formed by means of culturally central texts. The Bible—and specifically the book of Exodus—is doing something its authors and editors never imagined: it is forming the lens through which a pilgrim in Late Antiquity perceived a landscape, each sacred place within that landscape matched to a sacred passage from the Bible.

### Literary Itineraries

John Leland, the great English topographer of the sixteenth century, died before he could publish the records of his extensive travels throughout England, but in an introduction to this planned work, presented to King Henry VIII in 1546, Leland explained the origin of his desire to travel:

Wherefore, after that I had perpendid the honest and profitable studies of these historiographes, I was totally enflammid with a love, to see thoroughly

al those partes of this your opulente and ample reaulme, that I had redde of yn the aforesaid writers: In so muche that al my other occupations intermittid I have so travelid yn yowr dominions booth by the se costes and the midle partes, sparynge nother labor nor costes by the space of these vi yeares past... (xli)

We note in this passage a phenomenon that we are already growing accustomed to finding: the connection between the experience of place and literary works. Leland's explicit claim is that it was through reading historical writers that he was stirred to travel. The texts written by these historical writers fill much the same role for Leland as the Bible did for Egeria. Clearly we need a term for this class of writings, and we can perhaps not do better than to call them topo-creative texts. That is, they are texts that disseminate the important narratives that adhere to places. From the note given by Leland we can see that the historical writers of his time had succeeded, purposefully or not, in constructing a consciousness of England as a national landscape. These were not narratives, such as one might peruse about distant events, but ones that "enflammid" Leland with a "love to see thoroughly al those partes of thys your opulent and ample reaulme."

There is a second type of text we can term topo-reflective texts. These are travel narratives or other cultural products that provide a window on how culturally knowledgeable individuals experienced their world. Egeria's pilgrimage narrative is a specimen of this type of text. Such topo-reflective texts will form something of a "control" for our speculations as to the agency of texts in constructing places. It is one thing to assert that some text "must have" influenced the way contemporaries perceived their world; it is another to examine an account from someone who described his or her experience of a place and gives us clues concerning the textual associations at that place and time.

In sections of Leland's *Itineraries*—rough but detailed notes about what Leland encountered through his travels in England and Wales, which were finally given an authoritative form by the efforts of Lucy Toulmin Smith in 1907—we find references to various historical events and written texts. Had he lived to complete his projected work *De Antiquate Britannica*, doubtless the notes on historical sources would have been amplified, but as it is, we encounter a man traveling tirelessly and trying to match up what he knows about English history with what is actually present on the ground:

The castelle standing nere the west bridge is at this tyme a thing of smaull estimation: and there is no apparaunce other of high waulles or dikes. So that I think that the lodgings that now be there were made sins the tyme

of the Barons War in Henry the 3. tyme; and great likelihod there is that the castelle was much defacid Henry the 2. tyme, when the waulles of Leircester wer defacid. (15)

Leland's work falls into the topo-reflective category of texts as it allows us an unusually clear glimpse of a traveler reporting what he sees and how his previous knowledge and patriotic impulses shape his perceptions.

A work in which we can see both of these types of text—the topo-creative and the topo-reflective—is *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* by Samuel Johnson. When Johnson took his long loop through Scotland in 1773 with James Boswell, he carefully noted the landscape through which he traveled. In the far north he makes the following comment: "We went forwards the same day to Fores, the town to which Macbeth was travelling, when he met the weird sisters in his way. This to an Englishman is classic ground. Our imaginations were heated, and our thoughts recalled to their old amusements" (49). Having arrived at Fores, Johnson adds: "At Fores we found good accommodation, but nothing worthy of particular remark, and next morning entered upon the road, on which Macbeth heard the fatal prediction: but we traveled on not interrupted by promises of kingship, and came to Nairn, a royal burgh..." (50).

Johnson describes heated imaginations and minds recalled to former pursuits—that is, studies of Shakespeare. But Johnson's fellow traveler and future biographer, James Boswell, explains what exactly this looked like with respect to Samuel Johnson:

In the afternoon, we drove over the very heath where Macbeth met the witches, according to tradition. Dr. Johnson again solemnly repeated

"How far is't called to Fores? What are these,  
So wither'd, and so wild in their attire?  
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,  
And yet are on't?"

He repeated a good deal more of *Macbeth*. His recitation was grand and affecting... He then parodied the "All-hail" of the witches to Macbeth, addressing himself to me. (220–221)

Shakespeare surely did not expect to stir interest in an out of the way site that he had never seen, and perhaps could not have even found on a map, but his drama *Macbeth* did just that. The association of a dark and haunting scene with a particular place had the power to color the experience of a traveler—it created a significant place out of an otherwise unknown town. *Macbeth* thus falls into the topo-creative category.

The topo-reflective category of work is exemplified by the travel narrative itself. Johnson unwittingly provides a laboratory for watching how literary

texts do their work in forming the experience of place. We are allowed to watch this supremely literate Englishman responding to the sites along his way, which are constantly being processed through his immense reading and the expectations that were formed from that reading. We learn from Johnson's hint and Boswell's elaboration that Shakespeare's *Macbeth* left not only a general impression, but that these haunting lines were conjured from memory in the process of traveling over this ground. Testimony such as this means our analysis of the agency of *Macbeth* in forming English conceptions of Scotland generally, and Fores in particular, is not simply a matter of guesswork. The agency is visible in the text of the travel narrative, and in this case we can even see exactly which lines left an impression and formed the experience of this northern place.

Creative writers—poets, novelists, essayists—have often shown a keen consciousness of the influence of texts upon the experience of a place, and, vice-versa, the influence of place upon texts. Henry James in *English Hours* presents a series of meditations upon English landscapes, and at the close comes round to consider the curious case of Thackeray's unfinished novel *Denis Duval*:

Reading over Thackeray to help me further to Winchelsea, I became conscious, of a sudden, that Winchelsea—which I already in a manner knew—was only helping me further to Thackeray. Reinforced, in this service, by its little sister-city of Rye, it caused a whole question to open, and the question, in turn, added savour to a sense already, by good-fortune, sharp. Winchelsea and Rye form together a very curious small corner, and the measure, candidly undertaken, of what the unfinished book had done with them, brought me to a nearer view of them—perhaps even to a more jealous one; as well as to some consideration of what books in general, even when finished, may do with curious small corners. (234)

This is certainly not the sole example that could be drawn from *English Hours*; in fact, a keen pleasure of following James into different corners of England is the chance to witness him mentally process places by means of his knowledge of literature and history. Through his carefully elaborated states of consciousness, the textual associations are allowed a measure of free play. The following passage is from James' introductory essay on entering London, again making use of a novel by Thackeray:

I had an errand in the City, and the City was doubtless prodigious. But what I mainly recall is the romantic consciousness of passing under the Temple Bar, and the way two lines of "Henry Esmond" repeated themselves in my mind as I drew near the masterpiece of Sir Christopher Wren. . . . As I looked at Queen Anne over the apron of my hansom—she struck me as

very small and dirty, and the vehicle ascended the mild incline without an effort—it was a thrilling thought that the statue had been familiar to the hero of the incomparable novel. All history appeared to live again, and the continuity of things to vibrate through my mind. (16)

The modern visitor to London might well feel something similar, since the city has been covered so many times over with literary references. St. Paul's ("the masterpiece of Sir Christopher Wren") is of course still present, as is the statue of Queen Anne. In the Temple Garden, located within the precincts of the Inner and Middle Temples, one can see rose beds whose earlier incarnations formed the setting for Shakespeare's depiction of the origin of the War of the Roses in *Henry VI Part 1*. The Earl of Suffolk was given the lines that provided the audience with the setting: "Within the Temple Hall we were too loud, / The garden here is more convenient" (II. v.3–4). There in the garden the fateful scene played out:

*Somerset*. Let him that is no coward nor no flatterer,  
But dare maintain the party of the truth,  
Pluck a red rose from off this thorn with me.  
*Warwick*. I love no colors; and without all color  
Of base insinuating flattery,  
I pluck this white rose with Plantaganet  
(II.iv.31–6)

This would hardly have been an abstract geographical reference to the original London audience, wholly unlike the world-spanning geographical references that Marlowe used in *Tamburlaine*, but pointed to a place whose whereabouts would have been known, almost within sight. The use of Fores in Scotland at the start of *Macbeth* was of an obviously different order, and Shakespeare could count on his original audience mentally importing associations of mist and gloom and rocks, but in the tetralogy of plays comprising *Henry VI* parts 1–3 and *Richard III*, a large number of the geographical references are in London, and through them Shakespeare has continued the work of "historiographes"—so inspiring to Leland—and infused well-known settings with a popular national narrative.

In *English Hours* James calls London "the headquarters of that strangely elastic tongue" (22), and the literary associations contained within or nearby the city of London could be multiplied many times over, with references drawn from authors as distinct as James Boswell, Charles Dickens, and Virginia Woolf. Few travelers would gainsay the fact that a singular pleasure of travel is the chance to visit sites that had previously existed only in the imagination, and to see for themselves the relationship between words on a page and an actual landscape. Many

such physical references are ephemeral—forgettable stories that happen to be set someplace real. Other narratives, however, gain a cultural currency that gives them a symbolically important role within a culture, and the places connected to those narratives likewise gain a symbolic importance. Authors and artists are not passive purveyors of this kind of symbolic landscape but learn to manipulate words and other signs in ways that construct a physical place—a mere spot on the map—as a symbolically important place.

From the above examples, drawn largely from the English literary traditions, the reader might be tempted to think that this is a phenomenon relegated to societies with a highly developed literary culture, or, at the very least, a book culture. This impression, however, would be mistaken, as the same phenomenon is present in traditional societies too. The literature of anthropology is full of examples of the connection between texts—which can include oral tales—and the perception of the landscape. Howard Morphy gives an especially vivid description of this connection:

I was walking along a narrow river valley in the Snowy Mountains on the border between New South Wales and Victoria, with open temperate woodland on either side. I was accompanied by Narritjin Maymuru, a Yolngu, an aboriginal person from north-east Arnhem Land, a continent away to the north. We came to a place where the river opened out to form a shallow, oval lake, tapered at one end, with sharp pebbles strewn on either side. We sat down beside the lake and Narritjin began to interpret its mythology for me. It was, he said, land of the Dhuwa moiety connected with the Marrakulu and related clans of the Trial Bay area of the Gulf of Carpentaria. It was land connected with Ganydjalala, an ancestral woman who, with others, hunted kangaroos through the forests with stone spears. Ganydjalala is associated with the origin of stone spears as well as with one of the great regional ceremonies of Arnhem Land, the Djungguwan. The ancestral women cut down trees in the inland forests as they looked for honey. In different places, where the trees fell, they created water courses and lakes, or ceremonial grounds, or stone-spear quarries. (184)

Morphy was curious as to how Narritjin could comment so minutely on a place that he had not previously visited. Narritjin pointed out plenty of clues in the landscape that could be aligned with the myths with which he was acquainted: the sharp stones, the trees, and the lake that resembled representations in paintings used in the Djungguwan ceremony (184). We can compare this Narritjin, who traveled to a new place and found the appropriate mythical connections, to Samuel Johnson, whom we saw doing the same thing when he reached Fores in Scotland. Narritjin is also a knowledgeable—even culturally elite—traveler who has enough

command of his traditions to make the proper associations between his culture's narratives and the landscape that surrounds him.

### Sacred versus Storied

Johnson called the road to Fores "classic ground." Had the reference been to a biblical event and a site in Palestine, Johnson might well have used the adjective "sacred." Henry James is not so careful at differentiation, and when he comes to describe Stratford, the home of Shakespeare, he writes: "Stratford of course is a very sacred place." We see, then, how easily our discussion can stray into religious notions of the "sacred." That word brings up a wholly different conception about the value of place than the one we have begun to outline. If a place is "sacred" then the tendency is to import some inherent, perhaps otherworldly, significance to a plot of ground. If one believes in the Gospel story of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then the ground of such events is sacred no matter the popular state of belief. We might recall the words of Paul in Romans: "Although everyone is a liar, let God be proved true" (3.4). Even if, hypothetically, all people ceased to believe in the event, the place itself would nevertheless be significant—God would be proved true.

Mircea Eliade in his book *The Sacred and the Profane* brought the idea of sacred space into prominence through his systematic attempt to locate the ways that "religious man" discovers and creates the "sacred" in space and time. At first it sounds like Eliade is saying something similar to the contentions of this study:

By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes *something else*, yet it continues to remain *itself*, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu. A *sacred* stone remains a *stone*... But for those to whom a stone reveals itself as sacred, its immediate reality is transmuted into a supernatural reality. (12)

We too are talking about a certain "transmutation" of physical places into places of cultural significance. Eliade's next sentence makes clear an underlying difference: "In other words, for those who have a religious experience all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality." Here he makes this process of transmutation into a special experience for "those who have a religious experience."

The world, in Eliade's conception, is broken up into two different domains, the sacred and the profane. For the profane, "space is homogeneous and neutral; no break qualitatively differentiates the various parts" (22). It is a specific type of *experience* that has the ability to create qualitative, significant

space. “Every sacred space implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different” (26). This hierophany brings about one of the hallmark concepts of Eliade’s version of sacred space: the *axis mundi*:

Where the break-through from plane to plane has been effected by a hierophany, there too an opening has been made, either upward (the divine world) or downward (the underworld, the world of the dead). The three cosmic levels—earth, heaven, underworld—have been put in communication. (36)

Eliade goes on to provide many examples that seem to provide parallel accounts of centrality and connection between spheres.

One such example is the story of Jacob in his dream at Haran. The contrast between the approach of this study and that of Eliade will be clearest if we stop for a moment and consider this narrative, which can be briefly set out:

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending upon it. . . . Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!” And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel [House of God]; but the name of the city was Luz at the first. (Genesis 28.10–12, 16–19)

For Eliade, this narrative is a textbook example of the origins of a sacred place: the divine power has reached into human life (a hierophany), and the human response is to consider that place sacred and closer to heaven. But this is an uncritical approach to the story in Genesis and assumes that the story, however obscured, reflects something actual in human experience.

We are here arguing that narratives make a site such as Bethel sacred. It is a matter of switching the emphasis. Instead of a hierophany that establishes the site as sacred space, and which is reported in scripture, it will instead be stories that are used, consciously or not, to elevate places and establish them as sacred sites. The narrative of Jacob’s dream therefore says little about the origin of sacred space—little about an event—, but it says a lot about the way a sacred site attracts stories to legitimize



its position in a culture and the way features of a site get worked into narrative. In his commentary on the chapter, Claus Westermann notes that excavations have demonstrated that a sanctuary existed long before the arrival of the Israelite tribes: “J [the Yahwistic source] then takes up a story which arose and was handed on at a sanctuary . . . and gives it a new meaning in the context of the patriarchal story” (453). So we have traces here of an old story getting worked into the early Israelite history of the patriarchs.

As for the later history of Bethel, it provides a vivid example of the way sites are manipulated by political maneuvering. As Jerusalem gained centrality and was promoted as the central place of worship for both Judah and Israel, Jeroboam, king of the Northern Kingdom, established Bethel and Dan as alternative sites of worship (1 Kings 12.26–30). Writing about the later Bethel, Joseph Blenkinsopp notes:

Once it became a dissident and heterodox center from the point of view of Jerusalemite orthodoxy, [Bethel] acquired the dysphemism *Bet-’awen*, a term deemed appropriate because *awen* “evil, mischief” can also connote an unacceptable cult object. (94)

The ferocity of this religious struggle between sacred sites and the importance of a name is evident from the polemics of Hosea: “Though you play the whore, O Israel, do not let Judah become guilt. Do not enter into Gilgal, or go up to Beth-aven . . .” (4.15). Since the Jerusalem side eventually won this battle of places, it is the story of David and Jerusalem that is preserved in the Old Testament, but from fragments such as we find in Genesis 28 we can see that these “wrong” sacred sites could have also mounted a spirited defense. That defense would have consisted of pushing forward sacred narratives contrary to the dominant Jerusalemite version of the past.

But we have still not gone far enough in discussing the idea of the “sacred,” since for many the idea represents an emotional response more than a theory of origin. For them the idea of a “sacred place” is governed by the emotions of the sacred that accompany it. The great expositor of the nature of the sacred was Rudolf Otto. His book, *The Idea of the Holy*, an enquiry into the nature of *das Heilige*, or the holy. It is a word that in Otto’s view has been robbed of its meaning in common usage. His intention is to reattach the word sacred to its original nonrational and emotional meaning, and for this purpose he coins the word “numinous,” — that is, a sense of the *numen*, or the divine. For Otto it is a unique mental state that cannot be reduced to any other and that can only be

described by inexact analogies (7). The state comes about through an encounter:

The truly “mysterious” object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently “wholly other,” whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb. (28)

Eliade has taken this idea and applied it in a systematic way to religious systems, but for Otto we are dealing with an experience such as that portrayed in Exodus when God speaks to Moses from the burning bush—called by Otto “a genuinely numinous experience” (77). God instructs Moses: “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (3.5). Otto does not touch on the question of the value of this particular place, or its objective importance as an axis mundi, he is only interested in the immediate experience: “and Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God” (3.6). In that response we can see something of the *mysterium tremendum*, or dreadful mystery, that is stirred by this encounter.

Otto has done his best to delimit the “holy” and make it a distinct mental state. But despite this effort it appears to be closely aligned with theories of the sublime. Otto himself acknowledged this similarity but denies that there is a genuine similarity between the emotions: “A transition of the actual feeling into another would be a real “transmutation,” and would be a psychological counterpart to the alchemist’s production of gold by the transmutation of metals” (44). We, however, may not be so convinced when we find descriptions of the sublime that are so similar to Otto’s conception of the holy, such as the following from Edmund Burke:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (36)

This is so similar to the description in Otto that unless one is dead set on preserving the absolute uniqueness of a religious response, there is little value in distinguishing the emotions.

This idea of the holy or sublime points us toward a different way of understanding sacred places. This approach would not be marked by

the connection of a site to a culturally important narrative, but rather to the kind of emotion elicited. William Wordsworth in a well-known passage from *The Prelude* gives an illustration of the experience of place that foregrounds the emotional response. In the passage, Wordsworth describes himself as a young boy on holiday from school, rowing a skiff upon a lake by moonlight.

When, from behind that craggy steep (till then  
 The bound of the horizon) a huge cliff,  
 As if with voluntary power instinct,  
 Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,  
 And, growing still in stature, the huge cliff  
 Rose up between me and the stars, and still,  
 With measured motion, like a living thing  
 Strode after me . . .  
 . . . and after I had seen  
 That spectacle, for many days my brain  
 Worked with a dim and undetermined sense  
 Of unknown modes of being. In my thoughts  
 There was a darkness—call it solitude  
 Or blank desertion.

(1.405–412, 417–422, 1805 version)

The cliff uprising in the moonlight is terror-inspiring—sublime. The experience recollected by Wordsworth recalls Otto's description, quoted above, of an encounter with the "wholly other." There appears to be no connection with a narrative in Wordsworth's experience, in fact it is the very break with anything known or expected that makes the experience so terrifying. This is disconnected, unstoried experience.

This would be one way to understand a term such as "sacred place": a place that stirs up a certain variety of emotional experience, irrespective of any narrative connection. The problem with this is that we generally demand a certain amount of continuity in our pronouncement of a place as "sacred," and elements of Wordsworth's recollection militate against considering this place as "sacred" or "sublime" in any permanent sense. The entire recollected experience is built around particular conditions: stealing away in a shepherd's boat on a moonlit night, or the direction in which he was gazing and the illusion of the further cliff looming forth as he gained more perspective. If Wordsworth had returned to this place the next morning, it is hard to imagine it still as a "numinous" site. All those emotions were connected to the conditions, and it is these unique conditions that he describes in the text. He specified that this occurred: "by the shores of Patterdale" (1.376), but at no point is there a hint that this is a particular place to which he will

return, or urge another to visit. The place in itself is not important; rather the importance is in Wordsworth's individual experience there. In contrast, what makes a place "sacred" for groups of people—puts it permanently on the map, so to speak—is its connection to a significant narrative.

Wordsworth—a poet for whom place was a primary concern—at other times portrays the experience of place as intimately connected to narrative. In his poem "Michael" the details of a place become the spurs for a story:

Nor should I have made mention of this Dell  
 But for one object which you might pass by,  
 Might see and notice not. Beside the brook  
 Appears a straggl'g heap of unhewn stones!  
 And to that simple object appertains  
 A story . . .

(ll. 14–19)

What follows is the tragic story of an old father who loses his only son—an element of local history. The "straggl'g heap of unhewn stones" is what remains of a broken down wall within a hidden valley "Up the tumultuous brook of Green-head Ghyll" (l. 2). It is no public marker, rather private, and apt to be found only by poets, and even a poet might pass it by without a thought. But it is a marker that for those who know the story, gains an emotional power. This is not the experience of the sublime, but the relation of private human history to place.

"Sacred" is an easy word to use, but it is potentially misleading because of its tenacious connection to a specific emotion. The adjective will be used occasionally in this study since the three main chapters will center on a major pilgrimage site, and "sacred" tends to be the default adjective when speaking of such places, but the more accurate adjective is "storied." It is a word that may be applied to different kinds of significant places—pilgrimage sites or battlefields or historic neighborhoods—and which makes reference to what is common among these sites: they are connected to a culturally important narrative.

### Forming Identities

The idea that narrative contributes to the construction of place rests on the importance of narrative in human life. This importance is illustrated by a passage from George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch*. The externally cultured, but shallow, Rosamond has fallen in love with the new doctor in town, Lydgate:

Yet this result, which she took to be a mutual impression, called falling in love, was just what Rosamond had contemplated beforehand. Ever since

that important new arrival in Middlemarch she had woven a little future, of which something like this scene was the necessary beginning. Strangers, whether wrecked and clinging to a raft, or duly escorted and accompanied by portmanteaus, have always had a circumstantial fascination for the virgin mind, against which native merit has urged itself in vain. And a stranger was absolutely necessary to Rosamond's social romance, which had always turned on a lover and bridegroom who was not a Middlemarcher... Rosamond could not doubt that this was the great epoch of her life. (109)

Eliot is pointing out that experience is understood in terms of storylines or scripts. Rosamond has an ideal image of a romance in mind, from the entrance of a stranger to love at first sight, and on toward marriage—the perfect love story. Events are interpreted so that they fit into this narrative. Eliot hints at the artificial nature of this narrative by alluding to various fragments of narratives: the shipwrecked stranger is of course Odysseus landing on an unknown shore and coming across Nausicaa, and the stranger escorted by portmanteaus simply updates the generic scene to contemporary society novels. Rosamond's sense that the "great epoch" of her life had come likewise points to a narrative understanding of life: marriage affords a sort of climax to a young girl's life. Within the plot of *Middlemarch* this kind of ideal narrative is ultimately destructive, as it crushes the young Lydgate. For our purposes young Rosamond simply illustrates what we each know if we enquire into our own actions and their sources: we interpret events according to ideal stories that we have acquired from our cultural context.

The importance of narrative to individual life has been developed philosophically by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*:

We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters—roles into which we have been drafted—and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world... that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutters in their actions as in their words. (216)

This short passage affirms what was implicit in the passage by Eliot. Rosamond had entered into society and as a conventional girl taken up the stories of courtship and love and the story of what a girl's life should be about—what its "great epoch" should be.

MacIntyre is not interested in critiquing such scripts, as is Eliot. The unity of a life is a central point in his thought. Events in life can be fit into this narrative, and this gives life the possibility of evaluation and a goal. "To be the subject of a narrative that runs from one's birth to one's death is... to be accountable for the actions and experiences which compose a narratable life" (217). Virtues are those practices that allow us to overcome the obstacles in reaching the goals of this narrative and which threaten to sidetrack us (219). These virtues are what MacIntyre wants to resurrect, leaving behind the philosophical projects that tried to found ethics upon a universal standard.

Before we leave MacIntyre, there is one more important point to be examined. An individual may be involved in composing a single life story, but there are many roles that go into that single story.

...we all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for the one who inhabits these roles. (220)

Rosamond has an ideal love story, but she also must have ideal versions of her role as a daughter and her role as a member of a local community—"Middlemarchers." We could add to this the stories, the histories, that make up religious and national narratives. Rosamond is of course not the best character in whom to find these different roles and ideal stories coexisting; better is her major counterpart within *Middlemarch*, the idealistic Dorothea, a woman born with a passionate religious temper: "Dorothea knew many passages of Pascal's *Pensées* and of Jeremy Taylor by heart; and to her the destinies of mankind, seen by the light of Christianity, made the solitudes of feminine fashion appear an occupation for Bedlam..." (8). Eliot has once again paid careful attention to the fragments of stories that contribute to this ideal religious narrative, and this time we see the way various ideal stories can come into conflict. The reference to the insane asylum Bedlam points how actions that make perfect sense for women living under the common local ideal life, when seen from the vantage of a religious ideal life, appear insane, or without meaning.

The centrality of narrative in human experience is also taken up, from the perspective of cognitive psychology, by Jerome Bruner in his book *Acts of Meaning*. His goal in this work is to get back to the original goals of the cognitive revolution and return to questions about how human beings go about creating meaning in their world (2). The cognitive vehicle for such meaning construction is narrative.

Bruner anchors narrative within what he calls “folk psychology”—that is, “a system by which people organize their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world” (35). The assumptions of folk psychology include the fact that there are agents who do things, there is a world in which events take place, there are sequences of events that have explanatory power, and there are motives behind actions. Narrative is thus the natural way to make sense of events to ourselves and others. Bruner gives the example of narrative being used by a child to mediate personal desires and obligations to the family. Part of the task of the child is to couch her own desires and actions with explanations that fit into an expected and acceptable narrative. Bruner writes: “Getting what you want very often means getting the right story” (86). Narrative as described by Bruner is a tool for discovering meaning. By inclusion into a narrative, we assign motive, and thereby meaning, to our own actions and those of others. Naturally, it is those events that are out of the ordinary and somehow exceptional that most need to be narrativized and made understandable.

A striking claim put forward by Bruner is that human development is geared toward developing narrative skills. He notes that the first stages of child development and language acquisition are building blocks for narrative ability. Early language acquisition is centered on describing “human action and its outcomes” (78) and also proficiency in grammatical sequencing of actions. Narrative is used to mark the unusual, and an interest in the unusual seems to be built into the mind of a child: “Infants reliably perk up in the presence of the unusual: they look more fixedly, stop sucking, show cardiac deceleration...” (78). Having traced these acquisitions, Bruner notes that they “provide the child with an abundant and early armament of narrative tools. My argument, admittedly a radical one, is simply that it is the human push to organize experience narratively that assures the high priority of these features in the program of language acquisition” (79).

Both MacIntyre and Bruner emphasize narrative for different reasons. MacIntyre wants to see human life as a unity, and the possibility of drawing together the details of life into a coherent narrative offers the chance to introduce virtue and valuations. Bruner is more interested in the crucial part that narrative plays in allowing human beings to navigate the world and find meaning. Narrative is a perspective on life or a tool for living. But the commonality is worth noting: narrative is the way we construct meaning for ourselves, and the narratives that surround us are the scripts by which we live and the histories by which we understand our world.

Neither of these two thinkers has given attention to place and how place might tie in with narrative. Bruner recalls Kenneth Burke and his inclusion

of “scene” as one of the five key terms in a drama. We should not push past this too quickly: an element of every narrative is its setting, whether stated or assumed. Human beings always interact *somewhere*, and events must occur *somewhere*. When we talk about human beings experiencing their world through narrative and interpreting their own lives through narrative, place must be understood as present. Those meaningful narratives must have a setting.

Bruner points out how the elements of a narrative can come to have an emblematic importance:

Narrative, moreover, must be concrete. . . . Once it achieves its particularities, it converts them into tropes: its Agents, Actions, Scenes, Goals, and Instruments. . . . are converted into emblems. Schweitzer becomes “compassion,” Talleyrand “shrewdness,” Napoleon’s Russian campaign the tragedy of overreached ambition, the Congress of Vienna an exercise in imperial wheeling and dealing. (60)

Just as different characters can be used as shorthand for abstract ideas, so settings can similarly acquire significance. “Jerusalem” can be tied up with the idea of redemption; Mecca with the place of divine revelation. The land around Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, can represent a crucible for a nation convulsed in civil war. This is the mechanism by which place is able to ride piggyback on narrative. As a narrative grows in importance, the setting is able to detach and take on an extraordinary imaginative power. The evocation of a particular place can be a powerful trope, whether Yosemite or the Bastille. These are “storied” places. They are places that serve as the setting for an important narrative and whose very mention calls up that narrative.

The story that one makes out of one’s own life, we could call a personal narrative, or perhaps even more exactly, an identity. But along with this personal narrative we must also recognize narratives that go along with various larger entities. A nation has a story, and citizens take on a national identity based on that narrative. Religions also have a narrative. In Christianity one can immediately think of the central life and death of Jesus Christ, but then each denomination and sect has an idiosyncratic way of understanding the narrative of the church after that signal life. There are many narrative identities corresponding to the various roles inherited by a person. MacIntyre, although most interested in keeping his attention on the unitary human life, also acknowledges these multiple identities: “. . . the history of each of our own lives is generally and characteristically embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer histories of a number of traditions” (222).



Once it is understood that human beings live out their lives with a personal narrative that gives a sense of continuity and identity, and amid a tangle of other important narratives, then the importance of place can be expressed in a syllogistic fashion.

1. All narratives have scenes.
2. Identities are narrative in form.
3. Identities must have scenes.

That, I am arguing, is the reason for the ubiquitous existence of sacred or significant places. The emotions and certainties connected to who we are as persons get located onto specific places, and thus become landmarks that do far more than simply mark the land.

If we take a moment and categorize varieties of significant places, it becomes clear how well these places correspond to what we call identity. We can leave aside places that gain significance by being some kind of a marvel—the Grand Canyon, the tallest building in the world, a Frank Gehry-designed building. Most other places that come to mind will fit into differing levels of identity, ranging from the personal to the international.

Some places have a purely personal significance—houses one grew up in, school grounds, site of a first date, church where one was married. This personal level is exemplified in Peter Guralnick's description of the newly famous Elvis Presley showing his girlfriend around Memphis:

During the day they frequently drove around in an old panel truck that guaranteed anonymity, as Elvis showed her all the places that meant something to him in his life. He was painstaking, almost compulsive, about pointing out to her the route he had walked to the store, where he had played as a child, where his friends and cousins lived, the places where he had worked and played. (422)

Elvis is not unusual in having such places of personal relevance; anyone visiting the place where he or she grew up or spent a number of years could give a similar tour, mentioning along the way important events and daily routes. What is unusual is that by the force of his iconic status in American culture, so many of these sites are preserved and held in reverence. The inner cover of Guralnick's biography *Last Train to Memphis* consists of a map of Memphis in 1954 that marks just these kinds of personal places: Humes High School where Elvis graduated, Lauderdale Courts where his family lived, and United Paint where he worked. For most of us, such personal places will never be inscribed in the front cover of a biography, they simply remain important sites for our personal identity. It is the same personal world that John Lennon sings of in more general terms: "There

are places I remember, all my life, though some have gone . . ." The point of using such general language is, presumably, to allow any listener to plug in his or her own special places.

A further level of identity for many people is connected to a subculture with which they identify. These subcultures have important narratives that define them, and in turn those narratives have a setting. In a book entitled *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–1957*, Matt Houlbrook explores the way London was experienced by gay men:

If you walk down St. Martin's Lane towards Trafalgar Square, just before the National Portrait Gallery comes into view you'll pass a narrow alleyway called Brydges Place on your left. Down here for decades was one of the "old-fashioned" cast iron urinals; a noted site of sexual opportunity at London's heart. It was demolished in 1953, as part of the LCC and Met's "modernization" of the cityscape. (271)

Houlbrook also reproduces a map of London published in a dissembling 1937 guide to the gay sites of London (53) and goes on to discuss the street and parks and public spaces that formed the backdrop for gay life during this period. The book is a reclamation project, an attempt to project a lost world and to recreate its monuments and sites that once hosted a living culture. Commenting on a letter written by a gay man after his arrival in London, Houlbrook notes: "London is both a symbolic and experiential rupture, a productive space that generates and stabilizes a new form of selfhood and way of life" (3). As is evident from the longer quotation above, the space connected to this identity was left out of official versions of London, and were liable to destruction, not preservation. With the emergence of gay lifestyles into the open, issues of preservation begin to take on urgency, and today in a city such as New York, sites connected to gay rights are part of various tour packages. One Web site offering such tours gives the following description:

Stroll through the streets and squares where gay people have lived, loved, and changed history. Highlights include the city's oldest continuously operating gay bar, the restaurant where Edward Albee found a famous title, the house where Djuna Barnes wrote her pioneering novels, the theatres where lesbian and gay classics were first staged, the churches where losses have been mourned, and the clubs where victories have been celebrated. We'll pass the lesbian bar that was too feminist for its own good, the gay bar where a fateful union was sealed, and, of course, the now legendary Stonewall bar. (townhousetours)

Gay and lesbian culture is only one of many subcultures. Those interested in African American history can visit important sites connected to civil

rights. A government-run Web site maintains a national register of such sites and provides itineraries for anyone interested (*We Shall Overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement*). The road from Selma to Montgomery in Alabama has been designated a National Historic Trail by the National Park Service. Alternatively, anyone interested in the hippie culture of the 60s can take a tour of Haight-Ashbury. One Web site offers the following paragraph as an advertisement for its tour:

Flashback: A Mind-Blowing Trip Through the Haight-Ashbury of the 1960's

This tour takes the intrepid traveler on a vivid trip through the heart of the Haight-Ashbury district, the birthplace of the cultural revolution that sparked the 60's. We see the locations of some of the most memorable events of the Summer of Love, as well as the former houses of the Grateful Dead, the Jefferson Airplane, Janis Joplin, and other notable characters. (footours.com)

Some people visit these sites simply as citizens interested in the broad story of America, but for many these sites embody a level of identity.

Religious groups have important sites connected to their identity. Non-Mormons may be surprised to find the grand treatment accorded to the founder and prophet of that church, Joseph Smith, at the site of his birthplace in Sharon, Vermont. It was here on December 23, 1805 that a boy was born who would found the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. An obelisk was erected on the site that stands 38½ feet high—one foot for every year in Joseph Smith's life. Then moving west to upstate New York, where Joseph Smith came of age, a visitor can see the Smith family farm, the sacred grove where Joseph Smith received a revelation, and the Hill Cumorah where Joseph Smith is said to have found the golden plates from which he translated the Book of Mormon. Pentecostal Christians likewise celebrate 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles where a revival broke out in 1906. It was here that speaking in tongues came back into Christian parlance. From April 25 to 29, 2006, the Azusa Street Centennial was held in Los Angeles, gathering together again the various streams of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians who trace their origins back to this site. First on the program is the "Holy Spirit Procession and Centennial Rally, which "Begins at Bonnie Brae House and Concludes at Azusa Street Historical Site" (Azusa Street Centennial).

Religious identity transcends national boundaries. Muslims from America and Europe consider Mecca a holy site, while Christians from those same countries are apt to view Jerusalem as a city that holds sacred sites. Religious identity has been an important organizing force in world history, allowing for cohesive social units built upon more than tribal or

familial identities. W. Montgomery Watt in his book *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* traces the development of a new religious identity out of old tribal identities. Describing pre-Islamic tendencies he writes:

At the level of social institutions this was seen in the breakdown of the tribe or clan and of the solidarity associated with it. In the hard conditions of the desert men had to join with one another in order to survive. They did so on the basis of kinship in units which may be called tribes or clans . . . In Mecca this tribal solidarity was being replaced by individualism. (49)

This tribal system was a fundamental system of identity, overriding any other categories. The weakening of this tribal system is portrayed by Watt as a kind of social crisis, which was answered only by the creation of a new system of identity:

. . . when many of the Meccans rejected Muhammad, a distinction had to be drawn between those members of the tribe who accepted Muhammad and those who did not. In this way there was formed the idea of the community of those who accepted the prophet, and this community had its basis in religion and not in kinship. (54)

The end result of this new religion is evident in our contemporary world, one in which individuals ranging from Morocco to Indonesia claim Islam as their primary identity.

National identities must also be figured into this portrait, although nationalism as a means of identifying oneself with a nation-state is a relatively recent phenomenon. Americans nurture a strong sense of national identity, reflected in a wealth of sites dedicated to memorializing the lives of presidents or important events in American history. Historical buildings such as Independence Hall in Philadelphia where the Declaration of Independence and Constitution were signed, along with Civil War battlefields, have been taken over by the National Park Service and preserved as sites connected to the story of America.

Theoretically, we could meet a gay Mormon from a small town in Idaho. This man would grow excited at the prospect of giving a tour of the places in his hometown associated with youthful memories. He could also undoubtedly feel a certain amount of interest in sites commemorating gay culture and history, and at the same time acknowledge the importance of Mormon historical sites. If taken to Philadelphia to view the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall where the Constitution of the United States was signed, his patriotic emotions would be evoked. This imaginary person thus carries around four distinct levels of identity, and each important identity has important places connected to it. If we imagine a married

woman from Georgia who regularly attends a Southern Baptist church, then the equation is suddenly jumbled. The small town sites in Idaho would mean nothing to her, nor would the sites relating to gay culture or Mormon history—although conceivably both could find common ground at sites of national importance in Philadelphia. This woman would have her own distinct set of significant places, aligned with her different levels of identity.

Finally, we should mention sites of international importance: the pyramids at Giza and other spectacular remains from ancient civilizations. The odd fact about all these sites is that they are often being rescued from indifferent natives. We read about early modern Turks taking target practice on the face of the Sphinx and are tempted to swear angrily at their destructive ignorance. It may be helpful here to detour into a personal story from a journey to Ethiopia. I arrived at the monastery Debra Damo in a small bus that had been rented by an odd assortment of visitors: an American friend and myself, then a middle-aged Australian man, a lawyer from Hong Kong, and a young married couple from Switzerland. We were united solely by the fact that we were in historical Axum at the same time and looking for a shared ride to the outlying monastery. The driver of our small van was a young Sudanese man who spoke Arabic and was a Muslim. As all of us were preparing to ascend the fifty feet by rope to the entrance of the monastery, someone asked the Sudanese driver if he would like to enter—there would be no charge for the driver. The driver smiled but shook his head: no, he was a Muslim; he would not enter a Christian monastery. I thought this an odd response. It is not as if any of the tourists in our group were Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, or that the site had any particular religious significance for us. We were there to admire a significant historical site as tourists. Yet underlying our international “tourist” ethos is a rather strong narrative of human progress. All human accomplishment is taken to be part of the march of progress, and, monuments from places as diverse as Egypt, China, and Mexico are deemed worth seeing because of this underlying assumption. The Sudanese driver had no such humanistic and universalizing narrative at work in his mind: he was a Muslim and this site was connected to none of his levels of identity.

Something similar was noted by Alexander von Humboldt in his *Personal Narrative of a Journey to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent*. In the course of addressing the ability of natives to eat the flesh of their human rivals, he stumbles into a discussion of human identity:

Civilization has led man to sense the unity of the human race, the bonds that link him to customs and languages which he does not know. Wild

Indians hate all those who do not belong to their tribe or family... They recognize family and kin ties, but not those of humanity in general. (245)

The word “civilization” is of course simply a way to reference a widely held narrative about the progress of human societies. With this narrative internalized, the accomplishments and acts of all human beings gain meaning and importance. In a sense it underlies the project of a traveler such as Humboldt, intensely curious about all manifestations of human culture. But the salubrious result of such an important narrative—enabling cross-cultural appreciation and international efforts of preservation—should not deceive us into thinking it is a given. This is an acquired narrative, a level of humanistic identity coexisting and even battling with national and religious identities.

The immense rock-carved tombs and public buildings at Petra are among the “wonders of the world” and testify to human development. The culture-specific meaning of the site is largely lost to us, but an abstract humanistic narrative now supports their status: human achievement and accomplishment throughout history are part of our common human story, and are therefore to be valued and preserved. Petra has been designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, and this humanistic narrative is explicitly noted as the rationale behind UNESCO World Heritage Sites, which are defined as sites “of outstanding universal value.” A phrase I take to mean that such sites are not limited to national or local importance but have connection to our human—“universal”—identity.

Kwame Anthony Appiah in a recent essay on the politics of cultural preservation cites a similar statement from UNESCO:

Being convinced that damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world... (39)

Appiah has nothing but praise for this humanistic narrative, and he provides an illustration that allows us to see how it frames his own experience of cultural objects and places:

I’ve gazed in wonder at Michelangelo’s work in the Sistine Chapel and I will grant that their Holinesses Popes Julius II, Leo X, Clement VIII, and Paul III, who paid him, made a contribution, too. But which *people* exactly made that contribution? The people of the Papal States? The people of Michelangelo’s native Caprese? The Italians? This is clearly the wrong way to think about the matter. The right way is to take not a national but a transnational perspective: to ask what system of international rules about objects of this sort will respect the many legitimate interests at stake. (40)

In this formulation, there is no standpoint from which Appiah's own "transnational perspective" can be questioned: one is either small-minded and bound by a limited perspective or see things broadly and in the "right way." But this "right way" is certainly not a universal value with which all clear thinking human beings would agree. It is a humanistic narrative that is acquired through cultural products in the same way that other narrower identities are formed.

The picture we arrive at, then, is one consisting of multiple levels of identity, ranging from a personal identity to a humanistic identity, each level of identity being determined by an important narrative. For each level, it is possible to imagine sites that correspond to it. Not every narrative or scene will be important to us. Most novels are forgettable, as are most movies, television programs, and journalistic accounts. But for various reasons certain stories get taken up by a culture and are given a central symbolic importance. Those scenes that happen to be connected to the comparatively few narratives that serve as the foundation for an identity are liable to arise as extraordinarily durable and emotionally captivating places.

### What Comes Next

From here we will examine three case studies illuminating the construction of place. These will be drawn from three distinct cultural traditions: ancient Egypt, classical Greece, and Medieval Islam. One advantage of tackling three case studies widely separated in time is the opportunity to move beyond the mass of details connected with any single cultural tradition. In the second chapter, on Abydos in Middle Kingdom Egypt, we provide a synchronic approach to the question and take up the topic of the invention of a tradition. The tradition in this case will be the invention of Abydos as the landscape in which Osiris was killed and then resurrected. This narrative, celebrated in an annual dramatic festival, became the lens through which elite Egyptian visitors perceived Abydos. In the third chapter we follow the island of Delos over the course of about five centuries, providing a diachronic perspective on its long-term association with the story of the birth of Apollo. In this chapter we will especially be interested in the way the geography of the island is connected with political power, noting the way the island is deployed and redeployed in the changing political climates of Greece and the Mediterranean. In the fourth chapter we will attempt to see Mecca through the eyes of the Medieval pilgrim Ibn Jubayr, discovering how what seem at first glance like subjective impressions about Mecca are actually formed by his knowledge of the central religious texts of the Islamic tradition. The travel narrative of Ibn Jubayr—and other

examples of the genre, by implication—will stand out as unique carriers of social memory. This study is concluded with a meditation on places that are unstoried, and therefore the opposite of pilgrimage sites that attracted a large number of literary and artistic representations. The conclusion also furnishes an opportunity to set down some practical observations on the preservation of places, and the necessity of preserving texts along with actual physical landscapes. We might ask: what is Walden Pond if nobody reads *Walden*? Obviously, something would be lost, yet all too often discussions about the preservation of culturally significant places goes on with no attempt to care for or disseminate the texts that constructed those places.

I should also clarify that this is by no means a grand theory of literature. If my central thesis is true, I think it sheds an interesting light on the tangible ways that literary texts are more than simply words on a page that can be analyzed and taken apart, and more than texts within the ocean of texts disconnected from reference to our physical world, but that these texts have various ways to reach out and shape the world we inhabit by means of reference to physical places. Our pleasure in simple acts—such as walking around the block—may be more dependent on texts than we commonly suspect.



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## CHAPTER TWO

### ABYDOS: INVENTING A LANDSCAPE

Abydos is located about three hours north of Luxor. The site is located in Upper Egypt, which is south of Cairo and the Nile Delta. Most modern visitors come to see the New Kingdom mortuary temple of Seti I (1306–1290 BC), set on the west bank of the Nile at the edge of the green cultivated land. Two kilometers back from the beginning of the desert a sharp bay of cliffs rises. Up against these cliffs are a number of burial sites, including one complex that may have been the tomb for the Middle Kingdom king, Senwosret III (1878–1841 BC), and then a much more ancient group of burials located at Umm al-Qab. The scene will strike a visitor to other sites along the Nile as conforming to a common pattern—mortuary sites built along the western desert. The visitor could be forgiven for conflating Abydos with other sites. Our interest in this chapter will be to examine not how ancient Abydos fit into a common pattern, but how it functioned as the home for a unique narrative. For a time the narrative that defined its important features shaped the Egyptian hope for the afterlife.

The narrative that overlaid Abydos is that of Osiris. The Greek philosopher Plutarch, in the second century AD, set down the narrative of Osiris in an essay entitled “On Isis and Osiris.” This essay, dense as it is with references to Greek philosophy, is virtually useless in our effort to understand the narrative of Osiris as it would have been understood in the Old and Middle Kingdoms of Egypt, a time spanning from about 2650 to 1700 BC—two to three thousand years before the lifetime of Plutarch. The ancient Egyptians did not preserve the kind of mythical narratives that have come down to us from the Greeks. The reason for this lack of sustained narrative is evident from the nature of the earliest sources—which tend to be embedded within texts that had specific funerary use. The following is an “utterance” from the Pyramid Texts:

O my father the King, the doors of the sky are opened for you, the doors of the celestial expanses are thrown open for you. The gods of Pe are full

of sorrow, and they come to Osiris at the sound of the outcry of Isis and Nephthys. The souls of Pe clash (sticks) for you, they smite their flesh for you, they clap their hands for you, they tug their side-locks for you, and they say to Osiris: Go and come, wake up and sleep, for you are enduring in life! Stand up and see this, stand up and hear this which your son has done for you, which Horus has done for you. He smites him who smote you, he binds him who bound you, he sets him under your eldest sister who is in Qdm. Your eldest sister is she who gathered up your flesh, who closed your hands, who sought you and found you on your side on the river bank of Nedit. (Faulkner § 1004–1008)

We will examine this text in more detail near the conclusion of this chapter, at which point many of the details will make more sense, but for now we can make some general observations. The beginning of this utterance, like so many others, addresses the deceased king, who in his death was identified with Osiris. The speaker is identified with Horus, the son of Osiris and the avenger of his murder. Despite the fact that the mythical narrative is alluded to rather than told, its basic elements are clear enough: Osiris was murdered; his sisters Isis and Nephthys gather his scattered body; his son Horus must avenge him. By the Middle Kingdom, these events had been firmly attached to the landscape of Abydos. The purpose of the passage is not to tell an entertaining story, but rather to provide the deceased king with the words and knowledge that he will need in order to gain his resurrection.

Our contention in this chapter is that parallel to the growth in importance of the narrative of the death and resurrection of Osiris, the landscape of Abydos also increased in importance. The landscape was tied to the coattails, so to speak, of a powerful narrative that promised eternal life to ancient Egyptians. The Pyramid Texts, known to us by their preservation within the interior of some late Old Kingdom pyramids, are a topo-creative theological work that came to supply the landscape of Abydos with meaning.

The experience of ancient visitors to Abydos would be unknown to us were it not for the survival of a large number of stelae erected there that testify to the significance of this landscape. These stelae function as topo-reflective texts that inform us about the way Egyptians during the Middle Kingdom experienced and understood the landscape of Abydos. We could call them miniature travel narratives, although they are certainly not as verbose as the travel narratives penned by the Christian pilgrim Egeria or the Andalusian traveler Ibn Jubayr (who we will encounter in chapter four). In these stelae we find our only remaining evidence for an annual sacred drama reenacting the death and resurrection of Osiris.

### **Abydos in the Middle Kingdom**

Barry Kemp provides a useful note on methodology: "...continuity of forms masked changes in meaning and practice. Inventing traditions was something that the Egyptians were very good at. For each period the sources should be interpreted within the spirit and for the illumination of that age alone" (1989, 59). Kemp is warning against a temptation that every student of ancient Egypt encounters, namely, the interpretation of earlier more fragmentary evidence by later and clearer evidence. With Abydos it is a special temptation—since the Old Kingdom practices on the site are virtually unknown and the Middle Kingdom stelae are relatively abundant—to let one period talk for another period and to assume a basic continuity.

An example of this tendency to interpret one period by means of another is evident in interpretations of the tomb of Weni the elder, from the Sixth Dynasty in the Old Kingdom (2323–2150 BC), which included a long autobiography listing his accomplishments (Lichtheim 1973, 18–22). It is notable that in this autobiographical stela there is no mention of the festival of Osiris—a topic that would dominate autobiographical stelae a few centuries later in the Middle Kingdom (2040–1640 BC). Eberhard Otto showed little caution in interpreting this stela, discovered just south of the wadi that would become the processional route for the festival of Osiris: "This location can hardly be accidental: the festive procession passed on this road in imitation of the royal funerary procession, and it must have been the wish of [Weni] to take part in it, as it were, from his tomb" (32). This claim makes perfect sense from the standpoint of the Middle Kingdom, where we find many examples of people wishing to take part after death in the procession of Osiris, but there is no evidence that this was the motivation or hope centuries earlier in the Old Kingdom. There is some evidence, much of it collected by Edward Brovarski, that individual elements of the annual festival of Osiris were already present in the Old Kingdom, but given the tendency of cultures to invent traditions that adopt forms from the past, we should be conservative in our interpretation of this evidence.

In a well-known essay, Eric Hobsbawm calls attention to the fact that cultures have a tendency to invent traditions that have the appearance of continuity with the past. He describes where we might most expect to find these invented traditions: "we should expect it to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable" (4). What separates the Old Kingdom from the Middle Kingdom is just such a social breakdown, known as the

First Intermediate Period. The benign name designates a traumatic period in Egyptian history that left Middle Kingdom writers puzzling about the nature of order. This historical background means that we should be especially on guard for the important shifts that accompany an invented tradition, shifts that will perhaps be masked by superficial connections to the past. The methodology sketched by Kemp is in substantial agreement with that of Hobsbawm, and it allows us to avoid the trap of drawing easy continuities between different periods.

Something new happened at Abydos in the Middle Kingdom, or a little previously, transforming it into a sacred landscape connected to the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Osiris. During the Middle Kingdom, Abydos emerged as a popular pilgrimage site, as evidenced by a multitude of stelae left behind by visitors. In examining Abydos as it was experienced during the Middle Kingdom, we must begin by constructing a mental map of the landscape, being careful to exclude later structures. Instead of trying to cover 2000 years of changing history at Abydos, we will take a synchronic approach and fix our attention on Abydos as it was experienced during the Middle Kingdom.

The natural landscape a visitor finds today in Abydos appears substantially the same as it would have appeared during the Middle Kingdom. Upper Egypt is a distinctive landscape. A lush and productive band of agricultural land surrounds the Nile. This agricultural band is bright green and studded with palm trees. Just beyond this productive band, to the east and the west, lies the stark tan desert at elevations the water of the Nile does not reach. A contemporary visitor to Egypt who takes a Nile cruise in Upper Egypt will return with a disk full of photos in which the river and the lush productive land fill the foreground while, in contrast, the empty desert looms in the background. Abydos adds a uniquely spectacular element to the generic Upper Egyptian landscape. In the west, projecting out of the desert in the distance, is a steep scarp of cliffs. A conspicuous gap breaks up this sheer wall of cliffs, and since the early dynastic kings orient their tombs in the direction of this gap, it is possible that it was interpreted as a portal to the world of the dead. A broad sandy wadi, or valley, runs from the cliffs to the area of cultivation.

The human landscape, consisting of religious and memorial structures, is more complicated and harder to comprehend. The longevity and density of this human landscape can be glimpsed today by looking carefully at the desert ground, which is strewn with broken pottery fragments. The name of the oldest cemetery, Umm al-Qab, means literally, in Arabic, "Mother of Pots," indicating its richness as a source for ancient pottery shards. Many of the most important human constructions at Abydos have been either destroyed over time or are covered with sand, and it is through

reading the reports of archeologists rather than through tramping over the desert floor of Abydos that the human landscape of the Middle Kingdom can be fleshed out.

There are four main elements of the human landscape that relate to the story of Osiris in the Middle Kingdom landscape: the Temple of Osiris, the processional route, the ancient cemetery of Umm al-Qab, and the funeral enclosures of early dynastic kings.

### The Temple of Osiris

The most important human element in this landscape was the temple of Osiris Khentyamentiu. Despite the keystone-like position of this temple, anchoring as it does the other elements in the landscape, it is also the most difficult to understand. The major archeological examination for the site of the temple was done by W. M. Flinders Petrie in 1903. Barry Kemp at the start of a major reevaluation of this material stressed the speed with which Petrie worked:

One suspects that the work carried out on the Osiris temple at Abydos in 1902 and 1903 must have been the most difficult of all excavations which Petrie undertook. With a depth of over six metres of stratified debris, and with the whole site littered with heavy stone blocks, Petrie's achievement in making some sort of sense out of the wreckage will remain a very considerable one. Equally remarkable was the appearance of the final reports within nine months of the end of each season's work. (1968, 138)

A look at Petrie's elaborate plates detailing the remains of successive temple walls at once explains the continuing debate as to the nature of this temple. Our understanding of the temple is a victim of its ancient popularity, which led to multiple new versions and additions.

The good news is that it is clear, from fragmentary remains and testimony on Middle Kingdom stelae, that the Middle Kingdom king, Senwosret I (1971–1926 BC), erected a temple at this site, atop the remains of the Old Kingdom structures (Kemp 1968, 141–143). That temple, with periodic additions or renewals, was the most important Middle Kingdom structure at Abydos. The bad news is that virtually nothing remains of this Middle Kingdom temple since it was leveled early in the Eighteenth Dynasty, at the start of the New Kingdom. Kemp notes concerning this Middle Kingdom temple: "Except for a fragment of enclosure wall and a few foundation deposits nothing at all seems to have been left of the temple built by Senwosret I..." (151). For the Middle Kingdom, we must simply be content to state that a sizeable temple existed at this site, which served as the focal point for the festival of Osiris.

The Old Kingdom temple, however, was not entirely obliterated. These remains have given rise to a debate as to the nature of Old Kingdom temples in general. Barry Kemp examines the relationship between the formal national culture of ancient Egypt and the local or folk traditions that often underlay this national culture. He compares some local sites with their smaller and earlier temples, and writes: "One by one they became subject to court initiatives, and these replaced local diversity with uniformity in the style that we are most familiar with from Egypt" (1989, 65). He then uses the excavations of Petrie at Abydos to point out the limited size of the Old Kingdom temple. It was a structure that no one would confuse with later Egyptian temples. Concerning Abydos he argues: "Late in the Old Kingdom the temple site which lay adjacent to the town mound passed through a major phase of rebuilding which represented a step towards formality, though the temple building itself remained a modest one of mud brick" (77). The Old Kingdom temple thus remained, despite some formalizing royal patronage, essentially a representative of local Egyptian culture. Kemp chooses to emphasize the dramatic transition between the local culture and the formal and systematizing structures that will come in the Middle Kingdom from royal patronage.

David O'Connor (1992), along with Edward Brovarski (1994: part II, 16–19), interprets these smaller constructions, especially the small enclosure connected with Pepy II, as being *ka*-chapels—that is, shrines dedicated to a king within a local temple precinct. This view carries with it the discouraging possibility that the Old Kingdom temple has simply not been excavated yet and must lie somewhere to the south of the area uncovered by Petrie. This view emphasizes the continuity between Old Kingdom temples and Middle Kingdom temples, rather than their discontinuity. Josef Wegner, in his work on the mortuary complex of Senwosret III, accepts this latter understanding and assumes a basic continuity at the site: "[the small to medium size buildings excavated by Petrie] were royal cult structures built in association with a main temple (or rather a series of temples) of Osiris (Khentyamentiu) proper which has not been located" (98). The picture, then, is of a virtually unbroken line of temples dedicated to approximately the same use, and which were successively razed and rebuilt on this site.

Some kind of syncretism took place at Abydos, dating from at least the late Old Kingdom and seemingly completed by the time of the Middle Kingdom. The word Khentyamentiu means, literally, "foremost of the westerners," and by the Middle Kingdom it had become simply an epithet for Osiris. This is reflected in many translations of stelae that read: "Osiris, foremost-of-the-westerners." Originally the main temple in Abydos was dedicated to Khentyamentiu ("foremost-of-the-westerners") as a separate

god, as evidenced by an inscription from King Pepy II (2246–2152 BC) at the end of the Old Kingdom, part of which reads: “. . . which statues are in the temple of Khentyamentiu” (Petrie 1903, 42). In this early inscription there is no evidence of the presence of Osiris.

The nature of this change of gods is a matter of some uncertainty, and opinions about it inevitably mirror opinions about the continuity or discontinuity of the successive temples. Kemp writes: “One consequence of court patronage and the involvement of the formalizing approach at Abydos was the change in the identity of the god to whom the temple was principally dedicated in the Old Kingdom: from Khenti-amentiu, a local jackal god, to Osiris, whose cult was to take on national significance” (1989, 79). Thus the changeover becomes emblematic of the basic divide between the local culture and the national systematizers who bring Abydos into the orbit of a central royal theology. Josef Wegner (1996) reads this change of gods in a different way: “In essence those very attributes which define the character of Osiris are already linked during the Late Old Kingdom with the name of the local Abydene deity Khentyamentiu whose temple and cult continue to be the primary focus of ritual life at Abydos itself during the Old Kingdom” (43). One could think of this as the “soft” changeover theory, as opposed to Kemp’s “hard” changeover. Wegner would have us believe that when we read “Khentyamentiu” in the Old Kingdom, we should understand “(Osiris) Khentyamentiu” (45). A general continuity between the Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom temple and worship is thus underlined.

### The Processional Route

The Middle Kingdom processional route started at the temple of Osiris, ascended a slight terrace, and then dipped down to the wadi from which point it would head to the tomb of Osiris. Upon this terrace was a crowded group of cenotaphs. These were not actual tombs with accompanying burial shafts, but rather memorial chapels (Simpson 1980). We can only imagine how this dense array of chapels would have looked. Auguste Mariette, a French archaeologist from the nineteenth century, witnessed some late chapels standing and noted that they appeared as an army of tents from afar (Simpson 1974, 6). So, that is how we must imagine the appearance of this area during the Middle Kingdom: as an army of tentlike structures glistening white in the desert just outside the temple and along the pavement that likely formed the processional way for the festival of Osiris (O’Connor 1985, 28). The stelae accompanying these offering chapels were dispersed to museums throughout the world by early archeological plunderers, but many have since been collected and published. Some of these stelae come



from the Eleventh Dynasty at the end of the First Intermediate Period, but the majority are from the Middle Kingdom.

We learn more about the reasons for the construction of these offering chapels by examining the inscriptions on the stelae:

As for this offering chapel which I have made in . . . Abydos at the terrace of the Great God, Lord of the Gods, upon the district which possesses offerings, in the sacred land of the western horizon so that I will be powerful and effective in the company of the Great God. (after Simpson, *Terrace* 12)

The position of these structures, according to this and other stelae, is at the “terrace/staircase of the Great God.” This is a phrase that matches so well with the topography and known placement of the stelae that it can hardly refer to anything except where “50 meters to the south-west the ground sloped upwards to a low desert promontory” (O’Connor 1985, 167). Simpson previously had sketched out a hypothesis as to the course of the great procession upon leaving the temple of Osiris:

It might be possible to trace this processional way through the so-called Osiris temple to the portal leading on the west to the higher ground . . . and onto the natural hill. From this position the road would have veered to the south and west . . . toward the wadi and then followed the wadi course to the tomb of Osiris. (Simpson 1974, 9)

Two reasons for erecting an offering chapel can also be glimpsed in the short passage above. First, by calling the necropolis the “district which possessed offerings” the stela hints at what is expanded upon elsewhere: the owner of the stela hopes to gain the benefit of the offerings that are being brought to this area. Another stela directly asks for its owner: “May he receive offerings from the great altar on the feasts of the necropolis” (Lichtheim 1988, 120). A second reason appears at the close of the above passage: “so that I will be powerful and effective in the company of the great god.” Here the stela alludes to another common theme present throughout the many stelae from Abydos: a desire to take part in the great festivals—especially that of Osiris.

The popularity of the Osiris procession eventually led to the erection of stelae warning against any kind of trespass or building within the processional route. Although only one stela has been found, its text informs us that four were set up. Since the one we have was discovered on the north-eastern corner of the wadi, it is likely that the four stelae marked off the wadi as inviolate (Leahy 1989, 50–51). The one we have announces:

As for anyone who shall be found within these stelae, except for a priest about his duties, he shall be burnt. Moreover, as for any official who shall

cause a tomb to be made for himself within this holy place, he shall be reported and this law applied to him and to the necropolis-guard... But as for everywhere outside this holy place, (it is) an area where people may build tombs for themselves and where one may be buried. (Leahy 1989, 43)

The date for this stela is debated, with Leahy arguing that it is from the latter part of the Middle Kingdom. It testifies to a concerted effort to keep the processional route clear of extraneous building and even of individual trespassing on land that was considered sacred.

### The Cemetery of Umm al-Qab

Toward the end of the wadi that formed the processional route for the annual festival are burials for First and Second Dynasty kings (ca. 3000–2650 bc) at the site known now as Umm al-Qab. The presence of the earliest Egyptians kings in this area was a long-lasting tradition that turns up even much later in the record of dynasties constructed by Manetho in the third century BC. His record exists only in fragments cited by other authors, but the first king is listed as the legendary Menes of This (frags 6 and 7). “This” is the name of the nome (or district) in which Abydos was the central city. Even 1500 years after the Middle Kingdom, the fact that the earliest royal burials were at Abydos was dimly remembered, and we can assume that a similarly dim memory would have prevailed in the minds of Middle Egyptian visitors.

In addition to the First Dynasty’s royal burials, there were also Predynastic burials, the most spectacular of which is tomb U-j, dating from ca. 3150 BC. These early graves have proven important in reconstructing the early history of Egypt, along with early mortuary practices, but this information is of limited value to our reconstruction of Abydos in the Middle Kingdom—around 1000 years later. More important for us is how these early burials were perceived by Middle Kingdom Egyptians as sites connected to a living memory.

Today all that appears at Umm al-Qab is the slight rise upon which the tombs are located and the pock marks that represent modern archaeological work. Whether the burials were originally marked by a mound or some other marker remains a live question. Toby A. H. Wilkinson notes:

The appearance of the early first dynasty tombs remains uncertain, although a simple mound of earth covering the burial chamber seems likely... The super-structures of the mid- and later First Dynasty tombs... apparently comprised two elements: a hidden tumulus over the burial chamber and a larger mound covering the whole tomb. (233)

David O'Connor speculates that by the Middle Kingdom Umm al-Qab “would have seemed a rather desolate site. The First and Second Dynasty tombs had been plundered early, so the site was characterized by large sand-filled depressions, surface mounds and increasing amounts of wind-deposited sand” (unpublished manuscript 43).

One of the tombs at Umm al-Qab—that of the First Dynasty King Djer—came to be understood as the tomb of Osiris. The evidence for this identification is particularly strong in the New Kingdom, since a black basalt bed with the mummified form of Osiris dating to the Second Intermediate Period was found in it (Leahy 1977). At some point, ancient Egyptians dug into the ground and came upon the square mud-brick tomb for an ancient king, and then they proceeded to make what seemed to them a reasonable inference: this was the place where Osiris was buried. Anthony Leahy has pointed out that for this ancient “discovery” of Osiris’ tomb to take place, “. . . it is a prerequisite that the Archaic kings individually had been forgotten. The association of the tomb of Djer with Osiris would not have been possible if any clear recollection had survived of who the owner of the monument actually was” (Leahy 1989, 56–57). These tombs, hallowed by some sort of lasting tradition, were only dimly understood by the Middle Kingdom and could be transferred easily to Osiris. From the lack of Middle Kingdom offerings at Umm al-Qab, it appears likely that public access to this area was limited at first, but nevertheless it is certain that the pilgrim during the Middle Kingdom would have understood this slightly raised ground located near the steep cliffs—perhaps only seen from a distance—to be the place where Osiris was buried.

### Early Funerary Enclosures

Connected to these early tombs were the remains of funerary enclosures, which stood near the Osiris temple, just outside the town of Abydos. Only the enclosure of the Second Dynasty King Khasekhemwy would have remained standing at the time of the Middle Kingdom. The niched enclosure of Khasekhemwy, swept with sand, would have functioned as a reminder to Egyptians even then of the ancient and mysterious significance of Abydos. These mortuary enclosures are related to the royal burials at the cemetery of Umm al-Qab. Barry Kemp has suggested that there was a split motivation in these twin projects. Umm al-Qab was already a burial place with a considerable tradition behind it and still of religious significance in the First Dynasty, so it was the natural place for a king to be buried. But its isolated location almost two kilometers away from the cultivated valley and the town of Abydos made it a poor place for a grand architectural statement, and so a second mortuary structure was

added near the town of Abydos. These two structures—burial and monumental enclosure—would soon be combined in the mortuary complexes at Saqqara exemplified by the Step Pyramid complex of Djoser (Kemp 1967). This connection between enclosure and burial and the subsequent development of this connection in later mortuary complexes is important for our understanding of the rituals of Osiris. The architectural continuity between these earliest burials at Abydos and the later development of royal mortuary structures at Memphis points to a degree of ritual continuity. Josef Wegner notes in this respect: “...the physical evolution of the royal burial complex between the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom, would appear likely to have been paralleled by an evolving body of religious and ritual elements which constituted the underlying conceptual basis for the royal afterlife and mortuary tradition” (1996, 30). We will return to this point below as we follow the path of the narrative of the death and resurrection of Osiris and its connection to the landscape of Abydos.

### Pilgrim Experiences

The stelae that were left upon the “terrace of the great god” during the Middle Kingdom preserve many details we associate with travel narratives, albeit in a more compact and formulaic manner than we might expect. How closely these stelae sometimes get to being travel narratives can be seen in a stela constructed by the Chamberlain Semti the Younger.

When I came in the beginning to his majesty he caused that I examine his forefathers the gods and put an end to any harm and restore the form of their construction for eternity. I was ordered to gild their offering tables, the electrum being under my seal.

I reached Elephantine just as I was commanded so that I might kiss the ground for the lord of the cataract

When I came back having done what I had journeyed for, I drove in the mooring post at Abydos and I set up my name at the place subject to the god Osiris foremost of the westerners, lord of eternity, ruler of the west, whom that which exists serves, in order that I might become spirit (*akh*) there amid the followers of the lord of life and thereby might eat his [offering] cakes and go out in the day that my *ba* may make lamentation.\*

The outlines of a travel narrative can be discerned here. Semti in the beginning is in the presence of the king receiving an order. Fulfillment of

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\*This and each of the following translations from Middle Egyptian were derived from the hieroglyphic texts of these stelae as presented in Kurt Sethe's *Ägyptische Lesestücke zum Gebrauch im Akademischen Unterricht: Texte des Mittleren Reiches*. [Egyptian Readings for use in Academic Lessons: Texts of the Middle Kingdom].

this order takes him to Elephantine in the far south of Egypt, where the first cataract of the Nile is located (near present day Aswan). Then having completed his task he stops at Abydos on his return, where he “set up his name”—undoubtedly referring to the setting up of this very stela.

It will be helpful here if we recall the categories developed by Kemp for understanding the cultural trend of ancient Egypt. Kemp notes that the “great culture” of ancient Egypt that is recognizable to every tourist “was not the spontaneous creation of the common man” (64)—as if every ancient Egyptian was born with this unified national culture. This “great culture” had a history, beginning with its genesis in the centralized world of the palace and then slowly engaging other social levels with its values and standards. In order to gain dominance, this great culture had to “colonize the minds of the nation” (64). “Colonize” is a strong word, but it alerts us to the fact that in the archeological remains of ancient Egypt we are generally studying an elite culture and seeing the world through the eyes of that elite.

The word “pilgrimage” conjures up images of mass movements that are not appropriate in dealing with Abydos during the Middle Kingdom. It is within this context that we can make sense of the comments on travel and pilgrimage given by Jean Yoyotte in his *Les Pèlerinages dans l’Égypte Ancienne*, one of very few works to take up these issues in relation to ancient Egypt. He writes:

...the Egyptian *passed* on pilgrimage much more often than he *went* on pilgrimage. That is, the authoritarian structure of the pharaonic economy and society does not seem to have been very conducive for private trips, even when dictated by piety. The people were in the service of the State, of the temple or of a high dignitary... The narratives of voyages concern almost always official missions or trips purely professional. (24)

Yoyotte has described precisely the situation we see in the stela of Senti. This is not a man who has gone on a pilgrimage for the sake of a pilgrimage, but someone who *passed* on a pilgrimage on his way home from an official duty.

The stela of Senti is not unique in this portrayal, but one of several possible examples among Middle Kingdom stelae. Miriam Lichtheim, in her translation of various stelae from Abydos, groups stelae that mention an official mission into a single category. Two other categories of stelae are those set up by people who were inhabitants of the Thinite district, and those who fit more into our conception of “pilgrims”—that is, they have no clear motive for being in Abydos except for religious purposes (1988, 65). Reviewing these stelae Lichtheim agrees substantially with what we have seen in Yoyotte: “... even at its peak in the Middle Kingdom, Osirian piety did not result in

massive nationwide pilgrimages-of-the-living to Abydos. . . . Several thousand stelae erected at Abydos in the course of three centuries do not add up to a mass movement” (134).

It would be a mistake to imagine the kind of mass pilgrimage that Herodotus bears witness to in the late period. Speaking of the Egyptian festivals, he describes the throngs of people who come to Bubastis:

Now when they journey to the city of Bubastis, they do the following things. The men sail together with women, a great throng of both upon each flat boat. Some of the women holding castanets rattle them, and some of the men blow on their flutes—this through the entire voyage. The rest of the women and men sing and clap their hands. . . . When they gather together, the men and women, without children, reach 800,000—thus the natives say. (2.60)

We have no evidence that this kind of mass pilgrimage—for which there is good evidence in later periods—was representative of what occurred in Abydos during the Middle Kingdom. The pottery shards and mummified animal burials that provide evidence for mass pilgrimage at a later period are absent from the archaeological remains of the Middle Kingdom.

Yoyotte understands the situation of travelers in Middle Kingdom Egypt through the lens of a strong central authority: the centralized State controlled the rhythm of life and even the means of travel. But approaching the same evidence with Kemp’s differentiation between local cultures and the growing national culture, the situation looks somewhat different. It may not have been that travelers were being actively discouraged, but rather that nonelite inhabitants would not have cared to venture outside their local region, remaining more interested in local gods and folk-customs than in the national theology and its sites of symbolic interest. The centralized control of the Egyptian court, on the other hand, was steadily growing and creating what we might call a “cosmopolitan” Egypt—that is, a nation with a single elite culture that stretched from the northernmost parts of the delta to the southernmost parts of Upper Egypt. From the stela erected by the chamberlain Senti we find plenty of signs of this cosmopolitan Egypt. Senti travels to Elephantine to carry out the king’s commands. Earlier, he listed in the stela his official positions and titles, among which was “controller of Sais.” Sais, as a city in the northern part of the delta, near present day Alexandria, is a bookend to Elephantine, the furthest south city in Egypt. Senti thus asserts his knowledge of Egypt as a single state, identifying himself as one of the elite who is not bound by a local region.

Ikhernofret is another visitor to Abydos whom we learn about from a stela he had erected. His account, however, is unique since it not only states

the circumstances of his travel to Abydos and the spiritual benefits he hopes to attain, but also describes details of the rituals and events connected to the worship of Osiris at Abydos. Of particular interest is his description of the annual drama involving the death and resurrection of Osiris.

The beginning of the stela sets out the direct command of the king to Ikhnofret:

My majesty commands that you travel to This and Abydos, in order for you to make monuments for my father Osiris the foremost of the westerners and to embellish his secret image with fine gold.

Having already encountered Senti, we can more readily understand the situation: Ikhnofret is another example of an official sent on a mission by the king. His mission is to travel to Abydos in order to establish monuments and embellish with gold the ritual image of Osiris. The name of the king giving this command to travel and commendation is King Senwosret III, which puts us around 1850 BC. In the text of the stela the king also details Ikhnofret's long time service to him, which apparently began quite early:

...since you were brought as a pupil of my majesty, and became a foster child of my majesty, the sole pupil of my palace.

Ikhnofret was a member of the Egyptian elite, who were invariably centered around the king and his palace.

Having recorded his commission, Ikhnofret states his accomplishments in Abydos, and this makes up the bulk of the stela:

I accomplished all of that which his majesty commanded in the carrying out of what my lord commanded for his father Osiris Foremost-of-the-Westerners, Lord of Abydos, Great Power in This.

I acted in the capacity of "his beloved son" for Osiris Foremost-of-the-Westerners.

Ikhnofret begins the recounting of his accomplishments by boasting that he has done for Osiris everything commanded. He lists, as first of a string of accomplishments, his acting in the capacity of "his beloved son" for Osiris. The fact that this is the title for a character is clear by the wording of this phrase. He acted the part of "*his* beloved son" for Osiris, not simply of "the beloved son of Osiris." This was a traditional part in Egyptian funerary ritual—as Otto notes, it "signifies the son who has been charged with the funeral of his father" (41). But while it may have been a traditional title given to someone in every family, it was no ordinary family depicted by the sacred drama enacted at Abydos.

Ikhnofret was playing a part suspended between myth and reality. In the previous line Osiris is referred to as “father” of the king—the king being Senwosret III. Mythologically speaking, the son of Osiris is Horus. The king in Egyptian art was represented as Horus and the first of the king’s five traditional names is known as his Horus name. It is a designation that goes back into predynastic times, and Toby Wilkinson notes that the Horus title: “. . . expressed the notion that Horus was incarnate in the reigning monarch . . .” (184). Ikhnofret in claiming to have played the part of “his beloved son” is recording a high honor: he took the part of Horus in the drama of Osiris—a part that made him a symbolic stand-in for the living king. Ikhnofret goes on to talk about his general accomplishments, but here at the outset he has set out the fact, of which he was most proud.

Ikhnofret continues:

I adorned his eternal image.

I made for him the portable shrine “displaying the beauty of the Foremost-of-the-Westerners” with gold, silver, lapis lazuli, [a word not clear], tamarisk wood, and cedar. The gods who accompany him were fashioned and their shrines were made anew.

I made [word not clear] the hour priests of the temple so that they might do their duties and know the rituals that pertain to each day and the festivals at the start of the seasons.

I had control over the work on the *neshmet*-boat. I made the cabin.

I adorned the breast of the lord of Abydos with lapis lazuli, turquoise, fine gold, and every gem as ornaments of the god’s body.

I clothed the god with his equipment in my office of the master of secrets and my duty of ceremonial dresser.

I was clean of hand in adorning the god, a *sem* priest clean of fingers.

The structure of this section is determined by a series of perfect verbs. Some of the statements are elaborated; some quite brief. The only sentence that breaks this pattern is the one at the end that has a summing-up quality. In that final line Ikhnofret breaks off with two parallel nominal sentences in order to assert his honesty in carrying out his duties—which we can see from his narrative involved handling many precious materials. “I was clean of hand in adorning the god, a *sem* priest clean of fingers.”

The portable shrine in ancient Egypt invariably took the form of a boat, which housed the image of the god. The boats would have been carried by priests and were only notionally connected to water. We have numerous images of these special ceremonial boats within which Egyptian gods would make their public appearance on days of festival. From the passage it is clear that not only the boat of Osiris was adorned, but also the ceremonial boats for “the gods who accompany” Osiris. When we imagine the sacred drama with the appearance of Osiris and the other gods,



we must imagine a small fleet of these beautifully decorated boats being carried by priests, with a highly adorned sacred image of a god inside each one. The *neshmet*-boat was the name for the special boat that carried Osiris during his great procession, and as such it will make two more appearances below in the description of the great procession. The name is transliterated since its literal meaning is hard to fathom, but its basic appearance is clear because of its boat determinative at the end of hieroglyphic word.

There was much more at Abydos than the annual sacred drama of Osiris. Ikhnofret mentions “the rituals that pertain to each day and the festivals at the start of the seasons.” Each day evidently had its ritual requirements, and in addition the start of each season brought its own local celebration. In another stela an enlarged list of feasts and festivals was recorded:

... at the Monthly feast, the Half-monthly feast, the New Year's feast, the First and the Great Procession, the Thoth feast when the god comes, the *Wag*-feast, the Flame feast, the Sokar feast, the Beginning-of-the-season feast, the *Sad*-feast, the Procession of Min, the *Haker* feast, the Vigil of Peqer, the Numbering feast, the Five Day's feast, all the good feasts of the house of Osiris... (Lichtheim 1988, 91)

The situation was the same as at any major ancient Egyptian religious center—the calendar was crowded with feasts.

It is notable that Ikhnofret portrays himself as teaching the priests about certain rituals: “I caused that they learn the rituals that pertained to each day and to the festivals of the start of the seasons.” Ikhnofret claims to bring it about that the priests at Abydos know certain rituals. The construction used here can even be translated as “to inform” someone of something. The period under King Senwosret III was no dark age of ignorance, but was in the heart of the Middle Kingdom, so it is odd to see Ikhnofret coming to the local temple at Abydos and “informing” the priests about their duties. We can take this as an example of the kind of central control and guidance that could be exerted by the king and others in the palace. That control could reach down even to the daily rituals in Abydos. This passage is thus a particularly clear instance of the centralizing power of the royal palace and its national theology.

The next section of Ikhnofret's stela is more specific, describing the stages involved in the festival of Osiris and his own actions within this festival. The stela continues, again broken up into its main clauses distinguished by perfect verbs:

1. I conducted the Procession of Wepwawet when he goes out to in order to save his father.  
I warded off the rebels against the *neshmet*-boat.

2. I caused to fall the enemies of Osiris.  
 I conducted the Great Procession and I followed the god in his footsteps.  
 I caused the boat of the god to sail, Thoth making straight the sailing.  
 I equipped the sacred boat “appearing truly is the lord of Abydos” with a cabin and his beautiful regalia was set in place, that he might go out to the district of Peqer.  
 I cleared the ways of the god to his tomb before Peqer.  
 I saved Wennenofer on that day of great fighting.  
 I caused to fall all those opposed to him at the bank of Nedit.  
 I caused him to go inside the great boat and it lifted up his beauty.
3. I made glad the eastern desert.  
 I brought about rejoicing in the western desert, when they saw the beauty of the *neshmet*-boat as it landed at Abydos, and it brought Osiris Foremost-of-the-westerners, lord of Abydos, to his palace.  
 I followed the god to his house; his purification was done; his place was extended; I loosed the knot inside...; he...among his followers.

We cannot perfectly recreate the sacred drama from such a brief account, but it is possible to sketch it in broad strokes and to trace its progress upon the landscape of Abydos. Broadly speaking, we can see three basic movements here in this description: (1) the Procession of Wepwawet, (2) the Great Procession that involves a ritual battle and takes us to the region of Peqer, and (3) the triumphal return of Osiris to his palace in Abydos.

Ikhernofret begins by setting out on the procession of Wepwawet, a god attested at Abydos from early times. Since an Old Kingdom stela gives one person the title “overseer of the festival procession of Wepwawet” (Brovarski, 1994, part 1, 100) we can be sure something like this first procession existed in the Old Kingdom, although it has been grafted onto a larger festival for Osiris. The god Wepwawet was conceptualized in the form of a standing jackal, and his name means literally “opener of the ways.” In visual art dating back to the Old Kingdom Wepwawet is often portrayed on standards raised in front of the king. Eberhard Otto comments on this portion of the festival:

We know from ancient rituals of the coronation and royal festivals that, at the same time, [Wepwawet] is identified with Horus as an embodiment of the living young king in contrast to his deceased father... Thus the first part of the mysteries of Osiris signifies the seizure of power and the beginning of a new king’s rule. (41)

Since we have already seen that Ikhernofret is identified with Horus, it would have been Ikhernofret beginning the festival in the guise of Wepwawet-Horus, opening up the festival as he opens up the way forward. There is some ritual combat in this first act, but it is clear that the outcome is nothing but victorious, as befits the representative of the living king. Since so many of the stelae on the terrace expect the presence of Wepwawet, this opening procession must have departed from the main temple and then passed the stelae on the terrace of the great god. Having passed the stelae on the terrace, the procession made its way down to the wadi and then proceeded toward the ancient cemetery known as Umm al-Qab.

The second part of the festival is called the Great Procession. Since the word for procession (*prt*) is directly related to the verb that means “to come out” (*prj*), it is likely that once again the festival originated from the main temple and crossed the terrace of the great god. The goal for this Great Procession was clearly Peqer, which we must connect to the ancient cemetery we have been calling Umm al-Qab. The procession once again started up the wadi, this time not stopping, but continuing all the way to the burial site of the most ancient kings, Umm al-Qab. The specifics will not detain us too long, since the exact events on this procession are impossible to reassemble from this distance in time.

Referring to the line about Thoth “making straight the sailing,” Otto writes: “. . . one infers that what happened was a voyage on water, and not a procession on land in which the barque was carried” (42). This judgment is apparently based on the literal meaning of the word sail. Since the ultimate goal of this Great Procession is Peqer, a site that is nestled near to the great bay of cliffs, it is clear that while we may notionally be in the world of water and boats, we are certainly on dry ground, with sacred boats that would have been borne aloft by priests.

This sense of being notionally upon water hints that we are dealing with a mythic topography throughout this description of the festival, and there are more hints of this in the passage before us now. Most telling may be the line “I caused to fall all those opposed to him at the bank of Nedit.” This name also comes up within the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts in the context of the mythical death of Osiris:

Your eldest sister is she who gathered up your flesh, who closed your hands, who sought you and found you on your side on the river-bank of Nedit. . . . You shall ascend to the sky, you shall become Wepwawet, your son Horus will lead you on celestial ways (Faulkner § 1008, 1010).

It is clear from this passage, with its reference to Wepwawet and “your son Horus” along with Nedit, that it reflects the same mythical world that we

see in Ikhnofret's stela. In this passage Osiris lies dead and his sister Isis is gathering his remains. What happened to Osiris is clear from another passage in the Pyramid Texts: "... they have found Osiris, his brother Seth having laid him low in Nedit" (§ 1256). Nedit is not only where Osiris lies dead, but the place where he was murdered by his brother Seth.

Since we are firmly within the realm of myth, it would be a misstep to insist on the literalness of the words and go looking for some "sandbank" near a body of water. We are faced instead with a mythical topography for Abydos. Some physical site was undoubtedly chosen as the notional site for the death of Osiris, but this choice would have been according to the logic of myth and not a feature of the landscape per se.

An etymology for the word Nedit offered by J. Gwyn Griffiths strengthens the connection of the word with the world of myth. Commenting on the use of Nedit in the Pyramid Texts, he writes:

The mention of *the water of Djat* (more commonly Dat, the underworld) here tempts one to believe that the name Nedyet is a formation from "Dat" with the genitive preposition prefixed, and that the motive of the formation was to pun with *ndi*, "smite," as in 1256b of the Pyramid Texts: *his brother Seth smote (ndi.n) him to the earth in Nedyet*. (10)

This etymology is not certain, but it lends yet more weight to the proposition that while Nedit, for the purposes of the sacred drama, was an actual physical locality, it was first and foremost an imagined locality connected with the mythical narrative that had developed around Osiris. That narrative has then been fitted upon the landscape and localized.

Another hint to the mythic quality of this procession is the use of the epithet *Wennenofer* for Osiris. Joachim Spiegel in a book on the gods of Abydos draws an interesting parallel to this epithet:

It is probably significant that the epithet of Osiris *wnn-nfr*... has been put together with the old epithet of the king *ntr-nfr*. If *ntr-nfr* means "The God who renews himself," then *wnn-nfr* perhaps names "The one who exists by renewing himself..." (37)

The stela chooses to use this epithet for Osiris in an odd place—immediately after the mention of the tomb of Osiris at Peqer and immediately prior to that of Nedit, where Osiris was murdered. We have arrived at the place in the festival where we need to assume the death of Osiris, but Ikhnofret neatly skirts that event. Otto notes: "... apparently the act belonged to the most secret events of which nothing is reported" (42). As if to verbally cover over the delicate topic of the death of a god, an epithet was chosen that emphasizes the ever-existing aspect of Osiris.

The dark section of the myth of Osiris is hidden by unfailingly positive statements: "I saved Wennenofer on that day of great fighting. I caused to fall all those opposed to him at the bank of Nedjit." Horus vanquishes all who are against him. But Osiris is dead—that is the only way to make sense of the resurrection and triumphant return that follows in section three. The battles described here upon the sandbank of Nedit, even though couched in terms like "saved" and even the epithet "ever-existing God," brought the spectators to the nadir of the festival.

The final part of the festival was the triumphant return of Osiris to his temple from Umm al-Qab. The temple itself is given two names: "his palace" and "his house"—names that in the context of a god points to a temple. The return took place once again on the sacred *neshmet*-boat, which is said to "land at Abydos." The idiom "land at" is drawn from language about boats, but this choice of words causes no more difficulty than existing previously. The entire sacred drama was notionally understood through these sailing metaphors.

The universal joy stirred by the return of Osiris is not the product merely of a day's absence from his temple, but from the sense that Osiris has been resuscitated and come to life again after having been murdered. The event that preceded this resurrection is one of the most mysterious of the entire sacred drama—the night of vigil. One of the wishes on the Abydos Formula, a series of afterlife hopes recorded on many stelae from the Middle Kingdom, asks: "May he hear jubilation from the mouth of Tawer [at] the Haker of the night of vigil, the vigil of Horus-the-fighter" (Lichtheim 1988, 115). The event is clearly connected to this final part of the festival, since Ikhernofret also mentions here the land being made joyful by the return of Osiris. Otto makes a suggestion as to how we should understand this vigil: "The sparse allusions to the *hager* festival probably involve this: the fighter Horus sleeps in the temple of Osiris. He calls upon the soul of Osiris, which is hovering in the night air: 'descend to me!' and he 'animates' the statue. In the morning he is able to announce to a jubilant crowd that the buried god has been resuscitated" (42–43).

From the stela of Ikhernofret it becomes clear that for visiting Egyptians who were part of the elite national culture the landscape of Abydos was experienced as a unique mythical scene. The narrative of Osiris continually impinges on the experience of the landscape. Like the best travel narratives, the stela of Ikhernofret enabled us to understand what kind of interpretive lens was used to perceive Abydos. The narrative that made Abydos a sacred land was that of Osiris' death and resurrection. This was the topo-creative text that gave meaning to the landscape of Abydos. What we have yet to understand is how the narrative of Osiris came to have a broader personal significance for a portion of the ancient Egyptian population. The

next section will detail the way in which this narrative allowed ancient Egyptians to identify with the narrative of Osiris.

### The Self as Osiris

Theories of the origin of Osiris fall into two main categories, which have been helpfully summarized by Josef Wegner in his study of the mortuary complex of Senwosret III at Abydos. Wegner calls the first theory the “standard model.” This model attributes the origin of Osiris to the Delta town of Busiris, a city that even on stelae from Abydos occurs in relation to Osiris. For example, the stela of Nakhty overseer of cattle gives the following offering formula: “An offering-that-the-king-gives (to) Osiris, lord of Busiris, Khentyamentiu, lord of Abydos . . .” (following Lichtheim 1988, 67). Such a formula appears to connect Osiris primarily with the Delta town Busiris and leaves Abydos to Khentyamentiu. Since we have seen that Khentyamentiu was likely the original god worshipped at the temple in Abydos, it makes sense to see Osiris as being extracted originally from some other place. The coincidence of the Egyptian name for Busiris (*Djedu*) with the name for the ancient symbol for Osiris, the Djed pillar, has led some to see Busiris as the place of origin for Osiris. This standard model gets complicated quickly, though, since Osiris was not actually even the earliest god at Busiris, and once again a process of syncretization has to be understood (Otto 25).

The most important aspect of the standard model is what happens next: Osiris was taken up by the theologians near Memphis and worked into the “system” of the Ennead, which comprised nine cosmological gods. The primary texts for this royal theology are the Pyramid Texts, inscribed upon the burial chambers of pyramids built by Fifth and Sixth Dynasty kings (the late Old Kingdom). Griffiths assigns the date for these inscribed texts to between 2500 and 2270 BC (8), but many of them are undoubtedly older and reflect even more ancient funeral practices. The texts serve a definite purpose—they “provide for the future of the deceased Pharaoh in the world after death” (Griffiths 8). They are bewilderingly diffuse to the modern reader, but also yield fascinating glimpses of an ancient way of understanding death. James Allen notes at the start of his study of these texts: “. . . with careful analysis it is still possible to determine something of the global vision that must have existed in the minds of the Egyptians who built and inscribed the Old Kingdom pyramids” (1). That “global vision” was the accomplishment of the theologians that had control of royal burial in Memphis.

Two important changes happen to Osiris once he gets mixed into this central royal theology. First, Osiris gets a genealogy as he is worked into

the Ennead. Osiris is the son of Geb and Nut; brother of Isis, Nephthys, and Seth; Horus his son. Second, Osiris' role as the dead king gets mixed with ancient stories concerning a violent conflict between Seth and Horus. The contradictions between the competing narratives related to Osiris and Horus lead Griffiths to conclude: "What emerges clearly from a study of the Horus-myth and the Osiris-myth is that although they appear in the Pyramid Texts as a composite story they were not originally so" (14).

This standard model transfers this newly fashioned Osiris to Abydos. This happened, writers such as Eberhard Otto theorize, by an easy connection: Osiris, who represented the dead king in the Pyramid Texts, is identified with Khentyamentiu the god of the dead at Abydos where the most ancient kings were buried (31). By that easy mental leap, Osiris gets mapped onto Abydos, and of course grows in significance until he attains the position we encountered in the Middle Kingdom.

The second model for the origin of Osiris sees him as coming out of Abydos. Wegner credits J. Gwyn Griffiths with developing this model, and Griffiths does lean toward Abydos as the source for Osiris, his main evidence being that so many of the earliest topographical references in the Pyramid Texts place him in Abydos and the district of This (131). Since Abydos was the burial place for the earliest Egyptian kings, it is possible that the myth of Osiris is derived from rituals connected to royal burial. Reviewing the connections between elements of the myth and rituals involving burial of the dead king, Griffiths writes: "The myth appears thus to dissolve itself into a story built around a set of ceremonies in which the dead king is the centre" (35).

This second model has an essential similarity to the standard model: it sees the story as being taken over and changed by the royal theologians around Memphis, and thus going through the same basic structural changes. It is impossible to imagine the events of the sacred drama at Abydos without the version of Osiris that is being pieced together by the Pyramid Texts. Even if the second model is correct, and Osiris developed out of mortuary ritual at Abydos, the narrative as we find it in the Middle Kingdom at Abydos was decisively influenced by the changes that occurred as Osiris got mixed into the royal mortuary theology emanating from around Memphis and reflected by the Pyramid Texts.

Whatever the furthest origin of Osiris, he lands at Abydos in the Middle Kingdom as a figure with a new meaning. When the mythical narrative of Osiris got to Abydos after being developed and transformed by the royal theologians, his newness seems to have been immediately covered with layers of older references, such as the syncretism of Osiris with Khentyamentiu and the continuation of certain ritual elements such as

the procession of Wepwawet and the use of the *neshmet-boat*. That ancient cloak of ritual elements is no reason for us to be fooled into believing that this, or something similar, was the way it had always been in Abydos. The rituals connected to Osiris at Abydos were an invented tradition.

We have seen that the Pyramid Texts were the essential workshop for the narrative of Osiris as we encounter it in the Middle Kingdom. The Pyramid Texts were also the place where a meaning was assigned for the death of Osiris—a meaning that had far-reaching consequences. We will return briefly to a passage that we encountered at the beginning of this chapter.

O my father the King, the doors of the sky are opened for you, the doors of the celestial expanses are thrown open for you. The gods of Pe are full of sorrow, and they come to Osiris at the sound of the outcry of Isis and Nephthys. The Souls of Pe clash (sticks) for you, they smite their flesh for you, they clap their hands for you, they tug their side-locks for you, and they say to Osiris: Go and come, wake and sleep, for you are enduring in life! Stand up and see this, stand up and hear this which your son has done for you, which Horus has done for you. He smites him who smote you, he binds him who bound you, he sets him under your eldest daughter who is in Qdm your eldest sister is she who gathered up your flesh, who closed your hands, who sought you and found you on your side on the river-bank of Nedit, so that mourning might cease in the Two Conclaves. “O you gods,” speak to him, fetch him.

You shall ascend to the sky, you shall become Wepwawet, your son Horus will lead you on celestial ways; the sky is given to you, the earth is given to you, the Field of Rushes is given to you in company with these two great gods who come out of On. (Faulkner § 1004–1010)

What draws our attention on this second reading are the numerous parallels to the ritual drama of Osiris at Abydos. Horus is presented as victorious in a divine conflict, smiting him who had attacked Osiris. Osiris is urged to wake and to stand, and so this section is labeled a “resurrection” text by Faulkner. The situation corresponds in general to the resurrection of Osiris that took place in Peqer and the rites surrounding the night of vigil. The death of Osiris evidently took place at the riverbank of Nedit, and we have already seen how that name was invoked by Ikhnofret. Next the mention of Wepwawet and the leadership position of Horus again take us back to the Middle Kingdom drama.

Three topographical references in this passage are foreign to us. Two can be identified easily: Pe is the city of Buto in the far north of the Egyptian delta, On is the name for Heliopolis, near ancient Memphis and present day Cairo. Qdm is of doubtful location (Griffiths 127). It is evident that geographically we are dealing with a set of places that have nothing to do



with Abydos. These geographical connections are not without importance, especially since the final part calls Wepwawet and Horus “two great gods who come out of On.” Two crucial elements of what will become the cult of Osiris at Abydos are directly said to be of Heliopolitan origin.

The celestial emphasis in this passage from the Pyramid Texts is also surprising, and points us again toward a conscious fashioning of myth into a coherent structure. The king is first addressed and told “the doors of the sky are opened for you, the doors of the celestial expanses are thrown open for you.” The final part returns to this celestial destiny with reference to the “celestial ways” and the “Field of Rushes.” These references sound vague to the modern reader, but James Allen shows that these terms make sense within a coherent vision of the cosmos and the expectations of the afterlife for the king. “The king’s new world is most often identified by the word *pt* ‘sky.’ In the Pyramid Texts this refers almost always to a domain . . . and is contrasted as such with the world of the living” (3). Allen also demonstrates that the “Field of Reeds” is a place to be located in the sky, quoting the following utterance from the Pyramid Texts: “Travel the sky to the Field of Reeds, make your abode in the Field of Offering, among the imperishable stars” (Allen 6; §749c–e).

These celestial elements are deployed in an effort to map out the afterlife of the king, and the final result is a remarkable theology that mixes celestial with chthonic elements. Although individual aspects of the myth may have been drawn from ancient rituals connected to burial of the king, perhaps even going back to Early Dynastic Abydos, the coherent and complex view of the king and the mythology of Osiris must be the result of royal theologians during the Old Kingdom. Griffiths summarizes the changes that came to Osiris by his induction into this royal system:

The detailed implications, at the time, of the reception of Osiris into the Heliopolitan Ennead cannot be known, but the Pyramid Texts reflect a conscious change brought about in the attitude to him. A development is there shown in striking elaboration, whereby a god of the dead, who was the object of the deepest fear and dread, became a benevolent protector of the dead King. (120)

The connection of Osiris to the king comes about through a simple identification: the king = Osiris. With this identification, the events of the narrative of Osiris can be applied to the king. If Osiris is renewed after death, then so will the king be. This identification of the king with Osiris is present at the start of the fragment quoted above: “O my father the King.” Here, as in other passages within the Pyramid Texts as translated by R.O. Faulkner, “King” replaces the proper name of the king buried, written within a cartouche. Osiris is then mentioned, and is addressed with “you.”

By the end it is clear that the King is also in view, and is in some way identical to Osiris:

You shall ascend to the sky, you shall become Wepwawet, your son Horus will lead you on celestial ways; the sky is given to you, the earth is given to you, the Field of Rushes is given to you in company with these two great gods who come out of On.

The rising of Osiris is the rising of the King; the celestial destiny for Osiris is the celestial destiny for the King. This identification of the king with Osiris could be thought of as the “big idea” of the Pyramid Texts. It is found everywhere: “Awake, Osiris! Awake, O King! Stand up and sit down, throw off the earth which is on you!” (§ 1068). The king = Osiris. The end result of this identification is eternal life—incidentally, the first written expression of this hope in human history (Griffiths 64).

Between these Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts and the Middle Kingdom is about 100 years, which included the end of the Old Kingdom and the turbulent First Intermediate Period. If we are to give credence to later literary portrayals of this period, it was a topsy-turvy time of social change. The sage Ipuwer is given the following complaint:

O, but the land is spinning as does a potter’s wheel;  
 the robber is a lord of riches;  
 the [lord of riches] has [become] someone who is plundered.  
 (Parkinson 172)

O, but Elephantine and Thinis, the [districts] of Upper Egypt,  
 they produce no taxes [because of stri]fe.  
 Destroyed is grain, kohl, and *irti*-fruit . . .  
 What can we do about this,  
 when it all has fallen into ruin?  
 (Parkinson 174)

Out of this spinning potter’s wheel came a changed religious order.

Religious texts during this time go through an interesting development: they are dispersed to a group of people much larger than the king and his family. What we have been discussing as Pyramid Texts morph into Coffin Texts. This process of dissemination is often referred to as the “democratization” of Egyptian religion, but Erik Hornung describes this change with language that is less anachronistic:

Through a generalization of an originally royal privilege every deceased person of the Middle Kingdom and later became an “Osiris,” bearing the god’s name like a title or designation of role in front of his own. This usage

does not betoken a genuine identity with the ruler of the dead; rather, it means that through his own efforts the human being takes on a previously determined role that bears the name Osiris. (96)

To put this into the language employed earlier in this study, Osiris has come to form the identity not just of the king but of many Egyptians. It is an identity that has a narrative form to it: Osiris died, as all human beings do; he also rose and found eternal renewal, as human beings will also do if this identification holds. The landscape of Abydos became associated with this narrative, and as such it became a site of intense significance to many Egyptians.

Egyptians came to see the landscape of Abydos as reflective of their own afterlife. This is easiest to see in the so-called Abydos formula, a series of wishes for the afterlife found on many Middle Kingdom stelae at Abydos and elsewhere. We will examine here the “full version” of this formula, in the standardized form that it arrived at during the Twelfth Dynasty, at the height of the Middle Kingdom (Lichtheim 1988, 88). These afterlife wishes occur on a stela from the same period as that erected by Ikhnofret. After the explanation of a royal commission, the afterlife wishes come. Seven of these originally twenty afterlife wishes are especially relevant for our discussion:

1. May hands be extended to him bearing offerings in the feasts of the sacred land [necropolis] along with the followers of Osiris.
4. May he be exalted by those who are in This [the great land], the pure ones [priests] of the great god [Osiris].
5. May hands be given to him in the *neshmet*-boat on the ways of the west.
9. May he travel along with the great god [Osiris] to Peqer as the ancient *neshmet*-boat goes in the god's footsteps in the festivals of the sacred land [necropolis].
11. May he hear jubilation in the mouth of This [the great land] at the *Haker* of the night of vigil, being the vigil of Horus *Shen*.
12. May he travel those beautiful ways revealing the western horizon, to the area which bestows offerings, the great acclaimed gate.
15. May he be acclaimed by those in This [the great land] and may Osiris move forward to his place before the ancient ones who are in the sacred land [necropolis].
19. May he arrive at the council of the god and follow him on all the pure ways in the sacred land [the necropolis].

The “he” in each of the afterlife wishes refers, clearly, to the owner of the stela. A full exposition of these afterlife wishes would be an involved project, but I suspect that much in them will seem familiar now. First in

importance will be the clear references to the landscape of Abydos. The ninth wish mentions traveling with Osiris to Peqer with the *neshmet*-boat. Peqer being the ancient designation for Umm al-Qab and the *neshmet*-boat being the ritual boat for the Osiris festival, there is no doubt that we should imagine the procession in Abydos. The eleventh wish makes reference to the night of vigil, which, as we saw in the discussion of the stela of Ikhnofret, preceded the jubilant return of Osiris to the temple in Abydos. Abydos or the district of This are mentioned seven times, pointing again to the imagined setting for these wishes.

A number of elements pull us away from Abydos and remind us that the formulation of this system of thought came about in the Pyramid Texts. The references in wishes six and seven to joining the day- and night-boat of the sun sets us within the solar world of the Pyramid Texts. Allen writes concerning the path of the sky: “The image of the sky as mostly water fits well with the impression given by the texts, that it is primarily a domain of passage rather than residence. Most of the verbs of motion associated with it refer, either lexically or in their determinatives, specifically to passage by boat” (9). We have already seen that Ikhnofret conceived of the rituals at Abydos as taking place upon water, and again the afterlife wishes in the Abydos formula echo this notion. Lichtheim (1988) summarizes the theology of the developed Abydos Formula as follows: “The most conspicuous element of the new orientation is the wish to reach the celestial regions where both Re and Osiris dwell, and to be admitted to their divine barks” (58).

It is possible from the twelfth wish to glimpse how cosmic ideas, drawn from the Pyramid Texts, are subtly localized. The beginning of this wish reads: “May he travel those beautiful ways revealing the western horizon.” The “horizon” in the Pyramid Texts refers to a liminal place of rebirth in the east—at the horizon where the sun is reborn each morning. Allen mentions that it is called in the Pyramid Texts: “The place where the gods are born” (Allen 17, § 1704c). In the Abydos Formula it is located in the west, but the idea of rebirth still clings to it. Lichtheim discusses several possible meanings for the phrase as we see it above. It refers at times to the “celestial regions in which Osiris dwells.” But on the other hand it appears to have a localized meaning here, and so it has been taken to refer to the grave of Osiris at Umm al-Qab or more generally to the necropolis at Abydos. Lichtheim concludes that the phrase “western horizon” “meant the celestial western regions *and* the cemeteries of Abydos” (92, emphasis mine). Through the use of language that is both cosmic and intensely local in meaning, the landscape of Abydos is being fused with weighty concepts that had their origin in the Pyramid Texts.

In the wishes of the Abydos Formula, the referent is not directly called Osiris, but hopes to join Osiris on the ritual journey. We can note this in

the ninth wish: “May he travel *along with* the great god [Osiris] to Peqer.” This is not the overt identification of the person with Osiris, but rather a wish to be on the same journey. By accompanying the god on his rounds, he acquires the same end: a spiritual existence in the afterlife.

In the first chapter we noted that a personal identity has a narrative base—it is a story we adopt for our life. The story provides meaning and also unity to the diverse experiences of life. Through the incorporation of the figure of Osiris into the Pyramid Texts, an important narrative of the self emerged. The king was identified with Osiris, and by analogy overcomes his death. By the time of the Middle Kingdom, this story had been adopted as an important narrative of the self by many other Egyptians and thus formed a religious identity for them too. They too would be a part of the cosmic renewal gained by Osiris if they could just accompany him in his sacred boat and take up an oar alongside him.

### Always changing

Abydos today is reached by tourists in caravans of minivans and buses originating from Luxor, the site of ancient Thebes. It is a trip sometimes billed as a “pilgrimage” by tour promoters. No matter how much a visitor desires to imagine himself or herself on an ancient pilgrimage to the great land of Osiris, it does not work. Modern Egypt is constantly present, with its obviously different religion and values. The mud-brick houses of the village and the white minarets of local mosques remind one that this is no longer ancient Egypt, but the modern world. Middle Kingdom Abydos as reconstructed in this chapter no longer exists. It is a landscape that has passed away—along with its narrative that promised eternal life.

Ancient travelers too arrived at an Abydos that readers of this chapter might not recognize. Following is an account left by Strabo of his visit to Abydos toward the end of the first century BC:

Above that city [Ptolemaïs] is Abydos, in which is the Memnonion, a royal building, amazingly constructed, wholly stone with the same workmanship we ascribed earlier to the Labyrinth [structure in what is today the Fayum], but not so large. A well lies in the deep, so that a person descends to it through covering crypts constructed out of a single stone, surpassing in both size and workmanship. There is a canal leading to the place from the great river. . . . Abydos appears to have been a great city, coming in second after Thebes, but now it is a small settlement. (17.42)

Details in this account indicate that Strabo is writing from personal knowledge of Abydos, such as his description of the descent to the well that lies deep inside what he calls the Memnonion. Strabo is able to

compare the workmanship of the structure with a structure he had earlier encountered. When he visited Abydos, he approached the temple of Seti I by way of a canal connected to the Nile. He was then taken underground into what is now known as the Osireion. Modern visitors can walk behind the mortuary temple of Seti I and look down into the excavated and watery remains of this structure, once entirely underground. It was a different Abydos that Strabo experienced—as one might expect with 1900 years having passed since the Middle Kingdom. He was apparently never taken to any of the structures we earlier discussed. Even the purpose and meaning of the Osireion is obscure to him, since he refers to it as a Memnonion (Memnon being a mythical Ethiopian king credited by the Greeks with various deeds). The landscape is no longer weighted with promises of an afterlife, and the city has declined to the status of a mere settlement.

These constant changes are the reason the first section of this chapter was devoted to reconstructing Abydos at a particular moment in its history—the Middle Kingdom. There is nothing permanent about the meaning of a landscape. That meaning morphs and transforms right along with the important narratives of a culture. The “sacred-ground” that once required a set of four stelae to warn people against trespassing became once again simply a sandy wadi empty of meaning. The ancient landscape of Abydos—like many meaningful landscapes—was hostage to the fortunes of an important narrative. From the brief pronouncements on stelae—boasts of accomplishments or wishes for the afterlife—we catch a glimpse of how this Middle Kingdom landscape was experienced by elite visitors. They saw the physical landscape, but only through the lens of the mythical narrative of Osiris. Their brief pronouncements were not in the spirit of detached and objective visitors, but as individuals who felt that the narrative of Osiris was somehow their own narrative, their own identity. From our vantage point, we see that it was the very strength of that narrative of the self that led ancient Egyptians to invent the landscape of sacred Abydos.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### DELOS: THE SOFT POWER OF POETRY

Delos slowly gains clarity and outline as an excursion boat draws near. It is a small island, and by no means the only one in view. Naxos, Paros, Myconos, and Tenos are all within sight, not to mention Delos' near neighbor, Rheneia. These and a number of other small islands comprise the Cyclades, a chain northeast of Athens in the Aegean Sea. Delos is tiny and in many ways unremarkable, but the modern visitor may well feel like Ovid's ancient heroine Cydippe:

Stirred by the fame of the place, I hastened to see Delos and the ship  
seemed listless to make the journey.  
How often did I make complaints to the slow oars and have complained  
that scanty canvas was given to the wind!  
And just now I passed Myconos, now Tenos and Andros, and Delos was  
dazzling to my eyes,  
which when I saw it distant, I said "why do you flee from me, island?"  
(*Heroides* 21.77–83)

Near the beginning of the eighteenth century the French traveler Joseph Pitton de Tournefort, having recounted to his royal patron the past glory of Delos, notes: "Judge, my Lord, how impatient we were to see a Country so celebrated by Authors" (221). Tournefort too must have strained his eyes to see the island come into view, although without Ovid's poetic conceit that Delos once wandered the sea, rootless and free.

The natural barrenness of Delos is evident in the view from atop Mt. Cynthos, the mountain that rises in the center of the island. One gets a vivid sense of how empty Delos would have been without a narrative. As it happens, this island, though little among the cities and islands of Greece, was credited with a divine birth. In the introduction to a book on the economy of Delos from 314–167 BC, Gary Reger writes:

The island of Delos is a very small place. Despite its location more or less in the center of the Kyklades, it would probably have figured even



less in history than neighboring Gyaros, that “worthless” island incapable of paying even 150 drachmas tribute in the days of Augustus . . . , but for one extraordinary circumstance: it had been the birthplace of Apollo and Artemis. (1)

Any explanation for the prosperity and renown of Delos must finally come back to the simple fact that poets composed important poems that settled Delos as the place where Leto gave birth to Apollo.

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A concept that has come to play an important role in post 9/11 political discourse within the United States is “soft power.” Joseph Nye defined the concept as “the ability to achieve desired outcomes in international affairs through attraction rather than coercion or payments” (x). American movies, television program, and popular music can all be classed as forms of soft power insofar as they contribute to the spread of American political values and ideals. In the conclusion to his book *Weapons of Mass Distraction*, Matthew Fraser states his positive conclusion about American soft power: “American entertainment—Hollywood, Disneyland, CNN, MTV, and Madonna—convey values that have made America great, such as the abiding belief in democracy, free enterprise, and individual liberties” (260). They convey those values, of course, not only within the United States, but everywhere that American popular culture reaches.

A prominent critic of this cultural “soft power” was Edward Said. In his book *Culture and Imperialism* we see his interest in the connection of cultural products with imperial space:

In British culture, for instance, one may discover a consistency of concern in Spenser, Shakespeare, Defoe, and Austen that fixes socially desirable, empowered space in metropolitan England or Europe and connects it by design, motive, and development to distant or peripheral worlds (Ireland, Venice, Africa, Jamaica), conceived of as desirable but subordinate. And with these meticulously maintained references come attitudes—about rule, control, profit, and enhancement and suitability—that grow with astonishing power from the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century. (52)

To shift Said’s discussion into the language employed in this study, we can say that central British authors are *doing* something through their work: they are constructing public views of global space. This does not imply that these authors invented such spatial distinctions, but it does mean that their work is part of the socialization of these places, cultural tools for the

invention and ordering of space. For Said, Empire always relies on these cultural constructions.

Said explains the reason for the difficulty in admitting the interconnection between cultural products and the creation of space as an assumed disjunction between the cultural and political spheres:

In much recent theory the problem of representation is deemed to be central, yet rarely is it put in its full political context, a context that is primarily imperial. Instead we have on the one hand an isolated cultural sphere, believed to be freely and unconditionally available to weightless theoretical speculation and investigation, and, on the other, a debased political sphere, where the real struggle between interests is supposed to occur. (56–57)

So the tendency is to proceed as if cultural products—whether poems or works of scholarship—float in the ether, disconnected from any context. Cultural products, one could say, are treated as if they were only words on a page, presenting scholars with intellectual puzzles. It is in the political sphere that real actions affecting our world are thought to occur, and where power rears its head. Said's central point—throughout his large body of work—is that cultural products are accomplishing political ends, and the conclusion quickly follows that cultural criticism is part of political action.

Our laboratory for exploring this relationship between power and geographical representation will be the island of Delos, entwined in various forms of soft power throughout its history. The small island gained prestige in the first place by means of song. Indeed, nothing except a sense of prestige bestowed by a sacred narrative can explain why this small rocky island enjoyed such lasting fame. Because of that prestige, Delos was manipulated by Archaic Greek political leaders in the sixth century BC, powerful Hellenistic rulers deployed it as a prestige political holding, and then in late antiquity it formed a part of the new Christian cultural landscape. The means of manipulation by these succeeding cultural regimes was poetry, specifically poetry that conveyed mythical narratives.

Myth is a word that has produced a vast scholarly literature, much of which falls outside our interest in this chapter, but Walter Burkert in his series of lectures published under the title *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* provides a helpful approach:

The specific character of myth seems to lie neither in the structure nor in the content of a tale, but in the use to which it is put; and this would be my final thesis: *myth is a traditional tale with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance*. Myth is traditional tale applied; and its relevance and seriousness stem largely from this application. (23, emphasis Burkert)

Matters of “collective importance” can range from a city’s foundation story, to explanations for ritual, and to stories of creation and human origins. In each case mythical narratives are accomplishing something in a social setting. A clever tale, on the other hand, might be retold simply as a means of entertainment. This view of mythical narrative brings us close to Austin’s view of language, in which words are important for their performative meaning. That is, they are *doing* something in a social context. Burkert in his description of myth as “traditional tale applied” similarly emphasizes the performative: myth is doing something in a social context.

The political value of myth has long been recognized, and Martin Nilsson in *Cults, Myths, Oracles, and Politics in Ancient Greece* gave this aspect particular weight:

Myths served to justify the possession of a country or a district, they served to assert claims on some territory which a city wanted to win, and to impress the righteousness of these claims upon public opinion. (49)

In support of this opinion he adduces examples to show how mythical narratives were used by Greeks in their arguments about foreign policy and in self-presentation. This point is pressed too far, however, if mythical narratives are transformed into a form of state propaganda, forgetting that values outside direct political claims can be communicated through poetry or art, and that such values are exactly what we mean when we speak of “soft power.” Madonna and Disney hardly do the bidding of the government of the United States, yet a commentator such as Fraser recognizes that their products serve certain political purposes. Something similar could be said about the Greek poetry in this chapter: yes, it served political purposes, sometimes overtly, but having admitted this, we are not finished with the material. We must still *read* this poetry and seek to learn how it worked in its social and historical context. We must also allow for the way texts get used and reused as they pass through history, what Burkert calls the “consecutive changes of crystallization and application” (27). A single cultural product—such as the poetry of Pindar—can serve radically different purposes over time, which is the subject of the next section.

### Poets and Places

In the course of the seventeen books of his *Geography*, Strabo (ca. 64 BC–21 AD) details what was known of the geography of the world. Books 8–10 of this work cover Greece, and in book 10 he turns from the mainland and

describes the islands, beginning with Euboia and Crete, but then coming to the Cyclades, of which Delos is a part.

The island of Delos has a city, the temple of Apollo, and the Letöon lying in the plain. Situated above the city is Mt. Cynthos, bare and rough. The river Inopos flows through the island, not a large river, for the island itself is small. Delos has been honored from ancient time on account of its gods, beginning from the heroic times. For the *mythos* is related that there Leto laid aside her birth pangs from Apollo and Artemis. (10.5.2)

This is our introduction to Delos, and we should note what Strabo finds worthy of mention. The basic arrangement we will see repeated several times, with minor elaborations. Delos is a strikingly small island, and it is dominated by a single natural feature: a granite mountain named Cynthos whose rocky and rounded form rises in about the middle of the island. Inopos—hardly a river—issues from a spring. Most of the human additions to the landscape, including the town and temples to Apollo and Leto, were situated in a plain near the harbor. Even in such a thumbnail description, the mythical narrative of Leto giving birth to Apollo and Artemis leaps to the forefront, taking its place as the primary association for this small island. The ancient reputation of the mythical narrative appears to be the reason that Delos gets mentioned first by Strabo, in front of the other larger islands of the Cyclades.

To further delineate the island for the reader, Strabo employs a passage from a hymn written by the Archaic Greek poet Pindar:

For previously it was borne  
—says Pindar—  
upon the waves by gusts  
of all sorts, but when she born of Koios  
panting with sudden birth pains set foot  
on her, yes then four upright columns  
with adamantine hold sprang from their earthly base  
and held fast the rock on their heads.  
There, having given birth  
she looked upon her fortunate son.  
(10.5.2=Pindar frag. 33d)

The passage describes Delos getting a fixed location. Previous to Leto (“she born of Koios”) setting foot on the island, Delos had been blown this way and that by the winds, floating on the waves. With the coming of Leto the island gained a place, fixed forever by means of four columns

rising from the sea floor. The rest of the hymn is now lost, save for an equally brief passage preserved by another ancient writer (which we will encounter shortly).

Looking a little closer at Pindar's description of Delos being fixed to the sea floor, we notice that Pindar is constructing an architectural metaphor. The poem does not contain technical terms, but his description is suggestive enough to lead a reader or listener to imagine the front view of a temple. The four columns spring from an "earthly base" and "on their heads" is the rock, that is, the island of Delos. The "earthly base" easily becomes a pedestal for the columns and "on their heads" is another way of saying "upon the capitals" of the columns. With one further imaginative step, the rock set atop the upright columns becomes the pediment, a triangular space on which the Greeks often set a mythological scene. An early example of such mythological pediments comes from the temple of Artemis at Corfu, dating from around 580 BC (Lawrence 139–140). As time passed these mythological scenes become more and more complex, culminating in the well-known scenes such as those on the pediments of the Parthenon or the temple of Zeus at Olympia, dating from about 438 and 460 BC, respectively. Pindar, whose datable works fall between 498 and 446 BC, is writing with this architectural development in the background, and under his craftsmanship the island of Delos gains the sacred standing of a temple, along with becoming the space upon which we expect an elaborate mythical narrative.

The image of the island as a temple goes some way toward explaining the extreme action of the Greeks in purifying it in 426/425 BC, in the midst of the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides relates this action:

During this same winter the Athenians purified Delos in accordance with some oracle. For the tyrant Peisistratos had formerly purified the island—not all, but however much of the island as could be seen from the temple [of Apollo]. But at this time the whole island was purified in this manner: however many graves of the dead there were in Delos, they removed them all, and decreed that in the future one was neither to die nor give birth in the island, but rather to be carried unto Rheneia. (3.104)

It has been pointed out that the desire to propitiate Apollo may well have been a priority of the Athenians in the years following the great outbreak of the plague in 430 BC, as chronicled by Thucydides in 2.47 ff. (Laidlaw 68). The desire to purify a sacred precinct (*temenos*) is not unusual (the Greek word is related to the verb for cutting or separating). Commenting on the *temenos* in *Greek Religion* Walter Burkert notes, "... within the sanctuary everything is forbidden which would produce a *miasma*—sexual intercourse, birth, and death" (87). Delos thus, in effect, becomes a large

*temenos*. Pindar's poem goes some way toward explaining the zeal of the Athenians, since his poem subtly constructs the island itself as a sacred temple.

It is all the more remarkable that Strabo pushes Delos to the forefront of his account of the Cyclades since it was in a ruined state by the time he sailed through this region. The recent history of the island he recounts briefly in a further section, the final stages of which give a vivid picture of the Delos he would have known:

The generals of Mithridates along with the tyrant who had detached her [from Athens] ruined it entirely, and the Romans took it back as a deserted island after the king Mithridates had retired to his house, and the island continues until now to fare badly. The Athenians now have control of it. (10.5.4)

A more detailed version of this fatal sack of Delos around 88 BC by Mithridates VI, the king of Pontus and powerful eastern competitor to Rome, is told by Pausanias (III.23.2), but what concerns us here is the clearly weak position of Delos by the time Strabo wrote about it in the early part of the first century AD. The island was deserted. According to the archaeological evidence, that may not have been literally true (Laidlaw 269), but it had certainly ceased to be a vibrant commercial and cultural center.

But the sacred story remained, and it is interesting that out of the many poems about Delos, Strabo chose this fragment of Pindar about the coming-to-be of Delos. In the fragment, Pindar presents the island as literally gaining a fixed existence by Leto giving birth to Apollo. He is emphatic that when Leto set foot on the island, at that point the columns rose from the sea and the place became both fixed and sacred. There is poignancy in Strabo calling on just this passage as he tries to sketch this famous island. Even to his own time, that mythical narrative continued to give Delos an identity and meaning—even prestige.

Having quoted Pindar, Strabo evokes the glory days of the little island:

The islands set around Delos, known as the Cyclades, made it renowned, sending for its honor at public expense official delegations, sacrifices and choruses of maidens and holding great festivals in it. (10.5.2)

These festivals are also referred to by Thucydides, in the same passage that he mentions the Athenian purification of the island of Delos.

There was at one time a long time ago a great festival of the Ionians and neighboring islanders in Delos. They sent official delegations with women

and children—just as the Ionians do now for the festival in Ephesus—and athletic and musical contests were held there, and cities sent choruses. (3.104.3)

Both writers look back to a golden age for Delos, the time when this small island was a religious center to which Ionian cities—that is, those in the islands and along the western coast of what is today Turkey—and other nearby cities sent official delegations. The time frame for this golden age is established by Thucydides, who, commenting on events in 426/425 BC, refers to this great festival as long past. He goes on to quote the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (which we will examine closely in the following section) and, attributing the poem to Homer, sets these grand celebrations in the distant past.

Despite changing circumstances and the transformation of Delos from an Ionian site to one widely revered throughout Greece, we should note an important continuity: it partook of the song and dance culture of archaic Greece. John Herington defines such a culture as “a society whose prime medium for the expression and communication of its most important feelings and ideas was song” (3). The education of a cultured Greek consisted to a large extent in learning to master this tradition of song culture. This kind of acculturation took place through participation in choruses as well as attendance at countless festivals that featured poetry performances—not to mention more private formats such as the symposium. To be a cultured Greek was to be able to mentally navigate the complex world of mythical narratives. As we would expect for a song culture, the primary mode of understanding Delos throughout this early period was not the written book, but performed poetry.

When Strabo quotes Pindar in an effort to settle Delos into the imagination of his reader, he is not quoting a poem that he has heard performed, but rather drawing from a collection of Pindar’s poetry, undoubtedly a descendent of the edition of Pindar organized by Aristophanes of Byzantium at the start of the second century BC. Strabo knew of antique Delos by means of the antiquarian efforts of much later Greeks and Romans. The power of this preservation of ancient Greece can be glimpsed in such different writers as Strabo and Pausanias, who move through Greece as if through a world illumined by the past.

Both Strabo and Thucydides use forms of the word *theoria*, which can be translated as an “official delegation” or “mission.” An understanding of this word will clarify the performance context during this early period. The word itself is related to the verb *theaomai*, which means, “to gaze at” or “to behold” (Rutherford 2000, 137). From this meaning comes the sense that a visitor to a festival is one who has come to watch or gaze—such a

person being a *theoros*, the closest classical Greek word for what we would call a pilgrim. However, in this early period it is anachronistic to think of tourists/pilgrims venturing out alone to see a festival. The context tends instead to be official delegations sent by cities to important nearby festivals. These delegations are termed *theoriai*. Other usages of the word can be adduced, but as Ian Rutherford maintains: “The original idea was probably one of a spectacle of religious significance: a procession, a sacrifice or other ritual, an artistic performance, or a whole festival” (137).

It may be strange to consider the act of gazing or contemplating as the primary action of a pilgrim, but this leads to some interesting ramifications for the importance of place—notably the importance of the landscape itself for the experience of a festival. Rutherford draws just such a connection:

Almost every sanctuary is frequently praised for its natural situation, and natural features of the site, for example at Delos, Mt. Cynthus, the sacred lake . . . at Delphi the Castalian Fountain and the twin rocks called the Phaidriades; at Eleusis the stream called the Rheitoi; and so on. And it seems a reasonable assumption that pilgrims will have made a point of viewing such sights. (139)

Rutherford goes on to speculate that these pilgrims to the major Greek festivals would already know about the sites through the reports of other travelers and mythical narratives.

These comments leave an opening for a better understanding of poetry within the “song culture” of early Greece. One job that poetry filled was that of making vivid a landscape by means of words. The economy of festivals, in a world without photography or easy means of disseminating visual landscape details, depended to a large degree upon the ability of poets to fashion a place as a living presence within the minds of listeners, who were in turn eager to “contemplate” these sites and the festivities that take place within them. The value of poetic compositions appears to have been recognized by the festivals themselves, which held musical and poetic contests. In an appendix to his book *Poetry into Drama*, John Herington lists the evidence for these, and it turns out that there is evidence for poetic contests and/or prominent performance opportunities at every major festival. These include the major festival sites of Delphi, Olympia, Delos, Epidauros, and Athens. One practical effect of these contests was to create mythical narratives that incorporated important landscape details, a development that in turn would only strengthen the position of these sites in the cultural imagination.



During this period when the song culture prevailed, which we can extend to the middle of the fifth century BC, there is no Greek traveler such as Strabo or Pausanias who can provide firsthand accounts of the experience of place, allowing us to glimpse the social role of poetry. Such travel narratives are a mark of an ascendant book culture. Our evidence for the construction of place during this early period must instead be drawn from the songs themselves, and inferences drawn from internal or external evidence about the manner of their performance.

A poem that will aid us in understanding how place was constructed in archaic Greece is Pindar's paean 12. It is in a fragmentary state, being one of the Oxyrhynchus papyri preserved by the dry sand of Egypt. The papyrus itself comes from around the second century AD and reflects the same kinds of Hellenistic collections of Pindar that Strabo must have used for his quotation. Modern editions of the Victory Odes of Pindar descend from these editions, but among the lost books of the "Complete Pindar" were his paeans, some of which we can now glimpse.\*

... with the nine muses  
 you, Asteria(?), while looking after Leto's  
 bed for Artemis, pluck the flowers of such hymnic praise.  
 Often there come  
 from Naxos sacrifices of richly fed sheep  
 accompanied by the Graces  
 to the sheer hill of Cynthos, there  
 they say the dark-clouded bright-thundering  
 Zeus sat above the heights to guard by means of his foresight,  
 at the time when the gentle-minded daughter of Koios [Leto]  
 was released from the sweet pang of birth.  
 The twin children shone like the body of the sun  
 having arrived at the bright light;  
 Eleithuia and Lachesis  
 sent forth a great noise from their mouths...

If the supplement is correct, the beginning of the fragment is directed to "Asteria"—another name for the island of Delos. The first image, then, is of a personified Delos with the muses plucking the flowers of hymnic song that have gathered around the bed where Leto gave birth to Artemis and

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\* The Greek text used in my translation was drawn from Ian Rutherford's *Pindar's Paeans: A Reading of the Fragments with a Survey of the Genre*. I include only the lines that are complete enough to yield decent sense, omitting one line at the start and more than a dozen extremely fragmentary lines at the end.

Apollo. It appears to be a striking recognition that numerous songs have accrued to this site and are waiting to be gathered.

The next few lines provide us with the setting and origin of the song. Factually what Pindar says is that sacrifices have come from the nearby island of Naxos, and his reference to the accompaniment of the Graces implies the presence of a chorus to deliver a beautiful song. The best historical report that we have of the actual performance of a paean at Delos is a passage in Plutarch's *Life of Nicias*, the Athenian politician and general. The event Plutarch describes took place in about 418 BC (Laidlaw 70), and is therefore somewhat later than Pindar, but the scenario in Pindar's time would have been similar.

His splendid and god-worthy showy-gifts for Delos are well remembered. For [in times past] the choruses, which cities sent to sing for the god, as soon as they chanced to arrive, the crowd having straightaway moved to meet the ship, were bid to sing according to no particular arrangement, but disembarked in haste and disorder as they were fitting their garlands and changing their clothes. [Nicias], though, when he led his *theoria*, disembarked the chorus at Rheneia, along with the animals for sacrifice and other equipment. And bearing a bridge of ships which had been made by the Athenians to the right measure and adorned marvelously with gilded and dyed stuffs and garlands and curtains, at night he fixed it into a small causeway between Rheneia and Delos. When day came he disembarked by way of the bridge, leading the procession for the god and the chorus, expensively adorned and singing. After the sacrifice and the competition and feasting, he set up the bronze palm tree for the god. (3.4–6)

It is a lengthy passage, but one that cannot be excelled for clarity. Explicit is the fact that this was a performance by an official *theoria*, or delegation, as well as that the performance was an elaborate public spectacle, complete with robes and crowns for members of the chorus. The account also makes clear that sacrificial animals arrived with the chorus—something that is evident in the fragment of Pindar's paean. The reference to “the competition” hints that the *theoria* has arrived for a major festival that included athletic and musical contests. Helpfully, Plutarch has provided not one, but two possible scenarios for the performance of the paean. According to Plutarch's source for this event, it was common for the chorus to perform immediately upon its arrival, taking advantage of the excitement of a sudden arrival. Nicias' innovation appears to have been an added element of staginess—an elaborately prepared procession beginning at the start of the day.

These are the details that we must supply to understand the performance context for the above fragment of Pindar's paean. We can imagine a *theoria* from the island of Naxos (if the supplement to line 5 is correct) arriving

at Delos (as is clear from internal topographical references) for the start of a festival—perhaps the annual festival celebrating Apollo. The delegation from Naxos would have been dressed in robes and garlands, and their performance, whether immediate upon arrival or for a later staged event, would have been a public spectacle, witnessed by the crowd of native Delians and members of *theoriai* who had arrived from other cities and islands.

An easily overlooked detail about the paean fragment is the simple fact that it represents a paean *by Pindar*. It is clear from the victory odes that his compositions on behalf of wealthy victors in athletic contests were well rewarded; and from the opening lines of Isthmian 1, we can see that paeans and other such ritual works were part of this same economy of songs.

My Mother, golden-shielded Thebes  
 your matter I will set as my highest  
 engagement. Let not rocky Delos,  
 in which I am absorbed, bear a grudge against me.  
 (Isth. 1.1–4)

Thebes was Pindar's native home, and at the beginning of this ode in praise of a Theban victor he allows that the obligations to his home must take precedence over his current work on behalf of Delos. We can see, then, that paeans were another product commissioned at a price by wealthy patrons. In the case of our fragment, the residents of Naxos had paid Pindar to compose the paean, which implies both an outlay of wealth and significant planning.

This makes the paean an offering that is similar in function to other types of wealthy dedications at temples. We see at the end of the passage from Plutarch that Nicias “set up the bronze palm tree as an offering to the god.” All the different elements presented by Nicias—from the paean itself, participation in the sacrifices, the competitions, the presentation of a bronze palm tree—represent offerings to the gods honored at Delos. Each of these gifts represented a kind of *agalma*, or “pleasing gift.” The word *charis*—“grace” or “goodwill”—summarizes the imagined reciprocal relationship between humans and gods. This makes more sense of the odd note in our fragment of Pindar's paean that the sacrifices of richly fed sheep are “accompanied by the Graces.” This word confirms that the standard ancient Greek assumption about the nature of gift-giving is at play here. The *theoria* from Naxos expects to give something that will cause pleasure for the gods associated with the island. Sacrifices of richly fed sheep are one such gift, but the paean is itself another one—and having been commissioned from Pindar, it was far more costly than the sheep.

This parallel between physical gifts—such as statues—and performed hymns or paeans is evident from Delos itself. Several important statuary dedications from Naxos remain striking even now. Opposite the sacred lake (which we shall shortly encounter again) stands a terrace of lions. These are dated by their style to the last half of the seventh century BC. Fragments of five lions stand on the terrace now, but it is thought that originally there were at least nine of these statues (Bruneau and Ducat 173). It would have been a striking display of statuary, and Bruneau and Ducat, noting their positions, comments: “The lions seem thus to present themselves as the guardians of the domain of Leto, a divinity whose importance was very considerable in the archaic period” (173). In addition to these lions there was also the colossus of the Naxians. The date for this colossus is thought to be about 590 BC (Bruneau and Ducat 125). The original location of the statue is debated—its remaining fragments now rest on the northern wall of the oldest temple of Apollo on Delos—, but it was obviously related to the worship of Apollo and undoubtedly would have established itself as an important sight for members of a *theoria*.

Phillippe Bruneau and Jean Ducat comment on the early importance of Naxos:

We must date the lions to the end of the 7th century; they are thus a little previous to the Colossus of the Naxians. In Naxian marble just as the Colossus, they belong to that series of grandiose architectural and sculptural realizations by which without a doubt the preeminence of Naxos at Delos at the end of the 7th and the beginning of the 6th century is marked. (173)

It is with this physical context of rich gifts to Delos that one should understand the fragment of Pindar’s paean from the Naxians. The paean is one more manifestation of the importance that the Naxians placed on honor to the gods at Delos. By the time of Pindar’s paean the position of Naxos would have slipped badly in relation to Athens, which had effectively exerted control over Delos from the time of Peisistratus in the mid-sixth century BC (Laidlaw 57). Nonetheless, Naxos clearly continued to value its relationship with Delos, and a paean by Pindar was simply another delight-giving gift.

Mary Depew in an article on the performance of Greek hymns (a discussion which extends to paeans) notes the “deictic” nature of such dedicatory poetry. By this she means that the words of these poems draw attention to their performance context and establish that performance as a dedication (64–65). One can think of these internal references marking the process of performance as creating an object out of that performance—an object on a par with a statue or some other costly gift. One particular part of the deictic nature of hymns is their incorporation of the surrounding environment, and to illustrate this, Depew uses paean

6 by Pindar. This paean, also fragmentary, was written for a chorus from Aegina and meant for performance at Delphi—the mountain sanctuary on the mainland of Greece where Apollo had his famous oracle. Noting these specific references within the paean, Depew writes:

These references to the sanctuary's identifying features (the Castalian Spring, the *omphalos*) seem to belabor the obvious in describing surroundings that would have been evident to every member of the audience... The performative language in Pindar's hymn allows the group that the Aeginetan chorus represents to situate themselves and the myths that construct their religious and social identity in relation to the sacred geography of Apollo's sanctuary... (75)

Depew too is looking at what poetry is *doing*, and with her mention of the construction of a religious and social identity she touches directly on the concerns of this study. The references to places couched within the paean allow the audience to connect a narrative with important symbolic status to the landscape that surrounds them. Distinctive features of a landscape are welded by means of deictic statements to a narrative, and thus landscape features inherit the same symbolic meaning as the narrative.

With this in mind we can return to the fragment of paean 12 and note the way Pindar is forming his audience's experience of place. The primary audience, as we have seen, would have been those gathered on Delos for a festival. From the plain where the temples were located one can easily look up and see Mt. Cynthos rising in the distance. Pindar would also know about the sanctuary to Zeus that was located near the summit, present since about 700 BC and surviving into the Hellenistic period (Gallet de Santerre 263–264). Pindar presents his audience with Zeus sitting upon the hill, guiding by his foreknowledge the mythical proceedings. As we shall see, the presence of Zeus is a detail not found in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, and Rutherford argues that this shows a desire on the part of Pindar to distance himself from the version in the *Homeric Hymn* (2001, 370–372). Since Pindar introduces this information with “they say,” it is evident that he had a previous source for his information. Whatever his motive and source, Pindar is invoking an event that occurred on a mountain, which would have been easily in view, and it is likely that his audience had already visited the sanctuary to Zeus near the summit. Pindar, in the public setting of the paean, recreates Delos as a sacred place whose outstanding physical features are connected to the mythical narrative that drew *theoriai* to the festival every year.

The reference to Mt. Cynthos is the most obvious reference to place in the poem, but “Leto's bed for Artemis”—that is, where she gave birth to Artemis—is also an important physical reference since it reflects the

presence of an Archaic temple dedicated to Leto, the Letoön. This temple was located outside of the central complex of sacred buildings, near the sacred lake and the terrace that contained the marble lions dedicated by the Naxians—placed there probably as protectors of Leto’s temple. The Archaic period was the apogee of worship for Leto on Delos, as noted by Hubert Gallet de Santerre: “The Archaic is incontestably the most brilliant period for the Delien cult of Leto” (257). Her temple, dated to 540 BC, is quite small, “but it is very meticulous, and its plan, with cella, vestibule, and lateral door, is quite original” (257). We have already noted the long continuity in Naxian worship on Delos, as represented by the monumental statuary given by the island, and Pindar, who represents the culmination of so many Archaic values and forms, continues this Naxian interest in Leto by making reference to her temple.

For a better sense of the geography of Apollo’s birth, one can look to six short lines attributed to Theognis, whose exact dates are uncertain, but who is said by the *Suda* to have flourished in 544–541 BC—substantially prior to Pindar.

Lord Phoebus, when the goddess queenly Leto delivered you—  
most beautiful of immortals—having grasped the palm tree  
with her slender hands, beside the wheel-shaped lake,  
then all Delos was boundlessly filled  
with ambrosial aroma, and the great earth laughed,  
and the deep gulf of the gray sea was joyful.

(5–10)

The mythical narrative is not developed at any length, and ends with rather general statements about the earth and sea rejoicing, but the lines set down with specificity the actual birth of Apollo (and by extension Artemis since both gods are often treated as having been born at the same time). The birth took place as Leto grasped the palm tree and “near” or “beside” the “wheel-like lake.” The connection between the lake and the birth of Apollo and Artemis is clear, as is the presence of a palm tree near that lake—although probably not in the center of the lake as a modern tree, planted for the benefit of tourists, would indicate. Pindar’s reference then to “Leto’s bed” is not idle poetic language, but refers to a place near the circular lake. The Letoön must have been constructed to be near, or to actually represent, this birth bed.

We can now step back and examine our two passages—the one from Strabo’s *Geography* and the other the fragment of Pindar’s paean 12. In both cases, Pindar’s poetry is shaping the way a place is experienced, but it is fair to say that Pindar could never have imagined a world traveler like Strabo viewing the Greek world through his “complete poems”—no more

than Shakespeare could have imagined Samuel Johnson arriving at Fores and importing his lines from *Macbeth*. Despite Pindar's proclamations concerning the immortality granted by his verses, he could never have foreseen the changes in material culture that would transform the context in which his poems were encountered. There was nothing "living" about Pindar's work for Strabo, nor could he have had an inkling of the performance context for this poetry—the Alexandrian editors of his poems in the second century BC had already lost the ability to understand his metrical patterns (Pfeiffer 185–187). For Strabo and others of his time, the works of Pindar and other archaic poets had become the antiquarian lens through which the Greek landscape could be experienced. That represents a powerful influence, but it was not an influence that Pindar could have predicted or consciously manipulated, and it falls under the law of unforeseen consequences.

Our examination of paean 12 showed Pindar constructing the experience of a place by the use of referential—deictic—language. This is such a salient aspect of his surviving poetry that there can be little doubt he was conscious of this process. With reference to Delphi, Rutherford in his introduction to Pindar's Paeans even entertains the idea that perhaps Pindar "could have been contributing to a programme of Delphic propaganda, organized by Delphic authorities" (179). The evidence for this is a continuous interest in Delphi and the construction of myths that are, of course, highly advantageous to Delphi: "...the myth of the *omphalos* and the eagles... might well be intended to propagate the idea that Delphi was the centre of the world, which would naturally increase its attractiveness to pilgrims" (179). There are also a few surviving ancient notes about honors given to Pindar and his descendants at Delphi. Rutherford rightly dismisses the idea that Pindar was "bought" by Delphi, noting how Pindar assigned prestigious origins and myths to other sites as well as Delphi—we could look to Delos as a case in point. But the fact that Pindar did enjoy a close relationship with Delphi points to his consciousness in filling a cultural role as a poet, and an aspect of that role was the intertwining of myth and place through his supple verses that would be performed in the course of festivals and other special occasions.

If Pindar could have imagined a place for his poetry in Greek memory outside of performance, he might well have looked to the kind of memorializing that was granted to him by the island of Rhodes. Olympian ode 7 celebrated an Olympic boxing victory by the famous Diagoras of Rhodes, yet the main sections of the ode center on the island of Rhodes itself, culminating with the beautiful image of an island growing up from the sea and belonging to the sun. It is an image that gains in beauty as one realizes that the word for a rose in Greek is *rodon*. A curious historical

note survives in the scholia preserved in the manuscripts of Pindar's victory odes: "Gorgon says this song was dedicated in the temple of Athena in Lindos with gold letters" (Drachman 195). There is no way to confirm such notes set into the margins of Pindar's poetry, but there is also no reason to disbelieve it. The very oddness of the report lends credibility. It is not hard to understand why the Rhodians would want to memorialize this great poem directed at their island, and inscribing it in gold lettering within a temple would make the poem available to many visitors—something else for *theoroi* to contemplate during a visit.

The references to this kind of memorializing are fragmentary, but the possibility allows for a second way to understand the experience of Pindar's poetry. Speaking of ancient Sumerian hymns to temples, Rutherford notes: "It seems likely that before these [hymns] were collected, the texts were located inside or on the walls of the temples themselves. So too it is easy to imagine that Pindar's composition was stored in the historical Delphic temple as a permanent panegyric of it, and a source of edification for visitors" (214). The referential language would be divorced from a performance, but it would maintain its site-context and enable an individual reader to draw personal connections to the surrounding landscape.

Even this temple scenario is a far cry from the book culture that would emerge during the Hellenistic period, with its radical disassociation of poem and context. Peter Bing in *The Well-Read Muse: Present and Past in Callimachus and the Hellenistic Poets* discusses the transformation of poetry as a result of cultural change:

The coherent fabric of the polis-community had disintegrated, supplanted by the remote, dislocated mass of the Oikoumene. Poetry, in concert with this change, became a private act of communication, no longer a public one. Through reading, the literary community too was broken down into individual readers responding to a given text in isolation (or at best in circumscribed groups). Performance might now appear as a self-conscious fiction... (17)

The argument of this chapter pushes this one step forward and posits that along with this change in poetic composition came a simultaneous change in the function of poetry. The changed function was obvious enough as we compared the original context of Pindar's poetry with its later recontextualization by a reader of Greek antiquities, such as Strabo. In both cases, Pindar's poetry was forming the way the island of Delos was experienced, but that experience was being constructed in different ways. In these examples, we can distinguish between an original context in which Pindar was consciously manipulating and guiding an audience through



the language of his poem, and a secondary context, which Pindar could not have anticipated—indeed, which would have taken the foreknowledge of Zeus. This realization that words change as their context shifts lies at the heart of this chapter, and necessitates approaching place construction not as a onetime event, but as a dynamic process connected to cultural change.

### The Invention of Delos

There is a single reference to Delos in the Homeric epics. Odysseus has washed up on the shore of the Phaeacians, and encrusted with brine he walks out to meet Nausicaa among her maids. Standing well apart from her, crafty Odysseus seeks to win her over. This flattering speech includes the lines:

At Delos once beside the altar of Apollo I saw such a one,  
a fresh sprout of a palm tree shooting forth.

(6.162–163)

It is a short but beautiful simile applied to Nausicaa, but the reference is enough to show that the poet of the *Odyssey* knew something of Delos and considered the cult of Apollo on the island to be of great antiquity—going well back into the heroic age in which Odysseus would have lived.

A somewhat longer passage is set into Virgil's *Aeneid*. In book 3, Aeneas recounts fleeing Troy, and his stop at Delos:

In the midst of the sea is honored a sacred land,  
very dear to the mother of the Nereids and Aegean Neptune,  
which wandering around coasts and shorelines  
the pious Archer fastened to Myconos and Gyaros from its peak,  
and he allowed it to rest unmoved and to scorn the winds.  
To here I came, and very calmly this island received weary us  
in its safe harbor. Having disembarked we venerated the city of Apollo . . .  
I gave veneration to the god in the temple constructed with ancient stone:  
“Give us our own home, God of Thyumbra, and give to weary us  
walls and a people and a city that will abide . . .”

(3.73–79, 84–86)

The account of the fastening of Delos, previously wandering in the sea, is quite different than the version we saw in Pindar, with adamantine columns rising from the sea bottom. In this case it is Apollo who fastens it, as if with a rope, to nearby islands. And although the central myth of the birth of Apollo is not mentioned, the island, along with its city, still has a special relationship with Apollo. Aeneas, fleeing the downfall of

Troy, arrives at an island that already has an ancient temple, and the story once again pushes Delos and its sacred presence far into the past. It was already ancient at the time of the Trojan wars, built of “ancient stone” even then.

If this sacred presence from time immemorial is the norm in literary representations from Homer down to Virgil, it may be surprising to learn that there are also plenty of hints that the history of Delos was not quite so extensive. We can return to Thucydides for the following fact, evinced to prove that the early islanders on Delos and elsewhere were Carian pirates:

Delos having been purified by the Athenians during this war and the graves of all those who had died in the island having been exhumed, over half appeared to be Carian, being known by the form of the arms buried with them as well as by the fashion in which even now they are buried. (1.8)

This rare proto-archeological anecdote gives a glimpse into the non-mythological history of Delos. It cuts against the grain of the mythological portrayals that we first noted, for it is suddenly clear that at one time some other culture dominated this island. Since the Carians spoke a different language and were a distinct ethnic group, it follows that the religious system would be similarly distinct—and Delos home to another body of traditions and narratives.

Archaeologists recognize this dilemma. In *Athletes and Oracles*, Catherine Morgan traces the development of Olympia and Delphi—two exemplary panhellenic sites—in the eighth century BC. Her synthetic ability to bring together and analyze archaeological reports lends clarity to evidence that is often lost in minutiae, but when it comes to weighing literary constructions and actual archaeological evidence, she falls squarely on the side of the hard evidence:

At Delphi, mythological versions of cult history have provided a long, but spurious pedigree for Archaic and Classical ritual...and it is therefore tempting to try to prove these accounts archaeologically, according them an undeserved authority at the expense of the independent medium of the archaeological record. (126–127)

One text that could well be in her mind is Pindar’s paean 8, in which the poet sketches the successive temples at Delphi, going back to an original temple built by Apollo out of laurel, a second one built out of beeswax and feathers, a third built by Athena and Hephaestus out of precious metals, a fourth built out of stone, by Trophonius and Agamedes. This last stage is

not mentioned in the fragment of the paean that remains, but Rutherford argues that from scholia we can tell that this fourth stage was mentioned in its concluding lines (223). Pindar's construction of this past did not prove to be short-lived, and in the second century AD, Pausanias (10.5) referenced Pindar as he recounted the history of the temple at Delphi. Although, like Strabo, he is a skeptical reader, once again we find that Pindar has spun words that have accomplished something in the world—they have formed the lens by which later visitors would understand the significance of the temple at Delphi. This kind of poetic “soft power” would obviously have been important for a place that commanded respect not through might or size, but by its panhellenic reputation.

The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* in its Delphic section also provides a story for the origin of the temple, which corresponds to the fourth temple stage in Pindar's reconstruction. Having passed by many cities in his search to find an apt site for a temple as a seat for an oracle, Apollo comes to Parnassus, the rugged mountain upon whose slope Delphi is located, and declares it to be the place. The hymn continues:

So speaking, Phoibos Apollo laid out the unbroken  
foundations wide and especially long. Moreover upon [those foundations]  
Trophonius and Agamedes, sons of Erginos and  
dear to the immortal gods, set a stone threshold.  
And around countless tribes of men built a temple  
with worked stones, fit to be sung always.

(294–299)

This version is certainly different than the multistage version given by Pindar, who incorporated this stage but pushed the origins even further back in time. But the import of this version is the same: laying to Apollo's credit the foundation of the temple and pushing this back into mythical time. Another hint about the time frame comes from the end of the hymn as Apollo directs a group of Cretan sailors “from Cnossos of Minos” (l. 393) to land at Crisa and thereafter take control of the temple at Delphi. These Cretans had been on their way “to sandy Pylos” (l. 424), the legendary home of Nestor, with impressive Mycenaean remains extending back to the second millennium BC. Although Pylos is important in the *Iliad's* account of the heroic period, in the archaic period it had only the importance of storied ruins.

From this quick examination of two early poetic versions of the foundation of Delphi, we are left with the strong impression of a place that has extraordinarily ancient roots descending back behind the heroic times recounted in the Homeric epics. These are the accounts that Morgan decides to bypass, resisting the urge to try to find some

kernel of truth behind the mythical narratives. The account of the actual archaeological evidence for the founding of the temple at Delphi can be deflating after the poetic accounts. With that warning, here is Morgan's conclusion:

I can find no convincing evidence for temple construction in the sanctuary area at Delphi before the mid seventh century at the earliest. Various attempts have been made to assign cult functions to earlier structures, but the evidence is extremely tenuous. (132)

In her account Delphi is not exceptional, but simply part of a general change that overtook Greece beginning in the eighth century BC. It was in this century that Greece entered a renaissance in which "major restructuring took place in most areas of cultural and political life" (1). The newfound prosperity, Morgan argues, was first channeled into the internal sanctuaries of the city states, but late in the seventh century, as the city states and their territories became relatively stable, they began to invest in interstate sanctuaries such as Olympia and Delphi (5). So despite the poetic versions of ancient foundations, what we actually find are much later ones.

Anthony Snodgrass in *The Dark Age of Greece* mirrors this analysis of Greek historical development. As the title of his book indicates, his emphasis is on the years between the heroic or Mycenaean world of about 1400–1200 BC and the renaissance that swept over the Greek world from about 800 BC. For reasons that are not entirely clear, there was a decline from Mycenaean prosperity—a world glimpsed hazily in the Homeric epics—to an intervening "dark age" in which Mycenaean cities are abandoned and the material culture grows meager. Speaking of population levels, Snodgrass writes: "The years of Mycenaean decline must have witnessed a drastic fall in the population of Greek lands" (365). This period is slowly replaced by a renaissance, which Snodgrass places in the eighth century (436). Poetry was at the forefront of this renaissance. "These years of reviving fortunes also witnessed a revival in the other sense of the word: the new and intense enthusiasm for establishing links with the heroic age" (429).

As we have already seen, these are the ideal conditions for the "invention of tradition"—a phenomenon outlined by Eric Hobsbawm. In the previous chapter we saw this phenomenon early in the second millennium as Egypt came out of the chaos of the First Intermediate Period. Coming out of that time the cult of Osiris at Abydos quite suddenly gained a wide prominence, and the story of his death and resurrection had been localized upon the topography of Abydos by means of a ritual drama. In Greece in the

eighth century it is possible to see a similar grouping of circumstances, and with a similar result—a series of mythical narratives attached to important sites. It is easy to forget the self-conscious youth of Greek civilization, although that is the dramatic point conveyed by Herodotus in his *Histories* as he reports the Egyptian priests' ability to count 341 generations that separated the first king of Egypt from their own time, and reflects then on the foolishness of tracing one's family back sixteen generations to a god (2.142–143). This kind of anxiety stemming from an encounter with an ancient civilization was not such a looming factor for Greeks in the Archaic period, but nevertheless the emerging culture of Greece was young, and mythical narratives were a means to connect to a barely remembered past—which amounted to inventing a past.

Given this situation, when one is faced with the contradiction between literary sources and archaeological evidence, we do well to believe the archaeology. In this vein, Morgan sketches her response:

...it is vital to be chronologically specific, and to distinguish between actual early activity and the perceived need of the sanctuary to establish its identity in the changing circumstances of the later Archaic period. (149)

For the archaeologist the choice is clear enough, but Morgan also allows us to see that poets are not simply spinning out lying narratives but performing an important function in Archaic Greek culture. These mythical narratives are building an *identity*—a common story—that, among other things, constructs the perception of sacred places.

We can now turn back to the island of Delos. The archaeological record is much less clear here, thanks to “purifications” such as the one recorded by Thucydides, which were obviously destructive with respect to historical remains. The good news is that Delos is quite similar to Delphi:

The development of Delos is in many ways closely comparable to that of Delphi: the sanctuary was built over a Mycenaean village which had been abandoned at the end of the Bronze Age... Like Delphi, Delos has no long history of Iron Age cult activity, and although a very similar votive sequence began at the start of the eighth century, there is no undisputed evidence of a temple before *c.* 700 at the earliest. (Morgan 205–206)

Morgan's terms are somewhat different than what we have been using—one must understand “heroic” or “Mycenaean” in place of “Bronze Age,” and “dark age” in place of “Iron Age”—, but the basic chronology is the same. The poetic image of a Delos that was well-known and ancient even in the heroic age is clearly a fiction. This is not to discount the notion that there may have been some surviving notion of a story about the

birth of a god on this small island, but whatever survived was augmented and dramatically changed by the new poetic spirit. The flexibility and plasticity of Greek narratives concerning place has already been evident, and what was transmitted in our sources was not fixed ancient content but something that was constantly shifting.

The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* contains the earliest lengthy account of the birth of Apollo. It is also a complex text, and this must be taken into account before our analysis begins. The *Hymn* as it has come down to us contains two distinct parts, first a Delian section that narrates the birth of Apollo on Delos, and second a Pythian section that, as we have seen, narrates the foundation of Apollo's temple at Delphi. Although it is possible to put together cogent arguments for an original unity of the *Hymn*, there are compelling reasons to understand these two parts as originally separate poems, two of the strongest being the disparate geographical purview of the two sections, and the actual closing formula at the end of the Delian portion.

Martin West in his recent edition of the *Homeric Hymns* adopts a three-step model for the composition of the *Hymn*: (1) the Pythian portion was composed sometime after the First Sacred War in 591/590 BC, (2) the Delian portion was composed by a Chian poet named Cynaethus, one of the *Homeridae* ("sons of Homer"), who claimed that this song, modeled after the Pythian portion, was passed down from Homer, and (3) the two portions were finally combined into a single poem on the occasion of a singular event, the combined Delian and Pythian festival celebrated on Delos in 523/522 BC by Polycrates (10–11). This tripartite model for the origin of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* is attractive for several reasons. It acknowledges what the majority of scholars have long believed: these were originally two separate poems. Then it also accounts for the obvious formal parallels that exist between the two parts. Finally, it provides a place and time where such a hybrid and oddly joined poem could have come into real use.

On the basis of the model outlined above, the poem should postdate the composition of the Pythian part shortly after the First Sacred War in 591/590 BC, and antedate the combined Delian and Pythian festival in 523/522 BC. Thucydides, introducing a passage from the Delian hymn, attributes the lines to Homer:

Homer makes especially clear those things that were in these lines, which are from the opening-song of Apollo:

But then at Delos, Phoibos, you were much gladdened at heart,  
there for you the Ionians with trailing robes were gathered,  
along with their children and wives, in your street.  
There, having remembered you, they please you in boxing

and dancing and song, whenever they hold a competition.

(Thucydides = *H. Hymn to Apollo* lines 146–150)

Thucydides, near the end of the fifth century BC, quotes this passage by way of illustration of the “golden days” of Delos, which he had just finished describing. This is the classic image of the gatherings at Delos—an image invoked by Strabo approximately four hundred years later. Delos is conceptualized as an Ionian gathering place, and this reflects what we have already called the earliest stage of the Greek history of Delos. Since he unhesitatingly attributes the lines to Homer, he would almost certainly have dated the poem to Homer’s time, which Herodotus had placed at 400 years previous, but which most Greeks believed to be even earlier.

The attribution to Homer is encouraged by the Hymn itself. At the close of the Delian section the poet asks the choral maidens who the poet describes as widely renowned for their dramatic performance (ll. 156–164) to answer “who is for you the man, sweetest of singers?” (169). The singer, with a strong dose of self-promotion, answers for them:

“A blind man, who lives on rocky Chios—  
All his songs are more excellent than those afterwards.”  
(172–173)

As Walter Burkert concludes, this can be no anonymous Chian poet, but is a direct claim for Homeric authorship: “What a strange claim for an obscure, anonymous author! The best poet of all times, the absolute classic: this is meant to be Homer” (1979a, 57).

As readers, we are thus faced with a contradiction—one that is becoming more familiar as we proceed. Thucydides, no credulous critic, considered the *Hymn* to be from the time of Homer, but the general modern dating for the poem places it sometime in the sixth century. This contradiction is due to the fact that the poem itself is working to portray a time that was already at best a distant memory. This puts the modern reader in an odd situation: in the course of examining this oldest of surviving elaborations on the myth of Delos, one is faced with a narrative that is self-consciously antiquarian.

The opening section of the poem gives a Homeric-style glimpse into the relations of the gods on Olympus. The setting is long after the birth of Apollo, and Apollo is given honor by all the gods while his mother Leto sits with honor beside Zeus. After this sketch of their honored positions, the poet hails Leto, and this also provides our first view of the island Delos:

Hail O blessed Leto, since you begot splendid children,  
lordly Apollo and Artemis who pours arrows,  
her in Ortygia, and him on rocky Delos,

having reclined against the high mountain, even the Cynthian hill,  
right next to the palm tree, at the streams of Inopos.

(ll. 14–18)

A few lines later the poet reprises this description of Delos. Wondering how to hymn Apollo, the poet concludes:

Or [shall I sing] how Leto first bore you as a delight for mortals,  
as she reclined against the mountain of Cynthos in the rocky island,  
in sea-girt Delos, and on every side a dark wave  
discharged against the land with shrill-blowing winds?

(ll. 25–28)

This is the same mythical narrative of the birth of Apollo that we have seen attached to Delos several times. In this version the central physical feature presented is Mt. Cynthos, and the lines are quite emphatic that Leto is reclining against the mountain as she gives birth to Apollo (in this version Artemis is born in Ortygia, often identified with Rheneia, the small island next to Delos). Even with the *Hymn's* emphasis on Mt. Cynthos, the palm tree and the plain is always present, as is seen above in lines 17–18 with their reference to the palm tree and the Inopos, and again a hundred lines further into the *Hymn* when the poet describes the birth of Apollo:

She cast her arms around the palm tree, and propped her knees  
upon the gentle meadow, and the earth underneath smiled.

(ll. 117–118)

The continued presence of the palm tree and the meadow demonstrate that the site for the birth has not shifted. It seems reasonable to assume that the poet has emphasized Mt. Cynthos by the poetic license that could claim any rock on the island as part of Mt. Cynthos.

Having reviewed the texts referring to the birth of Apollo, Gallet de Santerre writes:

This collection of texts is sufficiently coherent, it seems, to assure that, from the 6th century perhaps, by the 5th certainly and the beginning of the Hellenistic period, the venerable relics of Delian piety (the sacred tree of Leto—whatever was its essence—, the lake “like a wheel,” and the altar of horns) were presented to pilgrims in the lower part of the island. (118)

The lines from Theognis, reviewed above, are one piece of evidence for the sixth century BC existence of these early Delian “relics.” The



*Hymn* provides us with essentially the same details, with the substitution of a “soft meadow” for the “wheel-like lake.” The sacred lake today is marked by a low modern wall that in truth forms more of an oval than a wheel-like circle. This wall marks the area where the ancient lake, also enclosed, would have stood. Gallet de Santerre nevertheless desired to find a contradictory tradition of sacred sites located on the summit of Cynthos:

But [these sacred sites] being opposed by another tradition, without doubt more ancient, which linked the same relics to the religion of Cynthos, it is not possible for us to conclude that their placement was identical to their original. (118)

One reason for his desire to posit an older tradition upon Mt. Cynthos is his concern about the lack of ancient origins for the mythical narrative surrounding Apollo upon the plain:

While keeping strictly within the bounds of excavations, we restrict ourselves to noting that Leto, like Apollo and contrary to Artemis, has not left on the ground certain traces of her presence before the course of the 6th century. Despite the features which confer to her the aspect of a very old divinity, despite her undeniable importance to the Archaic period, causing one to assume a long previous tradition, we do not have the right... to group around the Letoön and the oval lake the most venerable myths of the Delian fable, not to establish, upon this area... the primitive holy places of the island. (120)

This is of course a disconcerting situation for an archaeologist. To remedy this lack, Gallet de Santerre turns to the antiquity of the remains on the summit, which go back to the third millennium (25). But here one finds the same situation as we have already seen with Delphi—early remains are abandoned through the Dark Age and there is no certainty of continuity between the early and later practices. Surprisingly, the earliest remains on Mt. Cynthos are related to a sanctuary for Hera (the earliest), as well as for Zeus and Athena (121).

Our goal here is not to settle such archaeological questions, but rather to establish a broad case for discontinuity—which now seems evident, and which is supported by Gallet de Santerre’s summarizing statement about Apollo at Delos:

Apollo became at an ancient time and would remain ever after the great god of the island; nevertheless his cult does not seem to have been introduced—or to have taken on importance—until a date where the cult of Artemis had long since been preponderant. (136)

This leads Gallet de Santerre to comment that Delos is not unique in this apparent switch of important cults. He lists a number of similar cases from other sites in Greece, and we could add to his list Abydos, which we saw in the last chapter went through a similar transformation on the road to becoming the central site for Osiris.

Our second goal is to locate the ways that literary works fill in that discontinuity with the patina of an ancient narrative. At this point we are able to say about Delos what Walter Burkert has said about the nature of the god Apollo himself. Recounting the several foreign strands that played a part in the god's classical role in Greek religion, Burkert notes:

Youthful pure renewal at the annual gathering, the banishment of disease in song and dance, and the image of the arrow-bearing Guardian God are brought together in one vision; that a unified figure emerged from these elements is due probably more than in the case of other gods to the power of poetry. (1985, 145)

If the identity of a god such as Apollo can be put to the credit of poets, then it is an easy step to say that the identity of places—the mythical narratives that came to define them in the minds of ancient Greeks—were also largely the product of the imagination of poets. The means by which the *Hymn* defines Delos is a connected narrative that weaves into its course the actualities of Delos—the sacred palm tree, Mt. Cynthos, the stream Inopos, and the sacred lake. The compelling power of the story carries the physical island on its coattails.

### The Politics of Poetry

There is every reason to believe that by the Hellenistic period (late fourth to first century BC) poets were conscious of the “soft power” they wielded and its ability to increase the prestige of cities and to bolster political reputations. An example of this consciousness comes from Idyll 17 of Theocritus, an encomium for Ptolemy II Philadelphus (308–246 BC). Theocritus is best known for his elegant and urbane sketches of country life. In Idyll 17 (which we will refer to as the *Encomium*) we arrive at a new island: Cos, praised as the birthplace of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. The parallel to the birth of Apollo on Delos is no accident, and Richard Hunter in his commentary on the *Encomium* calls it a “reworking” of the Delian portion of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (8). The connection is most clear in the birth scene, located right in the middle of the 137 line hymn:

And Cos tended you, when you were a newborn infant,  
having received you from your mother when first you saw the day's light.

For there the daughter of Antigone, distressed with birth pangs,  
cried out for girdle-losing Eileithuia.

[The goddess] being favorable, stood beside here, and shed  
over all her limbs relief from pain. And he, like to his father,  
the beloved boy, was born. Cos shouted at the sight  
and holding the infant fast with her hands, she said:

“May you be a prosperous son, and may you honor me in just the way  
Phoibos Apollo honored dark-rimmed Delos;  
with the self-same honor may you set the hill of Triops,  
giving an equal reward to the Dorians who live nearby.  
And Lord Apollo loved Rheneia equally.”

(ll. 58–70)

Eileithuia was the goddess of childbirth, and in the parallel scene in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, Leto is in pain for nine days and nine nights and is only relieved when Eileithuia arrives at Delos—and that is the point at which Leto grasps the palm tree and props her knees against the meadow. Theocritus has artfully set up a parallel with the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* and expects the reader to locate the parallel and import the setting. If the reader has caught the parallel, and remembered that Apollo is an unnaturally precocious newborn, then there is no jolt when the island Cos addresses the newborn Philadelphus and requests that she be honored in the same way that Apollo honored Delos. And while Mt. Cynthos was the primary physical feature of Delos, Theocritus picks out the hill of Triops for honor. This was not a hill on Cos itself, but rather on the island Knidos. Into the fifth century, Knidos was the setting for a meeting of the Dorian Hexapolis—five leagued cities among the southern Sporades together with Halicarnassus, which shared Dorian roots. Theocritus was faced with a situation that, strictly speaking, was not parallel to Delos, yet he finds a way to force his parallel through the introduction of Rheneia, a near neighbor to Delos. Cos and the religiously important Knidos are thus linked in honor like Delos and Rheneia, and the Ionian league of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* is paralleled by a Dorian league.

In building this parallel, Theocritus shows his understanding of the foundation of immortality for a piece of land: a significant narrative attached to the site. As readers, we know it is not actually the request from Cos that causes honor to be bestowed upon the island, but rather the work of the poet in elaborating a narrative that “sticks.” And it was no divine event that created Delos as an imaginatively powerful place, but the “soft power” of a mythical narrative. In the typical fashion for Alexandrian poets, Theocritus does not come up with his own newly fashioned or divergent narrative, but instead allows the authority of the *Homeric Hymn* to work in his favor, and lets Cos gain its position by analogy to the events

on Delos. One could say that Theocritus is trying “to do for Cos what the *Homeric Hymn* did for Delos,” and his method for accomplishing this is to employ structural and verbal parallels, of which the birth scene is only the most obvious, as it actually introduces Delos into the discourse.

This attempt to create Cos as a Hellenistic Delos must be counted as a failure in the long term. In modern guide books there are many references to Cos as the home of Hippocrates and the ancient medical school on Cos, but I have found none to the birth of Philadelphus. However, this is not so much a poetic failure as a result of the general decline of the Ptolemies as historical figures in the Western imagination. Philadelphus was no Alexander or Julius Caesar—nor even an alluring Cleopatra. However, this long-term historical dead end should not be allowed to occlude the seriousness of this attempt to create Cos through poetry, nor should it keep us from seeing that just such a long-term fame was the intention.

The seriousness of this project is evident by the sums of money that were spent in the Hellenistic period on this kind of “soft power.” An arresting view of a prestige expense is provided by Athenaeus who in 192 AD completed his *Deipnosophistai* (*The Learned Feasters*)—a work that is valuable for preserving many fragments from earlier histories and poems. One of these passages is a description of a grand procession in Alexandria put on by Ptolemy Philadelphus in celebration of Dionysius:

...statues of Alexander and Ptolemy crowned with ivy wreaths made of gold. The statue of Arete standing beside Ptolemy had a golden wreath of olive. Priapus was present with them, having an ivy wreath made of gold. The city Corinth, standing beside Ptolemy was crowned with a golden diadem... Women followed this cart, having expensive garments and jewelry. They were hailed as the cities that were from Ionia and the rest of the Greek [cities] situated in Asia and the islands that were subdued by the Persian. All bore golden wreaths. (201 D, text from Rice)

This cart was just a small part of the long procession. A line of carts had preceded this one that carried gold-wreathed statues of Alexander and Ptolemy, along with statues of Arete and Priapus. Spectators might well be punch-drunk with the dazzling display of conspicuous wealth, but they could not have mistaken the political message: Ptolemy was the rightful successor to Alexander. The personification of Corinth, standing on the float with the statue of Ptolemy, and then the multitude of women representing the Greek cities that had been subdued by the Persians, conveys a subtler political and geographic message. As interpreted by E.E. Rice, this is a reference to the Corinthian League, founded originally by Philip II as a defense against the Persians (104–106). That threat was long past, and the Persian Empire a thing of the past, but

at least notionally Ptolemy wanted to be understood as the continued protector of Greek cities.

In her introduction to the text, Rice notes:

Politically, the procession sheds light on the complex national and international issues of the time; certain measures of propaganda extol the legitimacy and glory of the royal family at home and abroad, and the striking display of military force at the end of the procession must be seen in terms of the contemporary power struggle among the newly-founded Hellenistic states. (2)

The grand procession was no innocent celebration, but an event which could be read and interpreted by an audience—and disseminated abroad by means of written descriptions. Hellenistic poetry takes its place along with the grand procession as a parallel means to a similar end: aggrandizement of Ptolemy Philadelphus and his dynasty.

The scholarly preoccupations of the Hellenistic period are sometimes isolated from the political goals of the leading dynasties—of which one of the most prosperous was that of the Ptolemies. In a general history of the period written by Peter Green, *From Alexander to Actium*, the artistic accomplishments of the new critic-poets are given their own chapter, with no attempt to connect these projects to the political goals of their patrons. Writing with a distaste for these poets, Green observes about their work: “These hypereducated intellectuals were writing for—and very often about—each other, and thus, like Pound or Eliot, prided themselves on their richly exotic literary or mythological references” (171). A broader view concerning the value of the scholarly work at the *Museion* in Alexandria under the Ptolemies is given by Gregor Weber:

The importance of these institutions for the intellectual class, and its allure, ensured for the king highest prestige, especially in the Greek motherland...A conscious “propaganda”-effect was hence not an aim in any obvious sense; the substantial gain in prestige rested on a political activity that was indirect rather than direct. (81–82)

Delos and Cos were bound up with this Ptolemaic ambition, and had not acquired their poetic prominence through their past reputation alone. Delos had been incorporated into the constellation of Ptolemaic territory by 285 BC and remained so until about 260 BC. The Ptolemaic dominance was ended by a naval defeat at the hands of Antigonos Gonatus at the battle of Cos, and this period is followed by a complicated series of political maneuvers on the part of Rhodes, Egypt, and Macedonia (sketched by Reger 17–20). We might well be prompted to ask what could have been

so important about Delos and other small islands of the Aegean, to be at the center of a long political tug-of-war? Gary Reger establishes that the islands were important “stepping stones” for any political ambitions on the mainland of Greece, or from the mainland of Greece to points in Asia or North Africa.

Perhaps the nicest illustration of the role of the islands comes from the periods of Ptolemaic control. Throughout the 280s, 270s, and 260s the Ptolemies pursued a vigorous policy on the mainland, which entailed a heightened presence in the Aegean. On Delos they seem to have established a cache of grain, undoubtedly, for military use. They located garrisons at Itanos on Krete and on Thera, which guarded the routes from Egypt to Greece. (23)

As it happens, the time frame for the *Encomium* is fixed within narrow bounds. The mention in line 130, of his wife loving him “both as brother and husband,” informs us that this is during Ptolemy II’s marriage to Arsinoë, which took place sometime between 279 and 274 BC and ended with her death around 270 BC. The *Encomium* should, therefore, fall between those years, and this window also falls squarely in the middle of the period of Ptolemaic control of the Aegean, and Delos in particular. The islands that dotted the Aegean were considered as having important strategic interest by the Ptolemies, and it is no surprise, then, to find poets—who were part of the patronage system set up by the Ptolemies at Alexandria—incorporating the islands into their poetry.

Having established the political significance of these territorial claims, we might wonder how a poem such as this disseminated in the Hellenistic period. Certainly we must rid our minds of the contexts developed in the last section in which Pindar’s paeans and the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* were performed in front of a live audience gathered on the island of Delos itself. In those cases the work of constructing place was done by references that would have been immediately obvious to the audience—Mt. Cynthos or the sacred lake would have been visible. In the case of scholarly Hellenistic poetry, the performance context would have been quite different. So although the *Encomium* identifies itself as a hymn (line 8) and is therefore in the same generic class as the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, it shares nothing in terms of imagined setting. We know surprisingly little about the setting for Hellenistic poetry, such as this one, and Richard Hunter’s recent commentary on the *Encomium* does not even hazard a guess as to the original context. Bing has recently suggested the importance of letters in the spread of poetry. Contesting the idea that epigrams—an important Hellenistic form—were spread mainly through performance, he writes: “I consider it likely that letters (or short scrolls?)—in addition to presumably far

rarer epigram-books—served as a critical medium by which epigram was disseminated, thus permitting authors to react to, and vary, the epigrams of their contemporaries...” (2000, 147). Our image should not be of a single cutoff coterie of intellectuals, but of intellectuals spread across the new Hellenistic landscape, who, by means of letters and books, were able to follow and respond to each other’s work.

We can now turn to the most elaborate version of the mythical narrative of Apollo’s birth on Delos—*The Hymn to Delos* by Callimachus. The dense poetry of Callimachus is infinitely expandable—made for commentary, one might say. We will not attempt a complete commentary on the *Hymn to Delos*, but instead examine two brief passages that exemplify how Callimachus took the physical characteristics of this small island and infused them with meaning. If one were to simply outline the mythical narrative for the *Hymn to Delos*—minus digressions—it would sound virtually identical to the *Homeric Hymn*; however, we will see that Delos has been subtly updated and pressed into service as a symbol for Hellenistic aspirations, political and poetic.

Early in the hymn we get a brief introduction to Delos:

[Delos], windy and unchangeable, and sea-beaten  
 so as to be a better race course for sea birds than for horses,  
 is inset into the sea, which spinning so around [Delos]  
 throws off much frothy-refuse from the Icarian water.  
 Therefore even sea-faring fishermen have made her their home.  
 (ll. 11–15)

To one commentator, this section has a wholly negative purpose: “In the description that follows (11–15), the poet is listing the unfavourable characteristics of Delos..., in contrast to her primacy within the ranks of the islands...” (Mineur 60). It is true that Callimachus is building a contrast between the favor of Apollo as expressed in the following lines and its natural stature, but that does not mean we need to characterize these lines as “unfavourable.” Rather, by emphasizing the (perhaps) negative qualities of the island they anticipate the question he will shortly ask:

If so very many songs encircle you,  
 how shall I enweave you?  
 (ll. 28–29)

One must understand this central anxiety of the *Hymn to Delos*: how does one sing a place that has been celebrated many times and in many different ways?

One way to sing a place sung many times previous is to find and highlight new details. Callimachus does little with Mt. Cynthos, a physical feature that had dominated other accounts. The only mention of Mt. Cynthos comes near the start when Apollo is given the epithet “Cynthian” (l. 10). What does get referenced is a course for horses. At first glance it seems only an elaborate simile meant to comment on the small size of Delos—it is “a better race course for sea birds than for horses”—, but once we recall that there was an actual racecourse on Delos, the simile takes on new significance. Thucydides mentioned, in the course of the passage examined above, that when the Athenians purified Delos in 426/425, they also instituted the Delian games, to be celebrated once every four years. He notes that a new contest at these events was the horse race—which had not previously existed (3.104). Even today it is surprising to find on this small island a stretch of flat ground sufficient for a horse race, but as one walks away from the central sacred precinct, following a path surrounded by low stone walls, one arrives soon at the race course. The late date for the course means it would have been unknown to earlier poets, and Callimachus capitalizes on that fact by employing it in this initial descriptive passage.

The next line mentions “frothy-refuse” from the Icarian waters thrown up upon Delos. The “Icarian waters” makes reference to the flight of Icarus and his fall into the sea—the very image of vain human endeavor. His attempt at flight was said to have occurred at Crete, the major island due south of the Cyclades. The enduring slander about Cretans was that they were liars—it is an opinion repeated by Callimachus in his *Hymn to Zeus*: “Cretans always lie” (l. 8), and even gets picked up much later in the New Testament (Titus 1.12).

The connection of “frothy-refuse” to human speech becomes evident as we examine a short passage at the close of Callimachus’ *Hymn to Apollo*:

Great is the flow from the Assyrian river, but it drags  
 much impurity of the land and much refuse on its water.  
 The bees do not carry water to Demeter from every [source],  
 but only that spring which pure and unmixed wells up  
 from a sacred fountain, small, the very best.

(ll. 108–112)

Since it represents Apollo’s response to the suggestion of Envy—“I do not marvel at the singer who does not sing so many things as the sea does” (l. 106–107)—it is clear that these lines function as a programmatic statement about poetry. In the epigrams and fragments that remain of his larger works, Callimachus carries out an assault upon compositions that are large and bombastic in nature, and here he contrasts the impure



and debased flow of the Assyrian river with the pure and unmixed stream of the sacred fountain—obviously coming out on the side of purity and smallness.

Delos, amidst that refuse, is “inset into the sea” and is immune to these refuse-bearing currents. In *Iliad* 21.168 the same verb is used for a spear that is “fixed in the earth” and in line 11 of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* it is the moon that is said to be “inset” or “fixed” in the sky. In each of these examples an object is described as encroaching upon a foreign ground—a spear on the earth, the moon in the sky. Callimachus has similarly inset the island of Delos upon an already suspect sea. The idea of an inset island can easily approach the image of jewel—one thinks of Shakespeare’s description of England as “This precious stone set in the silver sea...” (*Richard II*, II.1.46). Delos in these lines is verbally disconnected from the sea on which it lies; the sea is the ground, Delos the figure.

In another recognition of Hellenistic reality, Callimachus notes that fishermen make Delos their home. Again, it is no decorative note, since Delos was known for its fish, and a report of the fish in and around Delos turns up in Pliny’s *Natural History* (32.18), written in the first century AD. The detail is cleverly employed almost as proof of the surrounding impurity. It is as if he is saying: “There is Cretan refuse tossed up around here, and look—there are even fishermen who can make their living out there. But none of this touches Delos in an essential way.”

The island itself remains governed by its adjectives: “windy” and “unchangeable”—or “unshakeable.” The first word, as a Mineur points out, is a “common epithet of high or exposed places and mountains in Homer and other poetry” (60)—undoubtedly used here to point up the rocky and windswept nature of Delos. On the other hand, the island is “unshakeable,” which may point to the ancient report that Delos was immune to earthquakes. Herodotus notes an earthquake on Delos, “the first and last,” explicable only as a divinely sent omen (6.98). Both details again help to cut Delos off conceptually from its environment.

In the five lines that introduce Delos as a physical presence, Callimachus has latched onto two concrete facts and begins to construct a portrait of Delos as small and pure. Neither of these values would be particularly expected if one had read only the earlier *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*. The question addressed by the poet of that work was how insignificant Delos—which could never be fruitful or feed many cattle—gained such honor. In the *Homeric Hymn*, the narrative of Leto’s search and the oath extracted from her by Delos gave an explanation to that basic question. Callimachus takes two unexpected and obvious facts—the smallness and purity of Delos—and emphasizes them at every possible opportunity.

Peter Bing (1988) points out how Callimachus, throughout the *Hymn to Delos*, is using these characteristics in a programmatic fashion:

... Delos' characteristics (her diminutive size and slender, delicate stature; her purity and love of song; her freedom from violence and war) allowed Callimachus to see in her not only an island but a metaphor for those poetic principles. These characteristics are conspicuous here precisely because of their absence from the *Homeric Hymn*. (94)

If these lines were encountered as a disembodied fragment, it would be hard to confidently assert their programmatic meaning, but given their context in a larger poem that establishes Delos as a symbol for new poetic ideals (emphasizing small compositions over epic size and allusiveness over bombast), they easily take their place as the initial building blocks in that larger picture.

Callimachus has come to Delos and discovered a symbol for his poetic principles. Much as Oscar Wilde joked: "Wordsworth went to the lakes, but he was never a lake poet. He found in stones the sermons he had already hidden there." So we catch Callimachus finding in Delos a symbol for the ideal poetry he already espoused. Since we know something about past versions of Delos, and about Delos itself, we can see the process with unusual clarity. It involves mirroring certain metaphoric concepts in the domain of physical description. Small and pure are ideal character traits for poetry—well, Delos can be described as physically small and pure as well. The *Homeric Hymn* took these characteristics as something to explain, and that explanation was the purpose of the narrative. For Callimachus, "small" and "pure" are the central reasons for praise.

She is not grudged to be called among the foremost,  
 whenever unto Oceanus and unto Titan Tethys  
 the islands gather, and she goes always as the leader.  
 And the Phoenician Kyrnos, no island to be scorned,  
 follows behind her steps, as well as Abantian Makris of the Ellopians  
 and delightful Sardo and even that one to which Kypris swam  
 first from the water, and the goddess protects her as repayment.  
 Those islands are fortified by reason of screening towers,  
 but Delos by reason of Apollo. What wall could be stronger?  
 (ll. 16–24)

In this passage from the *Hymn to Delos*, which immediately follows the physical description already examined, we find the islands personified and gathering at Oceanus. Among these islands Delos goes foremost. The passage is somewhat difficult for the modern reader because the

identification of the accompanying islands is shrouded by mythological references. “Phoenician Kyrnos” is modern Corsica; “Abantian Makris” is Euboea, the very large island nestled on the eastern side of the mainland of Greece; “Sardo” is modern Sardinia; and the island “to which Kypris swam first from the water” is modern Cyprus. So the image here is of tiny Delos leading a group of islands that includes some of the largest islands in the Mediterranean. Out of these great islands it is Delos that gets the highest honor. This is of course a frame of reference that is far outside the scope of the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, where we find a catalog of islands ringing the Aegean Sea, but no hint of a wider Mediterranean context. That earlier catalog was resolutely and perhaps anachronistically Ionian in orientation, attempting to portray Delos in an ideal local context. Callimachus immediately explodes that context and places Delos as foremost among Mediterranean islands—a change that reflects an enlarged Hellenistic view of the world.

At the end of this passage Callimachus asks rhetorically: “What wall could be stronger?” In the literal sense it is Apollo who acts as the special protector of tiny Delos, but Callimachus is well aware that this is only a fiction woven around the island. His underlying skepticism appears in a work such as epigram 15, facing an imagined grave the narrator asks a series of questions, culminating with “and what about Pluto?” and then the dark answer comes: “a *mythos*”—it is only a story. Despite obvious reverence for the Greek past and curiosity about religious rituals, he is clear that in the end what one is dealing with are simply words and the narratives they form. It is immediately following the above passage that he asks of Delos: “If so very many songs encircle you, how shall I enweave you? (l. 28–29). He understands that mythical narratives, constructed by poets like himself, are the ultimate source of Delos’ imaginative importance—the reason that in a gathering of islands, Delos goes preeminent.

A second and later passage, this one narrating the birth of Apollo, allows us to glimpse the recasting of the island as a political symbol.

... And [Leto] ceased gladly from her grievous wandering  
and she sat beside the flow of Inopos, which the earth  
sends out most abundantly at the time when at full flow  
the Nile comes down from the Ethiopian height.  
She loosed her girdle, and she reclined back with her shoulders  
against the trunk of the palm tree, having been worn out  
by grievous hardship; damp sweat flowed over her flesh.  
(205–211)

This is a scene with which we are now familiar, and Callimachus has borrowed a page from previous versions of the narrative, although with

some subtle changes to Leto's posture. Callimachus has also left out Mt. Cynthos and emphasized instead the stream of Inopos.

Callimachus includes the odd detail that Inopos flows at the very time that the Nile reaches its flood tide. Mention of the Nile flood introduces a well-known natural puzzle: why does the Nile flood in summer? Herodotus introduces the problem and then proceeds to offer three Greek accounts for the Nile's unseasonal rising (2.19–27). The several competing explanations in his account show that the rising of the Nile was a subject of speculation in 425 BC—and it would continue to be such for a long while. By referencing this long-standing debate, Callimachus not only lends a slightly mysterious aura to Inopos, but also hints strongly about the Egyptian origin of the water of Inopos—a claim that inevitably naturalizes Egyptian and Ptolemaic control of Delos. This is not the only such passage in Callimachus that alludes to the status of the Nile as source for the Inopos: in the *Hymn to Artemis* he refers to Inopos as “Egyptian Inopos” (l. 171), with no explanation.

In later sources this story is not only hinted at but flatly stated. Pausanias relates the story, supposedly heard from Delians themselves:

I know that I heard something else such as this from the Delians, that the water which they call the Inopos comes to them from the Nile. (2.5.3)

He repeats this fact in the context of explaining how the Asopus in the Peloponnesus is supplied by the Maeander in Asia Minor. Having mentioned this, Pausanias recalls that the Delians have a similar story connecting their stream to the Nile. So we see that these stories of subterranean river connections are not an uncommon motif, often carrying political implications, since they strongly imply colonial dependence on another center of power. The story of the Nile connection to the Inopos is also picked up by two technical geographers writing in the first century AD: Pliny in his *Natural History* (2.106) and Strabo in his *Geography* (6.271). For all the strength of the tradition, there is no evidence to back it up. The French traveler and scientist Tournefort at the start of the eighteenth century specifically comments on the water levels of the spring that he identifies with Inopos, which crests, as one would expect, in the winter and hits its low point in the summer—the time when the Nile floods (224). There is no reason to think that the water flow on Delos had changed dramatically by the time Tournefort arrived, and so we are faced with an ancient geographical fabrication that was widespread in the ancient world.

Given the propensity of Hellenistic poets to draw on technical sources, and not to simply make things up, it is likely that Callimachus himself

is drawing on previous reports and descriptions of Delos. Although the connection is rather alluded to than elucidated, there is every appearance in these references that Callimachus is making one of many scholarly allusions that the reader is expected to catch: the Nile is the true source for the Inopos. Further, it is hard to understand how both Strabo and Pliny would cite this odd fact if it were *only* a poetic conceit and not reported by some further authority. Although the remains are scanty, we know that geographical writing and descriptions were important in Alexandria during the third and second centuries BC (Fraser 520–525), and it thus appears likely that some of this literature was involved in discovering and propagating reports that furthered Ptolemaic ambitions. One way that such claims could be strengthened would have been to fabricate physical connections.

Callimachus has, of course, gleefully latched onto the report, incorporating it into a pregnant context. This “pregnant context” is the overall political bent of the hymn. We have already seen Ptolemy praised as a god in the digression on the island of Cos. When we recall that his center of operations was Egypt, then the Nile as a deep springing source for the water of Inopos dramatically brings Delos itself into relationship with Egypt, and by implication, with the Ptolemies.

In this same digression, Apollo prophesies from the womb of his mother about the future victory of Ptolemy over the Celts at their invasion of the mainland of Greece in 279/278 BC—an invasion that would reach all the way to Delphi. At the conclusion to this prophecy, Apollo notes where the shields to these “latter-day Titans” would come to rest:

Some of those [shields] will be dedicated to me, while others  
shall lie beside the Nile as prizes for a king who toiled much,  
[those shields] having seen their bearers consumed in fire.

(185–187)

Some of these shields were indeed dedicated to Apollo at Delphi, as Pausanias notes (10.19.4). Others, by a roundabout route, made it to the Nile in the hands of Celtic mercenaries who revolted and died on a deserted island in the Nile (Pausanias 1.7.2). The shields as they rest on the Nile are transformed into prizes for Ptolemy. By means of a clever selection from contemporary events, Callimachus has maneuvered the Nile into conjunction with both Apollo and Ptolemaic power.

The context can further be thought of as “pregnant” since it has to do with the birth of Apollo and the literal pregnancy of Leto. In fact, the discussion of the flow of the Nile in lines 206–208 occurs in the place where one would expect the woman’s water to break, and the birth pains

themselves follow hard on this description of the water flow. A few lines later, as Callimachus describes the physical effects of Apollo's birth, the flow of water is again emphasized: "At that time...with gold deep coiled Inopos flooded" (l. 260,63). The word used here for "flooded" was the technical word for the Nile flood, and its use once again calls us back to the connection between the flow of the Nile and the birth of Apollo. By this extended and suggestive system of parallels, the Nile—and again by association, the Ptolemies—comes to play a role in the very birth of Apollo.

A complex issue in the *Hymn to Delos* is the relationship between the political and poetic goals of the poem. Bing (1988) identifies these as complementary spheres:

Through the birth of Callimachus' patron, Apollo, Delos triumphs over the hackneyed heroic style which favors violence and noise. In the political sphere, Philadelphus and Apollo subdue the menace of the Gauls. These victories result in a harmonious world where the political order protects and fosters Delos...; and Delos in turn brings glory to the political order. (95–96)

The image of the Nile serving as the ultimate source for the tiny Inopos serves as an artful combination of these two spheres. The power and wealth of the land of the Nile comes to play an intimate role in the birth of Apollo—god of poetry and song. The ultimate connection of the birth of Apollo with song is evident in the celebration that comes afterward, as swans—"the most musical of birds"—circle the island seven times, which becomes in the hands of Callimachus an *aition* to explain why Apollo strung the first lyre with seven strings.

The Delian nymphs also sing out at this point, and they are identified as the "offspring of an ancient river" (l. 256). The identification of this "ancient river" is somewhat doubtful, as it must have appeared to ancient readers as well, since the scholia clarify: "of the Inopos" (Pfeiffer 72). It is certainly *possible* to construe this as a reference to the Inopos, and one person's stream is another person's river, but it is nevertheless surprising to find the water referred to earlier simply as a "discharge" or "flow," now given the designation of a "river." The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* refers to the "*streams* of the Inopos" (l. 18), and even Pausanias in the context of a discussion of rivers calls the Inopos simply "water" (5.3.2).

A more exact consideration of the mythical events should make this passage clear. The island of Delos gained its firm foundation, planting its roots in the sea, when Apollo was born (l. 51–54). Later in the *Hymn*, we find that at the time of his birth "all the foundations became golden" (l. 260)—at the same time that "with gold deep coiled Inopos flooded" (l. 263). The

flood of gold, the birth of Apollo, and the rooting of Delos on the sea floor are imagined as simultaneous events. Song arises at the same time, coming from the circling swans and the Delian nymphs. These nymphs, as part of this new alliance of power and song, can hardly be understood as ancient denizens of Inopos, but rather new offspring bequeathed by an ancient river—the Nile. Each reference to the Nile has been allusive, never direct, and this one is no exception, but the reference helps to construct a picture of song as begotten by the power and wealth of the Nile. Callimachus, in the midst of developing his poetic program, has also allowed us to see the reliance of that program of “smallness” and “purity” upon the protective might—the sheer largeness—of the Ptolemies.

This detailed look at some lines from *The Hymn to Delos* allows us a fuller grasp of the way a landscape can be consciously deployed by an artist. Callimachus expertly located metaphoric parallels between his vision of poetry and the topography of Delos and exploited those parallels to the fullest in his dense poetry. He also lodged Delos firmly within the political program of the Ptolemies, who were his patrons, and thus contributed to the perception of that empire among other Hellenistic elites. It is difficult to think of any writer who has understood better the connection between place and words and the way narrative can be harnessed to further geographic ambitions.

### Later Versions of Delos

The Greek islands today are a popular holiday destination for Europeans and Americans. In the London Underground, waiting for a train, I once saw a large advertisement that featured a beautiful woman with her head coming out of the sparkling water of a pool, behind her was the whitewashed scenery that is a hallmark of the Greek islands today. The caption on the advertisement read: “Live Your Myth.” One Web site notes the following about the small island of Mykonos, which is within sight of Delos:

Dazzling and ethereal in the light of day, captivating and mysterious under the lights of the night, cosmopolitan and erotic, vivacious and noisy, “tolerant” with her merry visitors, Mykonos is the centre of the tourist world.

The best-known Greek island is located in the heart of the Cyclades. It has inspired numerous photographers and artists with its beauty . . .

[touristorama.com]

Delos has obviously been displaced in the modern tourist imagination, becoming a diverting day trip for the archeologically-inclined rather than the center of imaginative interest.

Roland Barthes could have used the Greek islands as a chapter of his book *Mythologies*. Right after “Romans on Film” could have come

“Holidays in Greece.” Greece as a place has been taken up into language, the physical reality converted into a myth. Barthes writes:

Everything, then, can be a myth? Yes, I believe this, for the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions. Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things. A tree is a tree. Yes, of course. But a tree as expressed by Minou Drouet is no longer quite a tree... (109)

Our analysis of place has not relied on the Structuralism of Barthes, and his use of “myth” carries us away from the narrative basis of this study, but he describes a similar process of meaning being invented. Delos is not just Delos, but is changed as it is taken up into the language and symbolic exchanges of successive cultures. Barthes goes on to note: “... mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of things” (110). Whereas Barthes concentrated his work on modern mythology, this chapter has taken as its specific goal understanding the mythologies that have accrued to Delos, only to be replaced or refined as time passes. Here at the conclusion of this chapter we can briefly turn our attention to a dramatic change of narrative on Delos and other Greek islands.

With the coming of Christianity to Greece, an all out narrative warfare was commenced. The old stories that gave meaning to a site like Delos were systematically supplanted by Christian narratives. An initial example of this kind of narrative warfare is the island of Cyprus. In the *Iliad*, Aphrodite is called Cypris, a name derived from her supposed origin at Cyprus. The *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* recognized specifically Paphos, a city on the western edge of Cyprus, as her home.

Going to Cyprus, she plunged into her fragrant temple,  
in Paphos. There she had her precinct and fragrant altar.  
Entering there, she closed the shining doors,  
and there the Graces bathed her and anointed her with divine  
olive oil...

(l. 58–62)

From ancient times, Cyprus—and particularly Paphos—had been connected to Aphrodite, but Cyprus was also a site that gained prominence in early Christianity. Paul is reported in the book of Acts to have worked his way overland from Salamis in the east to Paphos in the west (Acts 13.6). There is no mention of pagan religion in this brief passage, but it is clear that Christianity was making a direct pitch for the allegiance of the populace.



At the end of the fourth century AD, the church father Jerome was living in Palestine and wrote the biography of St. Hilarion, a saint who had died in Cyprus earlier in the fourth century AD. Near the close of the *Life*, Jerome narrates the sea voyage to Cyprus on the part of Hilarion. After a somewhat novelistic encounter with pirates, Jerome notes: "... as he sailed through the Cyclades before a favourable wind, Hilarion heard on every side the voices of unclean spirits shouting from the cities and villages and running down to the shore" (White 112). It is as if the celebration recounted by Plutarch in his *Life of Nicias* has been brought to ghostly life. Instead of a joyous crowd of celebrants running to meet the ship carrying a *theoria*, unclean spirits rush to the shore at the appearance of a boat. Delos was the main pagan site in the Cyclades, and Jerome's brief note therefore represents a reinterpretation of Delos. The excited glimpse of the dazzling island portrayed by Ovid has now been replaced with the darkness of demon-haunted recesses.

The active Christian program of narrative colonization becomes clear as Hilarion encounters Cyprus.

After entering Paphos, the city in Cyprus made famous by poets' songs, which has on several occasions been destroyed by earthquakes and whose ruins alone now provide evidence of what it once was, he lived in obscurity two miles outside the city... (112–113)

Jerome foregrounds the fact that this was a place famous on account of its use by poets; and that points us to the mythical narratives surrounding Aphrodite. It is also clear that this is a city that has seen better days, filled with the ruins of a decayed past rather than the center of vibrant pagan religion. Disturbed by the people from all over Cyprus who flocked to him, Hilarion moved to a more secluded place:

After a long search Hesychius found a place about twelve miles from the sea and led Hilarion into the remote and harsh mountains... On entering, Hilarion saw before him a remote and terrifying place. For although it was surrounded on all sides by trees and there was also water flowing down from the brow of the hill, a most delightful garden and many fruit trees (the fruit of which he never picked for his food), yet there were also near-by the ruins of a very ancient temple from which the sound of an enormous number of demons (as he himself related and his disciples still testify) could be heard night and day... It pleased Hilarion greatly that he would have his adversaries nearby, and so he remained there for five years. (113)

The reader may well encounter a certain level of cognitive dissonance from reading this description of the secluded home of Hilarion. It is

identified as “terrifying” and then as demon-haunted, but it also appears as something of a paradise with water and fruit trees. But the explanation for this double-minded description—and for his refusal to eat from the fruit—is found with the note that these are the “ruins of a very ancient temple.” The water and those fruit trees were undoubtedly part of an ancient sacred precinct. A site that would strike a modern tourist as picturesque and Edenic is transformed into a terrifying spot that must be reclaimed from demons.

The Christian interaction with the pagan landscape would not, at least in the early years, be one of accommodation or avoidance, but one of conscious colonization. This is evident in the rationale imputed to Hilarion at the end of the above passage: it is precisely because of the demons that he decides to stay in the pagan garden. The success of this Christian colonization is evident from the end of the *Life* when Jerome discusses the competing sacred sites for Hilarion:

To this very day you will find extraordinary rivalry between the people of Palestine and those of Cyprus, the former arguing that they possess Hilarion’s spirit, the latter his body. And yet in both places great miracles occur each day, though more so in the garden on Cyprus, perhaps because he loved that place more. (115)

We are left, then, with the image of this formerly sacred place as a new haunt for miracle seekers—demons having been defeated. The story lodged in the mind of these pilgrims would now be dominated by St. Hilarion and no longer by Aphrodite. The vast corpus of hagiographies—lives of saints—can be approached from the angle of its activity in promoting narratives that had the power to construct a new cultural landscape.

The success of this Christianization process at Delos and nearby islands is evident from the reports of later travelers. Joseph Pitton de Tournefort in his *A Voyage into the Levant*, published in London in 1718, relates an account of the waters of the Inopos on Delos:

Surely this Spring must be the Fountain *Inopus* of *Pliny*; for I have heard ‘em say at *Mycone*, that this of *Delos* rose and fell at the same time with the River *Jordan*. *Strabo* says ‘tis carrying Prodigies too far, to bring the *Nile* as far as *Delos*. *Pliny* goes more seriously to work, and says the Fountain *Inopus* rose and fell as the *Nile* did: the People of *Mycone* have retained this Fable by Tradition, but they confound *Jordan* with the *Nile*. (224)

Although Tournefort relates the fact in passing, his account provides a window into the way narrative and place get intertwined. The relation of the Nile to the Inopos, a story that from the beginning was founded

more on political wish than physical reality, has survived but been brought into line with the Christian views of later Greeks. The biblical Jordan was substituted for the Nile. At the time when Tournefort visited Delos, there were no longer any native inhabitants on the island of Delos itself, but it was still used by the inhabitants of Myconos as a place for grazing (242). The “People of *Mycone*,” then, whose report Tournefort relates, are those in closest connection to the island, and for them the waters of the island were still fed by a distant river, but that long-lived report had been brought into accord with Christian geography.

Tournefort also mentions that Delos attracted its own Christian hermit:

At the foot of Mount *Cynthus* we were shown a small Lodge, where lived some years ago an *Ascetick*, as the Greeks call ‘em: his Name was *Maximus*, he was a Caloyer of *Monte Santo*, and he return’d thither to confine himself in a dismal Solitude, far from any near Object to disturb his Repose; for the *Myconiots*, who go daily to *Delos* to cut wood, to fish, or to hunt, gave him too frequent Distractions. . . This humble zealous Recluse was going to *Salonica*, to preach publickly against the Mahometan Religion, and thereby merit Martyrdom. . . (238)

Unlike St. Hilarion, this Maximus appears to have had only solitude in view when he settled on Delos. Whatever the former demon-haunted quality of Delos, it had long since been conquered by Christianity. The spiritual enemy was now personified by the Muslim Turks, who then held most of what had been Greek lands. But even after this Maximus had left Delos, his habitations continued to be pointed out by the Myconians, which is clear from the passive construction “we were shown”—reminiscent of St. Egeria’s constructions.

What Tournefort knows about the Classical past, he gets from Classical writers—not from local informants. His Classical sources were the same ones we have been examining: Plutarch, Strabo, Callimachus. His interest is drawn to inscriptions and ruins, which he scrupulously records; but for the people who have taken him to the island and acted as guides, the points of reference are the River Jordan and the residence of an ascetic.

Delos was a stop for many travelers from the Renaissance on. Charles Robson, on his way to Aleppo, noted his impressions of the Greek islands in a letter that was published in 1628 as a pamphlet entitled *Newes from Aleppo*.

*Delos*, now uninhabited, and onely sought unto for the vaste reliques of *Apolloes* Temple, environed with those Iles which encircle it, and commonly and truly called the *Cyclades*. . . At this *Mycona* wee stayed three dayes by reason of the extreamitie of weather: A barren Iland of small extent some fifteen miles in compasse, wholly inhabited by poore Greekes, having but

one, I cannot tell whether to call it, village or towne of the same name with the Iland, subiect to the Dominion and Spoile of the Turkes. (8–9)

Although a century earlier, the portrait of Delos confirms what we have already seen in Tournefort. Myconos continues to be the island most closely connected to Delos, and it is from thence that a learned European traveler is able to get to the famous antique island. This same Robson goes on to narrate an interesting cultural exchange that occurred in Myconos:

Here . . . the first thing I visited was one of their Churches: where by chance I found their Septuagint, and an old man nothing differing in poverty or habit from the rest, there conning his lesson, I tooke the Bible and re[a]d in it; he stood amazed at it, and offering to kisse my hand spoke to me in the common Greeke, which is so degenerate from the true and ancient, that there is either none or litle affinitie betwixt them. I answered in the learned, but I perceived he understood me as much as I did him, which was scarce one word. (9)

There is no visitation of Classical sites, and we can see that the orientation of the culture on these islands has decisively shifted. The Septuagint—not the works of Homer or Callimachus—is the touchstone for their physical environment. And although Robson betrays small-mindedness in his harsh judgment on the “degenerate” Greek language, it is nevertheless clear that this is no longer a culture with active ties to the Classical past.

The Renaissance traveler Cyriac of Ancona was an even earlier traveler to visit Delos and the surrounding Greek islands. The recent editor of his letters and diaries sketches a vivid portrait:

He is a kind of naval hitchhiker now, catching rides on the merchant ships of Venice and Genoa, carrying in his knapsack personally-owned manuscripts of Pliny's *Natural History*, Thucydides, and the ancient geographers Ptolemy, Pomponius Mela and Strabo. These he reads and annotates to keep himself busy while waiting for a ship to carry him to his next destination. (xiii)

Cyriac is thus a perfect specimen for this study, as he assiduously makes his way around Classical Greek lands with books in hand, looking to catch glimpses of a world that he can now only see with the help of books.

In 1444 AD this Italian humanist made a tour through the Cyclades, looking for ancient statues and inscriptions. From Myconos he made the expected trip to Delos, “the famous and sacred island of the Cyclades” (153), and which he later glosses as “birthplace of Phoebus” (161). He also

encountered some ruins that we will find familiar. In his terse style he mentions what he sees:

A colossal statue of Apollo twenty-four cubits tall made of bright marble:  
 The marble base, twelve feet wide and sixteen feet long: of the colossal  
 marble statue of Apollo, [is inscribed]:  
 NACIOI APOLLWNI [the Naxians to Apollo]  
 The traces and substantial, white marble remains of the ruined temple of  
 Delian Apollo: (155)

This is the colossal statue dedicated by the Naxians in the Archaic period, almost 2000 years before Cyriac. Cyriac's notations (accompanied by his own drawings) mark the beginning of what we might term the "archeological" view of the Greek landscape. Generations of travelers with similar antiquarian interests have copied inscriptions and dug into the earth and largely succeeded in recollecting the Classical past to the Western imagination.

Cyriac provides us with a description of a site on Naxos that will serve as a closing metaphor:

One climbs this steep marble height of Apollo, which is important for its ancient religious associations, with its view of the island of Delos. There, at its highest point, a naturally smooth marble wall of living rock that looks toward the rising sun with a brilliant white reflection... (165)

The "marble height of Apollo" could represent knowledge of the Classical past, and from this height Cyriac looks across the deep blue water to the island of Delos. Throughout this chapter we have been interested in the way specific cultural viewpoints change the way a physical site such as Delos is perceived and experienced. From the height of Apollo, Delos looks different, changed perhaps by the brilliant white reflection cast by the "marble wall of living rock."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MECCA: THROUGH THE EYES OF A PILGRIM

Vivid passages in the Qur'an betray the antagonism between the monotheistic message of Muhammad and traditional polytheism that once dominated Arabia. These passages fulminate against all who associate other beings with God, sometimes naming names:

Do you see Lat and Uzza  
And Manat the other third?  
Do you have a male [child] and Him a female [child]?  
(53.19–21)

Dim memories concerning each of these three goddesses are preserved in the *Book of Idols* written by Ibn al-Kalbi near the beginning of the ninth century AD. Concerning Manat—"the most ancient of all these idols" (12)—Ibn al-Kalbi writes:

...the Aws and Khazraj, as well as those Arabs among the people of [Medina] and other places who took to their way of life, were wont to go on pilgrimage and observe the vigil at all the appointed places, but not shave their heads. At the end of the pilgrimage, however, when they were about to return home, they would set out to the place where [Manat] stood, shave their heads, and stay there a while. (12–13)

The evidence used by Ibn al-Kalbi consists of quotations from early Arabic poetry that happen to mention these goddesses, or traditions passed down in the form of hadith. We find names and details of worship, but little concerning the narratives that must have underlain these practices. We have no clear conception of what it meant to arrive at "the place where Manat stood."

Scattered archeological remains of Arab civilizations, ranging from Yemen to Palmyra, serve as a second witness to pre-Islamic religion. Robert Hoyland

describes Arabian religious practices as reconstructed from inscriptions and other types of evidence:

To a number of these holy places pilgrimages would be made at certain fixed times of the year. The Sabaeans were, for example, cemented by an annual procession to the temple of Almaqah in Marib at the time of the summer rains... The Tal'ab was also an object of pilgrimage at his mountain abode in the land of Hamdam... And people went in honour of Dhu Samawi at Yathill... For as long as these ceremonies lasted pilgrims were obliged to set aside their weapons... and to abstain from sexual relations... and they would don special garments or adornments to advertise that they were temporarily exempt from the usual rules of tribal behaviour. (161)

However many details we accumulate in an effort to give imaginative life to pre-Islamic religious traditions, they are ineluctably gone, part of a lost world of narratives and rituals. Ibn al-Kalbi records the destruction of Manat: “[Muhammad] dispatched Ali to destroy her. Ali demolished her, took away all her [treasures], and carried them back to the prophet” (13). A similar fate awaited Lat and Uzza. It was this purposeful erasure that allowed for a new narrative to be mapped onto the landscape of Mecca. After 630 AD, Mecca would be known as the place where Muhammad initially received the revelation of the Qur'an and where the Abrahamic ceremonies relating to the hajj were reinstated.

F.E. Peters (1994) observes that:

The Quran merely suggests. The later Muslim tradition hastened... to fill in the details explaining how Abraham, and indeed Adam before him, had initiated the Hajj. Whatever modifications Muhammad undertook, the tradition asserted, represented a restoration of the original form of the Hajj. (58)

Through the effort to “fill in the details” of sacred history, Mecca and its central Ka'ba were created—that is, given an imaginative place within the minds of early Muslims. It is a powerful position that the site continues to hold after all these centuries—not because Muslims are somehow born hallowing the site, but because what they read, see, and hear teach them the sacred nature of Mecca. And it is narrative—a format hardwired into the human mind—that serves as the main tool for constructing the sense of the sacred. What else would it mean to “fill in the details” of the Qur'an except to create a linear narrative out of scattered points?

In this chapter we will examine two distinct ways in which narratives were settled upon the city of Mecca in the first two centuries of Islam. One is the reconstruction of the actions and traditions related to Muhammad and his farewell pilgrimage to Mecca. We cannot be sure to what extent he

envisioned his own actions as a lasting template, but there is no question that they became such, as Muslims reflected on the meaning of their faith. This template of the actions of Muhammad can be considered a narrative, since it settles as an ideal sequence of actions for a pilgrim to Mecca. A second example of narrative construction is the connection of various elements in Mecca with layers of narrative concerning sacred history. Rituals and structures that had an independent pre-Islamic existence are given a coherent place within the Islamic narrative of the past. We will approach these two narratives of Mecca through the experience of Ibn Jubayr, an Andalusian writer from present day Spain, who undertook the hajj during the years 1183–1185 AD. It is to an examination of his *Rihla* that we now turn.

### The Hajj and Ibn Jubayr

Vivid examples of the longevity of the social institution of the hajj are visible on the walls of many Egyptian homes. A visitor wandering into smaller towns, and down their streets and alleys, will see a common visual advertisement proudly announcing that the owner of the house has completed the hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca that is incumbent upon Muslims to complete during their lifetimes). The owners of these houses take the title *hajj*, having fulfilled the Quranic injunction: “Complete the hajj and umra for God...” (2.196). One house I came across in the small town of Al-Qusayr on the Red Sea coast had that Quranic injunction painted onto its wall. To the right of the verse was a square-framed image of the Ka’ba, the central shrine in Mecca around which pilgrims circumambulate. On the left was an image of an airplane, demonstrating that even though historically those who lived along the Red Sea coast commenced the hajj by means of a journey by boat to the Arabian port of Jeddah, in our time air travel has become the more comfortable and usual means of travel.

Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217 AD) would easily have understood the pride that spurs modern Egyptians to set a picture of the Ka’ba and other elements of Mecca. The book for which he is remembered, known as the *Rihla*, or *Travel Narrative of Ibn Jubayr*, is an account of his journey from Andalusia in the far west of the Islamic world to Mecca and then back again, lasting from February 1183 to April 1185. It is a book that by all appearances quickly became a classic. The historian Ibn al-Khatib, writing about 150 years later, calls the work *mashhura*, or “well-known.” Entire passages are lifted from it by later writers such as the traveler Ibn Battuta and the Egyptian historian al-Maqrizi. The modern writer I.R. Netton spotlights Ibn Jubayr’s work as the prototype for the Arabic genre of travel narrative (1994, 528).



The *Rihla* begins with a simple statement, related in the third person:

The departure of Ahmed Ibn Hasan and Muhammad Ibn Jubayr from Grenada—God protect it—with the goal of the blessed Hijaz...at the first hour of Thursday, the eighth day of the above noted Shawal, which is analogous to the third day of the foreign month of February. (47)

We learn from this short paragraph the basic facts about Ibn Jubayr's trip. He traveled in the company of a friend, he left from Grenada in present day Spain, and he began the trip on the third day of February. Careful notes as to the exact day that he enters and leaves cities will be a hallmark of his work, and the book itself is divided into chapters of unequal length marking the lunar months of the Islamic calendar.

Lacking in his notes is any notice as to what were his motivations in heading to the "blessed Hijaz"—the name for the western portion of Arabia that holds Mecca and Medina. A later biographical detail, preserved by the chronicler Maqqari (1577–1632 AD), fills in this gap with a colorful tale about Ibn Jubayr as a scribe back in Grenada:

[Ibn Jubayr], God have mercy on him, was—according to what Ibn al-Raqiq said—among the luminaries of very pious scholars. He served as a scribe at first under Sayyid Abi Sa'id Ibn 'Abd al-Mu'min the ruler of Grenada, who called for Ibn Jubayr to write a letter for him while he was drinking. He stretched his hand to Ibn Jubayr with a cup. Ibn Jubayr's anxiety became apparent, and he said, "Master, I do not drink at all." So his master responded, "By God, you shall drink seven of them!"

When he saw his master's determination, Ibn Jubayr drank seven cups. Then the master filled for him a cup of gold dinars seven times, and he poured that in his lap. Then Ibn Jubayr carried them to his house and he resolved in his heart that as reparation for his drinking he would complete the hajj with those gold dinars. Later he petitioned his master and informed him that he had sworn solemn oaths that he could not break that he would go on the hajj that year. His master granted his request and Ibn Jubayr sold a property, provisioning himself with it. Ibn Jubayr spent those dinars in the path of righteousness. (2: 385)

The tale provides a dramatic backdrop for Ibn Jubayr's trip, it being undertaken to make up for seven cups of alcohol—forbidden by Islam—drunk at the command of the ruler of Grenada. The tale has become de rigueur in biographical notices of Ibn Jubayr. Charles Pellat's sketch of Ibn Jubayr's life in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* runs as follows: "His talents won for him the post of secretary to the governor of Granada...but having been induced to drink wine on a certain occasion, he repented bitterly, and to expiate this sin decided to make the pilgrimage to Mecca" (755).

There are some good reasons, however, to doubt the historical veracity of this tale. It is notable that the story first appears in the work of the early seventeenth-century writer Maqqari, and gets no mention by the earlier chronicler of Grenada, Ibn al-Khatib (1313–1375 AD), who also provides a short biographical notice on Ibn Jubayr. Ibn al-Khatib summarizes this period of the traveler's life quickly and simply: Ibn Jubayr served as a scribe in Ceuta—near present day Tangiers—and then served in the same capacity at Grenada, winning much praise for his work, then resigned from that service and headed to the East (168). Nothing here disproves the tale from Maqqari, but Ibn al-Khatib finds no further story worthy of mention. It is also curious that Ibn al-Khatib sets Grenada as the second position taken on by Ibn Jubayr, while Maqqari's account specifically describes Grenada as his first position.

Maqqari adds to the uncertainty when he states that this information comes from a certain Ibn al-Raqiq. Elsewhere Maqqari calls him a *Maghribi*, meaning a Westerner or North African (1:193). He also supplies two descriptive adjectives: *adib*, or man of letters, and *mu'arrikh*, or historian (3:148). More helpful is the title of a book attributed to him: *The Means of Happiness [in the Description of Beverages and Liquors]* (3:148).<sup>\*</sup> It is easy to see how the story concerning Ibn Jubayr's drinking would fit into a collection on that topic; harder to judge is the trustworthiness of an account from such a book. This judgment is made more difficult by the seemingly impossible date supplied for Ibn al-Raqiq by Carl Brockelmann in his reference work on Arabic literature:

Abu Ishaq Ibr. b. al-Q. al-Katib al-Qairawani b. ar-Raqiq an-Nadim arrived in 998 AD as an ambassador of Badis b. Ziri to al-Hakim at Cairo and died after 1026 AD. (supplement 1: 252)

It goes without saying that this Ibn al-Raqiq could not have commented on the motivations of Ibn Jubayr if he was dead a full century before Ibn Jubayr's birth. Somewhere the attribution has been confused.

This same Ibn al-Raqiq resurfaces a little later in Maqqari's biographical notice concerning Ibn Jubayr:

Ibn Jubayr died in Alexandria on Wednesday the twenty-seventh day of the month of *Sha'ban* in the year 614 AH. The prayer of anyone who prays near his tomb will be granted, according to Ibn al-Raqiq, God have mercy on him. Ibn al-Raqiq also says [he died] in the year after that given here. (2:489)

From Ibn al-Raqiq's reference to the tomb in Alexandria and his assurance that "prayer near his tomb is granted" we can glean that he has information

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<sup>\*</sup> The full title is supplied by the editor of Maqqari's *Nafh al-Tayb*, along with a reference to Brockelmann passage quoted below.

regarding local Egyptian traditions about Ibn Jubayr. A note about prayers being answered at the tomb of Ibn Jubayr in Alexandria is hardly going to have Andalusia as its place of origin. The reported disagreement of Ibn al-Raqiq with the standard date for the death of Ibn Jubayr is puzzling and points to separate and perhaps local traditions about the writer.

The information associated with Ibn al-Raqiq by Maqqari has a way of occluding the points of genuine interest within the text of Ibn Jubayr's *Rihla*. Since our goal is to enquire into the cultural lens through which Ibn Jubayr perceives Mecca, it is important to question the historical foundation of this drinking tale, which is itself a lens for understanding Ibn Jubayr. We can begin by asking about what kind of internal evidence is present in the text of the *Rihla*, and what do we know about its historical context.

Reviewing the collections of biographical notices on Andalusian scholars, Michael Lenker notes:

The journey to the heartlands of Islam was of such significance that it constituted the foremost biographical information to be recorded, the true essence of each entry, and the centerpiece of all personal data. This is obvious from a number of very brief biographies in various compilations which contain nothing but the name of the individual and a short statement that he made the rihla. (197)

Ibn Jubayr falls slightly later than Lenker's primary focus and thus does not receive much attention in his study. Yet it is significant that the earliest biographical notice concerning Ibn Jubayr—that of Ibn al-Khatib—sketches his three pilgrimages to the East and treats them as the major events of his life, thus confirming Lenker's view concerning the biographical significance of travel to the East. From the perspective of several centuries of regular travel from Spain to the central Islamic lands, there was no need to give a reason for the travel of Ibn Jubayr—it fit into a common pattern.

Lenker works out from the biographical notices that the most common age for the pilgrimage was between the ages of 27 and 33 (215). Ibn Jubayr at the time of his initial journey was 38, and thus just past what we might call the "pilgrimage prime." Lenker also notes that "No one traveled to the East alone" (218). And we have already seen how at the beginning of his narrative Ibn Jubayr states that he embarked on his journey with a companion, Ahmed Ibn Hasan. This fact is also mentioned in Ibn al-Khatib's early biographical notice. The main purpose for most of these journeys, according to Lenker, was study:

From the foregoing it is possible to gauge how important the rihla was for the Andalusians. Far from being restricted to the search and study of

Tradition, it was a many-sided intellectual endeavor, true “Wanderjahre” spent with the best scholars in various parts of the Islamic world. (195)

Just how successfully Ibn Jubayr embraced this learning aspect of his pilgrimage can be glimpsed in Ibn al-Khatib’s dense list of the many teachers that Ibn Jubayr met and studied with during his travels (169–170).

Nor was Ibn Jubayr a lone *Maghribi*, or Westerner, in the East. In his narrative he has many occasions to note the presence of fellow Muslims from the West. These notes begin early with his mention of the Ibn Tulun Mosque in Cairo:

The Sultan made [the Ibn Tulun mosque] a refuge for *Maghribi* foreigners living and gathering in study circles there and granted a subsistence for them every month. (60)

Likewise, toward the close of his *Rihla* when he discusses Damascus, Ibn Jubayr notes how the Sultan Nur al-Din had found employment there for foreigners from the Maghrib, and this program had been so successful that he writes a call for more westerners to travel to the East:

So anyone born in our *Maghrib* who desires prosperity, let him travel to this country and live as a foreigner in search of knowledge, for he will find many helpful circumstances, the foremost being the lack of worry about making a living... The East’s door is wide open for that, so enter, you diligent one, in safety! (227)

In passages such as these, Ibn Jubayr refers to fellow westerners who have come before him as well as those who will come after him. He does not represent himself as a heroic traveler making his way where few have gone before. Neither Ibn Jubayr nor Ibn al-Khatib, his first surviving biographer, provides any explanation for this trip from Spain to the East, and the reason appears to be that no reason was expected; it was a common choice for an educated man such as Ibn Jubayr.

The tale told by Maqqari about the origin of Ibn Jubayr’s journey has a way of insinuating itself into discussions of the *Rihla*. In a study on Ibn Jubayr, I.R. Netton makes extensive use of the tale:

...his *Rihla* was a pilgrimage undertaken to make expiation...for the specific fault of wine-drinking: even though he had been forced to drink wine by the Almohad governor or Grenada... , his delicate conscience bade him to make amends. This motive of [expiation], rather than pure [seeking after knowledge] must have been the driving force on his journey, and omnipresent to him.... (1993, 57–58)

This assumption of a hidden “real reason” for his journey leads not only to a questionable view of Ibn Jubayr as a person, but also to a distorted reading of his *Rihla*, which comes out a few pages later in Netton’s study:

...it should never be forgotten by the reader of the *Rihla* that its primary motor is the expiation of the “sin” forced upon him in Grenada. Whether this desire for penitence and expiation unconsciously informs the occasional virulence of his writing about sectarian Islam, or Christianity, in an excess of zeal, remains a matter of speculation. It must surely be responsible, however, in part at least, for the extended narrative about, and description of, the Cities of Mecca and Medina: by laying such conscious stress on their physical description and the pilgrimage ceremonies, Ibn Jubayr, at least unconsciously, manifests to all, including the Almohad governor of Grenada, that his purpose is accomplished, expiation is made and forgiveness from Allah surely achieved. (1993, 62)

As we have seen, there is reason to be wary of the tale reported by Maqqari. The journey of Ibn Jubayr to the East needed no special motive, and there is no hint within his *Rihla* that he is looking for expiation.

We might wonder, then, just what purpose this tale of drinking and guilt could have served. Netton, oddly enough, provides in the above quotation a perfect example as to how a scrap of biographical information can shift the attention of a reader. With the tale in mind, a reader is apt to look for deeper resonance and to see significance in unexpected places. A text that otherwise might be a disappointment to a later piety-minded Muslim now becomes a tale of expiation. A parallel can be drawn with the short biographical headings attached to many biblical Psalms that are “of David.” Knowing that Psalm 51 was written by David “when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba” powerfully shapes the reception of the Psalm for a later reader. In a similar fashion, biographical information about Ibn Jubayr could add another layer of religious interest to the work.

The case of the Egyptian Sufi poet Umar Ibn al-Farid (1181–1235 AD) throws further light on the life of Ibn Jubayr. Although their lives overlapped chronologically, and they both spent significant time in Mecca and Egypt, it is not often that these two writers are mentioned together. Their literary output would never be confused, the one writing a classic travel narrative, the other being the master of symbolic Sufi poetry dense with wordplay. Ibn Jubayr is known primarily for his *Rihla*, but this was by no means the end of his output. Some long passages of poetry are preserved in the biographical notices of Ibn al-Khatib and later in the work of Maqqari. In addition to this poetry, Ibn Jubayr appears to have been identified with Sufi thought and practice. Ibn al-Khatib notes that after his return from

his second trip to the East in 1191 AD, Ibn Jubayr lived in Grenada and then moved to several other cities, finally reaching Fez in present day Morocco. There, according to Ibn al-Khatib, he was

... devoted to the Sufi way of life and to transmitting the learning he had. His merit is wondrous; his piety confirmed; his devout works are recalled. (169)

Ibn Jubayr and Ibn al-Farid shared a common interest in Mecca. In the passage cited above, Netton points out that Ibn Jubayr spends an inordinate amount of time describing Mecca—between a quarter and a third of his *Rihla*. The poet Ibn al-Farid was also drawn to Mecca and the hajj. Th. Emil Homerin writes concerning the long poem *al-Ta'iyah al-Kubra* by Ibn al-Farid: “The pilgrimage to Mecca is a pivotal theme in this and other poems by Ibn al-Farid, as he recalls some of the pilgrims’ rites and rituals and several stopping places along the way” (1994, 9).

Much of Homerin’s book on Ibn al-Farid concerns the transformation of the poet into a saint. He traces this transformation by noting his slowly expanding biographies. Beginning with rather short and unremarkable notices about his life, the biographical information expands over the course of a couple of centuries into the miraculous—stories fitting for a Sufi poet. Some of the stories collected about Ibn al-Farid take on a family resemblance to the tale of wine and expiation that we have seen attached to Ibn Jubayr. One colorful example concerns the Ayyubid Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil. Delighted with Ibn al-Farid’s poetry, the sultan sends a secretary to offer him 1000 dinars, but of course the Sufi poet will have nothing to do with the money or with the sultan (45–46), because:

... while some Sufi authorities permitted pious people to associate with sultans and the ruling elite, they cautioned against flattery, pomposity, and, especially, moral compromise, since to accept a gift might be unlawful if its donor had acquired it illegally. The safest route in such matters, then, was to abstain from meeting with rulers or attending court, so as to guard one’s piety and reputation. (Homerin 1994, 47)

The tale about Ibn Jubayr drinking at the behest of the sultan of Grenada, and his later guilt and expiation, conforms closely to what Egyptian readers would expect concerning a devout Sufi and his relation with worldly authorities. Moreover, by comparison to this example from the life of Ibn al-Farid in which the poet turns down a monetary gift offered to him by the Sultan, we see that the tale of drinking provides for extenuating circumstances in Ibn Jubayr’s acceptance of such a gift. It also had the advantage of allowing for a spiritual reading of his well-known *Rihla*.

The hagiographic treatment of Ibn al-Farid led to the construction of a shrine:

That Ibn al-Farid's grave was increasingly regarded as holy ground is evident from guidebooks on the Qarafa [a cemetery outside Cairo], written during the... 14th–15th centuries... Given Ibn al-Farid's rising popularity, it was only natural that his grave would become the recipient of Mamluk patronage... this Mamluk elite hoped to gain religious reward through their attentions to holy persons whether living or dead. (Homerin 1989–1990, 134)

Today a visitor to Egypt can locate this small shrine in the midst of a vast cemetery, and although it suffered a long period of neglect, it is now given at least minimal care. Just as the tomb of Ibn al-Farid received increased attention during the Mamluk period in Egypt—as early as the fifteenth century a shrine was dedicated at his grave—so the tomb of a famed and pious writer such as Ibn Jubayr also appears to have attracted religious dedications and a shrine, as is clear from the note attributed to Ibn al-Raḥiq that prayers are answered at his grave. In Ibn Jubayr's case the path to veneration ended, and the later fate of his tomb is not known.

Whatever may have been the opinion of later readers, or perhaps even the interpretation of his younger life spread by an older Ibn Jubayr, the *Rihla* itself appears as a book meant for its time, meant for a definite and clear readership. If we were looking to find a reason for this book—as opposed to the trip itself—one of the first places we should look is at those passages that advise and direct future travelers from the West. Ibn Jubayr chose to come to Mecca by going south along the Nile, crossing the desert to the town of 'Aydhab, and finally making the arduous boat trip to Jeddah. Along the way, Ibn Jubayr thought better of this chosen route and informs his readers—fellow westerners—how they should proceed to Mecca:

It is preferable for whoever is able is to avoid ['Aydhab] and take the route by way of Syria to Iraq, to arrive with the commander of the hajj at Baghdad. And even if that is not possible at the start, then at the end, at the time of the dispersal of the pilgrims, he should go with that same commander of the hajj to Baghdad, and from there to Acre, and if he wants let him travel from there to Alexandria, and then if he likes to Sicily. (75)

This passage, set early in the *Rihla*, is an example of the kind of advice provided as a travel narrative to act as a guide to those who come after him.

The tendency of modern commentators is to portray his work as a straightforward, diary-like account of a trip. Lenker, for example, characterizes it as “a day by day diary recording every important event and fact in Ibn

Jubayr's journey" (34). Netton follows a similar track: "Ibn Jubayr must have been a frequent, careful and punctilious diarist (or had an extraordinary memory)" (1993, 60). Yet these descriptions of the work do a disservice to its obviously complex compositional history. The passage cited above discredits the "diary" explanation since it shows clearly a retrospective stance from which Ibn Jubayr looks back on his trip and recommends that future pilgrims attend the hajj by way of a different route than the paths by which he himself arrived and left. With the benefit of hindsight, he was in the position to set down the best route, but he would obviously not have been in a position to offer this advice at the early stage of the journey in which this note falls. Passages such as this force us to revisit the diary hypothesis and posit a later construction of his work, allowing him on many occasions to work diary-like notes into more finished passages, but on other occasions to simply let his rough notations stand relatively unchanged.

This sort of scenario appears to be in the mind of a certain Abu al-Hasan al-Shari, quoted by Ibn al-Khatib in his biographical notice:

[He said] that the *Rihla* was not among [Ibn Jubayr's] compositions, but that rather he noted down the essence of what his *Rihla* contains, then someone who received from him what he instructed took charge of the arrangement of the *Rihla* and the composition of its contents. God knows best [what the truth is]. (171)

This is a report that no modern writer has taken an interest in. Yet it cannot be too quickly dismissed since it appears in the earliest biography of Ibn Jubayr and also finds a parallel with the compositional history of the fourteenth century *Rihla* of Ibn Battuta. In that case, it is clear from the *Rihla* itself that while Ibn Battuta was the one recounting memories, the actual composition was in the hands of Ibn Juzayy (Ibn Battuta 6–7). Ibn al-Khatib counts the *Rihla* as written by Ibn Jubayr, and his "God knows best" at the end of the above quotation marks a level of doubt as to the veracity of the report. But even if we dismiss the idea that someone besides Ibn Jubayr composed his *Rihla*, we can see that an astute early reader has seen the cracks in the diary hypothesis and noted that a second layer of considered composition has gone into this work.

An article by J.N. Mattock, although cumbersome in its literary evaluations, arrives at an important distinction in which he finds both "description" and "narrative" within the *Rihla* of Ibn Jubayr (36). This distinction is elaborated neither by Mattock nor by Netton—who also makes reference to this distinction (58)—, but from our point of view this distinction is better explained by a two-part composition process. On one hand there are clearly sections of the *Rihla* in which passages have



a diary-like feel, and these are notable for their brisk narrative style and constant attention to the date. These passages seem to be lifted right out of a travel journal. On the other hand there are large sections of text devoted to the description of important cities. In these passages dates are largely absent and there is a markedly raised rhetorical level.

The section on Damascus illustrates what is meant by this distinction:

The Month of Rabi‘ al-Akhir

The new moon [of his month] rose on Wednesday, which is the same as the eleventh of July, we being in Damascus, staying at the Dar al-Hadith to the west of the noble mosque.

The Account of the City of Damascus,

God the Most High protect it

The paradise of the East. The dawn of [the East’s] pleasing and radiant loveliness. She is the seal of the lands of Islam we have explored and the bride of the cities which we have observed. She is adorned with fragrant blossoms and honored in dress of silk brocade from gardens. She holds a firm position in the place of loveliness, and she was most beautifully decorated on her bridal chair. She was honored by the fact that God most high gave shelter to the Messiah and his mother, God bless both of them, from the city “on a hill possessed of repose and well-watered.” (209–210)

The principle means of organization throughout the *Rihla* is the marking of each new lunar month. In the close of the previous month, Ibn Jubayr moved step by step from Homs to Damascus. The opening of the new month continues in this diary-like style, and he briefly mentions the name of a hostel where he was staying, but then abruptly changes his style. The Account that follows is formal in its concern to poetically describe Damascus, as well as in the choice of words, which quite suddenly become high register and allusive. Examples of this verbal formality are evident throughout this passage, although hidden in an English translation. Damascus is called the *jannat al-mashriq*, or “paradise of the East.” In the very next phrase the root for “East” is repeated, but this time as the adjective *al-mushriq*, meaning “radiant” or “shining.” Damascus is referred to as occupying “a firm position in the place of loveliness.” For “firm position” Ibn Jubayr has used the construction *al-makan al-makin*, taking advantage of a noun and similar sounding adjective. It is apparent that Ibn Jubayr had a reputation for this kind of intricate rhetorical writing since in his biographical notice Ibn al-Khatib included a lengthy specimen of similar prose, drawn from a legal document (173–174).

This “Account of the City of Damascus,” therefore, was in all likelihood not a diary entry composed spontaneously as he looked out the window of his hostel *Dar al-Hadith*. It is a carefully crafted piece of writing. The remainder of the section on Damascus is less rhetorically dense, yet it

continues to function as a coherent unit. Through fourteen pages of Arabic text there are no dates or narrative passages; instead Ibn Jubayr provides a careful description of the central mosque of Damascus, including precise notes about its dimensions and appearance and history. From this central mosque, Ibn Jubayr progresses to sites in the vicinity of Damascus, which also have the impress of religious significance, one example being Jabal Qasyun, a mountain overlooking Damascus, where Abraham was said to have been born, and from where one could see the place where Cain killed Abel—the *magharat al-dam*, or “Cave of the Blood.” A coherent section such as this, which moves methodically through the city in a hierarchical fashion, does not mimic the natural steps of a visitor going to one site one day and another the next day, but is a final product in which a sum total of observances were compiled and included in a single lengthy descriptive section, and this section was then inserted into the chapter headed by the month *Rabi’ al-Akhir*.

At the end of the passage cited above from the Account of the city of Damascus, Ibn Jubayr employs a verse from the Qur’an. The verse in its entirety reads:

We gave the son of Mary and his mother a sign, and we gave refuge to those two at a hill possessed of repose and well-watered. (23.50)

The allusion to this verse was no poetic conceit, used in the way that some western writer might employ a few lines of pastoral poetry in a description of a natural scene. Ibn Jubayr here resembles Samuel Johnson alluding to *Macbeth* while traveling in Scotland, and expects his audience to understand the reference. In the Qur’an the verse is self-contained, and no further details about this particular event in sacred history are found in the text, but Islamic tradition had hastened to fill in the context of this verse, and it was often assigned to Damascus. In the book, *The Excellences of the Sham [Syria] and Damascus*, the eleventh-century writer al-Raba’i devotes several pages to traditions relating to this verse.

The prophet, God bless him and grant him salvation, recited the following verse, the word of the Exalted: “We gave [the son of Mary and his mother] refuge at a hill possessed of repose and well-watered.” Then [the prophet] said: “Do you know where that is?” They said: “God and his prophet know.” [The prophet] said: “It is in al-Sham, at the piece of land known as al-Ghawtah, a city known as Damascus, which is the best city in al-Sham” [Syria]. (17)

This same interpretation is repeated many times in literature on Damascus. The sixteenth century composer of a pilgrimage guide to Damascus,

Ibn al-Hawrani likewise cites this verse near the beginning of his account of Damascus (Meri 2001, 22).

Reading this Damascene literature, one might be tempted to believe that this linkage of the verse to Damascus was a settled fact, but the identity of this place was debated, and scholars supplied several different answers. The thirteenth-century commentator al-Qurtubi supplies a handful of interpretations for this verse, each having its own, no doubt, vociferous exponent: al-Ramla in Palestine, the Temple mount in Jerusalem, Damascus, or even Cairo (126–127). Such was the prestige of getting a mention in the Qur’an that an oblique place reference was bound to attract multiple claimants. Looking through a commentary by a fellow westerner such as al-Qurtubi, Ibn Jubayr would have found several choices for this identification, but in the local literature on Damascus, he found one clear and repeated interpretation for the verse. His choice to apply this verse to Damascus in a book that would soon gain wide circulation was a further sedimentation of this interpretation.

The book cited above, *The Excellences of the Sham and Damascus*, is particularly interesting for us since Ibn Jubayr twice informs us that he has read it (211, 222). Another time he mentions the *Reports about Damascus*, by the twelfth century historian Ibn ‘Asakir (219)—a work that, as Ibn Jubayr notes, ran to around 100 volumes. Josef Meri notes that in Ibn ‘Asakir’s work,

Places came to be associated with holy persons, including the Prophet Muhammad, ‘Ali, Husayn, Mary (Maryam), Noah (Nuh), Abraham (Ibrahim) . . . and with events from the sacred past, such as the murder of Abel on Mt. Qasiyun outside Damascus, the construction of Damascus’ walls and its Congregational Mosque, as well as the descent of the Messiah at the end of time. (2001, 11)

This passage underscores, in the case of Damascus, the broader point that has been argued throughout this study: one cultural task that literary works serve is the creation of significant space through the association of significant narratives with prominent features of a landscape. These associations are long-lasting and come to be part of the social framework of knowledge that shapes the way individuals experience the landscape. When Ibn Jubayr visited Damascus, he arrived with a large number of general expectations reflecting his Muslim upbringing, and through his reading of contemporary guidebooks, this baseline knowledge would have been augmented so that he received an official version of the city that went beyond the pieces of information that “everyone” knows. *The Excellences of the Sham and Damascus* by al-Raba’i is thus an example of a topo-creative work. The direct influence of this work can be measured through the

reportage and description of Ibn Jubayr, who writes about Damascus with the same language and stock descriptions that he found in this work.

There is nothing strange in the notion that books can serve as ideal introductions to a place. Anywhere one looks in the literature of travel, the presence of books and knowledgeable guides becomes manifest. This is not only a result of the mundane need to get directions and to arrive safely and with a modicum of comfort, it also is a product of the need to absorb and understand what is being perceived. Thomas Jefferson once wrote out some advice on travel, and the first bit of this advice relates to books: "On arriving at a town, the first thing is to buy the plan of the town, and the book noting its curiosities" (659). In his own travel journal one can see just how pervasive this influence can be:

While [Whately's] descriptions, in point of style, are models of perfect elegance and classical correctness, they are as remarkable for their exactness. I always walked over the gardens with his book in my hand, examined with attention the particular spots he described, found them so justly characterized by him as to be easily recognized, and saw with wonder, that his fine imagination had never been able to seduce him from the truth. (623)

If we imagine talking to Jefferson after walking around a garden, we should not be surprised to hear his descriptions of his experience sounding remarkably similar to those presented by Whately in his book on English gardens.

Although Ibn Jubayr's *Rihla* is often read as if it contained an individual's experience—a daily diary account of happenings along his route—, close examination reveals that passage after passage turn out to be shaped by previous written constructions. This is not to say that Ibn Jubayr is consciously copying; it is simply to say that the human experience of place is never without specific historic and generic associations. Every traveler relates the landscape in front of him or her, whether natural or human-built, to what is known in the way of historical facts and the conventions of different genres. These associations, as we shall see, are not free-floating in a mythical collective memory, nor are they triggered by place itself, but communicated by specific cultural products. In cultures that emphasize written texts, those texts—perhaps familiar from early childhood—are the constructors of the associations by which a place is perceived. These texts are the guides, and Ibn Jubayr, in his attempt to describe what he sees, often follows the paths that long before had been established. Texts gain authority with a culture for a variety of reasons, but once accepted, they set out the verbal paths and systems of references that determine the experience of a place.

Our mental image of Ibn Jubayr, then, should consist not so much of a "penitent" pilgrim making his way around the central Islamic lands

in search of forgiveness, but rather of an active and curious traveler busy reading the important histories and guidebooks concerning the cities he is visiting. Ibn Jubayr provides us with a vivid portrayal of his participation in this culture of books in his description of his ride across the Egyptian desert, crossing from the Nile valley to the town of 'Aydhab on the Red Sea coast:

No one can travel in this desert except upon camels because of its endurance for thirst, and the best thing that people of means use [to ride] on them are the "sedans," resembling camel litters, and the best kinds are those from Yemen... The rider is in this sedan along with his companion in a shelter from the scorching of the midday heat, and he sits relaxing and reclining in its hollow. He along with his companion can partake of what they need from the provisions or anything else, and whenever he wants he can read the Holy Book or another book, and whoever thinks playing chess permissible, and wants to play with his companion, can play for amusement and recreation. (71)

Besides the Qur'an, we have no way of knowing what else Ibn Jubayr was reading on this luxurious ride in a camel sedan. How assiduously he pursued his Qur'an reading we ascertain from the diary page where we learn that on the twenty-sixth day of the month of Safar he finished memorizing the *Kitab Allah*, or the "Book of God" (72). From the scattered references to books, throughout his *Rihla*, we can see that he was an avid consumer of historical accounts and guides concerning the renowned cities he was visiting. Like a modern tourist, he appears to have done his best to learn about the places he was seeing, and therefore to be an informed traveler.

The remainder of this chapter will be thus concerned with enquiring further into Ibn Jubayr the reader. Or, to put it differently, we will enquire into the sources that enabled Ibn Jubayr to interpret and find meaning in the world around him. What he takes from these sources are widely held narratives that shape the experience of pilgrims to Mecca. First we will take up the way multiple traditions about Muhammad's actions in Mecca came to form an ideal narrative of a pilgrim's actions. Then in the subsequent section we will turn to the creation of multileveled narratives concerning sacred history that linked important elements of the landscape of Mecca into a coherent whole.

### **Guides to the Pilgrimage**

The pilgrim's entrance into Mecca is a naturally dramatic moment, often the climax of a long and arduous journey, and it is not surprising that

the entrance scene gains significant attention from pilgrims who have written about the hajj. The Swiss traveler John Lewis Burckhardt left a detailed record of his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1814. His description, aimed at a western audience for whom almost every aspect of the pilgrimage would be foreign, provides details that often go unmentioned in Arabic accounts:

Whoever enters Mekka, whether pilgrim or not, is enjoined by the law to visit the Temple immediately, and not to attend to any worldly concern whatever, before he has done so. We crossed the line of shops and houses, up to the gates of the mosque, where my ass-driver took his fare and set me down: here I was accosted by half a dozen *metowef*, or guides to the holy places, who knew, from my being dressed in the ihram, that I intended to visit the Kaaba. I chose one of them as my guide, and, after having deposited my baggage in a neighboring shop, entered the mosque at the gate called Bab-es'-Salam, by which the new-comer is recommended to enter. (94)

Within this passage are many signs that the experience of Mecca is constructed by authorities. Burckhardt emphasizes that certain duties are mandatory for a visitor to Mecca “by the law.” This is not, of course, a reference to formal civic codes, but to the religious decisions that comprise the Muslim *fiqh*, or Islamic jurisprudence. Burckhardt does not hint as to where he learned these rules, but there was no reason for him to open a book since it formed the expected procedure that pilgrims followed. The ingrained social strength of this system is evident as the *mutawwifun*—the name for pilgrim guides at Mecca—surround Burckhardt, trying to gain him as a client. Burckhardt’s pilgrimage intentions are signaled to these *mutawwifun* by his cloak, the *ihram*, which consisted of two seamless woolen or linen sheets. The cloak symbolized that the pilgrim had become a *muhrim*, or one who had entered into a state of ritual purity until he had completed the *umra*.<sup>\*</sup> The final sentence of the above passage hints further at the underlying system of experience, as Burckhardt notes that the visitor is “recommended” to enter the mosque at a particular gate, the Bab al-Salam.

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\* The ‘umra is sometimes called the “lesser pilgrimage” and involves only the ritual actions related to the central section of Mecca, such as the circumambulation of the Ka’ba and the other actions expected of the pilgrims as they enter Mecca. The rituals connected to the ‘umra are also part of the hajj, but instead of always distinguishing them I will make constant use of the term hajj.

In 1853, traveling in disguise, the adventurer Richard Burton completed the hajj. In his *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Medinah and Meccah* he describes the approach to Mecca:

About one A.M. I was aroused by general excitement. "Meccah! Meccah!" cried some voices; "The Sanctuary! O the Sanctuary!" exclaimed others; and all burst into loud "Labayk," not unfrequently broken by sobs. I looked out from my litter, and saw by the light of the Southern stars the dim outlines of a large city, a shade darker than the surrounding plain. (vol. 2, 152)

Burton mentions the special prayer that pilgrims repeat from the time they don the *ihram* until they complete the hajj. The prayer begins *labbayka allahumma labbayka* ("Here I am, O Lord, here I am"). This prayer is known as the *talbiya* and occurs at the front of the special books that contain the necessary prayers for the hajj and umra. These books, which are today widely available in small inexpensive editions, contain many prayers besides this one. In fact there is a prayer for every ritual performed by the pilgrim as he or she enters Mecca. These prayers provide a structure and standard for the experience of the hajj.

Such a book of prayers poses logistical challenges for a pilgrim who has never undertaken the hajj, since it is difficult for a pilgrim to navigate all the details such as starting the circumambulation at the correct corner or knowing where the Maqam Ibrahim is located. This difficulty gave rise to the need for a guide, or *mutawwif*. The word for the circumambulation is *tawaf*, and the word for a pilgrim guide is formed from the same root. The *mutawwifun* are not just "guides" but literally those who enable someone to complete the *tawaf*, and it is a word employed specifically for the guides at Mecca whose primary work is to communicate the required actions and prayers. Such a function makes them indispensable to the pilgrim.

A signal feature of Burton's narrative of his undercover pilgrimage is his attention to such details of the pilgrim's experience. His *mutawwif* is a boy named Muhammad who was not hired in Mecca but had traveled there with Burton. We can glimpse the central role of this boy in Burton's description:

Then commenced the ceremony of *Tawáf*, or circumambulation, our route being the *Mataf*—the low oval of polished granite immediately surrounding the Ka'abah. I repeated, after my Mutawwif, or cicerone, "In the Name of Allah, and Allah is omnipotent!" I purpose to circuit seven circuits. . . . As we paced slowly round the north or Irak corner of the Ka'abah we exclaimed. . . . (vol. 2, 166)

In the course of his circuits Burton needed to say the correct prayers, and here the *mutawwif* was necessary, saying the prayers and allowing Burton to repeat them. For all his swagger, Burton was simply following the pattern dictated by his *mutawwif*, and the *mutawwif* in turn simply repeated the practices and words learned from those before him.

Modern pilgrim Michael Wolfe provides an updated but similar description of the circumambulation:

Keeping the shrine on our left, we began to turn. Ibrahim and Mardini went ahead, calling words over their shoulders as we followed. There were special supplications for every angle of the building, but not many pilgrims had them memorized. Now and then we passed someone reading set prayers from a handbook... (164)

One can imagine trying to maneuver through a huge crowded mosque for the first time, doing one's utmost to complete the necessary rituals, and at the same time trying to read or recall the long prayers at each corner and completion of a circuit.

The prayers uttered by the pilgrims are uniformly theological in character, exhorting God for forgiveness or simply recounting his attributes. Even at a site that is connected to a tangible story, such as the *hijr* where the patriarch Ishmael is said to be buried, the prayer prescribed for the pilgrim is focused on God alone:

O God, you are my Lord there is no God but you. You created me and I am your servant. I will keep your covenant and promise as I am able. I seek refuge with you from evil I do. (Records of the Hajj, 42)

The prayer continues in a similarly theological and abstract vein. Unlike the performative words from an ancient paean by Pindar, the prayers do not recount stories and map them onto the specificities of the landscape. There is no mention of any features of the Meccan landscape. The prayers reinforce abstract Islamic themes concerning the nature and oneness of God and the need for complete submission.

Mecca is a city experienced on a model we could label as "closed"—as opposed to the perhaps illusory tourist expectation of being able to "explore" a modern city. The pilgrim to Mecca is not confronted with a broad array of choices and possible actions, but the experience is directed by specific and traditional prescriptions. At the beginning of this study we noted the Christian narrative concerning the early visit of the Holy Family to Egypt, successfully mapped onto the landscape of Egypt by the Copts.



Damascus also comes to mind, which has Christian traditions surviving side by side with specifically Islamic ones, including sites connected to the biblical narrative of the conversion of St. Paul. In these cases there are numerous angles and alternative texts through which a landscape can be experienced. Christians and Muslims move through places crowded with differing associations.

Alternative constructions to the experience of Mecca exist, and are possible through stealth. One example of such stealth is the Shi‘a practice of *taqiyya*, or dissimulation. The root distinction between orthodox Sunnis and Shi‘ites is a radically different understanding of early Islamic history, especially with relation to the succession of Caliphs following the death of Muhammad, and sacred sites throughout the “blessed Hijaz” reflect and celebrate the Sunni understanding of Islamic history. Shi‘ites performing the hajj had no choice but to follow the prescribed path. Burton, while practicing his own version of secular dissimulation, relished his recognition of the contortions that Shi‘ites went through at Medina—second only to Mecca in importance—in order to secretly acknowledge their own version of history:

Then the Satanic scowls with which they passed by, or pretended to pray at, the hated Omar’s tomb! With what curses their hearts are belying those mouths full of blessings! How they are internally canonising Fayruz—the Persian slave who stabbed Omar in the Mosque—and praying for his eternal happiness in the presence of the murdered man! Sticks and stones, however, and not unfrequently the knife and the sabre, have taught them the hard lesson of disciplining their feelings... (vol. 1, 435)

The recurring persecution encountered by Shi‘ite pilgrims is testimony to the difficulty of approaching Mecca through any lens other than the one prescribed.

Ibn Jubayr, as a Sunni, felt no need to dissimulate during his visit to Mecca. The brief narrative of his entrance to Mecca reveals a man thoroughly immersed in the orthodox reading of the city. It has already been made clear that the experience of Mecca was determined by a system that had acquired a great deal of specificity in Muslim legal texts. These legal systems—the main Sunni schools being the Maliki, Shafi‘i, Hanafi, and Hanbali—were built, with varying principles of application, upon the foundation of the Qur’an and the collections of accepted hadith. In the outline of this system a learned Muslim—such as Ibn Jubayr—could recognize the words and actions ascribed to Muhammad in the literature of hadith.

Our specific text of comparison will be with the collection of hadith gathered by al-Bukhari (810–870 AD), known as the *Sahih al-Bukhari*. The canonical status of this collection is universally recognized. A collection such as the one by al-Bukhari was founded through a method of critical enquiry that began very early in Islamic history, the goal of the scholar being to discern by means of the *isnad*, or chain of authority, the reliability of an individual hadith, or tradition. The assumption in such scholarship is that if the *isnad* is sound, then the tradition is genuine. More recent academic studies of hadith argue over their reliability in reconstructing early Islamic history. For our purposes, however, such historical reconstructions matter little, as our attempt is not to get back to what did or did not happen in the early Islamic community, but to understand the process of imposing order on these traditions.

An organizational framework is no negligible thing. Such a framework imposed on the traditions—presumably collected in no particular order—could, unwittingly even, guide and determine the experience of later believers. The order imposed on the individual traditions allows for a mass of details concerning what Muhammad said and did to be corralled into a document that reflects a comprehensive way of life. The need for such an order is clear when one considers the crisis of authority that inevitably developed in the early years of Islam, described by Marshall Hodgson as follows:

In short, no man, no institution, no human structure of any sort could legitimately be vested with any responsibility which could relieve the individual Muslim of his direct and all-embracing responsibility before God. (320)

One solution to this crisis, developed by Sunni Muslim thinkers in the eighth and ninth centuries, was to valorize the practices that Muhammad had instituted at Medina. This answer naturally led to a great emphasis on gathering historical recollections concerning Muhammad's words and actions, and in time the great collections of hadith emerged, foremost among them being the collection by al-Bukhari.

Book 26 of the *Sahih al-Bukhari* is dedicated to the hajj and contains 534 traditions, often overlapping in content. Al-Bukhari had personal experience of the hajj, which he first completed at the age of 16. It is no surprise, then, to find his collection of hadith following the imaginary progress of a pilgrim. The assumption throughout the chapter on the hajj, sometimes made explicit, is that the actions of the pilgrim will, broadly speaking, follow the recollected actions of the prophet. What

did Muhammad wear? Where did he put on the *ihram*? What did he do in Mecca and in what order? The answers to these questions, along with statements attributed to Muhammad about technical matters, formed the basis for the prescribed acts of the pilgrim.

A little over 300 years after al-Bukhari organized verifiable hadith into his grand collection, and ordered the ones connected to the hajj into a single chapter, Ibn Jubayr visited Mecca. Beginning the short journey from Jeddah on the coast to Mecca, Ibn Jubayr writes:

We traveled that night until we reached al-Qurayn at the rising of the sun. This spot is a stopping place for the pilgrim and a place to set down baggage. Here [the pilgrims] take on the *ihram* and rest through the day which has just begun, and when night comes along they get things together and travel through the night, they arrive in the morning at the noble Haram. (82)

The “noble Haram” is here the mosque surrounding the Ka’ba, and so this passage finds Ibn Jubayr one night’s journey from his destination.

Al-Bukhari’s chapter on the hajj accords special attention to the placement of the *mawaqit* (sing. *miqat*), or boundary points for the entry to the large sacred precinct, also known as the Haram (the basic meaning of which is an inviolable area). The entrance to the sacred land was marked by means of *mawaqit* and it was at these points that pilgrims were required to put on the *ihram*:

... Ibn ‘Abbas reported: the Prophet of God (peace be upon him) set as *miqat* for the people of Medina Dhū al-Hulayfah, and al-Juhfah for the people of Sham, and Qarn al-Manazil for the people of Najd, and Yalamlam for the people of Yemen. Those [*mawaqit*] are for the people [from those areas] as well as for whoever arrives there from elsewhere intending to perform the hajj and umra. (volume 2, number 599)

Each of these places represent different directions by which pilgrims might arrive at Mecca, Yemen being from the south, Medina and Sham being in the north, and Najd standing in for the northeast. The lack of any specific place for pilgrims coming from Jeddah—a city on the Red Sea coast to the west of Mecca—resulted from the dearth of pilgrims coming from there in the earlier years of Islam. One of the hadith collected by al-Bukhari deals with just the question of what to do when one approaches Mecca in a way that was not covered by the traditional routes, and the answer given by Umar was that a new *miqat* should be created by analogy with the existing ones (volume 2, number 606). By Ibn Jubayr’s time Jeddah had become a major arrival point for pilgrims

coming by sea, and so al-Qurayn, a day's journey from the sacred sites in Mecca, had become the *miqat*.

We next find Ibn Jubayr arriving at Mecca after an all night camel ride:

And we entered Mecca—God protect it!—in the first hour of Thursday the thirteenth day of the month of *Rabi'*, which is the fourth day of August, at the Umra Gate. Our journey lasted all through that night, the full moon throwing its rays onto the earth, the night having removed its mask for us, and voices beating our ears with *labbayka allahumma labbayk* from everywhere, tongues clamoring with supplication, supplicating to God for answers, now growing vehement with *labbayka allahumma labbayk*, and now entreating with supplications. (82)

The Umra Gate is a corner that points due west and lies at the end point of the road that arrives from Jeddah. The Umra Gate is not as revered an entrance as the Bab al-Salam, yet the message is clear: Ibn Jubayr arrived on the road from Jeddah and went straight to the mosque, entering at the first gate he came to. As is his habit in such narrative sections, Ibn Jubayr sets down the date with exactitude, even including the western date. Generally he makes this elaborate accounting of the date at the start of a month, but this was an event that warranted its own specific date.

The cry of *labbayka allahumma labbayka* is the standard pilgrim cry—the aforementioned *talbiya*. It is a staple of hajj narratives, and the *Sahih al-Bukhari* demonstrates how this proclamation acquired importance.

'Aishah said: I know how the prophet, peace be upon him, said the *talbiya*: *labbayka allahumma labbayk. Labbayka la sharik laka labbayka, inna al-hamd wa al-ni'mah laka*. [Here I am, O Lord, Here I am. Here I am, there is no partner to you, Here I am, the praise and the grace are yours.] (volume 2, number 622)

This is the standard prayer for the pilgrim and found in every book containing the prescribed prayers for the pilgrim.

Continuing to describe his entrance to Mecca, Ibn Jubayr writes:

We found the Ka'ba, the sacred House, as a bride unveiled, conducted to the paradise of delight and surrounded by the delegations of the Merciful. We performed the circuit of entrance, then we prayed at the venerated Station, and we clung to the covering of the Ka'ba at the Multazam—which is between the Black Stone and the Door, and is a place for the answering of prayers—and we entered the dome of Zamzam, and we drank from its water, which is “for the purpose of whatever one drinks it” as said [the Prophet], peace be upon him, then we ran between Safa and Marwa. (82)

The passage moves forward in a series of first-person plural verbs: we found, we performed the circuit, we prayed, we clung, we drank, we ran. In an economical fashion Ibn Jubayr sketches the important ritual acts related to the umra. In fact, Ibn Battuta and his literary collaborator Ibn Juzayy seem to have felt that the description could not be bettered, and borrowed the passage for use at the start of their section relating Ibn Battuta's entrance to Mecca (188). The narrative of Ibn Battuta's *Rihla* borrows from Ibn Jubayr a number of times, as Ross E. Dunn has noted (314). In the case of the entrance to Mecca, the borrowing is oddly appropriate since the actions are themselves a sort of ritual script that Ibn Jubayr did not invent but rather followed.

Ibn Jubayr's narrative of the entrance to Mecca was related to other versions of this same event, such as this hadith from the *Sahih al-Bukhari*:

Ibn Dinar said: I heard Ibn Umar, may God be pleased with him, say: The Prophet, peace be upon him, arrived at Mecca and then performed the circuit around the House, then he prayed two ritual prayers, then he ran between Safa and Marwa. He then recited [the verse from the Qur'an]: "You had in the Prophet of God an excellent model." (volume 2, number 709)

The hadith reports the actions of Muhammad, but it also contains a number of coincidences with the previous passage from Ibn Jubayr. Both passages explain the rituals for a person entering Mecca. The actions of Muhammad—carefully given a sequential order by the use of the particle *thumma*—turn out to be a match for the actions of Ibn Jubayr. Muhammad completed the circuit, made two ritual prayers (at the Station of Abraham, as is clear from the slightly longer previous hadith), and then ran between Safa and Marwa.

The hadith ends with a quotation from the Qur'an. The historical context for the phrase is unusually easy to specify, being related to the defense of Medina from the attack of the Meccans (who were then still hostile to Muhammad). This conflict, known as the "Battle of the Trench" (for the distinctive form of defense that Muhammad and the Medinans adopted), took place in 627 AD. Within that context, Muhammad received and delivered a message that affirmed his actions:

You had in the Prophet of God an excellent model . . .  
(33.32)

The hadith, however, applies the statement more generally, and in a way that elevates any action by Muhammad into a paradigm for future Muslims. This phrase from the Qur'an brings to the surface what has been

implicit in other hadith: the traditions concerning Muhammad are not set down for curiosity's sake, but are there as a model for future Muslims. Insofar as those traditions come to form a sequence of actions, they form a powerful narrative of preferred actions for the pilgrim in Mecca.

After Ibn Jubayr's note that he drank the water of Zamzam, he employs an explanation attributed to Muhammad: this water is "for whatever purpose one drinks it." The implication of the phrase is that the water will aid the pilgrim in a particular purpose the pilgrim has in mind. The phrase is not a tradition contained in the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, but one of the thousands of traditions that exist in less authoritative collections. The tradition occurs in a section of the work *Reports of Mecca* by al-Azraqi entitled "account of the excellence of Zamzam"—five pages containing various reports about the water of Zamzam. It is given a brief *isnad*, and then the tradition is reported as follows:

The water of Zamzam is for the purpose of whatever one drinks it, if you drink it desiring healing, God will heal you, if you drink it out of thirst, God will quench your thirst. (290)

Ibn Jubayr recorded a second tradition that is not present in the actions attributed to Muhammad by al-Bukhari: "we clung to the covering of the Ka'ba at the Multazam." In a parenthetical passage Ibn Jubayr locates the Multazam as lying between the Black Stone and the Door of the Ka'ba and also as "a place for the answering of prayers." Once again, a reading of al-Azraqi proves to be of value. Ibn 'Abbas is there reported to have said:

The Multazam . . . is between the stone and the door. (246)

Immediately following this he provides another quotation, this one from Abu Zubayr:

I offered a prayer there in front of the Multazam, and it was answered for me . . . (246)

These two pieces of information mirror exactly what Ibn Jubayr reports concerning this area of the Ka'ba known as the Multazam. The bare outline of the experience of Muhammad as preserved in the work of al-Bukhari has been supplemented by beliefs that were popular in nature.

We are now in a position to conclude that more is going on here than the textual allusions of a well-read pilgrim. What appeared to be a pilgrim's "personal" experience of Mecca turns out to have been "read" from scripts—which we might call "pilgrims scripts"—embedded in texts

such as the *Sahih al-Bukhari* and secondarily in the *Reports of Mecca* by al-Azraqi (to be treated more fully in the next section). These pilgrim scripts come to form an accepted narrative of actions that the pilgrim must trace. The details of Muhammad's activities, gathered in no particular order by al-Bukhari, have been collected and turned into a durable narrative framework that every pilgrim, consciously or not, follows. The pilgrim does not follow some arbitrary grouping of rituals, but rather a narrative that becomes meaningful through its connection with Muhammad. The actions of Muhammad become the story of "every pilgrim."

### The Story of Mecca

Ibn Jubayr's lengthy account of Mecca begins with the Ka'ba, which in later visual representations stands out as an iconic image. The visual centrality of the Ka'ba finds a textual equivalent in the text of Ibn Jubayr:

The noble House has four corners, and it is almost a square... (83)

This mention of the central feature of Mecca initiates a survey that will radiate outward. The modern text contains headers that break up the account into five sections: (1) "account of the Holy Haram and ancient House," (2) "account of the gates of the noble Haram," (3) "account of Mecca... its noble remains and honored reports," (4) "account of its great shrines and sacred remains," and finally (5) "account of how God distinguished Mecca with good things and blessings." These headings only vaguely reflect the radiating outline of the text as it stands; Ibn Jubayr adopts a fluid style that resists reduction to headings. Nevertheless, the trajectory is clear: Ibn Jubayr begins with the central Ka'ba, proceeds to the elements around the Ka'ba, such as the black stone and the Maqam Ibrahim, then moves on to the colonnades, minarets, and gates of the Haram itself, and then includes a description of Safa and Marwa, the markers around which pilgrims must run seven times but which lay just outside the Haram itself. Having finished with these central elements, he turns to the mountains and cemeteries that lie around Mecca before treating in his next section the shrines located in Mecca and its environs. Finally, the text extends to odds and ends, such as the marvelous fruits available to pilgrims in Mecca, the lack of thievery, and the weather. Ibn Jubayr's account represents a steadily widening circle that imposes an order—even a hierarchy—on the experience of Mecca.

Ibn Jubayr mentions the *Reports of Mecca* by al-Azraqi as the source for three obscure facts about Mecca: no bird lands on the Ka'ba except in

illness (95); the mountain named Abu Qubays, lying to the east of Mecca, was the first mountain created by God (102); and finally the mountain Abu Thawr once called to Muhammad offering him sanctuary (108). While he carefully cites the source for these details, he does not mention—and perhaps is not aware—of a deeper and more pervasive influence: the entire textual approach to Mecca that he has adopted from the *Reports of Mecca*.

Oleg Grabar sketches an outline for the *Reports of Mecca* (a lengthy work, running to 504 Arabic pages):

Structurally the book can be divided into four unequal parts: the first covers the Ka'ba from the Creation to the Yemenis' attempt to destroy the Ka'ba late in the sixth century... the second, the "historical" Ka'ba and the immediately surrounding holy spots (Maqam Ibrahim, Zemzem well) ... the third, the Masjid al-Haram, i.e. the open space which surrounds the Ka'ba and which is entirely a Muslim creation... and the fourth, the living quarters of the city and a few miscellaneous items... (2)

Except for the opening section that traces the history of the Ka'ba from the dawn of creation to historical times, the outline for the *Reports of Mecca* aligns directly with Ibn Jubayr's account. In both cases the writer has begun with the central and iconic Ka'ba, continued to treat the other important structures near to the Ka'ba, then moved on to the Haram, or mosque, and finally continued to the outlying elements of Mecca. Ibn Jubayr can hardly be considered to have stumbled accidentally onto this same pattern. With the admission that he has al-Azraqi's work in hand, we can glean that he has borrowed not only odd facts about Mecca from this work, but also the systematic order through which he approaches Mecca.

Our interest in al-Azraqi's *Reports of Mecca* is to note the construction of a canonical version of Mecca, with layers of narratives and a hierarchical ordering of space, forming thereby the lens through which the space would later be portrayed. The building blocks used by al-Azraqi to construct Mecca are hadith, or traditions, arranged under brief headings, historical or topographical. G.H.A. Juynboll in his study *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith* distinguishes three kinds of early traditions: "...those dealing with pre-Islamic information—which is mostly legendary—from Adam onwards, those put into the mouth of Muhammad and finally those, considered to be historically reliable on the whole, dealing with Islamic history after the prophet's death in the widest sense of the word" (10–11). The traditions primarily relied on by al-Azraqi are of the first variety of hadith, reflecting legends that reach far back into sacred history, concerning figures such as Adam or Abraham,



and in later sections of his work, traditions relating to changes at Mecca by historical figures in early Islam.

Juynboll provides an important window into the origin of these traditions as he discusses the early environment that gave rise to a large body of hadith:

In conformity with the later position of the *qass* [storyteller] in society, who delights as well as scares his audience, the earliest *qisas* [stories] may well have contained sermon-like accounts of an edifying nature concerning the prophet and the Muslims of the first period. (11–12)

From a work such as the *Reports of Mecca* by al-Azraqi, with its dense description of ancient events, it is clear that early Muslim storytelling quickly filled in all the gaps in the broad narrative of the sacred past, not just the events connected to the life and teaching of Muhammad.

The storytelling world reflected in the *Reports of Mecca* is markedly similar to that seen in the monumental collection *The Legends of the Jews* compiled by Louis Ginzberg at the beginning of the twentieth century. This similarity comes as no surprise to anyone familiar with the Qur'an and its frequent reference to stories that had their origin in Hebrew scripture. A considerable crossover of knowledge from Judaism to Islam took place in the first generation after Muhammad (Newby 66–67). One result of this early connection is a body of shared stories. One such story is the account of “The Two Wives of Ishmael” in which Abraham visits the house of Ishmael in the wilderness and disapproves of his inhospitable wife (Ginzberg 266–269). The same story is recounted by al-Azraqi, with the unnamed wilderness transformed into the future site of Mecca, where Ishmael dwelt with the tribe Jurhum (24–25).

In al-Azraqi this story is given a brief *isnad* at the beginning, tracing the authorities that passed down the story:

My grandfather reported to me, from Muslim ibn Khalid al-Zanji, from Ibn Jurayj, from Kathir ibn Kathir, from Sa'id ibn Jubayr, from Ibn 'Abbas... (24)

At the very least, such a chain of authorities takes us back several generations previous to al-Azraqi himself, who, as we have already noted, flourished in the early portion of the ninth century. A tradition such as this one concerning Abraham and Ishmael must, then, represent local Meccan constructions going back well into the eighth century, and perhaps stretching into the seventh century. In the first century and a half of Islam a bundle of stories concerning Mecca and its sacred past were told and used to explain the topography of Mecca.

The *Legends of the Jews* proceeds from the creation of the world to the end of biblical history, providing at each step the accretions that were added to the “official” text by Jewish storytellers from all periods of their history. In explaining his methodology, Ginzberg notes:

... Jewish legends have rarely been transmitted in their original shape. They have been perpetrated in the form of Midrash, that is, Scriptural exegesis. The teachers of the Haggadah, called *Rabbanan d'Aggadia* in the Talmud, were no folklorists, from whom a faithful reproduction of legendary material may be expected. Primarily they were homilists, who used legends for didactic purposes... (xi)

This explanation draws a distinction between the original informal growth of stories and the manner in which they later appeared in theological collections. In Ginzberg's arrangement the stories have been surgically removed from their accidental context and gathered into a great compendium of Jewish legends. He admits to curtailing and combining stories from various sources (xiv). His work is helpful to the student of Islamic traditions in that it demonstrates the luxuriant undergrowth of stories that existed among Jews. One could imagine a later scholar embarking on a similar “Legends of the Early Muslims.” Yet at the same time one senses that the inevitable result of this kind of disembodied collection of stories is a loss of context that could illuminate how these stories accomplished specific things within their respective cultures.

In contrast, the stories contained in al-Azraqi's *Reports of Mecca* are tied to a particular topography—that of Mecca. Take, for example, the following story of Hagar and Ishmael, which is here picked up as Hagar is in despair about getting water for her young son. The supposed ultimate source of the story—once again Ibn 'Abbas—is repeatedly mentioned:

As Ibn 'Abbas says: the mother of Ishmael said, “If I absent myself from him, so that I do not see his death...” Ibn 'Abbas says: the mother of Ishmael then headed for *Safa* when she saw it overlooking [the valley], seeking to make out from there someone in the valley, then she looked to *Marwa* and then she said, “If I pace between these two hills, then I would distract myself and the child will die and I will not see it. As Ibn 'Abbas says: So the mother of Ishmael paced between the two hills three or four times, and in that time she could not cross the span of the valley except through sand. As Ibn 'Abbas says: then the mother of Ishmael returned to her son and she found him becoming dehydrated just as she left him. This grieved her so she went back to *Safa*, distracting herself, so that he might die and she not see it. So she paced between *Safa* and *Marwa*, just as she had paced the first time, as Ibn 'Abbas says. Her pacing between the two hills amounted to seven times, so Ibn 'Abbas said. And Abū Qasim said: For this reason people circumambulate between *Safa* and *Marwa*. (23)

This is a story that could easily be added to a collection about Ishmael and his mother, Hagar. Decontextualized, it would be another chapter in the many stories about Abraham and his relations. Set into a book such as the *Reports of Mecca*, the story takes on an obvious new significance, the point being to provide an aetiology for Islamic ritual practice, which includes seven laps around Safa and Marwa. If we keep reading we shortly come upon another point relating to the landscape of Mecca. The angel Gabriel stamps on the ground with his leg, thus creating the well Zamzam, the water of which quenches the thirst of Hagar and Ishmael.

As we follow the stories related by al-Azraqi we encounter every major historical point of interest within the mosque at Mecca. Do we want to know the importance of the Maqam Ibrahim? We find a story to explain its significance. What about the black stone that is kissed during the circumambulation of the Ka'ba? The origin of the stone is explained. What about the standing on 'Arafat and then throwing pebbles at the devil? Or about the semicircular *hijr* near the Ka'ba? What about the origins of the mountains that surround Mecca? All these elements are mentioned and incorporated into stories cast far back in sacred history. At no point do the stories begin to stand on their own as legitimate points of interest, as if they are being recorded by a storyteller who aims to please an audience by the sheer turns of a tale. The stories are harnessed to explain the landscape of the hajj.

Occasionally the traditions contained in the *Reports of Mecca* reveal the overt political and religious goal of magnifying the significance of Mecca. In the following example we see Mecca directly brought into competition with the other "Holy Land"—a place which, thanks to the traditions concerning the night journey of Muhammad, also had strong Muslim associations.

...Ibn Jurayj said: it came to our attention that the Jews have said the Holy House [the Temple in Jerusalem] is greater than the Ka'ba because it was the refuge of the prophets and because it is located in the Holy Land, whereas Muslims say that the Ka'ba is greater, for so it came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, as it was revealed that the first house set down for the people was the blessed one at Bakka,\* so that there came to be in it clear signs [such as] the Maqam Ibrahim, and *that* is not present in the Holy House [in Jerusalem]. (39–40)

The reported narrator of this controversy is Ibn Jurayj, a Meccan scholar who died around 767 AD and was allegedly the first to make a collection

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\* The reference to Bakkah as opposed to the expected Makkah—or Mecca—is at first puzzling. Reasons for this alternative spelling, along with clever differentiations between Bakkah and Makkah, are given in various geographical works—such as the *Mu'jam al-Buldan* by Yakut.

of hadith (Juynboll 21–22). Controversies regarding what is the greatest this or the most favored that was a popular genre in classical Arabic literature. In the case of Mecca the outcome of such an argument would be especially important, since for all its obvious importance, it was neither an administrative nor cultural center once the Umayyads had set up their headquarters in Damascus in 661 AD when Mu‘awiyah I was recognized as the Caliph over Muslim lands. Abd al-Malik, the fifth Umayyad caliph, also lavished attention on Jerusalem, constructing the Dome of the Rock between 687 and 691 AD. M.J. Kister notes that this Abd al-Malik was

accused of having built the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem in order to divert the pilgrimage from Mecca to Jerusalem, since Abdullah b. al-Zubayr, the rival caliph in Mecca, forced the pilgrims to give him the oath of allegiance. When the Dome of the Rock was built people used to gather there on the day of Arafah and performed there the *wuquf*. (1982, 105)

The early debate about the relative merits of Mecca and Jerusalem, then, should not be seen as a purely academic or literary debate, but one with direct consequences as to how different landscapes were valued and to the traffic of pilgrims.

The collection and collation of explanatory stories about Mecca was the aim of the *Reports of Mecca* by al-Azraqi. Nothing, it seems to have been assumed, could have simply been adopted from the pagan practices of the Arabs; everything must be tied to the earlier practices of the patriarchs and prophets. The final result of the collective effort that was expended in the first two centuries of Islamic history—an effort for which al-Azraqi represents a culmination—is a human and physical landscape inscribed with the Islamic sacred narrative. From our later perspective it is easy to take for granted the immense intellectual industry that went into creating Mecca as a fully imagined sacred site. There was nothing “given” about the direction that Islam would take—or that Mecca would be its center. Striving to understand the texts that formed the perceptions of a pilgrim like Ibn Jubayr, we can begin to treat sacred space not as something inherent in the land itself but rather as a quality imparted by striking and cohesive narratives.

### **An Interconnected Whole**

When Egeria toured the Holy Land sometime around the fourth century AD, she experienced the landscape through a single text: the Bible. Only rarely did her journal record the details of contemporary experience. Ibn Jubayr was similarly under the influence of a sacred past, but in his case it is a multilevel landscape, involving several interlocked narratives. No single

sequence of events could explain Mecca, rather a series of narratives were layered upon the site. Ibn Jubayr's account of Mecca includes a paragraph highlighting these layers:

Mecca, may God exalt it, is in its entirety a noble shrine. It is honor enough that God designated it as the place of his great House, and that the Friend of God Abraham first called [for the people to perform the hajj]. It is the Haram of God and his [designated place of] safety. It is sufficient that it is the hometown of the Prophet (God bless him and grant him salvation), whom God singled out for honor and nobility, and sent to him signs along with the Qur'an. It is the place where revelation began, and the first place where the trustworthy spirit Gabriel alighted. It was the place of the prophets of God and his most noble apostles, and it was also the birthplace of the leaders of the group of his Quraysh companions, as well as of the emigrants, whom God made the luminaries of his religion, and stars for those who seek guidance. (106)

In this heady mixture of references it is possible to locate three thematic groups, overlapping, but distinct: (1) Mecca as the hometown of the prophet Muhammad and the initial place where he received the revelation of the Qur'an, (2) the prehistory of Mecca, largely connected to Abraham and figures associated with him, and (3) Mecca as the birthplace of the "luminaries" and "stars" of the companions of Muhammad, which moves us into the later political history of Islam. We will now separate these three parallel strands of narrative and examine how they were inscribed onto the landscape of Mecca. As we will see, the built landscape of Mecca contained markers and inscriptions that worked to enforce a particular reading of Mecca.

### The Qur'an

The *Life of the Apostle of God*, composed by the early historian Ibn Ishāq (d. 768 AD) describes the initial occasion of revelation to Muhammad:

...in the month of Ramadan...the apostle set forth to Hira' as was his wont, and his family with him. When it was the night on which God honoured him with his mission and showed mercy on his servants thereby, Gabriel brought him the command of God. "He came to me," said the apostle of God, "while I was asleep, with a coverlet of brocade whereon was some writing," and said, "Read!" (105-106)

"Read!" is the first word at the start of Sura 96, traditionally cited as the first verses revealed to Muhammad. The site for this first occurrence of revelation was Hira', a mountain located just outside Mecca.

Toward the end of al-Azraqi's *Reports of Mecca*, as the outwardly radiating circle of interest comes to encompass the nearby mountains, Hira' is mentioned:

[Muhammad] used to come to Hira' and practice *tahannuth* there, which is worship and devotions by night... then he would return to [his wife] Khadija... and learn from her example until the Truth came to him while he was in the cave of Hira', where the angel came to him and said: "Read!" (427)

Again Hira' is singled out as the place of the revelation, this time with the added detail that the revelation came while he was in a cave. An account quite similar to this one can also be found in the *Sabīh al-Bukhārī*, and, in fact, this story has become a necessary part for narrations of the life of Muhammad.

As the site where revelation first came to Muhammad, Ibn Jubayr was not going to ignore Hira'. The mountain found a place at the end of his description of Mecca and its environs:

Among the famous mountains of Mecca... is Mount Hira', which is in the east at a distance of a parasang or so... It is a blessed mountain, at which the prophet, peace be upon him, often retired and worshipped, and it trembled under him... The first verse of the Qur'an which descended upon the prophet, peace be upon him, descended on this aforementioned mountain. (106)

The first thing to point out is the close—even dependent—connection between Ibn Jubayr's *Rihla* and the historical texts. Ibn Jubayr typically does not take it upon himself to repeat the important narratives connected to the sites he visits; he is content to allude to important events in the sacred past. We can gather from this allusive style that he expects a high level of knowledge from his readers. These brief references can be extraordinarily useful since they showcase what narratives could be assumed by Ibn Jubayr—and not explained at length.

From the above passages it is fair to say that Hira' had a genuine place in the pilgrim experience of Mecca, but not a primary place. In the spirit of the genre of historical enquiry that identifies alternative paths for historical developments, it is possible to identify alternative ways that Mecca could have been conceptualized and constructed. In the early years of Islam there was nothing "given" about the way this sacred space would be ordered. The Qur'an and the event of its revelation was of primary importance, and one could easily imagine that the mountain that contained the cave where revelation of this book actually began would acquire an important status.

However, Hira' received a relatively humble position within the spatial hierarchy at Mecca. This spatial hierarchy grew out of efforts to textually organize a complex place. The act of collecting stories imposed the need for a comprehensible way to organize them and give value.

By the time of al-Azraqi, the Ka'ba had been adopted as the structure of central importance within Mecca. The remaining elements were lined up in descending order as they fell away from that iconic structure. The Qur'an occupied a similarly central position within the belief system of Islam. It was natural then that a metaphorical connection would develop, and that the Ka'ba and the Qur'an would be identified with each other. This is an unexpected identification, perhaps, since tradition holds no historical connection between them. As we follow representations of Mecca through Islamic history we find an increasingly close connection between the Qur'an and the Ka'ba. In Ibn Jubayr's account of Mecca, he describes the appearance of the Ka'ba:

The entire outer part of the Ka'ba on all four sides was clothed in a covering of green silk, threaded with cotton, and at its top was an inscription in red silk, on which was written: "The first House set down for people was the one at Bakka." (84)

The quotation on the *kiswa*, or covering cloth, is from the Qur'an (3.96). Visual representations of Mecca that come down to us from later periods make consistent use of this same verse.

The expanding importance of the Ka'ba is testimony to the ultimate authority of the Qur'an to order life and space. It would not be the physical history of the Qur'an that would govern the way space would be ordered, but its actual pronouncements. A visitor such as Ibn Jubayr was not left on his own to piece together the spatial ordering of Mecca, he was guided by physical hints that allowed his knowledge of sacred history to find an analogue in the landscape of Mecca.

### Abrahamic History

Mecca had a unique relationship to Abraham. The historian al-Baladhuri transmits a statement from Muhammad that makes this explicit:

The Prophet of God, peace be upon him, said: Every prophet has a sacred precinct [*haram*]. I declared Medina sacred just as Abraham, peace upon him, declared Mecca sacred. (12)

The actions of Muhammad set the precedents and scripts that later Muslims implicitly followed as they completed the hajj, but Mecca was

simultaneously Abraham's sacred precinct. Surrounding the Ka'ba are a number of smaller structures. These include the small domed building that shelters the Maqam Ibrahim and the larger building that covers the Zamzam well. Less noticeable, but still important, is the low semicircular wall known as the *hijr*, located to the side of the Ka'ba. We can also place among this group the Black Stone inset into the Ka'ba. These structures were intimately associated with the pilgrim scripts that determined the experience of Mecca for pilgrims. Each was also related to the sacred narrative surrounding the figure of Abraham, and they worked together to construct an important layer of narrative.

The following is Ibn Jubayr's description of the Maqam Ibrahim:

This noble Maqam . . . is a stone covered with silver. Its height is three spans, its width is two spans, and its top is wider than its bottom. It is as if it were a large potter's stove—although it is above such comparison—as its middle is narrower than both its bottom and top. We looked upon it and were blessed with touching and kissing it. The water of Zamzam was poured for us in the traces of the two blessed feet, and we drank it. God benefit us from it. Those two traces are clear, along with the traces of the noble and blessed toes. (85)

A reader with no notion of the story of Abraham and his call to the people of all nations to perform the hajj could have no idea what the two footprints (and toe prints) signified. The narrative key to this passage is assumed to be in the possession of the reader. The footprints enshrined on the Maqam Ibrahim begged a narrative. Pilgrims would know this story well, but the visible presence of the two footprints would have impressed on the pilgrim that this is the place where that story took place.

A less obvious narrative invoked by this passage is the importance of water from the well of Zamzam. Again, Ibn Jubayr provides no details as to why water from this source is beneficial, and even when he turns to describe the well of Zamzam, he dwells on the structure standing over it to the exclusion of any exposition. Yet to understand why water from the well of Zamzam is poured into the footprints, or why earlier, upon his entrance to Mecca, after completing the circumambulation, Ibn Jubayr makes a point of noting that he drank water from this well, the reader needs to know that this was the water created by the foot of the angel Gabriel to satisfy the thirst of Hagar and the young Ishmael.

Ibn Jubayr provides another brief reference to Abrahamic history:

Under the rain gutter, in the open area of the *hijr* near to the wall of the Noble House, is the grave of Ishmael, peace be upon him, marked by circular green marble . . . Beside it, on the side adjacent to the Iraq corner, is



the grave of his mother Hagar, God be pleased with those two, and its mark is [also] green marble, its width being a span and a half. People seek blessing through prayer at these two spots in the *hijr*... (87)

Within the semicircular area defined by the *hijr*, two famous graves were present, marked on the pavement by means of green marble. It is here that Ishmael and Hagar were said to have died and been buried. Again, Ibn Jubayr makes no attempt to sketch this story.

The narrative related to Abraham found its symbolic embodiment in structures located in the first layer of structures beyond the Ka'ba. Footprints in stone and green marble embedded in the pavement were physical elements that caught the eye of the pilgrim and demanded the supplying of a narrative to make sense of them. These narratives were familiar enough to Ibn Jubayr that he felt no need to explain everything he was seeing; but as he recounts his experience, we may observe how elements of the built landscape were complicit in guiding Ibn Jubayr to one of the central narratives that gave meaning to Mecca.

### Caliphal History

We have seen how the Qur'an was allowed to dictate the spatial hierarchy of Mecca, and also how Abrahamic history was inscribed into the zone immediately surrounding the Ka'ba. In addition to these layers, there was also the accumulation of more than five hundred years of Islamic history. This historical landscape was distinguished from the first two layers of history and given a subordinate position, but a consciousness of this Caliphal history was nevertheless forced upon every pilgrim.

The Islamic legal schools were an important presence in the mosque at Mecca. By Ibn Jubayr's time these schools consisted of four dominant Sunni schools: Shafi'i, Hanafi, Hanbali, and Maliki. In the process of theological reflection in the early centuries of Islam, and partly as a result of geographical separation, distinct schools of Islamic jurisprudence developed. Their acceptance at the time of Ibn Jubayr as legitimate Islamic institutions is reflected in their officially sanctioned presence within the mosque at Mecca:

The Haram [mosque] has four Sunni Imams, plus a fifth Imam for the sect called Zaydis... And the foremost among the Sunni Imams is al-Shafi'i, God's mercy be on him. We mention him first since he is the one given prominence by the 'Abbasid Imam... (97)

Each school had a physical position within the mosque, either occupying a small open structure in the area around the Ka'ba or making use

of a colonnade. This physical placement of structures dedicated to the teaching of the different legal schools had obvious practical value, since Muslims from all over the world made their way to Mecca desiring to worship according to their own rite, but their placement also affirmed the legitimacy of the historical growth of Islam.

Caliphal history was made audible in the *khutba* or Friday sermon, delivered from the pulpit. This pulpit is an important feature in later representations of the mosque at Mecca, being a triangular structure on the pavement around the Ka'ba. Ibn Jubayr describes the *khutba* as a ritualized sequence of actions: the preacher ascends the steps of this pulpit and proceeds to give his sermon, which at its conclusion brought a stream of political recognitions:

Then he started on the second sermon and repeatedly blessed Muhammad, peace be upon him, and his family...and he singled out the four Caliphs by name...and he prayed for the two uncles of the prophet, peace be upon him...then he prayed for the mothers of believers, the wives of the prophet, peace be upon him...then he prayed for the 'Abbasid Caliph Abi al-'Abbās Ahmad al-Nāsir, then for the prince of Mecca Mukthir ibn 'Isā Ibn Fulaytah... (93–94)

Following Muhammad comes explicit mention of the four “rightly-guided” Caliphs, and in short order he arrives at the contemporary ruling 'Abbasid Caliph. These words sketching the political history of Islam were delivered from the spatial center of Mecca, near the Ka'ba. The pilgrim was again not left to his own devices in understanding the layers of narrative, but was guided to a correct reading of Mecca.

Another type of sign employed in the mosque to communicate Caliphal history, and especially the contributions of specific rulers, was physical inscription for the purpose of dedication or commemoration. There are numerous instances in which Ibn Jubayr records an inscription aimed at informing pilgrims who it was that contributed resources for a certain structural feature:

The Safa Gate is opposite the Black Corner [of the Ka'ba], in the colonnade which runs from the south to the east, and in the middle of this colonnade, facing the Gate are two columns facing that Black Corner, and upon those two columns is inscribed “Abdullah al-Mahdi Prince of Believers—may God prosper him—ordered the erection of these two columns, showing the way of the prophet, peace be upon him, to Safa, so that the pilgrim to the House of God and the one who performs umra might emulate him...” (90)

After completing the circumambulation and prayers behind the Maqam Ibrahim, Muhammad made his way to complete the laps around Safa and

Marwa. The path that was deemed his route was marked by the erection of two pillars. We have already seen how the unspoken progression that every pilgrim follows has been set by the traditions relating to Muhammad, and the construction of these two pillars put an official stamp on that system, assuring each pilgrim that they are indeed following in the footsteps of Muhammad. But we should not lose sight of the political agenda. The two pillars commemorate the pious beneficence of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdi, who ruled from 775 to 785 AD.

We have now seen that there existed three distinct layers of historical narrative that allowed a pilgrim such as Ibn Jubayr to mentally grasp Mecca. In the first two centuries of Islam, Muslims in Mecca developed these layers of narratives to explain the significance of every part of the hajj. We have tried to excavate these interlocking layers of narrative, being sensitive to the hints and allusions that illumine expected social knowledge. These narrative layers were emphatically not the property of one person, or the result of one person's intellectual effort, but were developed by a long social process culminating in the ninth century AD with central works such as the *Reports of Mecca* by al-Azraqi and the *Sahih al-Bukhari*, and then given a further level of concreteness by their incorporation into the spatial layout of Mecca. Because of these texts, the entirety of the hajj experience arose as an interconnected whole for a pilgrim such as Ibn Jubayr. Ibn Jubayr was able to transmit and further sediment the knowledge of the hajj through his *Rihla*, which would eventually become a classic guide to the hajj.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A STORIED WILDERNESS

On October 31, 1994, President Bill Clinton signed into law the California Desert Protection Act. The story of the bill's long history is triumphantly traced by Frank Wheat in *California Desert Miracle: The Fight for Desert Parks and Wilderness*. Wheat notes concerning the people whose work he highlights:

None of them sought or gained material benefit. All kept the fires of their dedication aflame for years, demonstrating how effective individual Americans can be if determined to carry on and never quit the fight. (xviii)

His descriptions of these people take on a hagiographic cast, as each leader in favor of the bill is transformed into a visionary and populist, while the opposition tends to be faceless and beholden to the ORV (Off-Road Vehicle) lobby, or mining and ranching interests.

I was living in Southern California in the early 1990s and had gained a love for the desert landscape. I had driven through high desert towns suddenly lined with blocks of tract houses, so protection for the Mojave Desert seemed a positive step. I was glad when the bill was passed, but before long I got to know a group of people who bristled at the idea of national park status for the Mojave Desert. These were characters who had no voice in Wheat's bureaucratic history of the California Desert Protection Act, but whose lives had been spent in and around the desert. Two people I have especially in mind are Bob Reynolds, working then at the San Bernardino County Museum, and Dennis Casebier, founder of the "Friends of the Mojave Road." In a book on the Mojave, David Darlington describes both:

As we drove north toward the freeway, Reynolds continued musing about Lake Manix, pointing out the ancient beach where Interstate 15 now flowed, pausing by a roadcut to look at layers of calcareous tufa. "At one time, we could have water-skiied on Lake Manix," he said. "There were pink flamingoes in the shallows and ground sloths frolicking in the

cottonwoods on shore.” As he reconstructed the scene, I realized that both he and Casebier habitually beheld a landscape invisible to most. I suppose you could claim that they lived in the past, but it would be more accurate to say that the past lived in them. (107)

One could say the same thing about the Christian pilgrim Egeria, whom we witnessed traveling through the Holy Land in the first chapter. She too “habitually beheld a landscape invisible to most.”

I had heard Bob Reynolds point out abandoned mining operations, old pack trails used by miners, and the origin of a limestone hill that seemed lost amid granite. Under his direction I turned up fossilized tracks of long extinct camels and even stumbled across the fossilized remains of an ancient rabbit in Nevada. Dennis Casebier, on the other hand, was a guide for the more recent Mojave. From his house located beside the old schoolhouse at Goffs, along a bypassed section of old Route 66, Casebier organized a group of desert enthusiasts, called the “Friends of the Mojave Road,” dedicated to preserving human artifacts from the Mojave. In the summer of 1997, I lived on the property at Goffs and organized the large collection of books on the desert in the Harold and Lucille Weight Library, learning every day from Casebier about the human history of this region, from the ranchers to the abandoned homesteads in Lanfair Valley.

Both Reynolds and Casebier had spent a goodly portion of their lives seeking to understand the desert’s past, and anyone willing to listen could soak up information and odd facts about nearly any feature of the Mojave Desert, yet neither of them were excited about the prospect of a Mojave Desert National Park. For Reynolds the creation of a national park meant that fossil digs and geological research instantly became more difficult, and that most of his favored camping sites became officially off limits. Areas that had once been empty would now be filled with RVs and vacationers drawn by the new national park status. For Casebier a national park meant that the human history of the area would be shunted aside in favor of preservation of the natural world. Darlington quotes Casebier on the issue of the national park:

Something about the national-park mentality wants to remove all human vestiges and make it the way it was before . . . They want to kick the people out and “restore” it. Well, Long Island was wilderness at one time, too; why not restore that? Part of what I like about this area is that you can see the cultural heritage. The East Mojave *ain’t* pristine; a society has functioned here for a hundred years. (82)

Through my talks with Casebier I got a glimpse of the “national-park” mentality. His four-volume guide to the Mojave Desert Road became useless

in the years following the signing of the California Desert Protection Act, as the dirt roads that gave access to the places whose history he had narrated were closed down. On another occasion I recall Casebier mentioning the tall wooden poles of an early telegraph line that came through the Mojave Desert. The park service had targeted them for removal since they could serve as perches for birds that fed on the endangered desert tortoise. For Casebier these poles were an important witness to the importance of the Mojave as a “transit region”—an area whose history is largely tied to the various means of getting people, products, and information through it. The poles were a reminder of that past, as distinctly as an abandoned gas station along old Route 66.

Dennis Casebier’s book *Goffs & Its Schoolhouse* is in perfect counterpoint to Frank Wheat’s *California Desert Miracle*. It is perhaps even more insistent on presenting pictures and details about its main protagonists, only in this case those protagonists were not the leading environmentalists and lawmakers, but rather the common men and women who inhabited the Mojave Desert and attended school at Goffs schoolhouse. Every scrap of information from contemporary newspapers or from oral accounts has been corralled by Casebier to present a history of this small corner of the world. At times this starts to sound like a traditional Western, as in the case of a shooting during a dance at the schoolhouse:

A shot was heard. A hush fell over the crowded Schoolhouse. The music stopped and chatter stopped. Lee Sweeny had been shot in the stomach at close range with a large caliber pistol. He was dying. The children were grouped together in the wash room and told Lee was not dead. At least one child had seen the pools of blood and wondered how a man could lose that much blood and still live. One of the large front doors was torn off the Schoolhouse to form a stretcher . . . Lee died on the way to Needles. (57–58)

At the time Casebier published this book, he was in the process of planning for an eventual full restoration of the Goffs School. Throughout his book an attempt is made to vivify the desert with characters and human stories. Casebier notes in the foreword: “The Goffs School—which was almost lost in the early 1980s through vandalism—stands as a symbol of the important role history plays in the East Mojave.” The stories may seem trivial, but Casebier understands that through stories Goffs will take on an imaginative life—becoming a symbol for lost stories in so many other abandoned sites.

This final chapter provides an opportunity to address a practical concern connected to notions of preservation and history—concerns that have been with me since I came to understand the positions of people like Bob Reynolds and Dennis Casebier. Not only in the Mojave Desert but all

around the world, preservation of historical sites goes forward without a sophisticated understanding of the role of narrative in creating a significant place. The assumption is often that some objective event makes a place important or sacred, and the role of preservation is simply to maintain a site as it was. What should be evident here at the conclusion of this study is that places are not innately significant—not part of some mystical axis mundi. The emphasis of this study has been on how place gains human significance as it is woven into culturally significant narrative forms. What would be the point of preserving a sacred mountain if equal care were not taken to preserve the narrative that lent it that sacredness among a specific culture? If the sacred narrative is lost, the sacred place will be as well. The mere preservation of sites will simply lend them to contemporary valuations, but through the study of historic texts we can preserve the importance of sites even as the cultures and religions that generated them are transformed.

This practical argument can be strengthened by a brief look at travel narratives to places that are not so significant, not so storied. One important chapter of travel writing consists of Western attempts to explore the empty spots on the map. In *The Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, Marlow recounts his youth:

Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there. (108)

Travel to these blank spaces differs markedly from travel to places that have already been socialized and worked into important cultural narratives. In the case of travel to these blank spaces we find topo-reflective literature informed by little or nothing in the way of topo-creative works. The result is that travelers have no narratives through which they can process and experience the world that surrounds them.

### “In the Now Pathless Wilderness”

Words like “frontier” or “territories” convey a specific image to many Americans, drawn from the mythology of the settlement of a continent. They signify an empty land ready to be settled, free from the old world, and by definition without story. Getting out to the territories was not always such a disconnected experience.

Arrian of Nicomedia, the author of a history of the campaigns of Alexander and compiler of the discussions of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, journeyed to the frontiers of the Roman Empire at the behest of Hadrian sometime around 130 AD. Arrian, who then held the governorship of Cappadocia, toured the Black Sea and stopped at towns and Roman forts along the coast. In addition to an official Latin report sent to Hadrian, Arrian penned a descriptive *Periplus*, or voyage narrative, in Greek. Despite the fact that he was a long way from any place a Roman would want to call home, he had no trouble locating himself within a framework of narratives, and his *Periplus* is primarily of interest for us because of its constant reminders of the classical past that invested even those distant shores with narrative.

We are reminded of this past from the very start of the *Periplus*:

We came to Trapezous, a Greek city, as that Xenophon says, having been founded upon the sea, a colony of the Sinopeans. We looked down upon the Black Sea gladly, from whence both Xenophon and you looked down upon the sea. (1.1)

Trapezous is by no means the first city one encountered upon entering the Black Sea by way of the narrow Bosphorus. In fact, Trapezous lies near the eastern edge of the Black Sea. Arrian has chosen to start his narrative at this middle point, which necessitated doubling back to sketch in the opening portion of the trip in order to set himself firmly in the footsteps of his great classical predecessor, Xenophon.

Over five hundred years earlier, Xenophon had fought his way out of Persia with a band of 10,000 Greek mercenaries, heading north through what is now eastern Turkey in order to reach the Black Sea. After an arduous journey, they caught sight of the sea, which represented safety, and what followed was an emotional outburst on the part of the battle weary band, recounted by Xenophon in his *Anabasis*:

...and Xenophon having mounted his horse and taking Lycus and the cavalry, went to help. Quickly they heard the shouting of the soldiers: "the sea! The sea!" and the word passing down. Then indeed all started to run, even the rearguards, and the beasts of burden were driven forward, and also the horses. When all arrived at the summit, they embraced each other crying, even the generals and captains. It having been suggested, quickly the soldiers collected stones and made a great pile. (IV.7)

They were not yet at the sea, and had several more days of marching and a bout of food poisoning to get through before they actually reached the sea, but when they did, they arrived at the Greek city of Trapezous.



When Arrian, then, makes mention of the place from which “Xenophon and you” (“you” referring to Hadrian, who had journeyed here in 123/124 AD and again in 129 AD) “looked down upon the Euxine Sea,” he is connecting himself with the emperor, but more interestingly he is connecting with a landmark event from the classical past. Arrian’s inconspicuous note that “gladly” he looked down upon the sea is, on second glance, also meaningful. He is asserting a similar, although fittingly subdued, emotional response—gladness. He is not making the claim that he looked out from the same distant mountaintop upon which Xenophon and his band shouted “the sea! the sea!” but he is subtly asserting: “I was there, at the place that Xenophon finally reached after his long march . . . and I felt similarly elated looking at the sea.” So at the beginning of his narrative Arrian is not highlighting the strangeness of the frontier, rather the fact that this land is storied, and part of his own cultural inheritance.

He was right. The Black Sea littoral had been colonized by Greeks at least since the sixth century BC. However, this does not mean that the Black Sea was considered to be tame or civilized in a deep way—something that Arrian, after noting his connection with Xenophon, makes clear:

The altars are now set up, although made of rough stone, and the letters on account of this are not carved clearly. The Greek inscription is written in error, since it was written by Barbarians. (1)

Coming at the start of the book, and following such a clearly symbolic statement as the identification with Xenophon, this detail functions to characterize the entire region as not quite civilized. Ovid’s complaints about his exile to Tomis on the Black Sea make abundantly clear how “outside” these coastal cities were felt to be.

In the course of his *Periplus*, which consists mostly of dry distances in *stades* between rivers and towns along the coast, Arrian points out connections with the mythical past. The most famous voyage into the Black Sea was that of Jason and the Argonauts, heading to Colchis on the river Phasis at the extreme east of the Black Sea to recover the Golden Fleece. Apollonius of Rhodes, in his *Argonautica*, ties the events of this trip to known localities. He is especially vivid in his description of the entrance to the Black Sea, which is blocked by colliding rocks:

And when they arrived at the narrow point of the winding strait,  
shut in by rough ledges on both sides,  
a swirling stream stirred from underneath as the ship proceeded,  
and much in fear they moved forwards,  
as already the crash of the clashing rocks  
continually struck their ears . . .

(2.549–554)

The narrowest place, surrounded by rugged cliffs, describes the Bosphorus—the passage to the Black Sea. In Apollonius' version (and in Pindar's earlier version in *Pythian 4*), there exists a natural barrier to entering the Black Sea—colliding-rocks that will destroy a passing ship. Having passed that barrier, Jason and the Argonauts arrived at a point “where on each side the wide sea was seen . . .” (2.579). Arrian was aware of this mythical history, and when he gets to the Roman fort Phasis, at the eastern end of the Black Sea upon the river Phasis, he diverts his attention briefly to the relics of the mythical past.

Here the anchor of the *Argo* is pointed out. One that is iron does not seem to me to be ancient—although its size is not in accordance with anchors now, and its shape is somehow or other changed—but appears to me to be quite recent in time. Some ancient broken pieces of another stone anchor are also pointed out, and, so far as one can guess, it is more likely these that are the remains of the anchor of the *Argo*. There was no other memorial here of the stories about Jason. (9.2)

Arrian at this point breaks off to describe something more expected—the fort and its defensive system. And Arrian concludes: “and in short it is equipped with all things so that none of the barbarians could even get close to it.” (9.4). Phasis is in the midst of a possibly hostile people, but it is nevertheless embedded within the imaginative geography of the classical world, and so hardly appears foreign in Arrian's description.

Arrian does not take it upon himself to describe every local tradition that he comes across, but employs mythological references in a strategic manner, leavening his text with references to the primary historical writers (Herodotus and Xenophon) and myths (Jason, Prometheus, and Achilles) that lingered along the coast of the Black Sea. When he gets to the northern reaches of the Black Sea, where he has no stories or associations, he writes concerning an area that covers 1,200 stades: “the areas between are deserted and nameless” (20). But that was not the way most of the Black Sea was viewed by Greeks and Romans. The Black Sea was by no means considered “home,” and was surrounded by hostile peoples, but it was strongly settled within an imaginative framework. A cultured writer such as Arrian was not, except for in its nether reaches, traveling within an unknown and unstoried place. The framework for experiencing the Black Sea had already been established, and the important narratives set.

For Americans, a vast continent stretched out beyond the horizon, and there was no narrative such as that provided by Xenophon or the myth of Jason and the Argonauts by which settlers or explorers could grasp the symbolic value of the land they were entering. This is no latterly constructed problem, but one acutely felt by Americans as they pondered

their continent. Thomas Cole, a leader of the Hudson River School of American painters in the first half of the nineteenth century, defended the American landscape in his "Essay on American Scenery." America, for Cole, had no lack of grand or beautiful scenes, which could vie with anything in Europe, and the main part of this essay works out in detail how America possesses analogues to every major type of European landscape. At the end he turns his attention to what is undoubtedly a lack: "I will now venture a few remarks on what has been considered a grand defect in American scenery—the want of associations, such as arise amid the scenes of the old world" (16). He immediately continues:

We have many a spot as umbrageous as Vallombrosa, and as picturesque as the solitudes of Vacluse; but Milton and Petrarch have not hallowed them by their footsteps and immortal verse. He who stands on Mount Albano and looks down on ancient Rome, has his mind peopled with the gigantic associations of the storied past; but he who stands on the mounds of the West, the most venerable remains of American antiquity, *may* experience the emotion of the sublime, but it is the sublimity of a shoreless ocean un-islanded by the recorded deeds of man. (16)

Cole uses the word "storied" as he explains what is present in the old world, and lacking in America, thus echoing an important term for this study. In fact, this short paragraph contains in a nutshell much of what has been developed and given a theoretical basis in the preceding pages. Cole points to "gigantic associations of the storied past," and appears to believe that Rome is a city of universal significance, but he nevertheless realizes that what makes a place significant are important events. He speaks with veneration about Milton and Petrarch, and would hardly put those poets on the same footing as an Aboriginal storyteller, but he knows that a culture learns about its important events through narratives set down in a canonical form by its artists and craftsmen. The storied landscapes of Europe were no abstraction for Cole, who by the time he wrote this essay, published in 1836 by the *American Monthly Magazine*, had spent three years in Europe, much of that in Italy.

In this same essay, Cole supplies us with an answer to the lack of associations in American places: "...the great struggle for freedom has sanctified many a spot, and many a mountain, stream, and rock has its legend, worthy of poet's pen or the painter's pencil." As of 1836, this would have covered a rather limited section of the United States. Sites connected with the founding of America and the Revolutionary War were largely confined to the original thirteen colonies. The old legends connected to various sites were captured by writers such as Washington Irving, but again these were rather limited in area.

As if feeling the lack in this tentative answer, Cole broadens his sketch: "...American associations are not so much of the past as of the present and future" (16). He paints with words what could be taken as a description for his well-known "Oxbow" painting, which dates from the same year as the essay:

Seated on a pleasant knoll, look down into the bosom of that secluded valley, begirt with wooded hills—through these enameled meadows and wide waving fields of grain, a silver stream winds lingeringly along—here, seeking the green shade of trees—there, glancing in the sunshine... (16)

They are words that easily call to mind "the amber waves of grain, purple mountain's majesty and fruited plains" of "America the Beautiful" (1893)—revealing just how easily this kind of landscape description fits in with American expectations. Cole then explains the significance of the common image:

You see no ruined tower to tell of outrage—no gorgeous temple to tell of ostentation; but freedom's offspring—peace, security, and happiness dwell there, the spirits of the scene. On the margin of that river. (16)

It is the very lack of story that makes this narrative, or rather that allows Cole to import a narrative for the future. The little town in the secluded valley is at the start of its narrative. This is the newborn that will grow into a new kind of nation, and in the process will eventually leave behind its own storied landscape.

Such an implied national narrative is easy to see in Cole's four-part "Course of Empire," which was also completed in 1836. The America that lies nestled in the valley is just a step beyond the wild state pictured in "The Savage State," the first painting in the Course of Empire Series. The future is littered with ruins that resemble what Cole would see in Europe:

Three quarters of a mile from these temples was the ancient port, now choked with sand, and near it are the remains of edifices supposed to have been the magazines. On an adjoining hill are remnants of three temples and two towers, in almost undistinguishable ruin. (40)

Although Cole does not go so far as to imagine America in a ruined state, he does look far into the future, when it has grown up and inhabited its empty frontier:

And in looking over the yet uncultivated scene, the mind's eye may see far into futurity. Where the wolf roams, the plough shall glisten; on the gray

crag shall rise temple and tower—mighty deeds shall be done in the now pathless wilderness; and poets yet unborn shall sanctify the soil. (16–17)

This is the future “classical” America. Along with those classical temples, there would necessarily be canonical narratives and texts to record them. These narratives are connected to the “pathless wilderness.” Just as the actual Classical landscape was traversed by stories connected to exploration (the voyage of Jason and the Argonauts, the travels of Hercules, and the homecomings of Odysseus and other heroes of the Trojan War), so the new world would be storied with its own epics of exploration. While Cole’s prophecy of American temples on the crags falls woefully short, the landscape 170 years later being overwhelmed by decidedly unclassical Wal-Marts and McDonalds fast food restaurants, he did foresee that the primary stories for the American landscape would prove to be the narratives of explorers and early travelers.

America is covered in foundation narratives and narratives relating to its exploration. We could start with Plymouth Rock where the Pilgrim’s landed and then move to the west coast where the Spanish missions fill a similar imaginative space. And as to the interior parts of the country, so often the literal paths of the explorers form the imaginative connection to the land. The Lewis and Clark expedition is the quintessential narrative of exploration on the American continent, and although Thomas Jefferson mentioned it nowhere in his detailed instructions to Meriwether Lewis prior to departure, perhaps the greatest achievement of the trip was to put in place an important narrative for a large stretch of the continent. It is a public narrative intimately connected to the complex textual history for the journals of Lewis and Clark. The journals were aided by a growing fascination with the trip on the part of the public—evident still in recent years by a steady stream of books on the expedition. But all this repeats the generic story that we have already noted several times: every culture incorporates its landscape into important narratives, using its own genres and styles, and winds up with a landscape inhabited by narratives.

Most important to us here at the conclusion is not to trace the history of this process in America, with its various stages, but rather to note the result. The modern traveler through the states of the northern and northwestern parts of the United States inevitably runs into many traces of this expedition. In fact, the experience of a well-read American traveling through these areas would closely resemble that of Arrian along the coast of the Black Sea. The National Park Service Web site, providing information on the 3,700 mile long Lewis and Clark National Trail, reads:

Many people follow the trail by auto; others find adventure in the sections that encourage boating, biking, or hiking. You can still see the White Cliffs in Montana as Lewis & Clark did. You may stand where they stood looking

over the rolling plains at Spirit Mound in South Dakota. You might meet the descendents of the people who hosted Lewis & Clark all along the trail. It remains for your discovery.

These are sentiments not far removed from the opening of Arrian's *Periplus*: "Being pleased, we looked down upon the Euxine Sea, from whence both Xenophon and you looked down upon the sea" (1). Nor are they far removed from Arrian's comments on the peoples along the shore of the Black Sea: "The Colchians, just as Xenophon says, border with the Trapezountines. And those he says are most warlike and hostile against the Trapezountines he names the Drillai, but they seem to me to be the Sannoi" (11). Another Web site, [LewisAndClarkTrail.com](http://LewisAndClarkTrail.com), lists important sites connected to the expedition in eleven states, and invites: "Re-live the Adventure." A cultured Roman, passing into the Black Sea from the narrow Bosphorus and then continuing along the southern coast to Phasis could also, it seems, relive the adventure, standing in the same place as famous adventurers and seeing the descendents of the people those adventurers encountered.

The first glimpse of the ocean on the part of the Lewis and Clark crew sounds almost Xenophon-like: "Great joy in camp we are in *view* of the Ocian this great Pacific Octean which we been so long anxious to See" (Bergon 316). Eleven days later, William Clark records their response at Cape Disappointment near the mouth of the Columbia River—a spot where a Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center now stands—to a view of the ocean: "men appear much Satisfied with their trip beholding with astonishment the high waves dashing against the rocks & this emence Ocian" (Bergon 322). Stephen Ambrose notes in his history of the expedition that at this spot "Lewis used his branding iron to mark a tree; Clark and all the men carved their initials into the surrounding trees" (310). They were aware of their momentous accomplishment, resulting in a continent whose coasts had been joined, but they would surely be surprised to learn just how thoroughly their voyage later stamped this land in the American imagination.

They were not ignorant of the human history that surrounded them throughout their trip. Thomas Jefferson had given specific instructions to gather detailed information about "the people inhabiting the line you will pursue," including information about "their language, traditions, monuments" (Bergon XXV). And Clark, in his own list of questions pertaining to the Native Americans they might encounter, notes under the fourth head "*Traditions or National History*": "From what quarter of the earth did they emigrate as related to them by ansisters... Have they any *Monuments* to perpetuate national events of the memory of a distinguished Chief—and if so what are they?" (xxxiii). In the journals themselves, this

knowledge of the past is plain. In one beautiful early passage, Clark records his experience with this history of the other:

after going to Several Small Mounds in a leavel plain, I assended a hill on the Lower Side, on this hill Several artificial Mounds were raised, from the top of the highest of those Mounds I had an extensive view of the Serounding Plains, which afforded one of the most pleasing prospect I ever beheld, under me a Butifull River of Clear Water of about 80 yards wide Meandering thro: a leavel and extensive meadow, as far as I could See... Small groves of trees are Seen, with a numbers of Grapes and a Wild Cherry... on the tops of those hills in every direction, I observed artificial Mounds (or as I may more justly term graves) which to me is strong evidence of this Country being once thickly Settled. (14)

Generically it sounds something like Cole's landscape description above, and one can even imagine a painting of the scene from atop the mound, but it does not quite fit within the American narrative. These mounds are of course Indian mounds and are perhaps the clearest remaining evidence that the empty frontier was not really empty, and were once inhabited by a completely different group of stories and popularized through a completely different range of generic forms.

Such is the odd fact about narratives of exploration. What looks to those who come later—after the cultural canonization of a text such as the Journals of Lewis and Clark—like a great narrative of exploration triumphing over an empty land, on closer examination becomes a journey through an already inhabited and storied landscape. The very texts that mark the ascendance of a new narrative over a landscape are often the best remaining witnesses to an older order of narrative.

In his book *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*, Stephen Greenblatt tackles some of these same issues related to travel into blank spaces on the map. He focuses on early Spanish narratives, especially the journals and letters of Christopher Columbus. Cecil Jane, the editor and translator of the documents pertaining to Columbus' voyage, writes:

At the present day, for a man to embark upon a voyage with no more than the very vaguest conception of the destination to which that voyage will conduct him is in reality impossible...no "new world" remains to be discovered...So true is this that it is not altogether easy to realize that in the later fifteenth century the position was radically different...and that those who set out to explore did in very truth set out to penetrate the unknown. (cvi)

Columbus and his voyages are therefore one of the few real narratives of a human being encountering completely blank spaces.

Greenblatt points out how Columbus, despite the fact that the islands are inhabited by a native culture, despite the fact that he is completely ignorant of the native language, declares himself in possession of the islands. He also assigns new names to these native islands:

To the first island which I found, I gave the name *San Salvador*, in remembrance of the Divine Majesty, Who has marvelously bestowed all this; the Indians call it "*Guanabani*." To the second, I gave the name *Isla de Santa María de Concepción*; to the third, *Fernandina*; to the fourth, *Isabella*; to the fifth, *Isla Juana*, and so to each one I gave a new name. (Greenblatt 52, quoting from Jane 2)

For Greenblatt, it is the actual speech acts of Columbus that are of interest, the formal written legal procedures carried out in the midst of a foreign world. He delivers a harsh judgment: "Columbus's founding speech act in the New World is spectacularly 'infelicitous' in virtually every one of the senses defined by Austin in *How To Do Things With Words*: it is a misfire, a misinvocation, a misapplication, and a misexecution" (65). That is to say, Columbus had no right simply by fiat to take possession and rename thickly inhabited islands.

The interest throughout this study has been to shift the focus from individual speech acts as reflected in legal and historical documents, and to look instead at the documents themselves and how they function as speech acts within the shifting context of a culture. Or, to look at it another way, we are moving from the inside to the outside. We have begun with literary and canonical texts and examined how those texts move out and influence the way people perceive their world. If we apply this method to the discovery of the Americas, our interest shifts to the means by which the discovery was popularized, and how these documents built up a narrative or lens through which all these previously unknown lands were thereafter experienced.

Such an account of Columbus would resemble the work done on Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación* in the recent volumes by Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz. They attend to the impression made on later readers of the influential account of the new world:

For many of these readers/writers, the men's remarkable tale was a source of inspiration. Friars used it for religious indoctrination and conversion; governors and settlers hailed the four men's presumed passage through their jurisdictions to promote the interests of Spanish settlement beyond the fringes of New Spain. In all cases, the Narváez survivors' presence represented in regional secular and religious history the local origin of Spanish Christian civilization. (122)



From this we can see that the text of the *Relacion* lent itself to forming an identity for the nascent Spanish-American settlements. The letters written by Columbus and secondary accounts of his voyages are similarly actors in the drama of European settlement of the Americas—as evident in our own time by the iconic status of Columbus and his continued ability to stir up strong feelings.

Some sense of this identity-building narrative process is even evident in the earliest account. It is significant that in his account of the first voyage, Columbus immediately records his names for the newly discovered islands. We note that the names refer first to Christian identity (the Savior, the Virgin Mary) and then to national identity (Ferdinand, Isabel, Juan). Nomenclature that mirrors the national and religious narratives that dominated early Spanish accounts of the New World. Columbus provides us with the native name for the island *San Salvador*—"Guanahani." Again we recognize the curious fact that a text, which in short order became a first narrative laid upon a "blank" spot on the map, unwittingly betrays the fact that other significant narratives once held sway.

Greenblatt writes: "...yet Columbus's letter does seem to anticipate and promote the mythic sense with which time has invested his account" (53). That is a vague phrase, and Greenblatt does not explore it further, but that defines the exact goal of this study: understanding how exactly texts gain that "mythic sense" and bestow it upon places. Our answer has been that texts promulgate important narratives that lie at the heart of personal, religious, and national identities. These narratives, in turn, necessarily incorporate physical places as settings. As a result, places take on something of the mythic importance of the texts themselves.

Columbus' discovery of the New World is a contentious story because of the devastation it brought upon the natives of America, both by sword and disease. Yet, in its general outline it is similar to stories we have already seen. We have examined the process by which Abydos was incorporated into a national mythology, and the poetic creation of Delos. At Mecca this transformation occurred by means of the largely voluntary conversion of the Arab population—in contradistinction from the more forceful conversions of the natives at the hands of the Spanish. Yet the results were similar in terms of setting in place new narratives. We could conceptualize this as a battle of narratives that proceeds with or without physical violence, and which occurs whenever different cultures inhabit the same space.

### Lessons from the Mounds

A comparatively minor, and far less destructive, example of the human interaction with the blank space of a map is William Bartram's *Travels*

through the American South during the 1770s. Although its influence of late has been growing, as evidenced by a recently published guidebook to the locations mentioned in the course of his travels, Bartram's *Travels* does not have (and never did have) the same place-fixing power as the Lewis and Clark narrative—probably a result of the overpowering centrality of the Civil War for Southern identity. The formative power for the Civil War is evident from the large percentage of historical markers throughout the South dedicated to that conflict, as well as from the common layout of the central square in small southern towns, which inevitably features a memorial to the Confederate dead. The deep importance of the Civil War is clear even to an outsider like V.S. Naipaul who recorded his impressions of the American South in *A Turn in the South*. He writes concerning a Confederate Memorial:

... the pain of the Confederate Memorial is very great; the defeat it speaks of is complete. Defeat like this leads to religion. It can be religion: the crucifixion, as eternal a grief for Christians as, for the Shias of Islam, the death of Ali and his sons. Grief and the conviction of a just cause; defeat going against every idea of morality, every idea of the good story, the right story, the way it should have been: the tears of the Confederate Memorial are close to religion... (100)

By identifying the grief of the Confederate Memorial with "religion," Naipaul comes close to identifying the narrative of the Civil War as forming a large part of the Southern identity. Nowhere in his book does Naipaul feel the need to mention William Bartram and his travels through the South—whereas it would be unthinkable to neglect Lewis and Clark in a similar book covering Montana and Wyoming.

None of these historical markers or monuments to the Confederate dead were in place when Bartram traveled through what we know as North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Alabama. On contemporaneous maps a large portion of the area through which Bartram traveled was simply left blank. He had no overarching narrative to guide his experience of the land that would become the American South. How different the experience of this blank land was from what Arrian describes is clear from Bartram's narrative:

After leaving Broad River, the land rises very sensibly, and the country being mountainous, our progress became daily more difficult and slow; yet the varied scenes of pyramidal hills, high forests, rich vales, serpentine rivers, and cataracts, fully compensated for our difficulties and delays. (61)

This is the kind of passage that could be multiplied many times. It is a simple description of the land that one is passing over, albeit with a keen

sense of natural beauty. We have seen many times what it is like to travel through a known or storied region, but it is striking just how stark the opposite experience can be. Bartram has no narratives to relate or sacred sites; he is simply passing bare landscape.

Similar scenes are abundant in all explorations of previously blank land. John Wesley Powell, in *The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons*, has many similar passages:

*July 27.*—Now our way is along a gently flowing river, beset with many islands; groves are seen on either side, and natural meadows, where herds of antelope are feeding. Here and there we have views of the distant mountains on the right. (181)

It is again a prosaic description of a type that can be multiplied. At times it is enlivened by the drama of danger from heights or rapids, but lacking are the kinds of rich cultural associations that were characteristic of the experience of Arrian along the Black Sea.

Powell's narrative is another example, like Lewis and Clark's, of an exploration that ends up forming the lens through which a large tract of land is commonly experienced. In his introduction to this work, Wallace Stegner writes: "...nearly everyone who runs any part of the canyons now—and there are many thousands each year—either carries this story of Powell's in his duffelbag or has it read or recited to him around the fire while the tamed Colorado slips past..." (xii). The large Arizona-Utah lake, formed by a dam, flooding much of the area through which he passed, ironically has his name attached to it.

Bartram and Powell expend most of their energy describing the storyless landscape as it passes before them, but they also give glimpses of past stories. The careful reader of Bartram finds everywhere evidence not of emptiness, but of habitation. This comes in several different forms. At Fort Picolata, near St. Augustine, he notes:

Bidding adieu to my obliging friend, I spread my sail to the favourable breeze, and by noon came to a-breast of Fort Picolata; where, being desirous of gaining yet farther intelligence, I landed; but to my disappointment, found the fort dismantled and deserted. This fortress is very ancient, and was built by the Spaniards. It is a square tower, thirty feet high, invested with a high wall... (86)

Here and at other places in his *Travels* we find evidence of "ancient" Spanish buildings. These are places connected to that narrative begun by Columbus and followed up immediately by the Spanish with further exploration and settlement. That narrative is clearly in ebb as connected to

Florida, and whatever human stories and experiences were once established there are now unknown.

More often we find in Bartram fragments of past Native American life, the abundance of which is bound to surprise anyone who has traveled casually through the South.

On the heights of these low grounds are yet visible monuments or terraces, squares and banks, encircling considerable areas. Their old fields and planting land extend up and down the river, fifteen or twenty miles from this site. (67)

Most of the time it is only such physical descriptions that Bartram provides, but in this case he immediately follows this up with scraps of actual history:

If we are to give credit to the account the Creeks give of themselves, this place is remarkable for being the first town or settlement, when they sat down (as they term it) or established themselves, after their emigration from the west, beyond the Mississippi, their original native country. On this long journey they suffered great and innumerable difficulties, encountering and vanquishing numerous and valiant tribes. . . . Having crossed the river, still pushing eastward, they were obliged to make a stand, and fortify themselves in this place, as their only hope. (67)

This has the sound of an epic, with its “long journey” and “innumerable difficulties,” and the site was connected to an important battle fought by the Creeks against another tribe. Even allowing for a fair amount of misinformation within Bartram’s report, it is clear that this is land that for another culture was far from blank, and inhabited with important narratives. If we could imagine a Creek Indian guiding us through this land, the narration would be interrupted by the significant stories and episodes connected to the land—exactly the kinds of narratives that Bartram cannot supply.

John Wesley Powell in a similar way gives us hints of other narratives, although he does not have the knowledge to expand upon them. Near the beginning of his narrative he states the reason for his expedition: “These canyon gorges, obstructing cliffs, and desert wastes have prevented the traveler from penetrating the country, so that until the Colorado River Exploring Expedition was organized it was almost unknown” (35). Oddly enough, immediately after this statement Powell goes on to list all the people who may have journeyed through this area. This list includes “Spanish adventurers” along with hunters and prospectors who told fabulous tales of these places. “The Indians, too, have woven the mysteries of the canyons

into the myths of their religion" (35). This being true, we may well be led to wonder what he means by the land being "almost unknown"? What each of those past accounts has in common was cultural inaccessibility. The Spanish adventurers were long gone, the hunters and prospectors told oral stories that exist outside acceptable written genres, and the Indians related myths that were far outside the norms of American culture. So when Powell calls the land "unknown" he is not really saying that people do not know this land, he is instead saying that it is "unstoried" with respect to his American culture. It would be his expedition that brought the land into this new cultural orbit, and his dangers and trials that would end up forming the accepted narrative.

If a reader leafs through Powell's book, which is full of photographs and etchings chosen by him and drawn from this area of the Southwest, the human presence leaps out. There is a caption that reads "A Typical Cliff Dwelling" (56), another one that reads "Ruins at the head of McElmo Canyon" (52). Led solely by the accompanying illustrations the reader would have to conclude that this is a densely storied land, and be somewhat amazed at the muteness of Powell as he travels through what was to him a blank land. It would be the predicament of an average American set down with no warning in Mecca during the time of the hajj—he or she simply would not have the narrative tools by which to understand a unique place and its rituals.

Having seen how narratives are replaced as a new and more powerful culture encroaches on the land, we are ready to draw a conclusion about the nature of preservation. The preservation of a site ought, so far as possible, to be aligned with preservation of the cultural knowledge that surrounds it. Too often physical preservation of a site and the literary preservation of cultural knowledge are considered separate pursuits. The need for both kinds of preservation is evident in Bartram's account of one of the numerous Indian mounds he encountered in the South:

At about fifty yards distance from the landing place, stands a magnificent Indian mount. About fifteen years ago I visited this place, at which time there were no settlements of white people, but all appeared wild and savage; yet in that uncultivated state it possessed an almost inexpressible air of grandeur, which was now entirely changed. At that time there was a very considerable extent of old fields round about the mount; there was also a large orange grove, together with palms and live oaks, extending from near the mount. . . . But what greatly contributed towards completing the magnificence of the scene, was a noble Indian highway, which led from the great mount, on a straight line, three quarters of a mile. . . . it was terminated by palms and laurel magnolias, on the verge of an oblong artificial lake. . . . (100)

Simply to imagine this overgrown scene is to see the flaw in Thomas Cole's painting "The Savage State" from his series on "The Course of Empire," with its benighted hunters through a chaotic landscape. This land must be imagined as a richly inhabited and richly storied place. It would once have looked something like those islands that Columbus stumbled upon, inhabited with "people innumerable" (Jane 2). And just as that first island had a name and a story, so had this land in Florida that Bartram witnessed.

But of course all is changed, that rich land without people, by the time Bartram returns: "...that venerable grove is now no more. All has been cleared away and planted with indigo, corn, and cotton, but since deserted: there was now scarcely five acres under fence. It appeared like a desert to a great extent..." (101). It is a vignette that goes some way toward explaining why the traveler through the south today encounters so little of the physical ruins that seem to lie everywhere Bartram looks.

These mounds occupy an interesting place in the American imagination. Thomas Cole is perceptive when he writes, as we have already seen: "he who stands on the mounds of the West, the most venerable remains of American antiquity, *may* experience the emotion of the sublime, but it is the sublimity of a shoreless ocean un-islanded by the recorded deeds of man" (16). We should imagine the sea, a place that has seen its share of remarkable deeds and stories, but whose utter and uniform flatness defeats any attempt to attach an association—it is un-islanded with identifiable narratives. In the same way, the American mounds afford a certain imagined sense of wonder, but are as lacking in narrative as a wild ocean seascape. Standing as a testimony to lost narratives, the mounds should be our reminder that to preserve a place means the simultaneous preservation of the important narratives that created it. The mounds today are grand blank witnesses to the presence of other ways of seeing this landscape, other ways of experiencing familiar places—proof that no narrative holds the land indefinitely or by some divine fiat, but only until the next compelling narrative comes along.

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