

# Sussex Research

## How landscapes remember

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## **How Landscapes Remember**

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## How Landscapes Remember

This paper considers the possibility that as subject or agent, the landscape might have the potential to contain, store or transmit memories of their past, which are engaged experientially as uncanny. In a simple sense it asks why there are some landscapes – or landscape features – that are regarded as spiritually animated by different social groups, at different times. The paper focuses on the Neolithic temple site of Borg-in-Nadur, in Southern Malta, which as well as having been a site of prehistoric ritual activity has more recently been the site of a significant devotion to the Virgin Mary, who graced the site with regular apparitions, and a focus for national and transnational Goddess pilgrimage. The paper suggests that sites such as Borg-in-Nadur can be seen as palimpsest landscapes, in which memory is layered such that experiential engagements with them draw the past in to the present, and forwards into the future. The paper examines the intertwining of prehistoric, Catholic and Neo-pagan engagements with Borg-in-Nadur, extending Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de memoire* (sites of memory) to encompass the *milieux de memoire*, or memorial environments, which are themselves also context of, and for, the uncanny.

Keywords: landscape, palimpsest, memory, religion, uncanny

### Powerful Places

On a sunny but fresh April morning in 2010 I met up with a friend of a friend – a man in his late twenties who was interested in my research – to walk around Borg-in-Nadur, Malta. The site is important, archaeologically. After initial excavation and conservation interventions in the 1880s (Grima 2011, 355), the site was re-excavated

between 1922 and 1927 by a team led by the University College London archaeologist, Margaret Murray, who catalogued evidence of a megalithic temple (dating from 3000-2000BCE) around which was subsequently built a bronze age (1500-700BCE) settlement with substantial stone fortifications. Much of the site is still evident today.

A year before the Maltese excavations began, Murray published *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921). In it she argued that the witch persecutions of early modern Europe were targeted at, and evidence of, a systematised pan-European pagan religion that pre-dated Christianity and had its origins in a Dianic fertility cult. Although largely discredited as a theory, *The Witch Cult* provided inspiration for the emergent Neo-pagan movements of the mid twentieth century, and particularly those like Gerald Gardner (1954), who claimed to have discovered an extant coven in England's New Forest, dedicated to the joint worship of the goddess Diana and a Horned God.

Borg-in-Nadur is an impressive location. It sits on top of a hill, commanding the valley that leads up from the natural harbour inlet of Birzebbuga. We were there in 2010 not because of the ancient ruins but because, from 2006, a local man called Angelik Caruana had been holding weekly prayer meetings at the site, after being instructed to do so by Our Lady, the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus in Christianity. During the meetings he received messages from and saw visions of the Our Lady, witnessed by crowds of several hundred people who gathered to pray and hear each new message. I had attended a number of these evening events, but was keen to experience the site in a different context – during daylight, and without the crowds. As we walked up to the twin-crested hill, then down into sharp-cut earthworks, my companion and I began to speculate on the nature of religious landscapes, and why particular places attracted religious groups.

It is well documented that religious sites are often constituted on existing sites of worship. Many Christian churches, for example, were established by replacement or repurposing of earlier, pagan, sites (Hasluck 1929, Hahn, Emmel and Gotter 2008). The contemporary religious landscape, then, consists of palimpsest sites, on which archaeological traces are layered, with the earlier ones seldom completely eradicated (Bailey 2007). This layering is frequently explained in political terms – with new sites built on earlier ones either to renew ongoing religious traditions, or as an attempt to eradicate their predecessor. But is there something more resonant about the layering of history in particular places?

My companion understood that Borg-in-Nadur was precisely such a resonant, palimpsest, place. “Look Jon”, he said, “is it any surprise that Our Lady called Angelik here? People have been worshipping here since there were people in Malta. There are some places that are just powerful. The people who built this temple knew it, and Our Lady and her followers know it. You can feel it when you’re here.” Indeed there was something about the site that seemed powerful – to exude what William James (1903) would have called a feeling of “More” (385); an excess of presence that fed a sense of the uncanny. Our conversation moved on to consider the source of this uncanny. Could it be that certain landscapes are in some sense powerful; or contained within them the long-term traces of ancient and repeated manifestations of sacred power? Can landscapes “remember” religious or spiritual presences; and if so, how?

### **Do Landscapes Remember?**

The title of this paper takes inspiration from Paul Connerton’s landmark study of *How Societies Remember* (1989). In that text, Connerton takes to task the prevailing view that memory – or remembering – is primarily a conceptual or cognitive process, to

figure the body at the center of societies' remembering. This shift from the cognitive to the bodily marks a broader shift within contemporary scholarship, that has been replicated in the study of landscape. Here, debates have been informed by a cluster of related ideas drawing from the "new materialism", the "ontological turn", the "sensory revolution", the "embodiment paradigm" and phenomenology (Dolphijn & van der Tuin 2013, Holbraad & Pedersen 2017, Howes 2005, Csordas 1990, Desjarlais & Throop 2011). It also takes inspiration from Eduardo Kohn's articulation of *How Forests Think* (2013), which "seeks to liberate us from our own mental enclosures. As we learn to attend ethnographically to that which lies beyond the human, certain strange phenomena suddenly come to the fore, and these strange phenomena amplify, and in the process come to exemplify, some of the general properties of the world in which we live." (22). For Kohn, the "beyond human" is mainly the flora and fauna of the Amazonian forest, but might we equally consider the "beyond human" of the spiritual or religious realm?

Landscape studies as it developed in the 1980s-1990s revolved around a central binary between the material and the conceptual – between the physical, rocks-and-earth landscape and the meaning that social groups make of it. This is sometimes framed as a distinction between space and place; as on the one hand the physical topography that can be measured, mapped, and looked upon objectively, and on the other hand the more subjective and experiential result of human engagement and classification (Casey 1996). The classic, or modernist, approach to landscape is based on this social or cultural constructionism – with the "old materialism" eclipsed by meaning. For Simon Schama, for example, "landscape is a work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock" (1996: 7). Places accumulate significance through repeated remembering, to become "places of memory" – what Pierre Nora (1996) called *lieux de memoire*. Nora's *lieux* are not always literally places, but can also

be events, symbols, ritual, texts: “any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community” (xvii). The community in question is the nation – and for Nora, the French nation. The *lieux de memoire* are central to constructing a sense of national selfhood; but also of national home.

Layton and Ucko point towards a shift of focus within landscape studies, from landscape as something lived, worked and gazed upon, to environment, as something lived *within* and engaged with (1999: 3). This move from modernist to post-modernist approaches collapses the material–conceptual binary, rehabilitating physical space, through a “new materialism” that figures the material landscape not as object, but subject – an actor, agent, or actant (Knappett & Malafouris 2008, Latour 2005, Wall & Waterman 2018). As Trigg (2012) points out, as much as human actors exert themselves on landscape – conceptually and otherwise – so landscape exerts itself, reciprocally, on human actors (4ff.). This in turn suggests we move from a focus on *lieux de memoire* to *milieux de memoire* – environments of memory – when we look at landscape and memory. The *milieu* is not merely a vehicle for the representation of memory, but itself generative or constitutive of memory-as-experience. Indeed, Nora himself contrasts *lieux* and *milieux de memoire*. In *lieux*, memory is alienated, in the sense that it is invested in conscious acts of remembering – in archives, texts, rituals, and places in the landscape. These places are domesticated, made homely through the act of their incorporation into memorial heritage. In *milieux de memoire*, by contrast, memory is immanent; it is lived or “inhabited” as spontaneous reality; it is “immediate with experience” (Schwartz 2010: 51), and without mediation. As such it is wild or undomesticated; unhomely, or uncanny. *Milieux de memoire* are not so much works of the mind, as of the body, and the senses – works of perception, rather than conception.

This turn towards the bodily, the sensory, and the experiential is evident within recent archaeology, which has also shifted towards more phenomenological and sensory approaches (Hamilakis 2014, Layton & Ucko 2003, Skeates 2010, Tilley 1994). These newer approaches encourage us to see archaeological sites – and indeed the Maltese temples – as experiential *milieux* – places to sense rather than places to look upon, or “read” (Skeates 2010, Tilley 2004). In *The Materiality of Stone* (2004), Tilley argues for a new phenomenological approach to archaeology, that acknowledges our embeddedness within the broader environment:

we have an environment and we are part of it and it is part of us. The world is not what I think (or what I see) but rather what I live through. We are immersed in it as fish are immersed in the sea. Through our senses the body extends into the world. (220)

And we might say, reciprocally, that the world extends into our bodies:

We experience and perceive the world because we live in that world and are intertwined within it. We are part of it, and it is part of us. Our bodily Being-in-the-world provides the fundamental ground, or starting point, for our description of it. (2)

The body is both interpretational constraint and enabling condition for the construction of meaning. (221)

Built environments – the environments of archaeological sites – are no less experientially significant. Indeed, they are arguably even more so, as they are built with consideration of their emplacement within the broader landscape. Maltese temples appear to be situated in relation to hill and valley contours, shorelines, spring-water



sources, solar and lunar cycles, and existing temples and settlements (Grima 2004, 2007; Skeates 2010: 163-166). This emplacement is important: “what makes a place significant is its relationship with...(other)... ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ places” (Tilley 2004: 221). Just as people are seen to inhabit an environment, rather than live upon a landscape, so too do buildings.

Nora (1996) distinguishes *lieux* and *milieux de memoire* not as modern–postmodern, but modern–pre-modern. His vision of modern memory as alienated is informed by a rather melancholic nostalgia, and concern for the state of French history/memory – and with it the legacy of the Republic tradition – in the late twentieth century (Schwartz 2010: 55). Should we, then, see the shift towards environment, embodiment and experience as a reversion to the pre-modern, or a progression to the postmodern? The answer, I suggest here, may well be both; and this becomes clear if we return to the idea that certain landscapes hold – or remember – power, or presence.

This power or presence is experienced as a feeling of the uncanny. Writing in 1919, Freud defines the uncanny as “that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (1919: 1-2). Indeed, both the original German *unheimlich* and its English translation as uncanny hold an inherent ambiguity or paradox. *Unheimlich* is the negative of *heimlich*, which on the face of it means homely and familiar, but can also mean secretive or concealed. Similarly, canny – which has Scottish and North English etymology – can mean agreeable, pleasant or cosy, but also sly, cunning, lucky or supernaturally powerful (Royle 2003: 10-11). *Unheimlich*–uncanny, then, lies at the cusp of the un/familiar, the un/homely, and the un/super/natural.

This indeterminacy, or unsettling ambiguity allows the uncanny to populate the landscape. The uncanny can be thought of as an eruption of presence semi-concealed in the palimpsest landscape. As Royle argues, “The uncanny is a crisis of the proper... It is a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was ‘part of nature’: one’s own nature, human nature, the nature and reality of the world.” (2003: 1). This vision of the uncanny depends on a particular modernist understanding of nature (and with it, landscape) as fixed and enduring – transcendent yet, in principle, graspable through the work of science (Latour 1993). Modernity, of course, banishes the supernatural as a causal explanation in the world, though it is always only ever “crossed out”, to use Latour’s phrase (1993: 32ff.). In a sense, then, the uncanny is modernity’s anxiety that nature can be disrupted by the residues of the pre-modern lurking under its surface; but also by the advances of (post-modern) technology. The twin figures of “The Sandman” – a ghostly character from Hoffman’s tales who steals children’s eyes, adopting different disguises/personae to conceal his real identity – and the android, or humanoid robot, loom large in accounts of the uncanny (Freud 1919: 5ff., Mara & Appel 2015). The uncanny therefore invokes both a “deep past” and an unsettling future, that is immanent in the present of the “beyond human” (Kohn 2013). Royle cites Ralph Waldo Emerson’s (1856) account of a visit to Stonehenge with the philosopher Thomas Carlyle, who describes the “uncanny stones” as themselves “conscious”, and having the ability to “eliminate time” (Royle 2003: 8-9). The site as a whole is “new and recent” but also ancient, even timeless, and evoking a time “a thousand years hence” (ibid.). Uncanny landscapes, then, like the commemorative ceremonies described by Connerton (1989), concertina or compress time, bringing past, present and future – pre-modern, modern and postmodern – together, through the palimpsest layering of memory.

## **Borg in-Nadur**

Unlike the French *lieux de memoire* discussed by Nora (1996), the Maltese temples – among them Borg-in-Nadur – did not become an important part of the Maltese national narrative, as it developed from the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries onwards (Sant Cassia 1993: 358). This is partly because they pre-date the dominant Maltese narrative of Christian aboriginality – which traces Malta back to the Biblical account of St Paul’s shipwreck on the island in 60CE, and his conversion of the Maltese (see Mitchell 2002: 22ff). The temples were, and are, much less homely – much less *lieux de memoire* – than the Baroque churches and cathedrals that characterise Maltese towns and villages, or indeed the passage from the Acts of the Apostles that describes St Paul in Malta. It was also partly because, from the days of the Grand Tour onwards (mid-seventeenth century), the temples were seen almost exclusively as the concern of foreigners (Grima 1998: 39) – and with the advent of British colonial rule in 1814, they became Crown property.

The colonial history of Borg-in-Nadur is one of preservation, management and custodianship. A strong narrative developed that the temple should be “protected” from the “ignorance” of the Maltese (Grima 2011: 363), who hunted and farmed on and around it. In the process, Borg-in-Nadur became constituted as an archaeological “site” – a status that was confirmed with Murray’s 1922-27 excavation. As Pruitt has argued, becoming a “site” turns a place into an object of authoritative knowledge, and elite inquiry (2011: 85).

The narrative of protection continued into the post-colonial era, with the British authorities replaced by the Maltese museums agency, Heritage Malta, as chief custodian. In time, the earlier Grand Tourists were replaced by mass tourists, for whom

Malta's temples were not only "sites", but also "sights". Borg-in-Nadur, though, was never so important a tourist sight. Neither was it a national *lieu de memoire*. Rather, it continued as an object of elite archaeological knowledge until, in the 2000s, it was recognised by two contrasting religious groups, as a *milieu de memoire*.

### **Angelik**

In January 2006, Angelik Caruana's wife bought an unassuming statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, that had caught her eye in a local shop in Birzebuga. A few days later he noticed that the statue appeared to be crying blood. It later also appeared to exude oil and salt, and became the subject of an investigation by Diocesan authorities. In April 2006, Angelik began having visions of Our Lady, and receiving messages from her, during episodes of ecstatic trance. The messages called for conversion and prayer, but also made interventions in the debates concerning abortion and divorce (needless to say she was against both), particularly in the lead-up to the national divorce referendum in 2011.

Angelik was part of a prayer group established by a local priest, who was also a member of Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) – an international movement within the Church that has been in Malta since the 1970s, gaining popularity from the 1990s onwards (Theuma 2002). CCR is a form of Pentecostal Catholicism, that emphasises the direct and unmediated intervention of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, healing by the laying of hands, and the power of prayer – particularly the rosary – to directly affect the balance of power of good and evil in the world. The prayer group is called *Mir*, the Serbo-Croatian for "peace", and was formed shortly after a group trip to Medjugorje, the Bosnian town where visions of Our Lady have been occurring since 1981. Angelik's own visions established him as the central figure in the group, whose members quickly

organised themselves into a “cenacle of twelve” called *Theotokos* (<http://ladyborginnadur.blogspot.co.uk/p/borg-in-nadur-borg-reres-to-group-of.html>, accessed 06/10/2012)<sup>1</sup>. The priest became Angelik’s spiritual guide, and a local psychiatrist – also a prayer-group member – gave psychological support, as well as being part of the Diocesan investigative team.

Angelik achieved a certain notoriety in Malta, particularly following the airing of a number of editions of the popular journalistic television show *Xarabank*. These focused mostly on the authenticity – or otherwise – of the crying statue, and Angelik’s ecstasy. The early response of the Diocesan commission was to remove the statue and house it in the Archbishop’s Curia for examination. Whilst away from Angelik’s house, the tears of blood stopped; the blood itself was analysed and found to be Angelik’s own. When it was returned to his house, the statue was encased in a glass cabinet to prevent interference, but in time the cabinet burst open, and the blood started again. For Angelik and his followers, this series of events demonstrated Our Lady’s compassion and empathy with Angelik himself. For his detractors – among them a forensic scientist who was interviewed for one of the *Xarabank* programmes – it was evidence of trickery. Having examined photographs of the statue and the cabinet, the forensic opinion was that the blood was daubed on to the statue, rather than exuding from it, and the cabinet was smashed from the outside in, rather than inside out. In the same programme, psychiatrists argued over the characteristics of Angelik’s ecstatic episodes, and whether or not they could be accounted for by any existing psychiatric diagnosis. Whilst Angelik’s psychiatrist supporter argued that his episodes came with symptoms that defied diagnosis, others warned him that he was potentially staking his reputation on a clear case of clinical delusion.

In November 2006, Our Lady asked Angelik to go to the hill at Borg-in-Nadur, where she would appear to him regularly on a Wednesday evening, and where he should encourage others to come and pray the rosary. They came, and within a short time, these Wednesday evening prayer groups were attracting a sizeable crowd of lay and religious participants who gathered to pray, witness Angelik's ecstasy, and hear each new message from Our Lady. In December 2006, followers of Angelik erected a large wooden cross on the mound adjacent to the Bronze age wall, below which a small stone altar was placed, together with a paved area for seating, and a replica of the crying statue. The cross sat on top of a square pedestal built from stones collected on-site – which may well have been part of the antiquities themselves.

According to Angelik's testimony, the choice of Borg-in-Nadur was not incidental:

When we arrived we waited in silence to see what would happen. At one point, at about 4pm, I heard the voice of the Lady calling me: "Angelik – come here."...I started walking...my feet led me, of their own accord, to a particular place...As soon as I reached a particular place, a strong light appeared from the sky, which was different from the usual one I'd seen in other apparitions [away from Borg-in-Nadur]. It seemed like a ball of fire. I knelt down and the Lady came and gave me this message: "I am sent by God to Malta on the hills of Borg-in-Nadur...I want conversion! I have chosen this place. I will that in the future, on this hill, people will start to come and pray as I am going to continue coming here." (<http://wikibin.org/articles/marian-apparitions-at-borg-in-nadur-5.html>, accessed 12/04/2019)

From this day in 2006 until 2016, when the Maltese Church banned them<sup>2</sup>, prayer meetings were held at Borg-in-Nadur, at which Angelik received messages that were transcribed and broadcast on social media. The messages frequently drew attention to the importance of the Borg-in-Nadur hill. They often called people there - “Come with eagerness to this hill of Borg-in-Nadur” - emphasising that this will draw them close not only to Our Lady herself, but also to her son, Jesus: “And so, I say it once more, that I am coming to Birzebbuga, onto this hill of Borg-in-Nadur, so as to draw you to him” ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGmCoT\\_u2jk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGmCoT_u2jk), accessed 12/04/2019).

Visual witness was of central importance to the Angelik movement. In the television debates, defenders of Angelik against both the forensic and the psychiatric arguments pointed towards the external and antagonistic detractors not having had first-hand experience of the phenomena under scrutiny. The sceptical forensic scientist had only looked at photographs, and the antagonistic psychiatrists had not examined Angelik in person. Those who had visited Angelik’s house gave testimony of themselves having seen the statue cry blood. When he began to feel the pain of Christ’s passion during ecstasy, they witnessed the appearance of stigmata on his hands. This visuality was also important during the prayer meetings at Borg-in-Nadur. Here, participants gave testimony to seeing strange lights in the sky; intensely bright sun images that hovered in the air like a sacramental host; solar auras that resembled Our Lady. This visual witness was also accompanied by other sensory experiences. Participants felt waves of warmth, even on windy, damp and chilly evenings; they smelt intense pleasurable aromas like none they had smelt before; they felt the presence of divinity as a kind of electrical charge to the atmosphere.

These experiences were framed – perhaps generated – by the context of the prayer meeting and Angelik’s visions, but also by the affordances of the landscape in

which they took place. The hill on which Angelik's supporters had built its altar and cross is a two-crested feature, with a gentle saddle in-between. Access to the hill is via a narrow rocky path that clings to the hillside before opening out onto a flat area just below the twin peaks, with a clear view of the hilltop. On nights when Our Lady appeared to Angelik, attendees would gather here and pray successive rounds of rosaries whilst waiting for his arrival. Angelik arrived in procession up the narrow lane, accompanied by his spiritual and psychological guides, and the *Theotokos* "cenacle of twelve". They would walk past the assembled crowd and up to the lower of the two hillocks. After further rounds of rosary prayer, broadcast on a portable PA system, Angelik's ecstasy would begin, and he would leave the grouping, moving to the higher hillock where the cross and altar were located. Here he would be joined by the priest and psychologist, who would record him as he spoke the words of Our Lady's message. These were then read out to the gathered crowd.

The landscape, then, provided something of a natural auditorium, or even church, with the flat space for audience or congregation affording clear sight and sound of occurrences on the stage, or altar. Some of the attendees brought folding chairs to sit on; balancing somewhat precariously on the uneven rocky floor. Others themselves sat on rocks, effectively repurposing them as stone pews, from which to view the events taking place on the hill. Others still kneeled on the stone, or brought small cushions with them on which to kneel.

The stone itself is limestone, of which the entire island of Malta consists, and most of its buildings – including its temples – are constructed. Having weathered over the centuries, it is smooth to the touch, but unyielding. A porous rock, it absorbs water, so is cooling in the hot summer months and damply cold in the windy winter. Tilley (2004: 95-6) argues that these qualities of Maltese limestone might have informed a



prehistoric cosmology of nature, culture and transition, that revolves around the contrast between the island's two types of limestone – the relatively hard coralline limestone and the softer globigerina. He observes that the harder stone was often used to mark points of transition within temple architecture (97); from light to dark areas connoting culture to nature; life to death. Borg-in-Nadur itself is built on – and from – an outcrop of this harder coralline limestone, marking it geologically as a place of transition, where nature, culture and the supernatural come together. The hardness of the rock added a penitential aspect for those sitting on the loose rock pews, but also contrasted with the softness of the globigerina limestone out of which most Maltese homes are constructed. As such, Borg-in-Nadur was marked as a place of unhomeliness, or *unheimlichkeit* – where uncanny encounters with the supernatural or divine might be expected.

The stone itself was also a source of this divinity – a sentient medium of miracles. Just as the statue that triggered the start of Angelik's engagement with Our Lady had cried tears of blood, so too would the stones which made up the hill of Borg-in-Nadur: "Come to me, my children. Come to me, so that I may bring you to my Son Jesus. I tell you once again: my heart is deeply saddened. Indeed, my children, the stones will weep once again. The stones will weep again" (<https://gloria.tv/post/XQ8x1yp437gh1BpQfavud1x2q>, accessed 12/04/2019). The stones, then, like the statue, are agents, or actants, in the miraculous process. They transmit the sorrow of Our Lady, and so the miracle of her appearance; but they are also in themselves the source of miracles: "Do not forget that conversion comes first, then, yes indeed, the water will begin to issue here on this hill and will heal people of chronic disease" ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_4Hntk2eXko](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4Hntk2eXko), accessed 12/04/2019).

Borg-in-Nadur sits in the landscape in a manner broadly similar to that of its ordinary past, framing it as an experiential *milieu*. Significantly, given Our Lady's

prediction of water at Borg-in-Nadur, temples were frequently situated in order to relate to both the sea and inland water courses (Tilley 2004: 91). Borg-in-Nadur itself overlooks the natural harbour of Birzebbuga, and lies between two *wied* (wadi, or valley) channels that hold water after rainfall. The temples were also oriented in relation to lunar and solar trajectories. With a south-facing aspect, Borg-in-Nadur affords clear views of the sun as it tracks through the sky. Angelik's messages from Our Lady, and the testimony of his followers, then, replicate themes of water and sun which were also significant to the temple's original users, and architects. Their experience of it as *milieu de memoire* draws on the palimpsest past of the landscape's layered memories.

### **Neo-pagans**

Before Angelik's – or Our Lady's – identification of Borg-in-Nadur as a centre for prayer, visions and messages, another religious movement had realised its potential as a *milieu* of religious experience. From the early 2000s onwards, Malta's temples – and prehistoric temple cultures – became a prominent focus for transnational networks of Neo-pagans, and particularly “Goddess pilgrims” (Rountree 2002, 2006), who began travelling to Malta to visit the temples.

Contemporary Neo-pagans are heirs to the legacy of Margaret Murray's *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* (1921), and the Goddess pilgrims to Borg-in-Nadur are heirs to her excavations. As a movement, Neo-paganism is broad and eclectic. It emphasises human kinship and continuity with nature, the inter-dependence and inter-relationship of all things, personal freedom and autonomy, and the divine reality of Goddess, God, and often other deities, conceived as forces within the cosmos (Rountree 2006: 96). Goddess spirituality, as a variant of Neo-paganism, draws together a number of esoteric traditions, and has a strong feminist/eco-feminist impetus, that emphasises

anti-patriarchal self-realisation through performative bodily engagement with Goddess sites, including Maltese temples. As well as building temples, the prehistoric inhabitants of the Maltese islands carved statues of people. Some were relatively small, that could be held in the hand, whilst others were larger – life-size – and at least one was monumental; standing some 2.5 metres in height. Many of these were demonstratively female figures and have been interpreted as evidence of a fertility or Goddess cult that is perhaps a precursor to the Dianic cult discussed by Murray (1921). It was this that drew successive groups of pilgrims to Maltese shores, to engage with sites such as Borg-in-Nadur.

For Goddess pilgrims, these sites are not merely a place of engagement with the power of the Goddess, but more substantively a source of that power itself. Rountree (2006) describes the experiences of one pilgrim, who she calls Ann Marie, as she engaged with the stones at Borg-in-Nadur. For Ann Marie, the stones of the temple are “as alive as she is” (108). She describes sitting with a group of other Goddess pilgrims, listening to the stones breathing, and then having a vision:

In it I saw stately women, closely following one another, dressed in long white skirts processing around the courtyard and then into and out of each of the four apses...[of the temple]...joined like a four-leaf clover. Ultimately they formed two figure 8's before returning to the courtyard. (108)

This vision is clearly different from Angelik's in that it involves looking in on a prefigured scenario – a memory secreted in the *milieu* – rather than being hailed directly and implored to act. To that extent, it is more past-oriented than Our Lady's appearance to Angelik. Yet Our Lady herself also revealed that she had visited Borg-in-Nadur before:

My children, a long time ago I had already rambled around these parts. Indeed, my children, someone had seen me and was frightened. It was a farmer. He was harvesting wheat on this hill in this area. Yes my children, I have been rambling here for a long time. My Son Jesus was sending me. I was living closer to you. These days are different to that former time. I have gathered you here on this hill. I was served by this person here [referring to Angelik]. I gathered you for the prayer of the rosary. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qD2N9Ec4FIQ>, accessed 12/04/2019)

This reference to rambling invokes movement and inhabitation in the same way as Ann Marie's stately women. They are of the past but in the midst of those who visit Borg-in-Nadur in the present. Rountree (2006) describes how Ann Marie's scene from prehistoric becomes embodied in the present and fed through into the future. She shared her vision with her tour leader, who suggested they re-enact it later in the day, when they visited another temple:

Thus a feedback loop was created in which bodily performance...produced a sense of intimate connection with the site and a vision of the past which was later performed by the pilgrims. Through their bodily performance in this liminal time/space, the pilgrims gained an embodied knowledge of the site, one they believed enabled them to 'connect with' women of the past. (108)

In the process, distinctions between past, present and future dissolve, and with them distinctions between inner and outer worlds, between body and environment, and ultimately between self and cosmos. Pilgrims describe this process as a form of "homecoming" (Rountree 2010: 150); generating the homely from the conditions of the *unheimlich*, or uncanny.

The international Goddess pilgrims' interest in the Maltese temples in some ways replicates the situation described by Grima (2011) – of temples considered largely the concern of foreigners, rather than Maltese. However, by the early 2000s – so before Angelik's initial call to Borg-in-Nadur – a local Maltese Neo-pagan movement had begun to emerge, drawing in part on Goddess beliefs and practices (Rountree 2010). Maltese Neo-pagans are also preoccupied with the inherent or latent power of the temples, and the stones from which they are constructed. They describe them as a kind of conduit, or "lightning rod" (Rountree 2010: 161), for powers emerging from the earth itself. This power derives from the combination and interaction of stones with one another, and with the wider environment or landscape in which the temples are located (162). As with Angelik and his followers, the temple provides a sacred space, or church, in which Neo-pagans can worship (163).

Neo-pagans see the power of Borg-in-Nadur coming from the earth – from below. The testimonies of strange lights in the sky, and Angelik's cue of looking upwards when greeting Our Lady, on the other hand, suggest power from above – from the sky. This points towards a distinction between Neo-pagan holism as "nature religion" (Rountree 2006: 96), and the Manichaean dualism of Catholic Christianity, in which good and evil; virtue and sin are distinguishable properties of soul and body; heaven and earth. However, a focus on the sky seems also to tally with the temple-builders' orientation to solar cycles; and the emphasis given to the significance of the Borg-in-Nadur hill itself, with its weeping stones and new water source, suggest a bringing together of earth and sky that is consistent with this earlier, pagan tradition.

### **How Landscapes Remember**

Both the devotees of the Goddess and the followers of Angelik see Borg-in-Nadur as the site of a potential reinvigoration, or restitution, of an earlier religious, or spiritual, dispensation. Like the Stonehenge encountered by Emerson and Carlyle, it invokes a deep originary past, which is drawn through the present and into the future. For the Goddess pilgrims, this was the prehistoric Goddess cult, which was seen to have lain latent within the stones of the Maltese temples – suppressed by modernist rationalism, but revived by the Neo-pagan renaissance, allowing the pilgrims to “come home” to their place of origin, and envisage a future in which the Goddess has a place. For the followers of Angelik, this was the revival of the redemptive promise of Christianity’s original message, as delivered to the Maltese by St Paul, but also an opportunity to bring themselves closer to the Holy Family and participate in its plans for the future. In both cases, then, hope for the future relies on an engagement with the past. This past is present in the landscape, and specifically the landscape at Borg-in-Nadur, which is a critical site for both groups. At Borg-in-Nadur, uncanny presence is immanent in the landscape, through its spatial affordances, through the materiality of its stone, and through its emplacement in the broader environment.

In his treatment of archaeological evidence as palimpsest, Bailey (2007) suggests that we should be attentive to the multiple and layered “moments” in the history of a piece of an archaeological object – from the original human identification of a raw material, to its fashioning into a useful object, to its use and eventual discarding, its rediscovery (by an archaeologist), its interpretation, analysis and exhibition (209). These moments build a series of meanings that the objects acquire over the course of their (social) life “from the original moment of manufacture to their current resting place, whether in the ground, a museum, a textbook, an intellectual discourse, or indeed as objects still in circulation and use” (208). This “palimpsest of meaning” is equally

applicable to archaeological sites as other artifacts. Before their formal excavation, sites might enjoy numerous moments of engagement, which are also moments of human experience and moments of meaning. For archaeological sites, the moment of excavation is also a moment of abstraction, which constitutes it as “site”, and some sites become nationally significant as *lieux de memoire*. Moments of engagement, however, also generate embodied, emotional and multisensory experiences. These experiences mark sites as *milieux de memoire* – contexts in which new meanings are layered upon old, to create the new. This layering of memory enables such *milieux* to “speak back”, as it were, from domains beyond the human. They become agents, with the capacity to act and act upon those present.

Whilst the *lieux de memoire* rest on a representational or linguistic semiotics, in which the places or sites of memory come to stand for particular ideas or principles – nationhood, patriotism, democracy, liberty, fraternity, equality – the *milieux de memoire* rest on what Law and Mol call “material semiotics” (2008). Material semiotics extends the relationality of linguistic semiotics to the material, suggesting that material things act upon each other in mutually constitutive ways: “They make a difference to each other: they make each other be” (58). Inasmuch as we are embodied, humans are also material, and so also enmeshed in these webs of mutually-constituting materiality, in which the landscapes and environments around us are as much agents as we are. As layered palimpsests, landscapes – and sites such as Borg-in-Nadur – offer an immanent engagement with past materiality; past moments of engagement; past uncanny; and just as, for Kohn (2013), the forests think through its engagement with Avila Runa (the people with whom he worked in Ecuador), so too the landscape of Borg-in-Nadur remembers through Angelik, his followers, and the Goddess pilgrims.

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## Notes

1. Much of the material on Angelik and the messages he received from Our Lady is taken from diverse internet sources, where they were broadcast by his followers.
2. In January 2016 the Diocese issued a statement that the meetings were to cease, and that the visions and messages were not of a supernatural nature.

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