Sacred beliefs and beliefs of sacredness

JANE HUBERT

> The limitations of my land are clear to me. The area of my existence, where I derive my existence from, is clear to me and clear to those who belong in my group. Land provides for my physical needs and my spiritual needs. New stories are sung from contemplation of the land. Stories are handed down from spirit men of the past who have deposited the riches at various places, the sacred places. These places are not simply geographically beautiful: they are holy places, places that are even more holy than shrines. They are not commercialised, they are sacred. The greatest respect is shown to them. They are used for the regeneration of our people, the continuation of our life: because that's where we begin and that's where we return.
>
> (Father Pat Dodson n.p.)

The discussion of sacred sites can take many forms. It may concern specific sites – how they are defined or how they can be recognized; who owns them and who has rights of access to them; what they mean to individuals and to communities, and what their relation is to both the living and the dead. Such questions are central to the discussion of the management of sites and how they can be protected, both physically and legally, from those people and processes that threaten them.

The Aboriginal people of Australia, Native Americans, Maori, Saami, Inuit and other peoples from countries all over the world, are deeply concerned about the threats – and actualities – of intrusion into their sacred sites, and of their destruction, whether they be 'living sites' in contemporary use, or sites that are no longer used, but remain important symbols of a distant past. There is no doubt that many sites, throughout the world, are currently under threat from many sources. One major threat is from commercial developments such as the construction of roads and bridges, shopping centres, housing and industries. Sites are also threatened by tourism, an increasing source of valuable currency, but potentially damaging to sites in both physical and spiritual terms.

In some areas the work of archaeologists may also be a threat to sacred sites. Apart from the intrusiveness, and physical damage that excavation involves, archaeologists have often added insult to injury by claiming to have 'discovered' sites which the indigenous people have known to exist for centuries, and which are their sacred sites. Such disregard for the indigenous population is widespread. Condori, with regard to the Aymara Indians of Bolivia, writes: 'The Portugals . . . take no notice of the original cultural context of our archaeological sites, and simply rename places whose names a long oral tradition has preserved, as if this was enough to credit them with their discovery' (Condori 1989, p. 48). He describes how the site of Tiwanaku has been plundered, and monoliths taken away to decorate private houses; most distressing of all, however, is the total appropriation of the site:

> They have built earthworks round the ruins so that today we can no longer get in to Tiwanaku. The Aymara people have to pay an entrance fee to visit the ruins as tourists where they listen to invented accounts of the meaning of our history. The archaeologists completely ignore the fact that for our culture the site is sacred. It is a *wak'a*, a place where our ancestors lived and through which they communicate with us in various ways.
>
> (Condori 1989, pp. 48–9)

What is it that Condori means when he says that Tiwanaku is a sacred site? What does the term 'sacred site' actually mean – to the Aymara and to other peoples in countries throughout the world? The members of one cultural group may – though not necessarily – know what they mean when they talk about their own places and sites, but can people of one cultural group know what other people in other cultures mean when they talk about their sacred sites?

What does the word 'sacred' mean, anyway? Even if we can define it in our own language, to what extent is the word an adequate translation of the word or words that denote unfamiliar concepts in other cultures and religions? All concepts expressed in a specific language are necessarily limited by that language. How far is it possible to translate, from one language into another, words that denote concepts that do not precisely – or even imprecisely – match? Furthermore, if such concepts *are* dissimilar, how can such a disparity be discovered? In the worldwide discussion of 'sacred sites' the English word 'sacred' has become the accepted term. However, it is quite clear that there are wide variations in the concept that the word denotes, and in what it includes or excludes.

The Maori people of New Zealand, for example, classify their cultural sites into 'everyday' sites and *waahi tapu* (and see Matunga 1994). According to Sole & Woods: 'The literal translation of wahi tapu is "sacred place", but the modern translation of tapu as "sacred" fails to capture its true essence, for the deep spiritual value of wahi tapu transcends mere sacredness' (Sole & Woods 1992, p. 342).

There are even greater complications, for even within Maori society there are said to be different definitions and classifications:

> The hierarchy and complexity of wahi tapu classification is compounded by the people of each iwi, hapu or whanau (tribe, subtribe or extended family) having their own definition which is valid only to them. No iwi, hapu or whanau would be so presumptuous as to define wahi tapu for another group.
>
> (Sole & Woods 1992, p. 342)

There may also be a wide variety of different kinds of sacred sites, with quite different forms and functions, within one culture.

The English word 'sacredness' is derived from Latin, and is defined as restriction through pertaining to the gods. The concept of sacred implies restrictions and prohibitions on human behaviour – if something is sacred then certain rules must be observed in relation to it, and this generally means that something that is said to be sacred, whether it be an object or site (or person), must be placed apart from everyday things or places, so that its special significance can be recognized, and rules regarding it obeyed.

Although the translation of words and concepts in other cultures may be inexact, the concomitant concepts of separateness, respect and rules of behaviour seem to be common to sacred sites in different cultures. But the nature of the sacred sites themselves may be very different, and thus difficult for those outside the culture to recognize, except by observation of the rules of behaviour that pertain to them. There may be no other way to recognize a sacred site, and this is of central importance, for the clash of interests between the people who are responsible for disturbing sacred sites – for whatever reason – and those whose sites they are often arises because outsiders are unable to recognize the sacredness of the sites they are disturbing. It is only comparatively recently that archaeologists, for example, have come to understand that what makes something sacred to people of a different culture may have none of the characteristics or trappings of those things or places they consider sacred in their own society.

To complicate the issue further, it is often the case that the names that are used for individual sites may also be applied to wider areas of land. In Australia, for example:

> White people generally would think of sites as things that can be pinpointed on a map. A site can be distinguished from its surroundings, just as the eyes of a potato can be distinguished from the rest of the vegetable. Laws to protect sacred sites seem to assume this characteristic. Yet Aboriginal usage is often less exact. The same word, for example, may function as the name of a clearly identifiable feature of the landscape and of a more or less extensive area in which that feature is located.
>
> (Maddock 1983, p. 131)

It may be possible for archaeologists and other outsiders to come to recognize the characteristics of sacred sites in cultures other than their own, and to treat them with due respect. But does this imply a fundamental acceptance of the sacredness of the site, or is it merely the adoption, without conviction, of appropriate behaviour? Is it, in fact, possible for people who have different religious beliefs really to believe in the sacredness of the sites or objects that are part of another religion? What do we mean when we say that we believe in the sacredness of someone else's site? How far can we really believe in the sacredness of sites which relate to beliefs that we do not share? If we *treat* something as sacred, is that enough? Is it enough if we follow the rules set down by those whose sacred site it is – or is this merely paying lip service to their belief that it is sacred, rather than really believing it to be sacred ourselves? Can we say that something is sacred to someone else but not to us? Is that not the same as saying that it is not sacred? Could it be, on the other hand, that what is sacred to one person is in essence sacred?

In England, which is predominantly Christian, the concept of sacredness is very specialized, and tends to be restricted to one area of life, religious activity. Religion is, for most people, in a compartment all of its own. It tends not to be part of daily life, and has little connection with family relationships or with the economic or political activities of the community (except in some notable cases).

In a country such as England the concept of the sacredness of the land as a whole is largely lost. So too are the sacred sites that serve to bind together the past, present and future of living communities. Environmental groups may struggle to prevent the destruction of specific sites, whether archaeological sites, areas of outstanding natural beauty, or bird and animal sanctuaries; but such threats to the environment are just that, and are not usually seen as having any deeper significance.

There are some sites in England, however, which are widely believed to have been sacred sites in the past, such as the ancient stone circles to be found in various parts of the British Isles. These are not treated as sacred sites by the majority of the population today, although religious significance is claimed for some sites – Stonehenge for example – by a minority (Fig. 1.1). As in many other parts of the world, the beliefs of this minority are dismissed, and their practices in the neighbourhood of the monument disallowed, even to the extent of persecution by the law of the land.

As far as the 'Church of England' and other Christian denominations are concerned (quite apart from other major religions that exist in England), the associated sacred places are usually very recognizable, at least to those who live in the community. They mainly consist of buildings, such as churches, chapels and cathedrals (Fig. 1.2). Today, even the churches are treated less and less as sacred places. The rules of dress that used to apply are no longer adhered to, and women may now enter bareheaded. There are still some rules that are usually followed, even by 'non-believers' – people tend not to shout or play games or run about in a church. Certain areas within the building are treated

Figure 1.1 Stonehenge, England. The stones are fenced off to prevent damage by visitors to the site. Photo: G. Gardiner.

with particular respect, such as the altar; Christians may genuflect as they pass or approach it, and will tend not to draw too near.

In the context of sacred sites and sacred places the prohibitions on behaviour that exist define the relationship between the god or gods and the people. Gods can protect and assist, but they can also punish and destroy, and therefore there is always some degree of danger involved in offending a deity, who must be placated and assuaged.

In many Christian societies, however, the prohibitions on behaviour that exist to maintain the fragile relationship between the people and their god tend to be restricted only to those activities that we call religious activities. Beyond these narrow confines the prohibitions do not exist, and daily life is relatively free from such restrictions.

In many other societies the concept of 'sacred' is not confined to one small area of life, but is manifested much more widely, and permeates all areas of life. For those people whose religion is confined to one small section of their lives it may be difficult to understand the concepts that underlie these different cultures, or to realize that what is believed to be sacred may not be confined to easily recognizable buildings or objects, but may consist of an apparently unmarked piece of earth or a rock, or a ledge on a mountainside. Perhaps one of the reasons why archaeologists and developers find it so hard to understand the reactions of indigenous peoples to the desecration of their sacred sites is because within the Christian religion it is possible to *deconsecrate* sacred sites. A church, for example, can be deconsecrated, by the carrying out of rituals, so that it becomes a secular site, an ordinary building that can then be used

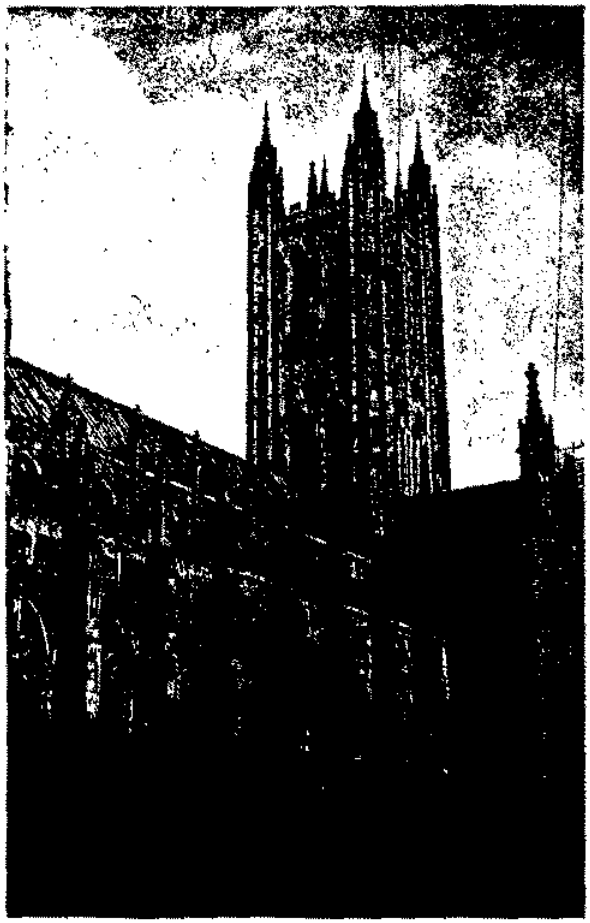

Figure 1.2 Canterbury Cathedral, England. Now as much a tourist attraction as a place of worship? Photo: D. Hinton.

for any purpose. Thus the sacredness of the church is not something that is inherent in the place itself. Ritual leaders can create a sacred place, and uncreate it.

Can sacred sites become secular sites in other societies, such as Native American or Australian Aboriginal communities? In Australia the sacred sites originate from the Dreamtime, when the ancestors created the land – and are said to be still there in the form of 'natural' phenomena such as rocks and rivers. Is it possible, in these circumstances, for a sacred site to cease to be one, if ritual elders decide to change its status? Or does it belong only to the ancestors and thus will remain a sacred site for ever, just as it has already been a sacred site for ever? Perhaps this difference between the nature of the sacred sites of indigenous peoples and the sacred sites of most of the people who wish to disturb them contributes towards the confusion and disagreement between the two groups.

There are many different kinds of sacred sites, but it is burial sites, perhaps, that have become one of the major causes of controversy in many parts of the world. What has come to be called the 'reburial issue' has focused attention on

a wide range of issues concerning attitudes to burial sites, the relationship between the living and the dead, and – in particular – the question of who has prior rights to burial sites, the people whose ancestors are buried there, or archaeologists and others who wish to disturb or destroy the sites for various purposes.

Burial sites often become sacred places in themselves (Fig. 1.3). What happens to these, and to other sacred sites, when the rules of behaviour that surround them are disregarded? Among the Suba people of Kenya the most important shrines, or sacred sites, are ancestral burial grounds. According to Odak (1989), a sacred site is desecrated if someone other than a ritual leader visits it. When the taboos surrounding a site are broken in this way, not only is its sacredness eroded, but an essential part of the traditional culture of the people is also lost.

Payne also points out, with regard to Australian Aboriginal sites, that the well-being of the people is dependent on the maintenance of their sites:

Figure 1.3 The creation of a sacred site: a reburial ceremony at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, USA in 1989. The bones, which had been disturbed by road construction, were reburied under the direction of Sioux and Seminole ritual leaders. Photo: Lydia Maher.

> The maintenance of a site requires both physical caring – for example the rubbing of rocks or clearing of debris – and the performance of items aimed at caring for the spirit housed at it. Without these maintenance processes the site remains, but it is said to lose the spirit held within it. It is then said to die and all those who share physical features and spiritual connections with it are then also thought to die. Thus, to ensure the well-being of life, sites must be cared for and rites performed to keep alive the dreaming powers entrapped within them.
>
> (Payne 1988, p. 72)

This concept is also acknowledged by Jo Mangi, from Papua New Guinea, who has had to confront the problems inherent in the situation of being a Papuan archaeologist working within his own culture. Faced with the dilemma of whether or not to excavate a site which, to him, has no special significance, he accepts the voice of the local cultural group to whom the site belongs, because of the effect his interference would have on the status of the site:

> If it's sacred to them I would rather leave it, even if I know I *can* excavate – if I go to the trouble of negotiating it. I'd leave it. I'd rather take their account of it, the oral accounts of it . . . the minute you tamper with it they lose their respect they had for it.
>
> (Mangi 1986, interview)

Many indigenous peoples would extend the concept of sacredness to the whole of their land. This is a very important point, and to some extent indicates a different understanding of sacred and sacredness. The focus on sacred sites and sites of special significance, in the controversy between indigenous peoples and those who threaten them from outside, has been a necessary focus. But it should not obscure the fact that in some cultures the very land itself is sacred. In North America, for example, Chief Seattle (quoted in Turner 1989), on the signing of the Treaty of Medicine Creek in 1854, said: 'Every part of this country is sacred to my people. Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove has been hallowed by some fond memory or some sad experience of my tribe' (Turner 1989, p. 192).

In many countries there are people of different cultures, or even groups within the same culture, who have differing attitudes towards the earth, and opposing interests regarding the use of the land. In particular, perhaps, where indigenous people and colonizing Europeans co-exist, the difference in beliefs about the nature of the earth lies at the very heart of the controversy about who owns the land, who has rights over it and how it should be protected.

The belief that all the land is sacred is also held by the Aborigines of Australia. Tunbridge, writing about the Adnyamathanha people of the Flinders Ranges in South Australia, demonstrates this, saying that there are many signs in the landscape which indicate the presence or the passing of the spiritual ancestors:

> The visitor to the Flinders Ranges may see a hill, a rock, a waterhole or copper where traditionally an Adnyamathanha person would have seen that and more: the huge serpent Akurra, a Dreamtime Spirit's head, a Dreamtime Spirit's urine, and emu meat thrown by two Dreamtime Spirits passing by . . . it is quite common for Dreamtime Spirits to leave behind them their faeces and urine, the former generally in the form of rock, the latter in the form of waterholes. Blood is left behind in the form of red ground. When both the birds Marnbi and Yuduyudulya leave their feathers behind, it is in the form of white quartz, and when the eagle leaves his feathers behind, it is in the form of flintstone.
>
> (Tunbridge 1988, p. xxxiv)

This does not mean that the Adnyamathanha do not have special places, especially sacred places, which are set apart, and which carry their own prohibitions and rules of behaviour for those who come into contact with them. But the rest of the land is *also* sacred in a way that it is hard for people from other cultures to understand.

In Australia, some Aboriginal groups who have long been alienated from their land, and know little about the individual sites and stories connected with them, have come to consider all of it to be 'sacred', though in a different sense from those Aborigines who know wherein the significance lies.

> A new kind of 'sites of significance' has been developing in the recent past. To some people of Aboriginal descent who were not reared in a living-traditional Aboriginal culture, almost everything of that culture which they hear about or read about now is, by definition, sacred, or almost so. And that applies to 'country' as well: all sites in Australia are 'sites of significance' because they are, or were, *Aboriginal* sites.
>
> (Berndt 1989, p. 17)

In some places sacred sites are now protected from intrusion or destruction by law. Thus Maddock asks whether all of Australia could be called a sacred site, and then continues:

> This is not a facetious question. In the flurry of attention to sacred sites in recent years some striking assertions have been made by Aborigines and others. As with statements about land rights generally, these assertions are aimed at affecting the use and control of land. A sacred site – by definition almost – should be respected and left alone.
>
> (Maddock 1983, p. 131)

It may be that to some urbanized groups who have lost their link with their original homeland anything connected with the traditional past has become 'sacred' to them; others may use the word deliberately, because of its power as a deterrent to those who wish to destroy the land.

For the majority of people, however, who talk of the sacredness of their land, there is no desire to manipulate, only a desire to ensure that the land is preserved. Leonard Bastien of the Peigan Nation in Alberta, Canada, talking about the threatened destruction of part of the Oldman River Valley, writes:

> Napi created the animals, birds and people and could talk with them. If Napi could talk with animals, plants, birds and rocks, seeking their power to help him, it follows they must have spirits and must be sacred. From this the Indian believes that nothing is inanimate and therefore all is sacred. Rocks are sacred as a human life is sacred. It then follows that the Oldman River Valley, home for many of these birds, rocks, plants and animals is sacred as well.
>
> (Bastien 1989, p. A5)

Echoing Odak (above), Bastien also points out that the destruction of the land is also the destruction of traditional culture:

> Without the valley as it is, existing medicine bundles would become vestiges of a dead culture, since input for change would not be possible. For the Peigan the river, the valley, the plants and the animals allow for the self-perpetuation of their culture.
>
> (Bastien 1989, p. A5)

Although the whole landscape may be considered sacred, there are differences between this and the sacredness of sites that have particular significance. Not every stone or plot of earth can be treated with the same degree of respect. Does this mean that there are *degrees* of sacredness? Or is it, again, merely limitations in the understanding of the cultures and languages concerned?

It may be difficult to define what is meant by 'sacred' among different peoples and in varying contexts, but when the land comes under threat then the sacred sites, sacred places and sites of special significance become identifiable, even to outsiders, by the extent to which the communities concerned will fight to preserve and protect them from disturbance, interference or destruction.

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11 *The perception and treatment of prehistoric and contemporary sacred places and sites in Poland*

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For most people in Poland their tradition and history is based on more than 1,000 years of the Polish state and of Christianity. As far as social consciousness and identification is concerned, Poland's past can be divided into two periods: prehistoric and historic times (Christianity). The way people identify with their national heritage differs according to the period, and each period is responsible for different kinds of tradition and social identification. The prehistoric period left many kinds of objects and places which may be treated or interpreted as sacred. In the historic period, sacred places functioned as centres of great importance, with which a given group could identify its religious, traditional and cultural roots.

Poland lacks any tribal communities. There is no direct cultural identification between modern communities and prehistoric groups, and no ancient ritual places with which any contemporary community can identify itself in terms of cultural links and common ancestors or roots. Cultural identification does exist with historic sacred places, however, and this is expressed in different ways by the Roman Catholics and by the religions of the national minorities in Poland. This tradition of cultural identification created one of the most important, characteristic and unique forms of the Roman Catholic church.

It is suggested that the variations in the perception and treatment of so-called sacred places and sites in Poland, whether prehistoric or historic, depend on the roles that they play and fulfil in contemporary society.

Prehistoric sacred places and sites

As far as Polish prehistory is concerned, from the first traces of human groups until the Slav period, it is extremely difficult to establish distinct criteria which allow classification of a given place as a sacred site. My concern here is not how many sites and places existed in a particular prehistoric period, but the way in which they are treated today. The basis for such a classification is usually the

lack of any traces of permanent habitation, or the presence of a special kind of artefact, for example a cluster of hearths, objects of unusual shape, content, etc. Some of the most typical prehistoric cult places are sacred groves and some lakes, streams, marshes and other natural features. On the basis of previous research (Bender 1972) it appears that cult places in central European communities were situated mainly in the open, which is why the objects are difficult to distinguish archaeologically, leading in turn to difficulties in interpretation.

Because of their unusual character, exploration of places regarded as sacred sites attracts relatively greater interest among archaeologists, and such work is more likely to get published in the press or popular scientific journals. Otalazka, near Warsaw, is an example of such a site which raised considerable interest about twenty years ago. It is a typical marsh site dated to the end of the Roman/Iron Age (fourth to sixth century AD), with unique finds consisting of a conical stone circle 6 metres in diameter with animal bones within it, which is interpreted as a kind of altar; and a so-called oval-shaped grill where, over a surface of approximately 10 square metres, pillars and thin vertical and transverse beams were driven into the ground. Within this construction a huge quantity of pottery and animal bones was found, and there were also places in which sacrificial pots had been deposited. Otherwise, this site has the typical characteristics of a marsh site (Bender 1972). The only basis and criterion for classifying this place as a sacred site was the 'unusual' character of its finds. The modern perception of the site's characteristics as 'uncommon' meant that, from the very beginning, it was the subject of numerous articles in newspapers and archaeological journals.

Such spectacular events do not happen very often in Polish archaeology. It may be assumed that cemeteries and certain objects from settlements, some types of pottery, amulets, clay figurines, treasures, etc. would also have had sacred meaning for a given community. However, objects which are likely to have been connected with ritual activities in prehistoric times – unless judged to have exceptional aesthetic value – are not treated by archaeologists any differently from secular objects.

There are also places in Poland which have attained an accepted place in social consciousness today because of their aesthetic and landscape values, as well as their atmosphere of mystery. Complexes of peaks in Lower Silesia are examples of this type of place, their features preventing them from being classed with ordinary settlement areas. Peaks such as Sleza and Lysa Góra, are well known in Poland, and information about them exists in almost every tourist guide; they have become very important tourist centres. It should be stressed in this context that archaeological monuments are not commonly a focus for tourism in Poland.

Stone circles have been found surrounding the four peaks of the Sleza Massif – Sleza, Radunia, Wiezyca and Lysa Góra. Excavations have shown that they are not part of a fortified system, and thus the peaks had no strategic significance. In addition, sources of drinking water are outside these circles, which

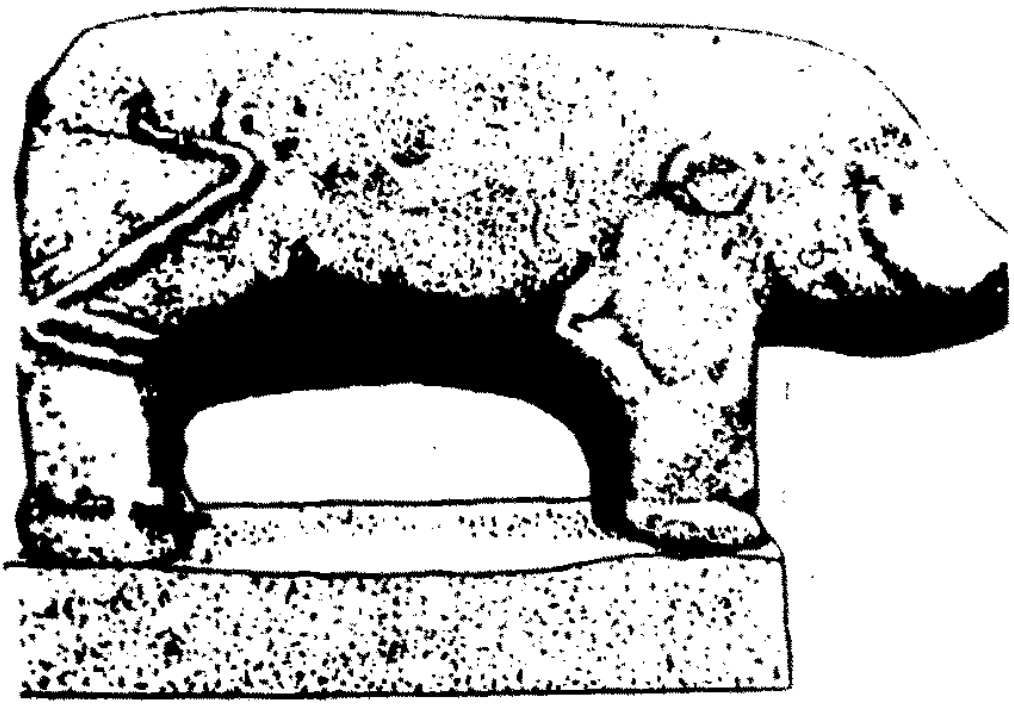

Figure 11.1 Stone carving of a she-bear from Sleza.

demonstrates that they were not hill-forts. On Sleza, which is regarded as a major cult centre, there were two circles: one, which surrounded the peak, was constructed with stones of different sizes, joined without any kind of mortar; the other circle, half-way up the mountain, is crescent-shaped, with a circumference of *c.* 400 metres. In addition to these circles there are monumental stone sculptures, including two she-bears (Fig. 11.1), a man with a fish, a 'monk' and a mushroom. All of these, which are very well known in Poland, are marked with an 'X' sign, a feature which has fascinated archaeologists, and which has been taken to be a sign of Celtic significance. The date of these objects is not clear; they were probably used by people of the Lusatian culture or by Celts, and this Sleza area may have been a centre of importance in both of these periods (Cehak-Holubowiczowa 1959; Gediga 1979). The Sleza complex undoubtedly functioned in the Middle Ages, and a German chronicler wrote about Sleza: 'Because of its quality and size, when the accursed pagan cult was kept, Sleza was treated with great adoration by the people' (Gierlach 1980, p. 110). One must remember that this was written at a time when Christianity was a strong influence in Poland. Today, the special treatment given to the stone circles, and their wide reputation as tourist attractions, is not because of their special 'sacred' character, but rather because both circles and stone monuments are spectacular.

Thus it can be seen that, although prehistoric sites may be significant in contemporary social consciousness, this is not because the sites have religious or sacred significance in the present. They are important either because of the

nature of the artefacts found on them, which indicate a special significance to the people who placed them there in the distant past, or the sites are, in themselves, so spectacular that their impact is, in a sense, inescapable to living populations, even if their original significance is unknown.

Contemporary sacred places and sites

Within contemporary Poland, therefore, the places that function, both cognitively and empirically, as sacred sites, are those that have been created within the Christian period. This does not mean that all the sites are Christian sites. The current claim that contemporary Poland is a mono-religious country is not true. Inside its borders coexist not only different kinds of Christian religions but also other religions, such as Islam and Buddhism, which have emerged in different cultural contexts. Within each particular tradition there are different places of special importance, not only because of differences in religion but also as a result of history, tradition and culture.

It is not easy to construct a useful classification of sacred places which takes into account all the different religious traditions that exist in Poland today. One of the largest categories of sacred places consists of places with pictures and/or sculptures which are regarded by the church authorities as holy and miraculous. Another group consists of places where religious revelations have taken place, and another consists of places where supernatural phenomena have occurred, e.g. crying pictures in Lublin and Wyszków (in 1949) and bleeding crosses in Slupsk (in 1980), Olecko (in 1981) and Rudnicki (in 1991).

Sacred places in contemporary Poland are normally perceived mainly through their religious, magical, historical-cognitive, and political functions. Generally, at least two such functions coexist at the same place. Among the most frequently cited examples are the sanctuaries of the Holy Virgin, which are very numerous in Poland and are still increasing in number. Religious communities usually gather around their parish churches, which are under the care of priests, Orthodox priests, mullahs, monks, etc. Their main task is to strengthen the faith of their congregation, and one of their very characteristic ways of doing so is to organize pilgrimages to sacred places in different parts of the country.

The religious functions of sites are undoubtedly the most important in contemporary Poland, but the manner in which they influence the congregation is changing over time. Pilgrims are influenced by a series of stimuli of various human senses: eyesight, hearing and smell. The most extreme example comes from the Lichen Sanctuary of the Holy Virgin, a relatively new sanctuary created about 100 years ago, in a period which can be described as a time of glory and magnificence. On the few hectares which belong to the parish of the Marian order (*księża Marianie*), which has been taking care of this sanctuary since 1949, many chapels (Fig. 11.2), grottoes (Fig. 11.3), altars, etc. have been built in order to commemorate different episodes from the Old and New

Testament, the history of the Catholic church in Poland, and the history of Poland, including the political events of modern Poland (Makulski 1984). In spite of the fact that these references are so blatant, the sanctuary is socially perceived as an exclusively religious sanctuary, without political or historical significance.

Despite the long history and rich liturgical tradition of the Polish Catholic church, new elements are continually being introduced. For example, in Górka Duchowna, Good Friday mystery plays (Fig. 11.4) began to be enacted two years ago.

The Holy Virgin sanctuaries in Poland, apart from their religious functions, fulfilled, and still fulfil, crucial political functions. The biggest Polish sanctuary, the Jasna Góra Sanctuary of the Holy Virgin in Czestochowa, is also the best known, outside as well as inside Poland. It is not only the most important religious place in Poland but also a centre of Polish culture and tradition. There are many monographs concerning Czestochowa which show the importance and significance of this place for Polish culture. This sanctuary came to special prominence in the last decade, when the Pauline monks, who are responsible for it, protected and helped people who were being persecuted because of their political convictions, and also their families. Masses were celebrated for the country during which people prayed for the liberation of Poland from the rule of communism. All Poles, especially practising Christians, were supposed to make a pilgrimage to Czestochowa in order to demonstrate not only their godliness but also their political attitude. It was a relatively easy task to distinguish ordinary 'religious' pilgrims from 'political' ones. The latter usually had a rheostat attached to their lapels or sweaters, which was the symbol of resistance against communism, the sign of 'Solidarity' or 'Fighting Poland'. Such people also assumed a very characteristic position, kneeling on both knees with their hands crossed on their chests (a sign of deeper religious initiation than the ordinary joining of the palms in prayer), and having their heads bent submissively onto their chests.

Another sacred site which has political significance is the Sanctuary of the Holy Virgin in Stoczek in the Warmia region. This sanctuary is famous not only because of its holy picture (which is a copy of a picture of the Holy Virgin of the Snows from Rome) but because it is the place where the Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, the Primate of Poland, was imprisoned in the 1950s.

An important place of pilgrimage is the Church of St Stanislaw Kostka in Warsaw, where priest Jerzy Popieluszko preached and where he is now buried. Father Popieluszko was brutally murdered by the Polish intelligence service and is regarded as a symbol of Poland's fight for freedom and independence.

The St Anna Mountain Sanctuary in Silesia is completely different in character. It is the place of pilgrimage for people of German origin, and as such is the place where the German minority manifests its separate character. Official post-war propaganda proclaimed that Poland is a homogeneous country without national minorities; thus the Germans living in Silesia were treated as Silesian citizens (*Slazacy*), and the St Anna Mountain Sanctuary is

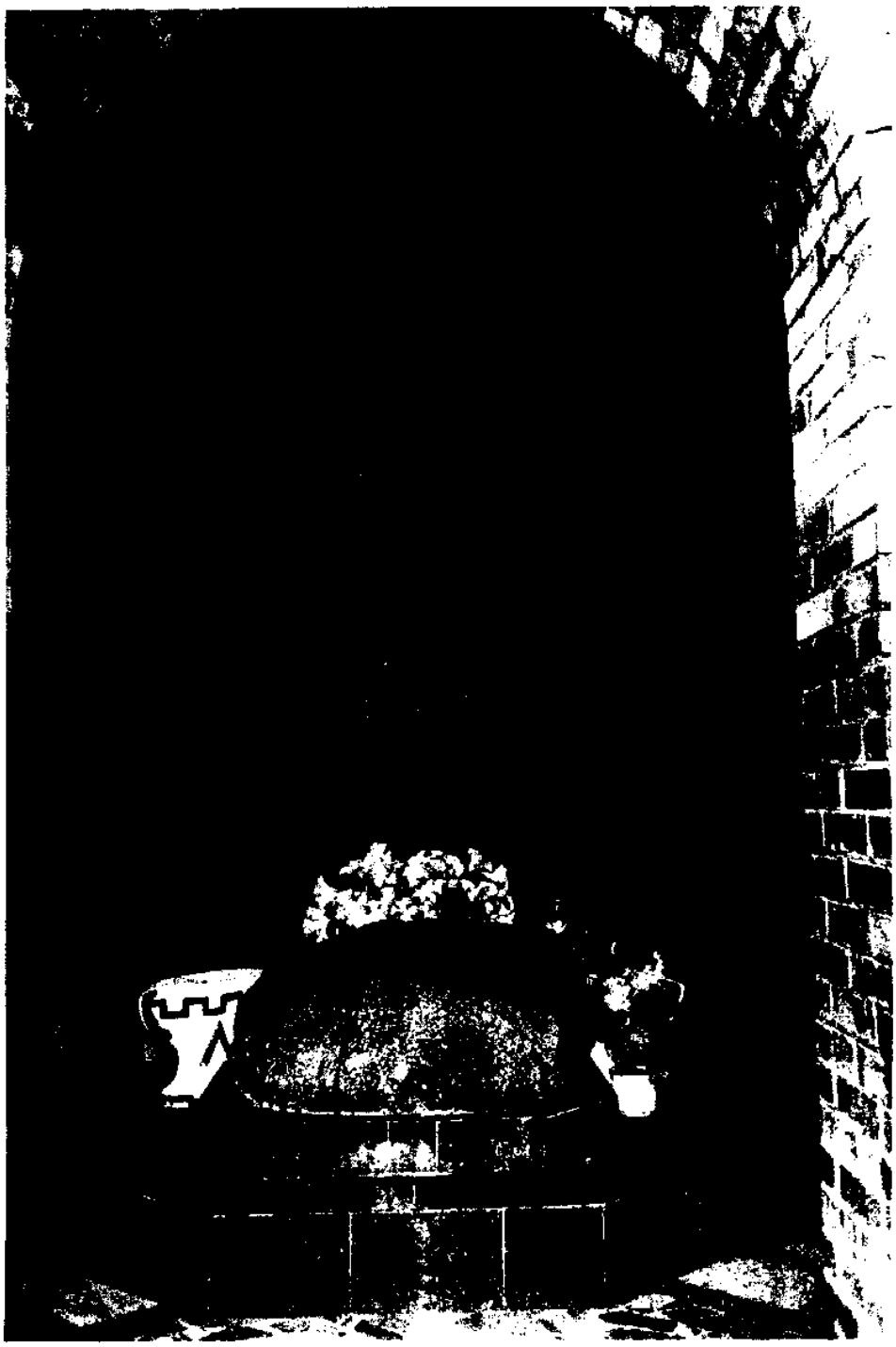

Figure 11.2 Chapel of Revelation of the Holy Virgin at Lichen. In the centre of the chapel there is a stone with the footprints of the Holy Virgin.

Figure 11.4 A scene from the Good Friday mystery play at Górka Duchowna, commemorating the death of Jesus Christ.

the central pillar of their religion and culture. Germans from all parts of Poland meet at the sanctuary, and celebrate masses in their own language. This place has a very important impact on the integration of the German minority in Poland.

Other minorities living in Poland – Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Lithuanians – also have their own sacred places. Thus, the Sanctuary of the Holy Virgin from the Holy Mountain of Grabarka near Bialystok is the centre of the Orthodox church in Poland (Fig. 11.5). There has been an Orthodox church there since the seventeenth century (until it was burnt down in the summer of 1990) with a very famous icon of Spas Izbownik from the twelfth century. A dynamic movement has emerged, concentrated around the sanctuary, in order to defend their own, mainly Byelorussian, culture. The core of this movement consists of young people who, through religious practices,

Figure 11.5 Grabarka – expiation crosses in the ground and on a tree.

Figure 11.6 An old Muslim cemetery at Kruszyniany.

want to learn the roots of their own culture and to make Polish opinion aware that Poland is not a nationally and religiously homogeneous country, and that the stereotype of the 'Polish Catholic' is false (Madra 1982; Mironowicz 1983).

Even now, many sacred places are categorized as magical, the most famous being those where one can recover lost health. In order to do this, many ritual activities have to be performed, e.g. a person has to walk on a pilgrimage from her/his home to a sacred place of this kind, taking water from the springs and streams which usually flow near such a site, and which are regarded as having curative powers. For example, in Grabarka there is the holy well from which a single gulp of water guarantees good health for the following year. There is also a small stream near the sanctuary which, it is believed, will cure all diseases. During this ritual, the hands or face are washed with the water and then must be wiped very carefully on a towel or rag, which is then left as the locus of diseases near the stream. That is why, during the annual church fairs, so many different kinds of towels, rags and scarves are left in the vicinity of the stream.

Almost all places considered sacred in the sense defined above are also commonly regarded as tourist attractions, especially for people whose religions are different from those whose sacred place it is. The most popular tourist places, because of custom and architecture, are those most different from Polish culture, e.g. Kruszyniany (near Bialystok), the centre of Islam in Poland, where there are eighteenth-century mosques and cemeteries

(Fig. 11.6) (Borzyszkowski 1977; Datko 1983), Grabarka and Wojnowo (Fig. 11.7) in the Warmia region (a village settled by members of the old Orthodox Slav church (*starocerkiewnostowianski*)).

The best time to visit Grabarka is on 18–19 August when the traditional annual church fair takes place (Fig. 11.8). At that time, the Heads of the Orthodox church from Poland, Byelorussia and Russia congregate there, wearing very beautiful, rich and unusual canonicals, together with several thousand Orthodox believers of many nationalities, wearing their national costumes. The behaviour of many tourists is the same as elsewhere. Some people discreetly observe the mystery play which takes place all around, mixing imperceptibly with the crowd, while other tourists behave ostenta-

Figure 11.7 The old Orthodox Slav church at Wojnowo.

Figure 11.8 The annual Orthodox church fair at Grabarka.

tiously, loudly and noisily, and take pictures against a background of Orthodox priests, crosses and coloured wagons.

Generally speaking, conflict between members of different religions does not exist in Poland. The desecration of sacred sites which sometimes occurs is typically criminal in origin, and not directed against any particular religious group, e.g. the theft of a silver sarcophagus of St Wojciech from Gniezno Cathedral, the theft of an icon from the burnt Orthodox church at Grabarka, or the theft of icons from Uniate Orthodox churches in the Bieszczady mountains, in southeast Poland. Only the actions of Nazis and Stalinists in the past were directed at destroying the heritage of a particular national or religious group. For example, during the Second World War, the Jewish synagogue in Poznań was converted into the town's swimming-pool, and only now is action under way to return this synagogue to its traditional owners. Also, as a result of the mass displacement in the 1940s of people of Ukrainian descent, many Orthodox churches in the Bieszczady mountains were left without any kind of care, falling into disrepair and having objects stolen from them.

Although they are important to the community, it is clear that, in general, churches and other sacred places are insufficiently guarded and protected. The church authorities have direct responsibility for the protection of their churches, and they are also responsible for all repairs and preservation. However, all repairs of those buildings which were built before 1939 have to be carried out under the control of the Vojvodeship Conservator of Art which,

in the last few years, because of the deep economic crisis, has been unable to give religious communities very much help. For this reason the churches are now supposed to become self-supporting.

Conclusion

It has been shown that those places in contemporary Poland that are perceived as sacred, although they may have some historical and political significance, are most important to contemporary believers because of their religious and magical functions. In contrast, prehistoric sites do not have any contemporary function. They may be perceived as having had sacred significance in the past but because people of today have no direct cultural identification with prehistoric groups, these ancient sacred places are perceived almost exclusively as monuments of the past.

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20 *Tourism and the Bighorn Medicine Wheel: how multiple use does not work for sacred land sites*

NICOLE PRICE

The Bighorn Medicine Wheel (Fig. 20.1) and Medicine Mountain are located in the Big Horn mountains of northwestern Wyoming, 60 miles east of Cody, Wyoming. The wheel sits at 9,750 feet elevation on a rocky ledge. It does not occupy the highest spot on Medicine Mountain – the highest point is the site of an Air Force radar installation.

The ledge containing the Medicine Wheel is part of a barren windswept plateau, accessible for perhaps three months of the year. A stone circle 80 feet across has been placed there, including twenty-eight spokes or lines marked

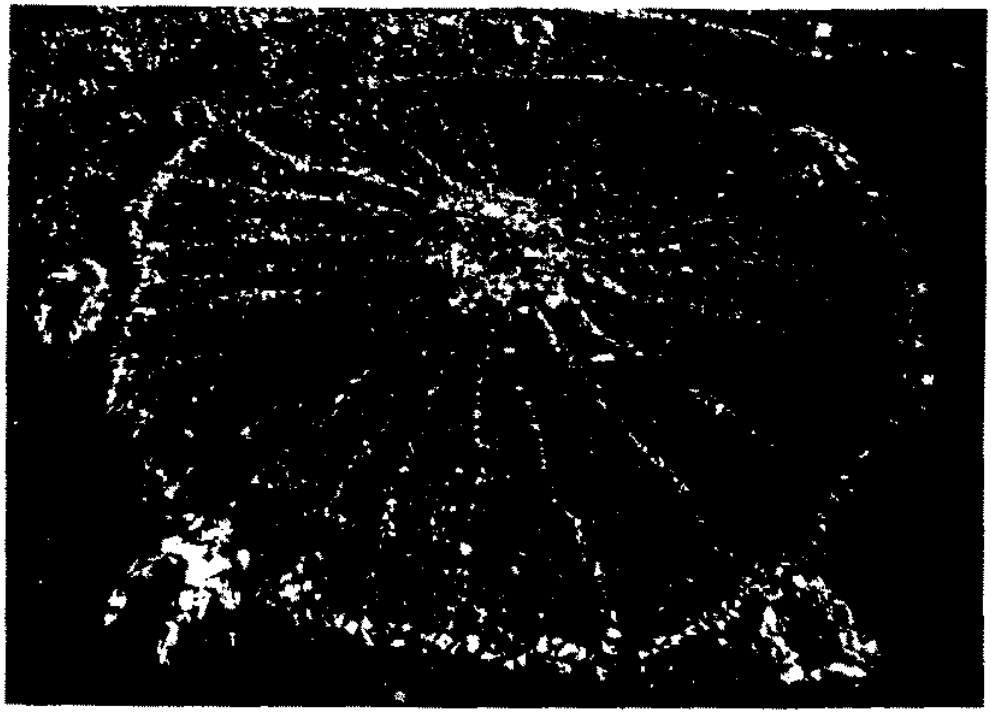

Figure 20.1 Aerial view of the Bighorn Medicine Wheel. Photo: C. Milne, from *Sacred Earth*, Canada: Penguin Viking Books 1992 and New York: Abraham Books, 1993.

with stones, and six rock cairns: four inside the circle, one in the centre and one outside to the southwest. The central cairn is the oldest part of the feature, and archaeological studies have found that a central hub existed before the circle and spokes were added. There are caves around the area that were used for ceremonial purposes. The feeling of timelessness is always present at Medicine Mountain and hours seem like minutes. There are old trails that come up onto the mountain from both east and west and parts of these old trails are still visible and can be traced and walked. Walking a part of the old trail sends one back into the past; with a little imagination one can feel the walk people would have taken coming here, knowing of the sacrifice they would be making and the hardships to be endured. There are steps cut into the limestone and the trail does not lead right up to the wheel but into what would have been a cave or tunnel that has been filled in with rock by the Forest Service.

History of Native use

The Bighorn Medicine Wheel and Medicine Mountain are sacred land sites and have been for a long time – some of the dating for this site goes back as far as 10,000 years. As different tribes came and went, the one thing that has been a constant is the fact that the Medicine Wheel and Mountain has always been a neutral area for all tribes, and arms were not allowed within this area. While they were there all tribes were friends and not enemies. Tribal Elders talk of enemy tribes camping side by side, while the men were preparing for ceremonies or rituals. At these times much trading of goods and medicines took place.

The Northern Plains tribes were nomadic peoples who travelled over great distances in the course of a year, following the buffalo herds, searching for plants to supplement their diets and to go to places where they could meet other tribes, to exchange medicines and to do trading. The Cheyenne, for instance, travelled from North Dakota all the way to northern Texas.

The tribes were nomadic when the Medicine Wheel and Mountain were first used. Then came the police warfare action of the United States government and Indian reservations were established. The Native Americans became disassociated from the ritual and renewal practices for the Medicine Wheel and Mountain area because they were not allowed to leave the reservations.

However, contemporary use of the Medicine Wheel has continued through the years by a number of tribes: Crow, Northern and Southern Cheyenne, Blackfeet, Shoshone, five bands of Sioux and the Northern and Southern Arapahoe.

Why the Medicine Wheel and Mountain are sacred

Native Americans would only visit sacred sites such as this for a very specific purpose, and only after much preparation had taken place away from the site.

Many offerings would be made, which were purified before the visit even started. Proper respect for the site had to be maintained throughout, and no one would go there just out of curiosity In fact, Native Americans would only have visited this or any sacred site at times of great tribal need, otherwise they respectfully stayed away. It has been done like this for thousands of years.

The Medicine Wheel and Mountain were and are used as a vision quest area by a number of tribes, and herein lies the great problem in allowing tourism or other types of multiple use of the area. The land base for a sacred site is the home or lodge of the spirit life that dwells within, in this case a mountain. The rulers of the universe reside here, not only the rulers of the physical elements but the spiritual elements as well. It is here where the offerings are taken, and the prayers that go with them are accepted or rejected. It is here that the prayers are answered.

Herein lies the great division between the white, dominant culture and the Native Americans, for the dominant society lives with a commemorative religion, which commemorates a person, place or event in the past. The Native American religion, on the other hand, is one of renewal. Each spring a whole renewal process started again, and each place had a ceremony dedicated to the renewal of the spirit life that was part of an area, be it sky, earth, water, animal or plant.

Because of these cultural differences between the Native Americans and those who dominate planning and legislative organizations, the Elders that work with the Medicine Wheel Alliance have asked many times, 'How do you design plans to protect sacred places when you are dealing with people who have never held anything sacred? People who probe the earth, probe the sky and oceans, tread upon all the earth, touch everything and all without feeling the mother earth under them!'

To Native Americans the highest and best use of land is that which ensures the spiritual harmony of the area, past, present and future. In Montana, Wyoming and South Dakota there are a number of sacred sites: Bighorn Medicine Wheel and Medicine Mountain, Bears Tower (better known to many as Devils Tower), Bear Butte, Black Hills, Sweetgrass Hills, Badger-Two Medicine and Old Man Tree, to name just a few. These are places of great beauty, quiet places – or at least they used to be. As development takes place and people come to the area out of curiosity, they feed upon the spirit of the mountain or area and the spiritual harmony of the land is disrupted. Native Americans believe that this is why they now have the problems of alcoholism, child abuse and diseases of the elderly that they do. They feel that bad things have happened to their peoples because they have not been allowed to come to sacred sites and appease the spirit life of these places.

'Not been allowed' is the key phrase here, because there was a time, from 1880 to 1924, when Indians were not allowed off their reservations. Not until the Native American Religious Freedom Act was passed in 1978 did Native Americans feel they had the right to go onto federal lands and practise their

religion. There are still old Shoshone people who do not believe even to this day that they can leave their reservation.

Multiple use and the Forest Service

In the view of the United States Forest Service, 'multiple use' involves the management of all renewable surface resources within the National Forest System so that they are used in the combination that best meets the needs of the American people. Resource conservation is implicit in this, and thus some land will not be exploited for all its possible resources. The intention is that resource management is to be co-ordinated and harmonious, without any impairment of the productivity of the land. Consideration will be given first to the various resource values that exist, even though this may not result in the highest economic or financial returns.

The Forest Service, because of the multiple use mandate, has had to address scenic, historic, wilderness, grazing and water developments. They are now having to address *sacred land sites of the Native American.*

The Forest Service is a formidable agency, started 100 years ago by a group of scientists who were only looking to enhance timber production on forest lands. With the advent of the multiple use concept, a new group of people also wanted access to these spaces. The Forest Service does not have the expertise to deal with all the varied interests that have now sprouted up, especially in the area of sacred land and sites. The difficulty that arises here in relation to sacred land issues is that most federal agencies want these issues debated, whereas the view of the traditional communities is that religious issues should not be debated; such a situation therefore has grave consequences for traditional practitioners when they are asked to do so. The spirit life of a sacred place does have an ecosystem but, unfortunately, as presently administered, there is no place in the multiple use system to access the spiritual quality of the land and its ecosystem.

The Medicine Wheel and Medicine Mountain already support multiple uses. They are used for cattle-grazing, a radar dome, tourism, hunting and snow-mobiling; timbering has been considered, and it will probably be considered again in the future as the Big Horn Forest Service looks for more timber. The land managers need to realize that all the land cannot be used all the time, for all of the multiple uses.

Development plans

In 1988, the Forest Service development plans for the Medicine Wheel included a 2,000 sq. foot information centre right at the Medicine Wheel itself, and a viewing platform at least 90 feet (27 metres) long, wide enough for two wheelchairs side by side, placed adjacent to the Medicine Wheel. Plans

also included a new and large environmentally coloured fence around the perimeter, new walking trails to the 'Five Springs overlook' and tipi rings, and interpretive signs to tell people the history of the area. The development proposal also included a new parking lot for thirty cars and two large vehicles. The road up to the wheel was to be widened into a good, two-lane road approaching within 30 feet (9 metres) of the wheel.

All this was planned to take place without any Native American input. According to the then District Ranger, 'We've never seen any Indians up there, so why should they be concerned?' The fact that the Medicine Wheel and Medicine Mountain area is a sacred site was not even considered in these plans or, for that matter, in any other development. Since 1988 the Medicine Wheel Alliance and its affiliated tribes have worked long and hard to get the Native American viewpoint into the working plans for this area. To date, we have gone through a scoping document and Draft Environmental Assessment and are waiting for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The Big Horn Forest Service has recently stated that there will not be an information centre right at the Medicine Wheel after all, nor will there be a viewing platform. Beyond that, at this point, we do not know what is in the imminent Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

The highest and best use

The Bighorn Medicine Wheel and Medicine Mountain has always been a very sacred area, used for vision questing or prayer; a place to renew the spirit. Native Americans of today would once again like to see it become just that: a place of spiritual renewal. All they have asked is that at least a 2½-mile radius be established as a preserve of some kind. Sensitive development could include walking trails to the Medicine Wheel and a small information centre, with a replica of the Wheel displayed for the curious, placed at least a mile and a half away from the Wheel itself. Signs should be devised to inform visitors how they should approach the area, what are appropriate offerings, and what the site should be used for.

To traditional Native Americans, Medicine Mountain is the equivalent of a church and therefore should be treated as such. As more and more land is consumed for development of all kinds, places such as these will become increasingly important for the solitude and meditative experiences they can provide to all.

We have created historical and cultural parks which have been turned into recreational developments. When a sacred site is part of a federal, state or local property, it usually becomes the tourist attraction for the area. This may be the reason why Native American Indians are reluctant to discuss or identify areas of importance.

Now, perhaps, we need to think along the lines of sacred land parks; each creating, by its own definition, a space set apart for contemplative uses, to be