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Cenotaphs and Sacred Localities

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CENOTAPHS AND SACRED LOCALITIES.

‘Im allgemeinen wird man behaupten dürfen dass, wenn die Griechen einmal die “Gräber” ihrer Heroen aufgraben hätten, sie in den weitaus meisten Fällen keine Gebeine gefunden haben würden. Die “Gräber” waren alte Kultstätten, die allmählich in der Legende das Grab des einstigen Gottes wurden.’¹

A NOTICEABLE feature with regard to sacred localities (sacred springs, trees, wells and the like) not only in Ancient Greece, but also in other lands, is the frequent association of the sacred spot with the supposed grave of a saint, prophet or holy man. For example, a long list of sacred localities in the Punjab was published by Miss Burne and Mr. Rose in *Folklore*, xxi.² and it will be seen that the feature to which I have alluded, is as prominent here as in the traditions of Ancient Greece. It has, of course, attracted the attention of the authors, who offer two slightly different explanations of the phenomenon. (1) ‘The power of the original healer has passed into his tomb instead of into his descendants, or has been communicated by him to a well instead of to a disciple.’³ This explanation, it will be observed, admits the existence of the buried prophet and his holiness as the ultimate source of the power of the locality. (2) ‘It may be doubted whether those legendary Fakirs, who are said to have given power to the wells, are not in reality early devotees of the wells in question, whose memory lingers at the places they themselves worshipped, and beside which they were frequently buried.’⁴ Here the locality is recognised as the original sanctity, but it is taken for granted that the sacred well is associated with an historic personage actually buried at the place.

¹ Pfister, *Der Reliquienkult im Altertum*, p. 396.

² ‘Occult Powers of healing in the Punjab,’ *Folklore*, xxi. p. 313.

³ *Ib.* p. 319.

⁴ *Ib.* p. 323.

Now at the outset I should like it to be clear that I do not for a moment deny that it is quite possible in individual cases that (1) the tomb of a holy man may eventually give sanctity to the locality in which it is placed or (2) that a devotee may be buried near a sacred spot in which he had worshipped, and that his tomb may acquire the sanctity of the holy place. But I cannot help regarding these as the minority of cases, the variations of local accident, and I believe that some more general tendency in the development of religious thought must be discovered to account for so invariable a tendency to associate a supposed tomb with the sacred locality.

I say a *supposed* tomb, for the first point to grasp in approaching the problem is that in a great many cases there is no tomb and never has been a tomb at these holy places at all. Take for example the Malay *kramats*, (*kramat* is primarily an adjective which means 'possessing magical power,' secondarily a *kramat* locality). 'Theoretically *kramats* are supposed to be the graves of deceased holy men, the early apostles of the Mohammedan faith, the first founders of the village, who cleared the primeval jungle, and other persons of local notoriety in a former age.' Some, we are told, connect these *kramats* with ancestor worship. 'It is certain, however, that many of these *kramats* are not graves at all' and Mr. Skeat concludes that they have their origin in 'primitive nature worship or the adoration of the spirits of the natural objects.'¹ Was there an actual tomb of Teiresias shown at Telpousa? The graves of Kalchas and Podaleirios were admittedly cenotaphs.

Writers on classical religion have not usually taken the tomb seriously, but their account of the association of dead heroes is rather different from that which I propose to give. The doctrines of that inversion of Euhemerism which is the creed of Usener's school, demand that the sacred localities were the places of worship of gods, who subsequently degenerated into heroes. The fatal objection to such a theory is that it neglects the priority of the sanctity of the localities to the sanctity of the personalities connected with them. No one, I think, who has studied the question of sacred wells and trees from the comparative standpoint, or who has read Mr. Hartland's exhaustive treatment of them in the second volume of his *Legend of Persons*, can doubt that the

¹ Skeat, *Malay Magic*, pp. 62 foll.

sanctity of magical localities goes back to the remotest beginnings of preanimistic religion.

The cause which ultimately, I believe, underlies this association of sacred places with a supposed tomb, is a tendency of no small importance in the development of religion, the tendency to give a defined personality to the vague power or spirit inherent in, or associated with objects of awe or reverence. It is unnecessary to multiply examples of the way in which localities impress superstitious man with awe, sometimes in virtue of their grandeur, whether menacing or beautiful, sometimes in virtue of some peculiar characteristic.¹ 'Nullus enim fons non sacer,' says Servius.²

In many cases, the reverence paid to these sacred localities may have preceded the development of animistic religion. It is quite clear in many of the instances of healing wells, that the water originally worked its cure in virtue of its own *mana* or magic power, not because it was the instrument of some spirit. And the ford rites, which I have discussed elsewhere,³ have often for their object the aversion of the danger which arises from contact with the magic water itself, rather than with a spirit inhabiting it. But early, at any rate, the animistic stage is reached. The power of the water is personified, if vaguely, in a spirit or a *numen* :—

Lucus Aventino suberat niger ilicis umbra
Quo possis viso dicere numen inest.⁴

It is important to notice how vague at first these *numina* are. Of the Nez Percé Indians we are told that 'their conception of the world was animistic, according to which there were spirits in trees, hills, rivers, and other natural objects. These spirits *had no special names*, and were intimately associated with the objects in which they dwelt. *When named they took the names of those objects*. The spirits were both good and evil ; those residing in the trees and streams benevolent. There were a few trees that rose almost to the dignity of shrines, and which were said to hold conversation sometimes with shamans and chiefs, giving them advice on important occasions.⁵' Here the spirits hardly seem to have a generic name. The generic name is of course the next stage in the process of

¹ See Karsten, *Studies in Primitive Greek Religion*, p. 41 ; Frazer, *Pausanias*, iii. p. 447.

² Servius, *Aeneid*, vii. 84.

³ *Folklore*, xxi. p. 159.

⁴ Ovid, *Fasti*, iii. 295.

⁵ Spinden, 'The Nez Percé Indians,' *Memorials of the American Anthropological Association*, ii. Pt. 3, p. 258. The italics are mine. Cf. account of the Shuswap, Teit, *Jesup North Pacific Expedition*, ii. 7, p. 60.

more definite personification. The waters are sacred because they are the habitation of a kind of spirit called Nymphs. 'Fontes sacros quia omnibus aquis Nymphae sunt praesidentes.'¹ In many cases, these nymphs are identified, or their life at least is identified, with that of the water or grove,² but the power of the water has none the less made considerable progress in a process of evolution towards becoming an independent personality who uses the water merely as an instrument. Sometimes animism goes to its furthest conclusion, and we have a Skamander, who rises in human form to rebuke Achilles.³ And again, local geographical names play a part in the differentiation of vague water powers into individuals.

τῶν ὄνομα ἀργαλέον πάντων βροτὸν ἀνὲρ ἐνισπείν
οἱ δὲ ἕκαστοι ἴσασι· οὐδ' ἂν περιναϊετώσιν.⁴

For Hesiod, as for Miss Kingsley's West Africans, every bend of a river has its peculiar spirit. For the people who know the locality each is an individual personality under a definite name. Animism takes a short cut to achieve the individual personality towards which the majority of holy places move by a more circuitous route.

Another statement of Servius must be placed beside the one quoted above. 'Facite nemora circa fontes. Et hoc ideo quia ut diximus heroum animae habitant vel in fontibus vel in nemoribus.'⁵ The vague indeterminate nature spirits may be 'heroum animae' as well as 'nymphae praesidentes.' In Lithuania we find the same strange combination and mention of spirits called *deivaites*, who are at once ghosts and water nymphs.⁶

The apparent anomaly will not disturb those familiar with the confused thought of primitive man. Vague spiritual personalities like these nature spirits with generic names, but without names of individual significance,⁷ can be almost anything, precisely because their character-

¹ Servius, *Eclogue*, i. 53.

² For the death of nymphs when their tree is cut down cf. *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, 214 foll.; *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 41; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, viii. 741-744; Apollonios Rhodius, *Argonautica*, i. 471; Plutarch, *de def. Orac.* 11. The stories of Rhoikos and Arkas, *F.H.G.* i. p. 35; Bode, *Mythog. Graec.* ii. 50.

³ *Iliad*, xxi. 213.

⁴ Hesiod, *Theogony*, 369.

⁵ Servius, *Eclogue*, v. 40.

⁶ Usener, *Götternamen*, p. 89, s.v. Deives.

⁷ 'Erst in eigennamen verdichtet sich die flüssige vorstellung zu einem festen kern, der träger einer persönlichkeit werden kann. Der eigennamen nötigt, wie der rufname des menschen, an eine bestimmte persönlichkeit zu denken, für welche er ausschliesslich gilt.' Usener, *op. cit.* p. 330.

istics are so nebulous and because they are so far from being, as yet, the clear-cut personalities towards which they are moving. M. Mauss remarks of the Australian *Iruntarinia*, 'Ceux-ci sont des esprits d'une nature singulière et dont la personnalité mythique est des plus mal déterminées. Étrangement confondus avec les âmes des ancêtres perpétuellement réincarnés en leurs descendants et, par conséquent, confondus avec les doubles des vivants, ils sont encore des sortes de feés qui vivent sous terre, dans une espèce d'Elysée souterrain, plein de lumière et de soleil et merveilleusement arrosé. Enfin les *Iruntarinia* ont des figures d'animaux et se confondent en somme avec les espèces totémiques des groupes locaux auxquels ils sont attachés.'¹ Skeat notices in the case of Malay Jinns that they form a connecting link between gods and ghosts, and how the nebulous indeterminateness of their personality confuses in one class spiritual powers imported by Mohammedanism, with Hindu spirits and nature spirits.² Any student who attempts to analyse the various forms of devil or fairy enumerated by Burton, or who endeavours to establish the distinction of *δαίμονες* and *ἥρωες* will soon discover that in the majority of specific instances his hard and fast distinctions do not apply. M. Bouché Leclerq, for example, discovers that he cannot separate rigidly the dead from heroes. 'A ce degré de vulgarisation des qualités et dignités héroïques, la distinction que nous voulons maintenir pour clarté entre les révélations héroïques et les révélations necromantiques, nous échappe.'³ He has mistaken the cause of his difficulty, and in the light of anthropology his degeneration theory cannot be accepted. Nature spirits, heroes, daimons, ghosts, all shade into one another. *νεκρὸς εἰ ὥσπερ ἡμεῖς μόνῃ τῇ γοητείᾳ διαφέρων*, says Menippos to Trophonios:⁴ it is as difficult for us as for the maligned hero to explain where exactly his prophetic power came from or to place Trophonios in the rigid boundary of any single category. The fact of the matter is that so long as spirits are called by a generic name and have no individual name of real significance, their characteristics are nebulous and ill-defined. They may even belong to quite different categories at the same time. Such confusion of mind is not uncommon.

¹ Mauss, *L'Origine des Pouvoirs Magiques*, p. 31; cf. *ibid.* pp. 14 and 17.

² Skeat, *Malay Magic*, p. 93.

³ Bouché Leclerq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'Antiquité*, iii. pp. 316, 319.

⁴ Lucian, *Dial. Mort.* 3, 2.

An example occurs to me in which a Black Dog figures at once as the soul of 'a wicked, wicked old man,' and at the same time as the black dog who is the harbinger of death.¹

The history of the evolution of these confused classes of spirits is not really difficult to understand. In the progress of religious belief, as in the progress of civilisation, the gradual recognition and resolution of inconsistencies plays its part. *Mana* becomes differentiated into good and evil; 'medicine' tends to become classified as *φάρμακα πολλὰ μὲν ἐσθλὰ μεμιγμένα, πολλὰ δὲ λυγρά*.² In a similar way spirits tend to become departmentalised just as poet and prophet tend to become differentiated. Conscious reflection and the work of the learned assist the process. The statement that Thales was the first to divide the spiritual world into God, daimons, and heroes is at least to this extent true, in that the demonologists with their classifications undoubtedly assist the process of differentiation. But it is important, I think, to realise that belief halts always behind reason. When the classes become differentiated in theory, in practice they overlap. The man who fears a pixy does not, unless he has time to think it over, decide what particular form of fairy he imagines it to be. It is the vague spiritual personality of which he has awe, rather than a clear-cut conception of a little man dressed in green clothes.³

The stage then of the 'nymphae praesidentes' recognises a vague class of indeterminate spirits who reside in the sacred locality; the magic well is 'the fairies' well.' A further step comes when a definite nymph emerges as the particular presiding deity of a fountain. Telphousa has an individual personality; she is no longer capable of being confused with a ghost.

But the tendency is to seek for a still more definite personality. In the British Isles the saint tends to oust the fairy, in Greece Telphousa becomes the spring where Teiresias died and was buried.⁴ The connection

¹ *Folklore*, xv. p. 83.

² Homer, *Odyssey*, iv. 230.

³ An interesting example of how little rigidity there is in the popular conceptions of nature spirits as opposed to literary definition is the case of the neatherd in the *Iphigenia in Tauris*, l. 272, who mistakes Orestes and Pylades for possible Nereids:

εἴτ' οὖν ἐπ' ἀκταῖς θάσσετον Διοσκόρω,
ἢ Νερέως ἀγάλμαθ', ὃς τὸν εὐγενῆ
ἔτικτε πεντήκοντα Νηρηΐδων χορόν.

⁴ Apollodoros, iii. 84; Pausanias, ix. 33, 1; Diodoros, iv. 67; Strabo, ix. 2, 27, 411. Bouché Leclercq, *op. cit.* iii. p. 332.

between water, earth, and the netherworld doubtless assisted the victory of the *heroum animae*, and there is further, I believe, a certain stage in religious development, in Greek religious development at any rate, where spiritual interest is absorbed chiefly with ghosts or the souls of the departed. And it is owing to this tendency to crystallise the power of the water into a clear-cut personality, and the interest in the spirits of the dead, that the vast majority of healing and divinatory springs in antiquity were associated with some hero's grave. In some cases it is true the hero has been ousted by the greater dignity of the Olympian God,¹ but in many, the hero marks the final stage of the development of a divine personality. And the favourite explanation of the hero's presence will naturally be that he was buried there, just as the inhabitants of East Scrafton in Yorkshire believe that St. Simon was buried at their well.² The particular hero to be chosen at any given place to undergo the honour of a supposed burial by the side of the local sacred well or tree, will depend of course, on local circumstances and popularities. To find Amphiaraos and Teiresias at the sacred wells of Boiotia is what we should expect. The popularity of the Mohammedan Saint, Sidi Gherib, is such that apparently most of the cairns in N. Africa, which, exactly like the wells of Greece, tend to be considered as the graves of holy men, are associated with his name.³ In Palestine, of course, it is the tree of Abraham; 'ubi Abraham habitavit et puteum fodit sub arbore terebintho et cum angelis locutus est et cibum sumpsit, ibi basilica facta est jussu Constantini mirae pulchritudinis.'⁴ And in Palestine too, there is a development, analogous to that in Greece of the 'nymphae praesidentes' into a dead hero. 'These oaks under which we now sit are believed to be inhabited by Jan and other spirits. . . . Many of them in this region are believed to be inhabited by certain spirits, called Benât Yá'kob—daughters of Jacob—a strange and obscure notion in regard to which I could never

¹ For the supersession of heroes in cult by Olympian gods see Rouse, *Greek Votive Offerings*, p. 11. A similar theological tendency is traceable in mythology, e.g. in the story of Glaukos and Polyidos where, in some of the later versions, Apollo takes the place of the Kouretes, and in others, Asklepios that of Polyidos.

² Gutch, *County Folklore*, ii., *The North Riding, etc.*, p. 32. 'The country people asserted that St. Simon the Apostle is buried there; an evident mistake. It is however possible that some holy martyr of that name . . . may have suffered during the Danish persecution.' The suggested explanation is that of the fireside rationalist.

³ Douté, *Magie et Religion dans l'Afrique du Nord*, p. 434. For an account of these cairns *ib.* pp. 419-435.

⁴ Frazer, in *Anthropological Essays presented to Prof. E. B. Tylor*, pp. 128-130, quoting the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*.

obtain an intelligible explanation. . . . Connected with this notion, no doubt, is the custom of burying their holy men and so-called prophets under those trees, and erecting *mûrars* (domed shrines) to them there.¹

I am convinced that the evolution of a divine personality as the patron of a sacred place on the lines indicated, is a real process which takes place in the history of religious development. First there is the awe of a mysterious power, then animism endows this power with the shadowy personality of a spirit which, in course of time, tends more and more to become a concrete individual with a defined character and a personal name. It is the kind of process that leads the Oxfordshire peasant to account for the monolith known as the Hoar Stone by supposing it to be the grave of a great General Hoar. Just as the Hoar Stone existed before the creation of a fabulous general, we may suspect that the sites of the supposed graves of many of the Greek heroes possessed an immemorial sanctity to which is directly due the attachment of a hero cult in the later stages of their history. Homer's description of the grave of Eetion inverts the normal, though not, perhaps, invariable order of religious development:—

ἦδ' ἐπὶ σῆμ' ἔχευ. περὶ δὲ πελέας ἐφύτευσαν
Νύμφαι Ὀρεστιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο.²

In conclusion a not uninteresting support is lent to the theory put forward, by the rites of *lekanomancy*. *Lekanomancy* is the Greek name for all forms of divination by means of the bowl of water, and all its methods are really nothing more or less than the performance of the divinatory rites of holy wells by means of the practically more convenient instrument, the bowl of water. The most popular, of course, of the methods which fall under the scope of this title, is that of seeing the past or future reflected in a bowl of liquid or a crystal. Now leaving out of account modern drawing-room superstition, if I may call it so, which tends always to lay emphasis on the subjective element in the rite, and the 'psychic' condition of the performer, the theories of the validity of the process display exactly the same development from the power of the magical water to a spiritual agent, a clear-cut personality who uses the water

¹ Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, pp. 474-6, quoted Frazer, *op. cit.* p. 120, cf. Frazer, *loc. cit.* p. 120. The Daughters of Jacob are associated in many places with groves of oaks and shrines, in one indeed, it is the damsels, not a deceased prophet, who actually live in the tomb.

² *Iliad*, vii. 419.

as his instrument. The first stage is intimately connected with the magic well. Looking into magic water in a bowl is merely the transference to a convenient fireside instrument of the ritual of the sacred well which reflects past, present, or future events, like that of Demeter at Patrai,¹ of Apollo near Kyaneai,² or the magic spring at Tainaron³ and the superstitious rites which Lucian is thinking of when he describes his great prophetic mirror and well in the *Vera Historia*.⁴ Similarly in Cornwall, the conjurer of St. Colomb, rather a celebrated West Country character in the beginning of the last century, detected thieves by showing their faces in a tub of water.⁵ Apuleius' accusers make the possession of a mirror a charge of magical mal-practice.⁶

The next stage, analogous to that of the 'nymphae praesidentes,' is reached when the magical power of the water is no longer *per se* sufficient; a spirit must be invoked to cause the image to appear. 'Angelo bianco, angelo santo, per la sua santità et per la mia virginità mostrarmi che ha tolto tal cosa' must be recited by the damsel before the image of the thieves will appear in the phial of Holy Water.⁷ A further stage yet is attained, when a spirit is not only invoked, but actually appears.⁸ Sir Frederick Swettenham describes how an Arab placed in some water a piece of paper on which a charm had been written. First there appeared a little old Jinn, who was then asked to conjure up the scene of the robbery.⁹ In the little old Jinn the power of the magic water or crystal has become a clear-cut personality.

Further, that tendency for spiritual interest to become absorbed in ghosts, assisted perhaps in this case by the imposing barbarity of the horrors of necromantic ritual, have produced a contamination of necromancy and hydromancy, and the spirits invoked into the water may be ghosts. St. Augustine, who interprets the legend of Egeria as meaning that Numa invented hydromancy, is positive that there is no distinction between hydromancy and necromancy.¹⁰ And it is curious to note that

¹ Paus. vii. 21, 12.

² Paus. vii. 21, 13.

³ Paus. iii. 25, 8.

⁴ Lucian, *Vera Historia*, i. 26.

⁵ Hunt, *Drolls and Romances of the West of England*, 2nd series, p. 210.

⁶ Apuleius, *Apologia*, 13.

⁷ Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions of Scotland*, p. 520.

⁸ Reginald Scott, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Booke 15, cap. xix. pp. 188, 189.

⁹ Skeat, *Malay Magic*, p. 538.

¹⁰ Augustine, *de Civ. Dei*, vii. 35, quae sive hydromantia, sive necromantia dicatur, id ipsum est, ubi videntur mortui divinare.

Tzetzes believed that Odysseus did not go down to Hades, but consulted the ghost of Teiresias by lekanomantic means.¹

More generally the method is to summon some god or spirit into your water or crystal, and the process of the evolution of the power of the water into a personality is thus completed; when summoned into the instrument your god or spirit will converse with you direct. Just as the Oropian spring lost all its divinatory powers and became merely the receptacle for the *ex voto* offering to Amphiaraios, so in the minor art of lekanomancy the water ceases even to be the instrument whereby the invoked spirit reveals the future, it is now merely part of the magical paraphernalia used in invocation. This is the part which it plays in the divinatory rites of the *papyri*.² Hippolytos gives an interesting account of the various methods of conjuring apparatus which charlatans used to effect the appearance of the god or spirit in the bowl.³ In classical times there is an instance as early as the Mithridatic Wars of a prophecy of 160 verses delivered by a boy contemplating a *simulacrum* of Mercury in a bowl of water.⁴

In the smaller sphere then of one of the minor arts of divination, the same tendency which we endeavoured to trace in the case of sacred localities, may be observed. The craving after a definite personality to reverence is no unimportant factor in religious evolution. By the increasing definition of its progressive stages it creates by limitation, a personal spiritual power from the formless *mana* of its earliest awe, as the sculptor gradually reduces from the formless block the statue of a man. And while individual cases may be due to other and local causes (it is possible to bury your John Nicholson by a sacred well or to plant a grove round his sacred grave), the almost universal association of spiritual personalities with sacred localities must be due to a wider underlying tendency of religious evolution. In many cases at least, the sanctity of the localities is older than this association, and I cannot help thinking that the ultimate reason for the very frequent appearance of the supposed graves of saints and heroes at sacred wells and trees, is due, both in Greece and elsewhere, to the tendency we have mentioned combined with the strong feeling of reverence for the spirits of the departed great. The saint dispossesses the fairies, and Teiresias ousts Telphousa, when a stage of religious develop-

¹ Tzetzes, *ad Lykophron*, 813.

² Abt, *Die Apologie des Apuleius*, p. 246.

³ Hippolytos, *Ref. omn. heres.* iv.

⁴ Apuleius, *Apologia*, 42. His authority is Varro.

ment is reached which demands a personality to worship worthy of the sanctity of the place. When a hero does not suffice for the religious aspirations of the worshippers, either the sanctity of the locality will fall into desuetude or the more august figure of a god will take the hero's place.

W. R. HALLIDAY.