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## *Roads to Stonehenge*

A prehistoric healing centre and pilgrimage site in southern Britain

### **Introduction**

Pilgrimage is widespread in many cultures past and present.<sup>1</sup> It typically involves a physical journey to a site of significance to a person's beliefs in order to connect with the power of the place or imitate the actions of archetypal beings. The aim is usually spiritual renewal, emotional enrichment, renunciation of the past, guidance about the future, performing a rite of passage, or seeking physical and spiritual healing. The geographical focus may be a site that has achieved prominence through associations with particular events, special people, or a remarkable feature in the landscape. But the act of pilgrimage performed with commitment, imagination, and care is also an emotional initiation in the sense of being a ritualized ordeal that propels participants into a different state of consciousness.<sup>2</sup> Physically, pilgrimage on a large scale leads to the development of infrastructure coupled to economic and cultural prosperity not only at the focal site but also along the routes that feed it. Thus pilgrimage as a distinctive social practice has a recognizable archaeological signature.

In this short paper I briefly would like to consider the archaeology and anthropology of pilgrimage sites in the context of prehistoric ceremonial centres. Attention is first directed towards the general characteristics of such sites before something of the complexity of how they might have been used is explored through two case-studies of ancient pilgrimage sites that now represent the tradition on a global scale. The spotlight then turns to the site of Stonehenge in central southern Britain as a possible pilgrimage centre of the third and second millennia BCE, the best-known within a network of such centres at intervals across the British Isles.<sup>3</sup>

### **Pilgrims and ceremonial centres**

Many cultures across the world, past and present, can boast ceremonial centres serving various communities at local, regional, and supra-regional scales. Some are modest in size, others very grand. But occasionally there are rather different places. Special places. Places that have a meaning and quality that far exceeds the merits of their geographical location or the capacity of local populations to build and support them. All of these ceremonial centres, in varying degree, share a number of key characteristics:

- They developed over time and as such that their scale and complexity grows as their popularity, power, and influence expands;
- Visiting them involves the commitment of time and resources for anything between a few weeks to a few years, and a journey that often involves discomfort, hardship, and danger;
- At their heart is some kind of unique focal structure or relic that gives the place its power, but most ceremonial centres also include a wide range of ancillary structures for other devotional and recreational purposes as well as accommodation and facilities for hospitality and respite;
- As well as rich physical material culture associated with the place itself, and the events that take place there, participants also experience a textured intangible culture by way of music, songs, sounds, dances, performances, gestures, smells, distinctive cuisine, oral traditions, folklore, beliefs, and histories;
- Ceremonial centres are destinations for the faithful who believe in the power of the place – the traditional

- pilgrims – as well as those who simply wish to be part of the scene or derive benefits from it in other ways (social, economic, political etc.);
- The chief concern of most ceremonial centres focuses on physical and spiritual well-being: health and healing; and
  - For practical purposes ceremonial centres must be easily accessible, or made accessible, by defined routes and relevant transportation systems such as tracks, roads, rivers, or seaways, some of which may have ceremonial or ritual characteristics either in relation to the experience of the pilgrim (walking alone or in groups for example) or the movements of the presiding deities as they enter or leave the sacred arena.

As Karen Armstrong has discussed,<sup>4</sup> pilgrimage is something rather fundamental and grounded in two key emotional attachments. First, is the experience of ecstatic ›ascent‹ represented either physically by tall temples, ziggurats, and pyramids that allow pilgrims to climb into the cosmos to meet their gods, or metaphorically through the cosmic pole, tree or ladder linking cosmic levels or ›worlds‹ below, on and above the earth. Second, is the pervasive symbolism of the Golden Age at the beginning of time where life itself began, a myth found in nearly all cultures. Along with these could be added a third attachment: trying to understand the future as reflected in the popularity of oracles as pilgrimage centres in the ancient world.<sup>5</sup>

Against this background it should be recognized that pilgrimage, and the creation, development, and use of major ceremonial centres, has a longevity and a geographical reach that few other traditions enjoy.<sup>6</sup> Inanimate materials such as human bones and recognizable body parts<sup>7</sup> may be the centre of attention, in other cases stone is significant as with the use of white quartz pebbles deposited by prehistoric and Christian pilgrims alike in Atlantic Europe.<sup>8</sup> Timing is often important, as with the harvest-time pilgrimages to Mount Brandon on the Dingle Peninsula in Ireland originally to celebrate Lughnasa,<sup>9</sup> and there is no point going if the deity is not at home. In many cases the ceremonial centres endure despite changes to their cultural context, associated beliefs, and manner of usage. It is doubtful, for example, whether those communities that laid the foundation

stones at many of Europe's great cathedrals would recognize much of the litany and ceremony that now goes on within their walls and around about, yet they remain enduring centres of attention. As the following two case studies show, pilgrimage and the iterative modification of ceremonial centres never sleeps and the combination of tangible and intangible culture creates a structured, complicated, and deeply emotive experience.

### Case studies of ancient pilgrimage in the modern world

#### The Hajj

Hajj literally means ›to set out for a place‹, the place in question being the city of Mecca (Makkah) situated on the Arabian peninsula at nearly 300 m above sea level in a narrow valley within a mountainous region some 80 km inland from the Red Sea coast in modern Saudi Arabia.<sup>10</sup> As the birthplace of Muhammad the Prophet, and the site of his first revelation of the Quran, Mecca is regarded as the holiest city in the Islamic world.<sup>11</sup> Yet its origins extend back into the second or third millennia BCE and by the first millennium BCE it was a trading centre, a gathering place for peripatetic tribal communities, and a well-known religious centre.<sup>12</sup> Its focus was a sanctuary or *hawta*, probably the ›very holy and exceedingly revered‹ temple mentioned by the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus in the first century BCE.<sup>13</sup> During the first half of the first millennium CE warring tribal communities suspended hostilities during the months of pilgrimage to Mecca and other *hawtas* in the area where they performed rituals that may have included fertility rites and rain-making ceremonies.<sup>14</sup> The shrine at Mecca was controlled by the Quraish tribe whose monopoly was institutionalized through a religious association called the Hurns or the ›People of the Shrine‹ so that pilgrimage and trading brought a measure of prosperity. It was in this context that Muhammad, born into the Quraish, became familiar with the temple and the idea of pilgrimage.<sup>15</sup> Muhammad and his Muslim companions were based in Medina 435 km to the north of Mecca during the 620s CE. When Mecca surrendered to the Muslims in 630 CE the city was cleared of its

pagan idols and pilgrimage there was made exclusive to Muslims. Muhammad himself completed his first and only Hajj (also known as the Farewell Pilgrimage) in the year of his death, 632 CE.<sup>16</sup> Muhammad enjoined fellow Muslims to do the same such that it became established as the fifth pillar of Islam; the most significant manifestation of Islamic faith and unity. Mecca itself was transformed, with many of the traditional pagan ceremonies drawn into a reformed tightly choreographed performance celebrating a monotheistic deity.<sup>17</sup> A pilgrimage to Mecca became an obligation to all Muslims, and nowadays about three million make the journey to Mecca each year, mainly during the twelfth Muslim lunar month of Dhu al-Hijjah. The focus of the modern ceremonies is the Kaaba (also known as the Sacred House or the Ancient House): a cuboid stone structure 13 m high with sides measuring c.11 m by c.13 m believed by Islamic scholars to have been built around 2130 BC although remodelled, adapted and rededicated several times since.<sup>18</sup> The Kaaba is built from locally quarried granite with a marble and limestone floor and internal marble cladding. Three pillars stand inside with an altar between two of them. The long axis of the building is aligned with the rising star Canopus towards which the southern wall is directed, while the short axis roughly aligns with the sunrise of the summer solstice and the sunset of the winter solstice.<sup>19</sup> A piece of meteoric iron known as the Black Stone is built into the eastern corner. The Kaaba is often regarded as the centre of the world with the Gate of Heaven directly above. As such it marks the intersection of the sacred world and the profane, the embedded Black Stone being symbolic of this link as a stone that had fallen from the sky to connect heaven and earth. About 20 m east of the Kaaba is the Well of Zamzam, believed to be a miraculously-generated source of water revealed to Hagar, the second wife of Abraham and mother of Ismael who was thirsty and kept crying for water.<sup>20</sup>

The Kaaba and Well of Zamzam are the central features of a much wider ritual landscape that extends outwards in all directions. Getting to Mecca traditionally involved three main routes – the Egyptian route from the west, the Syrian Route from the north, and the Iraqi route from the east – as well as numerous other subsidiary routes some of which included passage by



Ill. 1: Grave with green marker-stones in a cemetery at Şanlıurfa, Turkey. Photo: Timothy Darvill.

sea.<sup>21</sup> Archaeological evidence along these routes includes paved roads, stone way-markers, bridges, water systems, hostels and rest places (*Khans*), mosques (*Masajid*), forts (*Qal'at*), palaces (*Qusur*), cemeteries, and settlements.<sup>22</sup>

Once at Mecca the ritual observances typically spanned six days. Day 1 involves changing into the traditional costume for the Hajj (*Ihram*), circling the Kaaba and touching the Black Stone, passing between the hills of Safa and Marwa, and then travelling to Mina to camp. On Day 2 pilgrims journey eastwards to Arafat and after a short vigil return via to Muzdalifa collecting stones from the desert on the way. Day 3 involves a journey from Muzdalifa back to Mina stoning the largest pillar (*jamarat*) as they pass, before travelling from Mina to Mecca to circle the Kaaba, and then returning to Mina to camp in the desert. Days 4–6 are spent travelling between Mina and Mecca, stoning the pillars on the way.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the performance, prayers are offered and songs are sung. Water from the Well of Zamzam is drunk, and flasks of water purchased for the journey

home. Associated artefacts in the form of keepsakes and water-flasks become distributed across the Islamic world by returning pilgrims. Traditionally, those who have undertaken the Haji are entitled to wear a green turban, a symbol of achievement that is also represented at their burial place (III.1).

### Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Along with Rome and Jerusalem, Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, northwest Spain, is one of the most celebrated pilgrimage centres in the Christian world through an association with St James the Greater (Ill. 2).

Situated on high ground between the Rio Tambre and the Rio Ulla, the modern city stands on the site of medieval and Roman settlements in an area also rich in prehistoric occupation.<sup>24</sup> James was one of Christ's apostles beheaded in Jerusalem on the orders of King Herod Agrippa in about 44 CE. Little is known about his life and times, but Eusebius of Caesarea (265–340 CE) in his *Ecclesiastical History* tells how James miraculously healed a paralyzed man on the way to his death, and the fifth century CE Illyrian priest St Jerome of (345–419 CE) claimed the evangelization of Iberia was down to missions by James.<sup>25</sup> It was probably on the back of these claims that a legend developed in which, following his execution, the mortal remains of St James were brought by sea in a stone boat to Galicia for burial. However, details of this story, elaborated through the medieval period, were only recorded after the body of James was ›revealed‹ in the territory of Amaea in the 820s CE. Accounts of this vary, but most embrace the idea that a strange nocturnal brightness guided the process that eventually led to the location of the burial site (possibly a megalithic tomb or a Roman mausoleum). The discovery was reported to Theodimir, Bishop of Iria Flavia, who declared that the remains were indeed those of James the Apostle and notified King Alfonso II who ordered a shrine to be built on the spot where the body was said to have been found.<sup>26</sup> The first pilgrims came to honour the tomb of St James from the 830s CE; miracles associated with healing the sick stacked up, and the town and cathedral became very wealthy.<sup>27</sup> More than 100,000 pilgrims a year now travel to Santiago which was inscribed as a World Heritage Site



Ill. 2: Cathedral of St James the Greater, Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Photo: Natascha Kubisch: *Der Jakobsweg nach Santiago de Compostela*, Darmstadt 2002, 147.

in 1985;<sup>28</sup> the routes leading to Santiago were declared a Cultural Route by the Council of Europe in 1987.<sup>29</sup>

The small shrine initially constructed at the wish of Alfonso II was rapidly surrounded in the north by the San Juan baptistery and in the east by a Benedictine abbey and two other churches. The whole was enclosed by a rampart, which also provided protection for a small settlement around the sacred sites. As the popularity of the shrine grew, the need for a larger church was recognized and the present cathedral, a masterpiece of Romanesque and Baroque architecture, was first consecrated in 1211 CE.<sup>30</sup> Like many pilgrim churches across Europe it was designed on a grand scale.<sup>31</sup> The *Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela* was prepared by Aimery Picaud, a monk from Pathenay-le-Vieux in Poitou, France, in the 1130s and widely circulated from the late

twelfth century onwards.<sup>32</sup> It described the main routes to get to Santiago, what could be seen along the way, and encouraged charity towards pilgrims.

Most pilgrims approach Santiago from the east along the well-trodden Camino Frances that starts 700 km away at Puente la Reina. Four feeder routes converge here after crossing the Pyrenees. The Via Turonensis is the most northerly and starts in Paris, the Via Lemovicensis starts in Bazoches, the Via Podiensis starts in Le Puy, and the southerly Via Tolosana starts in Arles. Along the road pilgrims often sang while they walked. Partly paved, the routes are provided with bridges and way-markers. Wayside shrines lay between the hospitals, monasteries and churches in the principal towns along the route; there is also some evidence for institutionalized control of the facilities along the principal routes.<sup>33</sup> Before arriving in Santiago pilgrims took a purifying bath in the cold vivifying waters of the Rio Labacolla and washed their clothes there.

Arriving in Santiago pilgrims presented themselves at the hostel where they again washed and were given clean clothes to wear into the sacred enclosure. The night following their arrival was spent watching the Saint's tomb. In the morning, when the bells rang to announce first mass, the pilgrims gathered at the chest of good works where, after reading the indulgences, the priest invited them to place their offerings. Then they received the sacraments of penitence and communion before climbing up to the statue of St James behind the main altar. Attending services in the cathedral occupied subsequent days. The sick were ever hopeful of being cured during one of these performances which in recent centuries included use of the famous ›Botafumerios‹, a thurible containing 40 kg of incense that is swung over the heads of the congregation. Smells are an important part of the modern ceremonies, as they might well have been in ancient times. A journey out from Santiago to Padron, the former Iria Flavia, on the banks of the Rio Ulla was essential: it was on the banks of the Rio Ulla that St James was believed to have landed and first preached on the nearby hill of Padron.<sup>34</sup> Before starting the return journey, the pilgrim's staff and sachel were placed on the high altar in the cathedral and blessed.

Badges, medallions, and small religious objects such as statuettes of St James carved in jet were available for

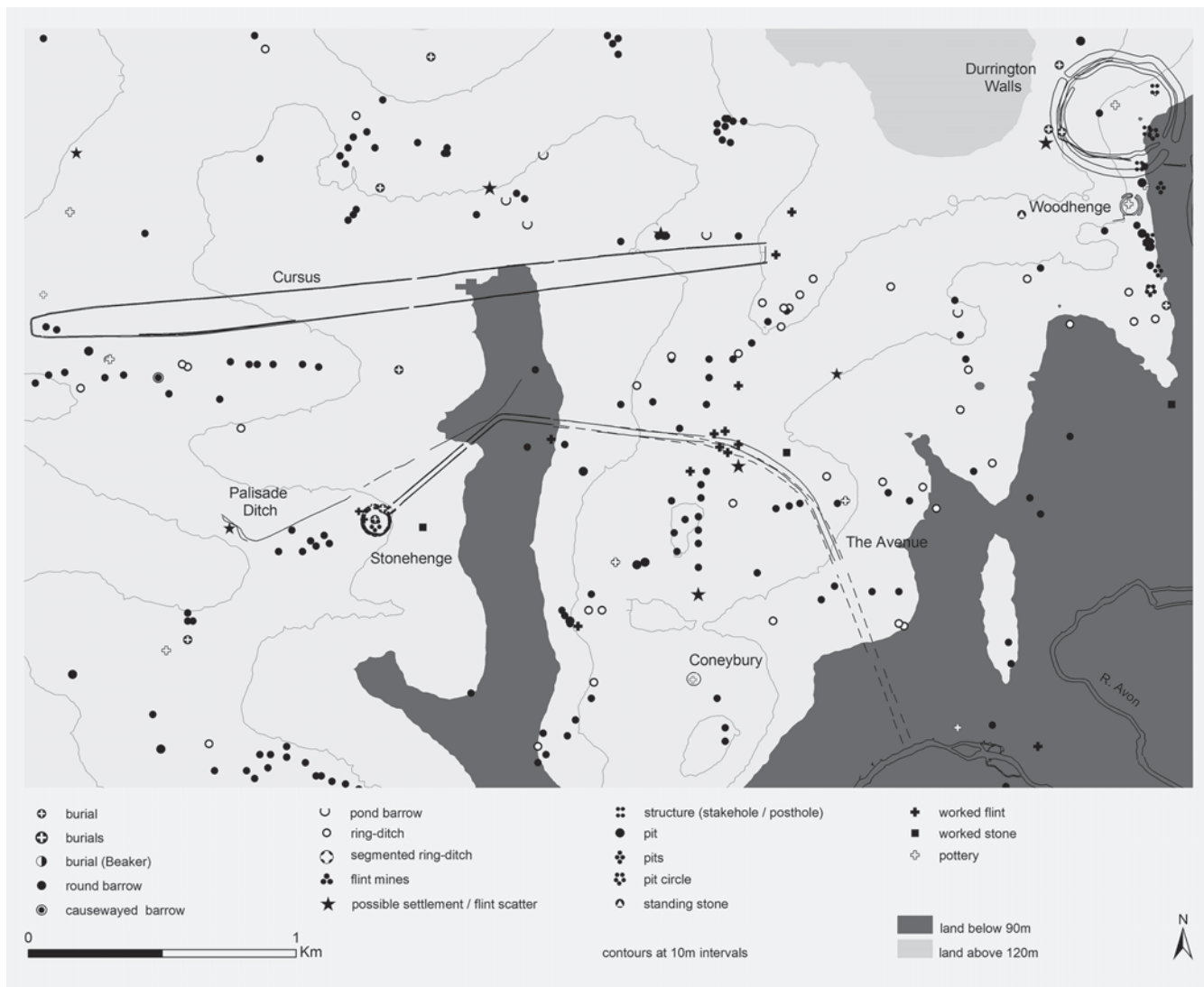
pilgrims to buy, and all who made the journey successfully were provided with a certificate of confession and communion known as a *compostela*. Much of the architecture and material culture associated with the pilgrimage to Santiago is marked with an emblematic scallop-shell of the kind found in the waters around the Galician coast and anciently dedicated to Venus. Pilgrims sometimes collected these shells and sewed them onto their hats as a sign of their travels, while lead or tin copies were sold in the cathedral square. Examples have been found in London and elsewhere during archaeological excavations.<sup>35</sup>

### Stonehenge, Wiltshire

Like the Kaaba in Mecca and the Cathedral of St James in Santiago de Compostella, Stonehenge (Farbabb. 4) is the focal point of a much larger and long-lived ceremonial landscape whose construction and use must have been every bit as complicated and rich as the case studies already discussed (Ill. 3). The monument we see today was first raised about 3000 BCE as an earthwork enclosure, the central stone structures being added and iteratively modified in the period between 2600 and 2000 BCE.<sup>36</sup>

In the centre are five great Sarsen Trilithons, each comprising two uprights linked by a lintel which could be seen as ancestral deities, probably representing the Divine Twins.<sup>37</sup> Around the outside is the Sarsen Circle, perhaps constructed as a simple calendar with the 30 uprights each representing the day of a lunar month.<sup>38</sup> Together the Sarsen elements form a coherent structure whose architecture embodies a cardinal axis orientated on the midsummer sunrise to the northeast and the midwinter sunset to the southwest. Its construction involves the use of mortise and tenon joints and neat dressing of the main faces in a way that suggests influences from carpentry.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, broadly contemporary timber structures of similar plan are known in the area and further afield.<sup>40</sup>

The large stones for the Sarsen structure (Farbabb. 4) were locally sourced, but within the Sarsen Circle are the remains of around eighty smaller stones collectively known as ›Bluestones‹ (Farbabb. 5). These show



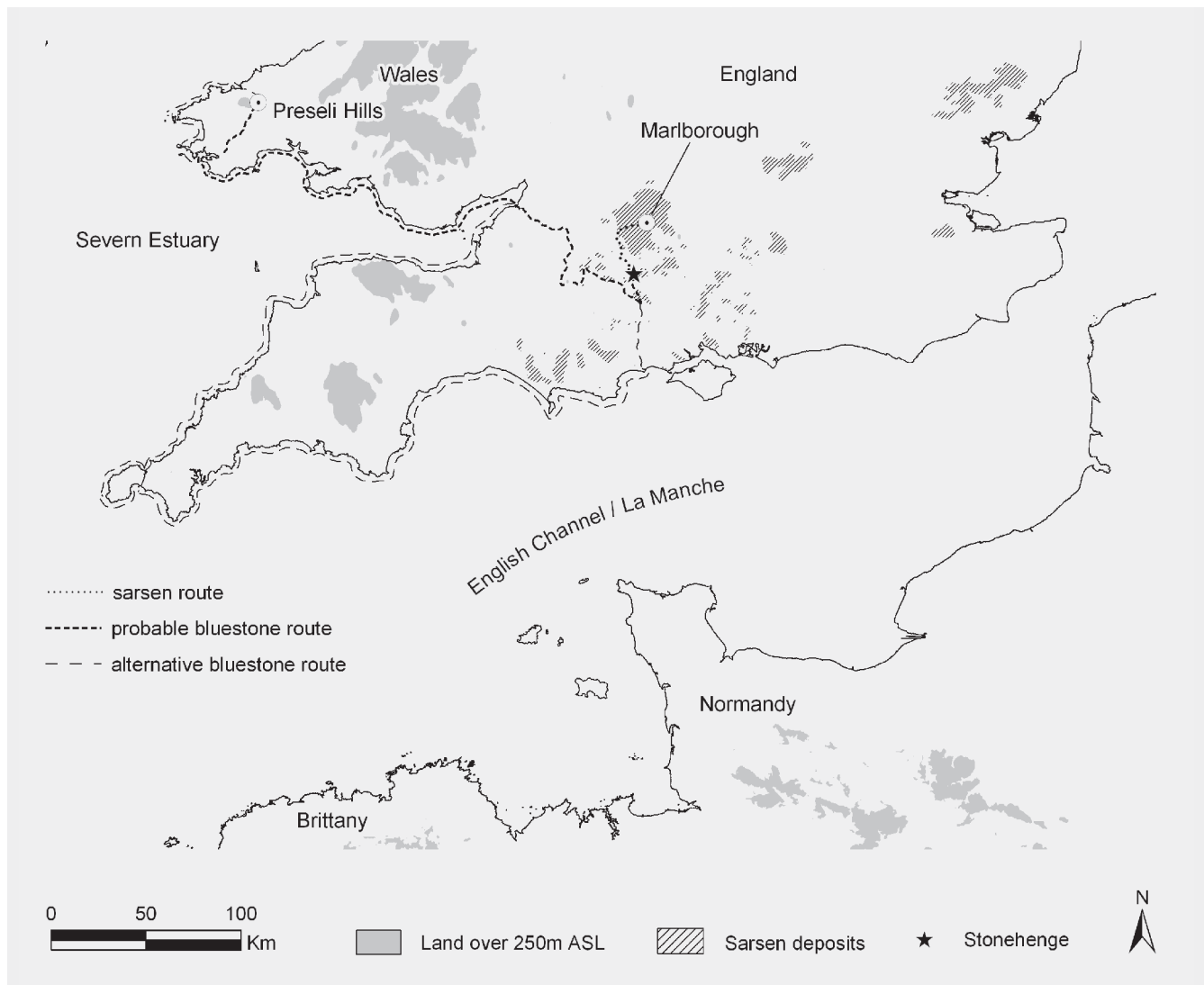
Ill. 3: The Stonehenge landscape showing the distribution of principal monuments of the fourth to the second millennium BCE.  
Photo: Drawing by Vanessa Constant.

considerable lithological diversity (dolerites, rhyolites, ashy shales, tuffs, and sandstones) most of which originated in the Preseli Mountains of southwest Wales some 230 km away as the crow flies.<sup>41</sup>

During the lifespan of Stonehenge these stones were variously moved around in at least three main configurations, and pieces were detached and used for the manufacture of armllets, talismans, and lucky charms in the form of discs and small axes. The use of such objects in the context of healing rituals,<sup>42</sup> coupled with long-lived oral traditions explaining the purpose of the Bluestones

in terms of their healing properties and connections between the source of the Bluestones and holy wells, suggests that the power of Stonehenge lay in the perceived magical properties of the imported Bluestones.<sup>43</sup>

The landscape around Stonehenge has evidence of occupation and monument construction dating back into the eighth millennium BCE.<sup>44</sup> From the period of Stonehenge itself there is a scatter of henges, cursuses, long mortuary enclosures, henge-enclosures, post-settings, pit clusters, and burial places (Ill. 3). People attending ceremonies and rituals at Stonehenge no doubt moved between these various places and the central



Ill. 4: Possible routes for the transportation of Sarsen and Bluestone to Stonehenge. Photo: Drawing by Vanessa Constant.

circles, much of the intervening downland being open pasture at the time. There is evidence for structured movements through the landscape. The Stonehenge Cursus built about 3400 BCE as some kind of processual way between King Barrow Ridge in the east and Fargo Ridge in the west.<sup>45</sup> Slightly later, an embanked earthwork avenue some 35 m wide linked Stonehenge with the river Avon some 2.5 km to the southeast. The Cursus may also symbolically mark the passage of the sun across the sky from east to west at around the time of the spring (vernal) and autumnal equinoxes, while the westerly section of the Avenue perpetuates the cardinal axis of Stonehenge in being aligned outwards from the

monument towards the midsummer sunrise. But what of the cultural routes associated with the site? In this connection there are two important schemes: the routes along which the stones were brought to Stonehenge; and the routes along which pilgrims may have travelled to attend ceremonies and festivals there.

#### Stones in the road

It is widely assumed that the large Sarsen blocks used for the construction of the Trilithons, Sarsen Circle, Station Stones, Slaughter Stone, and Heelstone at Stonehenge

derive from a source somewhere near Avebury on the Marlborough Downs some 30 km to the north of Stonehenge. Indeed, Richard Atkinson once proposed that the stones had originally passed through Avebury before being taken to Stonehenge.<sup>46</sup> The Marlborough Downs are certainly littered with the remains of Sarsen boulder-fields (Farbabb. 6) that could indeed be the source for the Stonehenge stones, but, as detailed surveys have shown, Sarsen can be found over wide areas of southeastern England.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, a small-scale study of Sarsen off-cuts from Stonehenge suggested that several different rock types were represented and these may equate with different sources.<sup>48</sup>

How the Sarsens were moved has been a matter of considerable speculation and experiment. The largest weights around 35 tons, although many of the 80 or so blocks are much smaller and both easier to move and easier to find within the size-range of naturally occurring blocks. Most of the route from the boulder-fields of the Marlborough Downs to Salisbury Plain would involve travelling over land, although short sections of the river Avon could have been used if the stones were placed on rafts of some kind. Sleds run over wooden rollers is the method most usually recognized as experiments using sleds on tracks have also proved successful.<sup>49</sup> Human muscle power would have been important, but draft animals including oxen would have provided motive power far more effectively.<sup>50</sup> Richard Atkinson<sup>51</sup> suggested a fairly direct route from Avebury southwards via Bishops Cannings, Redhorn Hill, Robin Hood Ball, and on to Stonehenge. Geologist Patrick Hill suggested an alternative route starting at Lockeridge some three miles to the east of Avebury to run south to Knap Hill, down into the Vale of Pewsey, around Woodborough Hill, and then down into the Avon Valley which can be followed to within 3 km of Stonehenge.<sup>52</sup> A third alternative is offered by Mike Parker Pearson<sup>53</sup> which uses the first part of Hill's route but deviates westwards after Knap Hill to run through Marden before joining the southern part of Atkinson's route to approach Stonehenge from the northwest. Other possibilities may exist, and if the Sarsens came from multiple sources then other routes must be sought as well. What is interesting, however, is that Knap Hill and Robin Hood Ball are both Neolithic enclosures constructed in the mid fourth

millennium BCE and thus fixed points in the landscape that would have been known to those moving the Sarsens, while Marden is a henge-enclosure beside the river Avon whose construction and main use was contemporary with the movement of Sarsens to Stonehenge.<sup>54</sup> As Colin Richards<sup>55</sup> has suggested, moving stones for the construction of the great stone circles was not simply an engineering challenge, the very act of doing it was a competitive activity designed to enhance the status, standing and coherence of the community.

Much the same applies in the case of the 80 or so Bluestones brought to Stonehenge from west Wales. The distance is greater (230 km as the crow flies) but the stones are smaller (up to 4 tons). The source area comprises a series of upland outcrops on the eastern end of the Preseli Hills for the dolerites and spotted dolerites (Farbabb. 7 and 8), and various outcrops on the sides of the flanking river valleys for the rhyolites, tuffs, and ashy shales.

Access to the coast is relatively easy and the traditional view elaborated by Richard Atkinson is that these pillars were taken on rafts either from Newport on the west coast or Milford Haven on the south coast along the northern shores of the Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary before being paddled up the Bristol Avon to Frome, ported overland to the headwaters of the Hampshire Avon or Wylye, and then by river again to Stonehenge (Ill. 4).<sup>56</sup> A longer sea route around the southwest peninsula, along the south coast and then northwards up the Hampshire Avon to Stonehenge provides an alternative water-bourne route.<sup>57</sup> However, none of these routes have yielded evidence of way-markers or stopping places, and, despite various claims, there is no evidence for pieces of Bluestone debris along the way either. More plausible is the use of over-land routes.

South Wales is a fairly mountainous region, although the uplands are cut by substantial river valleys and there are passes between the hills. Many of these provided natural routeways for the migration of animals,<sup>58</sup> lines which are used by later tracks and modern roads. Wooden sleds and slide-carts pulled by draft animals are amongst the traditional vehicles for carrying heavy loads in the Welsh uplands<sup>59</sup> and similar apparatus could have been used in prehistoric times. The appearance of simple





Ill. 5: Standing stones on Carn Menyn in the Preseli Hills of Wales, UK. Photo: Timothy Darvill.

wooden wheels in northwest Europe in the late fourth millennium BCE<sup>60</sup> might have made the task easier. It is also possible that, for short distances at least, Bluestone pillars could have been carried on wooden stretchers or carrying-frames that spread the weight and allow a group of bearers to do their work. Gresham and Irvine<sup>61</sup> have argued that routeways into the uplands of Wales were often marked in prehistoric and later times by standing stones, some of which still survive in the landscape. Such a stone lies on the central part of one of the dolerite sources on Carn Menyn at the head of a route down to the Cleddau Valley (Ill. 5), and further standing stones have been recorded between the Preseli Hills and the coast as well as along possible eastwards-leading over-land routes.<sup>62</sup> At Rhos-y-Clegyrn to the south of the Preseli Hills



Ill. 6: Standing stone at Rhos-y-Clegyrn, Pembrokeshire, UK. Photo: Timothy Darvill.

excavations revealed evidence of a repeatedly used encampment around the standing stone (Ill. 6), tentatively dated to the period when Bluestones were being moved from Preseli to Stonehenge.<sup>63</sup>

#### Stationary travellers

In one sense the people who brought the various building blocks to Stonehenge must be seen as devotees committed to a cause and both creating and following the route of the stones. But what about other users? I have argued elsewhere that Stonehenge was a place for the living and that one source of renown was as a healing centre.<sup>64</sup> It is easily accessible by river from the south coast

of Britain; the river Avon leads directly from the southern end of the Stonehenge Avenue to the English Channel at Christchurch. The river Avon can also be followed up-stream to the north providing access deep into the chalklands of central southern Britain. Ridgeways, some of which may be of considerable antiquity, following the crest of hills link Salisbury Plain with much of southern Britain.<sup>65</sup> The basic infrastructure for prehistoric travellers is well attested. Moreover, investigations as part of the Stonehenge Riverside Project suggest that festivals involving feasting and hunting took place at Durrington Walls around the time of the winter solstice. On the evidence of isotope studies and occasional imported items of material culture it can be suggested that animals and people came to the area from northern and western parts of the British Isles.<sup>66</sup> Many may have made the final stages of their pilgrimage to Stonehenge along the structured route defined by the Avenue starting at the river Avon and in the final stretch following the sunbeams cast by the mid-summer sunrise and midwinter sunset.

Isotope studies have also revealed that at least two people buried in the Stonehenge area spent at part of their lives in southern central Europe.<sup>67</sup> The Amesbury Archer, a 35-45 year old male with severe disability in his left leg as a result of a knee injury was buried along with a vast collection of grave goods around 2380-2290 BCE. He is believed to have spent his teenage years in the Alps, and the accompanying grave goods suggest travels, or at least connections, to Germany, France, and Spain. A second grave, probably that of the Amesbury Archer's son or grandson lay adjacent. It dates to about 2350-2260 BCE and he too may have travelled continental Europe before being laid to rest in the environs of Stonehenge. The remains of other such travellers may be revealed in due course as further burials are studied, but another source of evidence is represented by grave-goods. A glass bead placed with the burial of an adult male at Wilsford South of Stonehenge probably came from the eastern Mediterranean or Near East;<sup>68</sup> while finds of amber beads and spacer-plates originating from the Baltic coastlands concentrate in graves around Stonehenge.<sup>69</sup> Other small metal and bone objects may also have travelled considerable distances between their

place of manufacture and the point of final deposition.<sup>70</sup> In general these are not so much traded items as the personal keepsakes and momentums that travellers pick up on their journeys and keep with them for the memories they evoke and the symbolism they project.

## Conclusion

Pilgrimage is a persistent passion with many common features and themes across time and space. Here it is only possible to touch on the evidence, but I hope that I have shown how Stonehenge can be fitted into a wider picture of special places and ceremonial centres present in many cultures. Stonehenge was in this view an active and important place – a monument for the living. The Sarsen stones provided the architectural framework and were no doubt replete with meaning and symbolism. They created the ceremonial precinct that housed the Bluestones which themselves provided the power of place. It would be naive to think of Stonehenge as having a single unchanging purpose. But one of its roles I argue was as a shrine that became a celebrated healing centre, a place of pilgrimage for those who came in the hope that their ailments would be cured and their well-being improved, much as later pilgrims journeyed to Santiago de Compostella or Mecca in the case studies discussed above. No doubt the great deities, possibly gods of the sun and moon, presided over these occasions at Stonehenge, immortalized perhaps in the Trilithons. But the stones were not just memorials to the gods; the gods were active agents in the well-being and fecundity of their people.

Bringing the stones to Stonehenge no doubt involved special routes and roads, dotted with monuments and markers along the way, and near the monument itself formalized as an Avenue that in its first section embodied the solstitial axis and served to link the circles with the river Avon. What we are beginning to glimpse through new research at Stonehenge and in the Preseli Hills is the need to think about these and related sites on a wide geographical canvas in which the central places were linked by networks of cultural routes.

## Wege nach Stonehenge. Ein vorgeschichtliches Heilzentrum und Pilgerstätte im südlichen Britannien

Das Pilgern zu einschlägigen Kultzentren ist weitverbreitet in heutigen wie in vergangenen Zeiten. Diese Stätten verfügen alle über unzählige bekannte Straßen; einige davon sind durch archäologische Beweise ›sichtbar‹ geworden. Das ist aber nicht alles: Aspekte von Komplexität und Nutzung kultureller Zentren können im Vergleich durch zwei anthropologische Beispiele dargestellt werden, bei denen historische Stätten auch heute weiterhin genutzt und aufgesucht werden. Sie bieten uns Einblicke wie strukturiertes und zielgerichtetes Reisen in frühgeschichtlicher Zeit funktioniert haben könnten: der *Haji* nach Mekka (Saudi-Arabien) sowie der *Camino de Santiago* (Spanien). Mit diesen Vergleichen lohnt sich ein erweiterter Blick auf die Kreideebenen um Stonehenge als rein archäologisches Zeugnis (von Reisen) im Süden Englands. Die großen Steinmonumente des 3. und 2. Jhs. v. Chr. haben nicht isoliert bestanden, sondern waren Teil einer ausgedehnten, längerfristig genutzten zeremoniellen Landschaft, an der sich zahlreiche Straßen und Wege für materiellen sowie personellen Austausch / Kulturtransfer trafen. Zwei Kernpunkte bezüglich der Routen nach Stonehenge werden hier untersucht, zum einen die Herkunft und Verbreitung der Gesteinsarten, die zur Konstruktion von Stonehenge genutzt wurden: die Sarsen-Steine der südenglischen Tiefebene (Downs) aus Wessex und die sogenannten Blausteine aus dem südwestlichen Wales. Zum anderen wird der Ort daraufhin untersucht, wie der Ort auf jene Personen wirkte, die diesen besuchten und woher sie stammten.

### Notes

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