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New Ways to Sites of Power.

Retrieving a Spiritual Landscape in Franconia

[In: Anczyk, Adam and Joanna Malita-Król (eds.), *Walking the Old ways in a New World. Contemporary Paganism as a Lived Religion*. Katowice, 2017: Sacrum Publishing House, pp. 67 – 100]

“Sites of Power” have become a fashionable topic. Books covering such sites for the whole country or for specific regions can be found in museum bookshops, public and university libraries all over Germany. To provide some exemplary titles (in translation): *Cultic sites and Places of Sacrifice in Germany* (Kuckenburger, 2007) – a book I recently saw in the museum bookshop of the renowned *Neues Museum* of Berlin – *The Book of Cultic Sites – A guide to ancient Places of Sacrifice, Sanctuaries and Cultic Sites in Germany* (Graichen, 1999), *Sacred Groves – Sacred Woods: a travel guide of cultural history* (Bauer et al. 2005). These books are written from a variety of perspectives: cultural history, history of religions, esotericism, geomantics, church history, regional studies etc. There are numerous ways in which intrinsic “powers” are attributed to a certain site, including natural qualities of such sites, rendering them “energetic”, or to spiritual, Pagan or Christian “inscriptions” (Kleinknecht, 2011, p. 659f.) or even to some spiritistic phenomena located there. There are also extrinsic attributions, due to connections with myths, legends or historical events.

Current interest in sacred places or in “sites of power” is strongly directed at pre-Christian sites (Fenzl, 2014, p. 9). This cultural movement may be understood as the desire to “return to the origins”, as a search for “roots” and “enrootment”. Pierre Bourdieu identified this search as a polar opposite to the experience of uprootment and of de-localisation of modern culture and its emphasis on mobility. He developed this notion in a study on cultural movements among the Berber people of the Algerian Kabyle region, who seek to revive their own non-Arabic culture (Bourdieu, 1970, pp. 739-758). Bourdieu had

conducted his studies in the context of a social experience marked by dislocation and the transformation brought about by industrialisation in Algeria. The quest for reaffirmation of identity through renewed appreciation of cultural origins was understood by Bourdieu as a form of *nostalgie structurelle* for a “time before time” (“*d’un temps avant le temps*”) – a sentiment which he shared with his informants and which he found to be characteristic of modernity (Silverstein, 2003, p. 27). In the perspective of “embodiment studies” which have been markedly inspired by Pierre Bourdieu’s studies on “habitus” as the embodied product of interaction with culture and place, attention to embodied experience and participation in specific, significant environments has been raised. This echoes well with a turn to the study of embodied experience in the fields of religious and cultural studies. Thus, Manuel Vasquez seeks to relate the “webs of symbols” to the embodied existence with its experiences and practises which create and transmit meaning:

Both our material practices and the material world in which we are embedded are agentic. (...) The insight that language is not the only form of material agency is crucial in my call for scholars to avoid semiotic reductionism and to engage in a holistic exploration of the diversity of practises that constitute religion as constructed yet lived category (Vasquez, 2011, p. 83f.).

Vasquez also cautions against a materialistic reductionism as follows:

We can recognise that consciousness, and particularly religious experience may not be fully definable, fully reducible either to neural processes or sociohistorical practises, or to a combination of both. (...) But this non-reductive, nontotalizing phenomenology of embodiment has little in common with the essentialist, subjectivist, and idealist phenomenology that has been appropriated by religious studies (idem, p. 107).

This perspective may draw attention to the way, in which the beliefs attached to such sites, in particular of pre-Christian times, are approached [68] and received. It may raise awareness that many of those interested in those sites do not wish to convert to Esotericism or to Paganism, but rather seek to extend the realm of their own (spiritual) experience by learning about such sites and by visiting them.

Taking interest in a place as a “site of power” implies an approach which can be distinguished from interest in historical, cultural or aesthetic aspects. It involves the quest for an experience of a site as “powerful”. In the genre of books on “sites of power” this usually means “spiritually powerful”, as distinguishable for instance from awe inspiring aesthetic properties. Someone who visits such a site will want to experience this power

there. This means to engage in a “pilgrimage”. The practice of “pilgrimage” may be defined as seeking spiritual experience through embodied action in the landscape, rather than through interiorized faith or by standard ritual of a religious service. The renewal of public interest in pilgrimages both from religious and, interestingly, from secular parts of German society has somewhat preceded the rise of publications on “sites of power”. The act of “pilgrimage” may be defined as visiting a special place with the intent of partaking in the powers present at that site. It is a central concept in the anthropology of religious ritual and experience of Victor Turner (Turner, 1969, pp. 94ff.). “Pilgrimage” is also at the core of the project of a book on 46 “sites of power” in Franconia, which will be presented here. Some of these sites are presently sites of pilgrimage for Roman Catholics or have been so in the past. Others are surrounded by myths and legends or have been recognised as “special” sites in nature. By describing them as “sites of power” they have been redefined with reference to history of Paganism and to features of Esotericism¹. Thus “Old Ways” have been retraced for readers who wish to walk them in a “New World” – by acts of “pilgrimage”.

Such experientially motivated excursions may be regarded as “pilgrimage”: not as fact-finding tours but as embarkment on voyages of experience, to [69] which expectations of transformation, of re-connection to “origins” or even of some form of “initiation” may be attached. Such interest may not be primarily driven by the desire to study the whole system, e.g. of Germanic Paganism, but rather to connect intuitively to its sites and manifestations. This may even be connected to a desire of arriving at a more profound sense of cultural-spiritual identity localised in significant sites.

In this perspective I will report on a book of studies about 46 “sites of power” in Franconia, a historic region of northern Bavaria with a strong sense of regional identity, to which I contributed: Körner, Wolfgang (ed.), (2016). *Kraftplätze in Franken – Geomantischer Guide zu Kultstätten und energetischen Orten*, Schesslitz: Vivita Verlag.

Cultural traditions deriving from German Romanticism have paved the way for the success of this book, as of the whole genre of books on “sites of power” in Germany.

¹ “Esotericism” is understood here in the precise sense in which Antoine Faivre (2003) has defined it as a distinct and powerful current and tradition of European spiritual thought, unified by a basic set of seven common features, which account for its unity in spite of the variety of its phenotypes. Esotericism originated in Antiquity.

According to the philosophy of (German) Idealism all perceptions were essentially projections of the Self, concretely of the “empirical ego”, but, under certain conditions, such as encounter with nature, an encompassing “absolute ego” could manifest itself in the Romantic experience of nature, by which a common spirit in the individual person and in nature would emerge to awareness. F. W. J. Schelling’s influential *Philosophy of Nature (Naturphilosophie)* (Bowie, 2016) developed this more pointedly, relating “Nature” to the concept of the “Absolute Ego”. Thus significant experiences of nature brought a common element of the subject and of nature to awareness. The spiritual quality and relevance of such experience is based on a spiritual concept of nature. The Platonic concept of the “world soul” and its relation to the individual souls is in the background here (*ibidem*).

With the appraisal of external nature as the expression of “Nature”, the experience of nature and of special sites therein has received new importance. In this context, the concept of the “genius loci” (the spirit of a place) of Antiquity has been rediscovered, adopted and philosophically transformed by Romanticism (Kleinknecht, 201, pp. 303-312). The philosophy of German Idealism tended to interiorize this concept, interpreting it as the subjective impression raised by a site of special properties, such [70] as aesthetical qualities or association with memorable events. The Philosophy of Nature however reinstated the belief of Greco-Roman Antiquity in intrinsic spiritual properties of special sites (Kozljanić, 2004, pp. 159ff.), the belief that special places were inhabited by their specific local “daimonion”, the “genius loci”. It was advised to make a sacrifice upon entering such a site, as Horace confirms (Kozljanić, 2009, pp. 12-32). This belief was taken in a more metaphorical sense during the Enlightenment period, as shown by numerous statues in Baroque gardens, such as of nymphs or of Pan.

Nevertheless, in Romanticism the “genius loci” was again assumed to have ontological properties, either as a spirit being or as a manifestation of a divine nature. A certain range of ideas existed as to the actual nature of a “genius loci”, which did not cause dissent however, since the decisive point about the philosophy (or epistemics) of Romanticism was concerned with how such a phenomenon showed up in personal experience and in subjective perception. This is an important point which should be kept in mind also for the evaluation of the approach of “Geomantics” presented here, from the late 20th century onwards. The focal point is that a “site of power” manifests itself in personal experience and perception.

Its spiritual quality is warranted by the belief that nature – i.e. both outer and inner nature – has a divine quality. This implies that Pagan traditions about deities or spirits located at “sites of power” are of high interest. However, they need not be taken for “spirit beings” in the Pagan sense, but can be reinterpreted in terms of Romanticism as manifestations of divine nature.

In late Romanticism interest in special sites of power of nature and of culture flourished. This revived the notion of a “genius loci” – and of sites of pilgrimage – which had been rejected as “pagan” by the Reformation (idem, pp. 40ff.), but it did not restore the Roman Catholic attributions of such sites. Rather it defined their significance through a Pantheistic or Panentheistic philosophy of “Nature” as present both in the subject and in external nature. This made the encounter with “sites of power” spiritually significant for a person as means of attaining an experience of spiritual quality, be it revelatory or “energetic” (as “force of Nature”). In the spirit [71] of the Philosophy of Nature of Romanticism and its universalism any notions that such revelations could be bound to a specific religion in particular were rejected. Any religion could serve as a medium of discerning such “sites of power”.

In the late 20th century this tradition gave rise to a movement of discerning such “sites of power” practically, of preserving and restoring them and of accessing them properly. (Kozljanić, 2009, pp.12-32). This movement is called “Geomantie” in German, which may be translated as “geomantics” to distinguish it from the forms of (oracular) divination which are known as “geomancy”.

The growing acceptance of geomantics is inspired by the descriptions of Feng Shui by scholars of Chinese culture, which began to receive recognition in Europe in the early 20th century. Feng Shui has since become ever more influential in German speaking countries, (Bischof, 1999) and is now regularly offered by architects, interior designers and landscape architects as part of their professional services. This reception raised interest in the European traditions of geomantics which had largely broken off after the Renaissance period which lead to several publications from the late seventies of the 20th century onwards (ibidem).

In 1995, members of the movement founded an organisation for geomantics in Germany, named *Hagia Chora* (Greek: “sacred sites”), which organised courses and training

programs, comprised landscape architects, historians of culture, philosophers and architects (Bischof, 2001). Subsequently groups for practical work with geomantics were founded all over German speaking countries. This work comprises identifying sites of power but also rituals aimed at “spiritual healing” of “disturbed sites” and work with “nature spirits” or elementary spirits of the Hermetic tradition. The website of the Swiss association of geomantic groups gives a good impression of it (Hurni, 2014). A leading figure in this process was Marco Pogačnik of Slovenia, a co-founder of *Hagia Chora*, who combined geomantic rituals with his work as an artist (Pogačnik, 2017). The book I am reporting about was written in cooperation with authors who were trained by Hagia Chora or inspired by it. [72]

Stefan Brönnle, a pioneer author on the spiritual qualities of landscapes, defined geomantics in 1998 (in translation):

Geomancy is a wholistic experiential science which strives to grasp the spiritual, psychic and energetic identity of a place and to consider it which creating in architecture, art or landscape planning (Brönnle, 1994).

The emphasis in this definition is put on the subjective experience of places. This avoids the issue of how to define and to explain such perceptions. Serious research has been done on this matter in the 20th and 21st centuries, as described by Olivia Kleinknecht in her comprehensive documentation on the phenomenon (Kleinknecht, 2011, pp. 80-129) which includes models of physics (idem, pp. 345-592) as well as philosophical approaches (idem, pp. 593-720). The assumption that such phenomena may have a basis in natural science has gained some acceptance in German culture, in particular due to the work of the *Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene* (IGPP) (Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health), which was founded in association with the University of Freiburg in 1950 and has been dedicated to research on “fringe phenomena” in collaboration of scholars from the natural sciences and psychology (IGPP, 2016). Convictions among those engaged in geomantics – that there may be some physical basis for “energies” of sites, as geological qualities and due to their association with special spiritual acts, rituals or manifestations – can thus rely on scholarship received in some segments of German culture. Still, the belief in specific spiritual entities, of Paganism, Hermeticism or Christianity, goes far beyond this basis. A discussion of these claims would be beyond the scope of this essay. However, it may be clear that the popular success of geomantically inspired books on

“sites of power” in German speaking countries is by far no fringe phenomenon. It shows to which extent convictions about (spiritually effective) “energies” of some places, and, though probably to a lesser degree, beliefs about spiritual “entities” or beings have been received in general culture.

The genesis of the book *Kraftorte in Franken* about “sites of power” in Franconia rests on these cultural foundations. If, in the following, I write about “energies” of places of “power,” it does not imply any judgement about the existence or nature of such “energies” or “power,” but simply [73] refers to the culturally determined understanding of such ideas, as described above.

In terms of science of religion, this geomantic approach and reception may be defined as one of syncretism. The Pagan history and character of such sites is retrieved in a syncretistic perspective which is influenced by “nature spirituality”, of which “geomantics” is a special case, with its own ritual and practical approaches. We may acknowledge that “geomantics” has more aspects to it than a pure religious syncretism, understood as the merger of two religious systems. It is related to the ongoing debate about physical models of reality, and what may be accepted as “real” in research on the fringes of the generally accepted cosmology and anthropology. It also has aesthetic and psychological features. For our perspective, however, the syncretistic features are the most important. It may be noted that only a fraction of the readers of books on “sites of power” can be identified as Neopagan, since the Neopagan communities of Germany comprises no more than some few thousand members. The fact that readers who will identify as Christians, as religiously unaffiliated or as non-religious, buy books of a geomantic character on “sites of power” indicates a state of religious fluidity. Geomantics apparently provide the possibility to engage in a new, spiritual perception and experience of “sites of power” without challenging the overall religious identity of its readers. This may be called a “latent syncretism”. In it Pagan perspectives have been revived. Pagan features, deities and spiritual beings receive new appreciation on these terms.

The book *Kraftorte in Franken* was written with the practical purpose in mind, to provide a guide to readers who would want to visit such sites and to experience them with spiritual intent, in a deliberately wide sense of “spirituality”, which extends into the cultural, psychological and aesthetic spheres. Consequently, some passages deliberately address the

aspects of “pilgrimage” and “embodied experience”. The genre of books on “sites of power” in Germany may be understood as evidence of such latent syncretism. Some authors who do not identify as Esotericist or Neopagan will argue that the spiritual features and “energies” which can be experienced at “sites of power” suggest that they can be accounted for in terms of paranormal research. This may be exemplified by a prolific author on sacred [74] sites in Bavaria, Austria and neighbouring regions, Dr. Fritz Fenzl, a Roman Catholic grammar school teacher of religion in Munich, as evidenced by the publication list on his website. (Fenzl, 2017). Here the traditional Roman Catholic category of the “supernatural” converges with the modern “paranormal” to account for phenomena and perceptions of “sites of power”.

Traditionally, the Roman Catholic Church has such “sites of power” and cultivates them as sites of pilgrimage, such as Lourdes, Fatima, Częstochowa or Maria Brunnlein in Wemding. The “personal” and the “natural” elements appear conjoined in the sacred powers of these sites. In Roman Catholic and Orthodox theology the sacred powers present there are believed to be the effect of “sanctification”, by benediction or by the manifestation of a saint at a site. The powers of the saint may be accessed at these sites, in particular by means of a pilgrimage with its long ritual preparation in approaching the site. A sense of “cultic continuity” (“Kultkontinuität”) has been preserved in those cases where such sites have been identified as sacred sites even before Christianization. In some cases, this has now been acknowledged. It is understood as adding to the auratic quality of these sites.

However, a new spiritual and ritual practise of attending such sites is developing among people of Esotericist convictions. Roman Catholic sacred sites are visited by non-Catholics who perceptibly wish to relate to these “sites of power” in a non-Christian way, e.g. by collecting water from a sacred fountain without participating in the appropriate prayer and rites. This causes annoyance at times (“Esoteriker pilgern nach Wemding”, 2005).

Protestantism vigorously rejects the notion of “sacred sites”, understood as sites being imbued with some special spiritual power. Seeing that the issue of salvation and of faith is defined exclusively through the relation of a believer to Christ, there is no place for “sites of power” in Protestantism. The Reformation abolished pilgrimages and rejected any notions of ontologically sacred sites. Among people of an atheistic orientation, the attitudes of “sites of power” will likely be determined by their concept of reality. Those adhering to a positivistic

and mechanistic world view will [75] most likely reject any notions of an ontological “power” of a site.² They may be open to aesthetic qualities of “sites of power”.

In order to assess the distribution of convictions among the readership, some statistics may be useful. Close to two thirds of Germany’s population belong to either the Protestant or the Roman Catholic Church, evenly divided. Of the population close to half professes belief in God, one quarter believes in a spirit or life force, who may be termed as being of a “Spiritual orientation”,³ many of them probably Esotericists, and one quarter does not have any religious beliefs at all. In Switzerland and Austria the proportion of Atheists is lower with the proportion of those of “Spiritual” orientation higher (Eurobarometer, 2005). These segments of the population do not share homogeneous views about the nature of “reality” though. The increased acceptance of “alternative world views” in society makes the picture of attitudes with regard to “sites of power” more complex. The findings that over 20% of Germans believe in reincarnation according to a survey of 2012 (Statista – Das Statistik-Portal, 2012) – a belief rejected by Christian churches and by adherents of a positivistic world view – indicates a diversity of beliefs across these groups.

Readers of these convictions will approach the issue of “sites of powers” differently. However, opinions about them are not only determined by the denominational views on these issues, but by differing world views and epistemologies. A complex pattern of possible convictions about “sites of power” emerge, which provide for different approaches of interest in this issue among readers. A grid of convictions about “sites of power” in the German cultural sphere may look as follows: [76]

² I will avoid the term “secular” since it refers to the separation of state and church and does not necessarily imply a belief system. Instead I will use: “Atheistic” or, following some sources: “Materialistic” to denote the corresponding belief system. This is not to be confused with the issue of cosmological views about what constitutes “reality”. Here the distinction “mechanistic” and “alternative” will be used.

³ „Spiritual orientation“ constitutes a distinct category of convictions, mostly of a pantheistic or panentheistic quality, which has been identified by sociology of religion in recent years. It is distinct from the notion of “spiritual” as describing an intensive religious attitude or practise in any religion (cf. Heelas, 1996).

Matrix of convictions about „sites of power“:

	<i>Ontologies – models of “reality”:</i>	
<i>Belief systems:</i>	Positivistic, “mechanistic world view” and world view based on the distinction of “natural” and “supernatural”	“Alternative” world view: incl. quantum physics, “informational fields”
Atheistic	no belief in “powers” or “energies” of sites, no acceptance of a category of the “supernatural” (predominant view)	belief in “energies” of the sites due to geological or “electrical” factors, e.g. “Leylines” or water (minority view)
Protestant	no belief in “powers” or “energies” of sites, no acceptance of a category of the “supernatural” (predominant view)	belief in “energies” of the sites due to geological or “electrical” factors, e.g. “ley-lines” or water (minority view)
Roman Catholic (traditional) / Orthodox	belief in the “supernatural” in addition to the “natural”: saints manifest themselves at special sites and exert their powers there; sites may also be endowed with spiritual power by consecration (predominant view)	a convergence between the views above and the idea of “powers” of sites by consecration may exist (minority view)
(Neo-)Pagan	traditional belief in the presence and manifestation of deities and spirits at certain sites, belief in “genius loci” on the basis of the “natural” – “supernatural” distinction	Neopagan belief in “energies of sites” may be included in as far as the “pagan” convictions are understood as “nature spirituality”
Esotericism of the Romanticist and Idealistic tradition	perceptions of “energies” of places are subjective phenomena, of the unconscious mind or “soul, according to aesthetic qualities of sites, “genius loci” interpreted as “projection”	“energies” of sites of power are due to natural features, of geology or water, by connection to special events, or due to personal relation to a specific place.
Esotericism in Hermeticist tradition	possibly an interpretation of spiritual beings at “sites of power” as metaphors for their aesthetic qualities or a traditional belief in spiritual beings from an “otherworld”, similar to the Pagan views	belief that spiritual beings of different qualities and orders [77] inhabit specific places according to intrinsic qualities of the sites
The “Geomantic” milieu	as above in either Esoteric tradition	as above in either Esoteric tradition (predominant view)
Spiritism	the manifestations of spirits at special sites may be understood as manifestations either of the unconscious mind evoked by special qualities of such sites or of spirits as ontologically distinct beings	belief in the presence of kind or malevolent spirits who manifest themselves at special sites, in correlation to natural “energies” of the sites or due to special events predominant view

This sketch of a possible distribution of convictions about “sites of power” may indicate the diversity of views among the readers of books on “sites of power” in Germany.

On the project of a book on Sites of Power in Franconia: the history of the project

In 2014 I was contacted by the publisher of a regional esoteric monthly magazine, *Prisma*, André Hammon, after some findings of mine about Pagan features at an ancient chapel, known as the “Shepherds’ Chapel”, and its site – now a Lutheran parish church – by the town of Altdorf, east of Nuernberg, had been published in the journal of the Lutheran Church of Bavaria (Greif, 2014a). The article was reprinted by various newspapers in southern Germany and beyond. Further reports were published in the press (Blinten, 2014). A publication in the esoteric magazine *Prisma* followed. (Kleinhempel, 2014a). Hammon had a series on sites of power in his magazine, which prompted requests from the tourism industry to publish these contributions in a book, which could be presented to guests. He was connected to a regional network of people interested in geomantics and in spiritual features of the landscape, called *Noris Geo* and based in Nuernberg. Together we were to write a book about sites of power in [78] Franconia. The book’s editor, Wolfgang Körner, a landscape architect, had trained with *Hagia Chora*.

The region of Franconia, comprising northern Bavaria and some adjacent districts, is a historic region of Germany and was a part of the core territory of the Frankish kingdom some 1550 years ago. It has distinct cultural and political traditions along with a dialect and has retained a common sense of identity and in spite of being incorporated into the state of Bavaria two centuries ago. A book on “sites of power” in Franconia would likely resonate with public interest in regional identity. The book, entitled *Kraftplätze in Franken – Geomantischer Guide zu Kultstätten und energetischen Orten* (Sites of Power in Franconia – Geomantic Guide to Cultic Sites and Energetic Places) was published in 2016 (Körner, 2016).⁴

One of the „sites of power“ presented in the book is the aforementioned „Shepherds’Chapel“, which dates back to the 8th century and has been remodelled in the 14th century. It stands closely adjacent to a “St. Michael’s” church, built around the year

⁴ See the overview of sites in the content pages on:
https://www.academia.edu/15399536/Kraftpl%C3%A4tze_in_Franken

1050. In the period of Christianization dedications of churches to St. Michael were usually made on sites where Woden had been worshipped before (Brückner, 1992, p. 721). According to tradition, this church site served as a mission centre in the time of the Anglo-Saxon intensive Christianization of Franconia from the 8th century on. Significant surviving iconographic and architectural features support the view that this chapel has preserved significant features of a Germanic Pagan temple in design, ornamentation and symbolism of axis. It is reinforced by sacrificial objects excavated in the chapel as well as by traditions about its peculiar name and by the cultic programme represented in the saints formerly venerated there.

In spite of the lively public interest in these findings, which may be attributed to a desire to learn about one's cultural identity, Pagan sites and interest in historical Paganism are still burdened with a heavy taboo in Germany, as being somehow associated with National Socialist sympathies, due to the interest National Socialists took in Germany's pre-Christian past. Any reference to a Pagan history of "sites of power" will readily be confronted with the accusation of sympathising with a National Socialist orientation. Accordingly interest in the Pagan history of sacred sites is bound to meet with widespread reticence (Kuckenbug, 2007, p. 9). Since this chapel belongs to a Lutheran parish, backlash soon followed in the church press, denouncing these claims as spurious infatuation with a Germanic past (Greif, 2014b).

The thesis has however been received in a publication on the region of Nuernberg edited by the government of the State of Bavaria (Moritz, 2015, pp. 44-47) and in other guides to regional history (Auer, 2015, pp. 52-55). In spite of the controversy following these publications, the basic thesis that the "Shepherds' Chapel" dates back to Pagan times can now be considered to be publically received and thus to have entered common awareness in the region. The public controversy spurred me to work out a full essay on the issue (Kleinhempel, 2014b), which was published in the magazine *Herdfeuer*, edited by the Asatru-oriented *Eldaring* Association, which is recognised academically and available in university libraries. With kind permission by the Eldaring association the article is accessible in German and in an abbreviated version in English on the "Academia.edu" website (Kleinhempel, 2016).

Principles of the book and the inclusion of Pagan aspects in “sites of power”

Given the degree of public interest and receptivity to the issue of Pagan history of sites of worship and “places of power”, we soon agreed, as the group of authors, the editor and the publisher, that we would try to combine these perspectives in our articles, wherever possible. Among the authors hardly anyone would identify himself or herself as Pagan, while most are engaged in the regional geomantic association of *Noris Geo*. Some identify as Christians, some as Esotericists, most hold an eclectic mixture of beliefs. Some are active in academia. They come from a variety of fields: theologians, like myself and a colleague, engaged in academia, a historian,[80] a landscape architect, a psychologist, therapists, a professional photographer, some are experienced authors, some engaged in geomantic activities (idem, p. 234ff.). The professional perspectives and specific sensitivities were fruitful for cooperation in the project.

The book was designed to be accessible to average lay readers, who would be interested in visiting these sites. Elements of a tourist guide were thus included, such as GPS-data in QR-code to locate the exact positions of some sites. This was especially important in places where no special features of nature nor architectural remains or buildings would mark a site. It was to provide sufficient information to anyone who would want to visit a site to relate spiritually to it. This applied to churches, to archeological sites of former sanctuaries, to sites in nature of historically documented or geomantically or aesthetically perceptible spiritual qualities. The information provided should be sufficient to give a clear picture of the spiritual “inscription” of a site, so as to be “readable” to the visitor, but not to overburden the reader. Constraints of the volume of the book made further brevity necessary in some articles, where more could have been written to provide a comprehensive understanding of a site.

The book was specifically written for those who would take interest in Franconian “sites of power” with spiritual interest. The geomantic section in each article on a site would be given a special paragraph, to which would be added sections on religious history, geology, natural features, architecture, cultural history etc. The whole book was designed to provide a reader interested in spiritual aspects of these sites with information and means in order to visit the sites with the intent of connecting spiritually to them, as on a “pilgrimage”.

“Pilgrimage” is understood here in a sense detached from the formal Roman Catholic frame, as an “embodied practise” of relating to a sacred site for the purpose of spiritual experience, by partaking of its “powers”.

There was agreement that articles should generally include a section on the religious and cultural history of the site as well as on geomantic features. As a result, several articles include sections contributed by others, specialists in the corresponding fields. Spiritual aspects of mediaeval architecture and [81] its symbolism of space, the lore of nature spirits, astrological features and geomantic aspects of construction or of natural sites were included as well. My own contribution to the book focused on the perspective of history of religion of the sites. The Pagan “stratum” was included wherever it could be identified. Some authors have a culturalistic approach to the issue of sacred sites, while most adhere to an essentialistic point of view about ontological qualities of “sites of power”. Both are represented in the book, making it accessible to readers of various convictions.

Not all of the sites described in the book are churches today. Some have been sites of shrines and of veneration in Pagan times. Others have traditions of being “auratic”, supported by legends and by public appraisal. We have included sites of ancient history, but also two landscape gardens, in Aschaffenburg and Bad Kissingen, dating back to the late 18th and early 19th century respectively, when sites of “sacred nature” were deliberately created in the spirit of Pantheism. In some sites an application of the polar opposition of “sacred” and “profane”, as proposed by Eliade (Eliade, 1961) remained ambiguous. The geomantically trained editor attempted to verify “energetic” properties of sites by an intuitive method comparable to “dowsing”, according to accepted practise in this tradition – a method discredited as “personal gnosis” by some, but widely accepted in the field of geomantically interested readers. These findings are accordingly included in the book and related to other perspectives as guidelines for readers. Apart from specifically “geomantic” perceptions, information from sources of history of religion and of culture, as well as of local traditions, provide means to “read” symbols from different strata of a site’s religious history and meaning. For example, wayside shrines, which are common in Franconia, in Southern Germany and Austria, some in the form of column shrines, others built as tiny chapels, are often surrounded by three trees, mostly linden trees, which were once sacred to the goddess Freya. They are reminiscent of the sacred groves of Germanic, Celtic and Slavic

Paganism, and are probably derived from them. The linden trees were also regarded as having protective powers (Polle, 2012). Sensitising readers to the sub-consciously preserved elder religious features enables them to relate to them accordingly. [82]



Fig.1. Wayside chapel near Landersdorf, community of Thalmässing, southern Franconia, Photographer: Jose de Aquino (Cevalux)

Implications for the presentation of Pagan features of sites of power and their hermeneutics

The intention for this book was not only to provide informations about “sites of power” of sacred and geomantically special sites, but also to serve [83] practical purposes as well. As mentioned before, the book was designed to be a guide for visits. In a spiritual perspective it was meant to lead the readers to these sites and to prepare them for what they might possibly experience there. In a sense it was designed as a “book of pilgrimage”. In some aspects this follows the ideas of Victor Turner who focused on the connection between pilgrimage and “drama”, understood as enactment of community in the process, and the experience of “liminal states” (Turner, 1969, p. 94ff.). The three states of “rites of passage” as described by Arnold van Gennep comprise “segregation”, “margin” and “aggregation”: the integration of this experience into normal life. The first one denotes the passing from the ordinary state at the outset, the second a state of dissolution and “mystical union”, called “liminality”, the “threshold state” in which embodied initiatory experiences are made, and the third a reconfiguration of identity in a new state which integrates elements experienced in the second (*ibidem*). This model can be applied to spiritual initiations – and, as Victor Turner did, to pilgrimages as enacted, transformative spiritual rites and experiences. Turner related the core concepts of “liminality” and of “communitas” to each other in the description of pilgrimage (Turner, 1969, pp. 94-113 and 125-130).

Now this book does not contain ritual prescriptions nor is it associated with organised pilgrimage. The latter exists to a certain degree through geomantic excursions offered by *Noris Geo* or by some of the authors individually (Körner, 2017). Sites described in the book are visited on outings, some with long walks, which have the character of a pilgrimage of like-minded people experiencing a special bond of feeling of a spiritual community with each other and a spiritual connection to the site upon arrival. The excursions are meant to be initiatory, to lead the participants to a spiritual perception of the sites visited, which should be transformative to some degree, in the way that the contact with the sacred is by tradition said to have this effect. Thus Wolfgang Körner wrote in the edition of the website of *Noris Geo* for January, 2017 – here quoted in translation:

Geomantics is the ancient science of the mutual relations between the energies of earth, cosmos and man. We geomanters regard the Earth to be a living being – we are part of this living being

and should accordingly [84] act respectfully... There are different levels of consciousness on earth, which are inhabited by different beings. The work of geomantics is about training the perception and to create a spiritual communication for the benefit of all... At present we are preoccupied with the “new energy”. (...) Duality loses importance. A greater communion with the realm of the angels and of the risen masters arises. (...) Gradually a network of sites of power begins to reveal itself, which enhance this state of consciousness. Therefore we will engage more in 2017 to offer corresponding excursions (ibidem).

In this statement the space for the Pagan elements connected to some “sites of power” is apparent: according to Körner, the Pagan spiritual entities are indeed to be included in the “realm of the angels and risen masters”. In the spirit of syncretism the “bonding” experience between the visitor, the site and also the community is described in a key concept of Hindu Advaita Vedanta philosophy: as overcoming of the “duality” of subject and object. Turner had identified this experience of fusion as essential to “pilgrimage”. The universalistic attitude to the realm of the spiritual present in the geomantic association of *Noris Geo* implies that spiritual entities of different religious and spiritual systems will be included in the perception of “spiritual energies” of a place and in their interpretation. Some quotes from the book may illustrate this syncretistic approach, in which the Pagan element proper, finds itself included. Thus Körner added an experientially oriented comment to my article on a pre-Christian temple at a Roman army base, where Woden and Mercurius Avernorix were venerated (Kleinhempel, 2016, pp. 202-205) (in translation):

Following the path further on (...) when one looks closely at the beech trees, some 50 metres to the left, one can notice one beech tree, which, in contrast to most of the others whose trunks are bare in the lower range, has a strong branch at a height of some 3 metres. There you turn right and and walk uphill a gentle slope for some 10 metres. You arrive at a mighty forked beech tree with two trunks. Now you stand at the point where the quality of Woden radiates. In contrast to Mercurius the mental space is wide open and filled with light. This energy does not work on intellect but on intuition (idem, p. 205). [85]

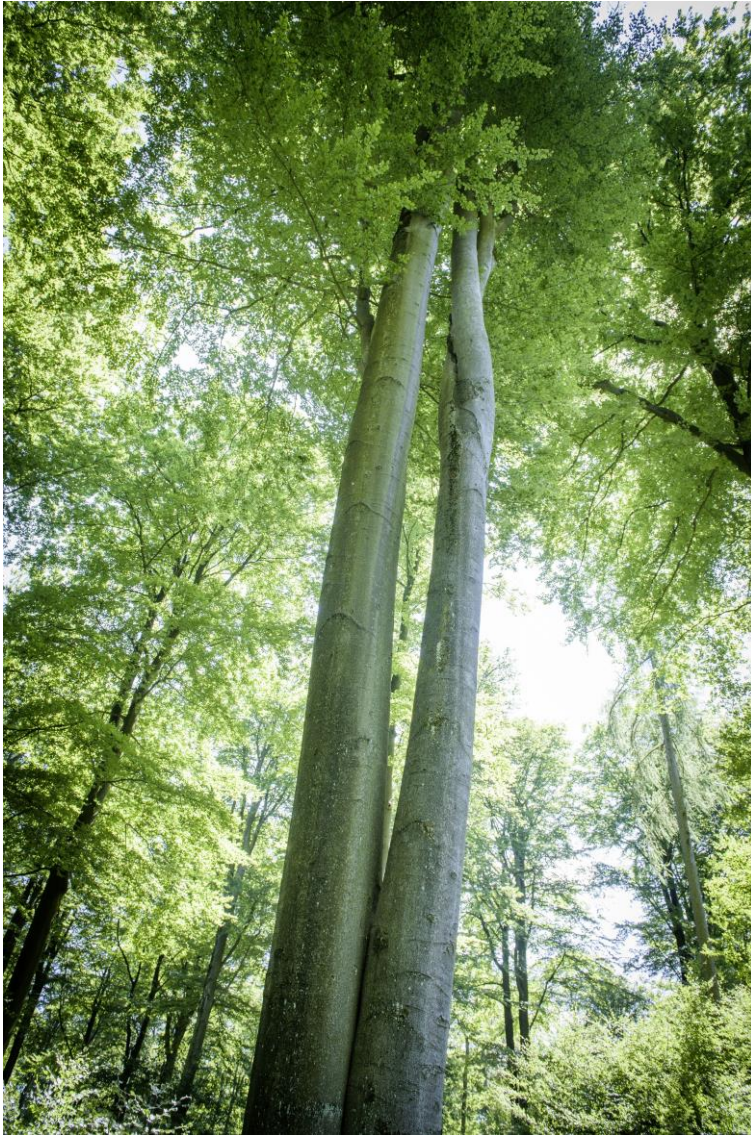


Fig. 2. Woden's beech at the site of power on the Greinberg near Miltenberg. Photographer: Wolfram Murr

The syncretism of veneration of the Germanic god Woden, the Gallo-Roman Mercurius Avernorix and the Roman Mercurius, documented by archaeological findings for this Roman army camp in the province of Germa-[86]nia Superior, finds its reflection in the syncretistic approach to the rediscovery and discernment of the spiritual powers attributed to the specific deities at the site and at special places in nature within this camp ground, which is now largely wooded. In this hermeneutical approach, the historical deities are “naturalized” and re-discovered as spiritual entities, which continue to act as “genius loci” and to manifest themselves through features of nature, as described here. The original meaning and dedication of this site – Kleinknecht defines this as “imprint” of information onto an object

or site (Kleinknecht, 2011, p. 556) – is retraced by geomantic means and re-discerned, as if in a palimpsest, in features of nature. The religious history of the site is believed to have been preserved in nature and to be conserved in it for over two millennia. In geomantic hermeneutics, the Pagan gods are believed to still be effective here, so that their “energies” can be sensed here. The interesting point here is that the geomantic approach provides a mode of access to relate experientially to the Pagan gods at their former site of veneration. Thus Woden – the god of divination – is re-primed in experientially perceptible psychophysical terms. A new form of semi-ritualised embodied practice of relating to the Pagan deities emerges here. It may be quite accessible to many readers since it is not framed as “religious” practice, but as empirically based nature spirituality.

This approach is also present in the description of another site, of the small city of Schweinfurt, a centre of industry and education (Kleinhempel, 2016, pp. 213-217). Here Körner added, in the geomantic section:

Schweinfurt’s main axis from the bridge over the river Main (...) to the city hall and to the St. John’s Church runs along a ley-line. Here several centres of energy are lined up. In the St. John’s Church you experience the energy of Mars. (...) You experience a vigorous energy of action. If you follow the Leyline in the direction of the market place you come across a granite column, sponsored by Schweinfurt rock bands. It stands exactly in this line and expresses the connection between heaven (Uranus) and earth (realisation by Mars). You may observe that geomantics has not remained an ancient art, but is still alive and inspires artistic creations. From here you see the market with the city hall and its tower. (...) It is the combination of Uranus and Mars, which marks the character of this city. Both are very masculine powers. You will experience the balance if [87] you walk across the bridge over the Main to the island in the river. There, eastwards, on the banks of the Saumain, between willow trees and nymphaeas, resides the river daeva of the realm. Experience her open playful power. (...) Continue westwards(...)under this linden tree you can experience the energy of Sophia. (idem, p. 216f.).

This passage is interesting through its combination of the elements of natural, geomorphic elements, the ley-line, with attributed qualities which are related to astrological aspects, or Roman deities interpreted as transcendent “energies” and qualities of spaces with their correlates in the psychophysical realm of man and the realm of culture. More “entities” are added to those, namely a feminine nature spirit identified as a “daeva”, here rather understood in the sense of the Hindu “deva”, a class of ancient Persian-Indian lesser deities reinterpreted as friendly nature spirits, and “Sophia” a divine entity of Hellenistic origin, present in Hermeticism and Christian mysticism, associated with a linden tree, and thus “embodied” or located in nature too. Interestingly no reference is made to the Christian

“imprint” of the St. John’s Church, which should expectably be the most dominant. Rather a “Marsian” quality is detected there. This indicates that a specific canon of syncretism is followed here, which integrates the traditions of Hermeticism and Paganism in particular.

The website of *Noris Geo* advertises the book *Kraftplätze in Franken* as guide. The guided tours – or rather “pilgrimages” – offered by *Noris Geo* are a special case of reception of the book, which addresses its purpose. Even beyond the members and customers of this association visitors are using the book as a guide to a “spiritual landscape” – or, put otherwise: to sites in the landscape whose spiritual qualities and “inscriptions” have been retraced to include the Pagan stratum where possible. [88]



Fig. 3. Granite stele on ley-line in front of St. John’s Church in Schweinfurt. Photographer: Wolfram Murr [89]

After the Pagan features and origins of the “Shepherds’ Chapel” of Altdorf by Nuernberg became widely known, visitors sought to connect to this “stratum”, bypassing its long history as a Roman Catholic chapel, its secularisation during the Reformation, its abuse as a shed and its recent renewed dedication as a funerary chapel of the Lutheran parish. On one occasion I observed a group of visitors taking up positions in the narrow alley between the main church and the south façade of the chapel, in front of the three windows with theophoric symbols, two of them of runic character. There they stood to meditate for a long while, in order to connect to the specific Germanic deities represented by each symbol. This was neither a “secular” visit to an ancient monument of cultural history nor the attendance of a Christian service at the chapel. The article on the site, reprinted in an abbreviated version in the book of sites of power in Franconia, (Kleinhempel, 2016) had served them as a guide to the symbols and the deities.



Fig. 4. *The Shepherds’ Chapel on the left and St. Michael’s Church to the right, viewed from northwest. Photographer: Alex Blinten [90]*



Fig.5. *The southern façade of the Shepherds' Chapel with the rune symbols above the windows. Photographer: Ullrich Kleinhempel*



Fig. 6. *Visitors of the Shepherds' Chapel standing in front of the window on the southern façade with their Pagan symbols, meditating to relate to the spiritual energies of the Pagan deities represented by each. Photographer: Ullrich Kleinhempel [91]*

In this very article Woden is presented as the dominant deity of the site, which is supported by the fact, that during the period of Christianization shrines and temples of Woden were usually re-consecrated as St. Michael's churches. Woden's qualities of psychopompos, as leader of the souls of the departed, provided the common trait, facilitating this transition in terms of "continuity of cult". In this perspective it appears as strange irony that the chapel, which originally bore the dedication for "St. Michael" before its transference to the main church, erected in front of it, now serves as a funerary chapel.

The awareness of the chapel's Pagan past influences perceptions about it even among those who are certainly no Pagans. Thus the pastor of the St. Michael's parish during the time when archaeological diggings were held in the Shepherds' Chapel, in 1988, Gerhard Böck, told me a story of peculiar phenomena of "resonance" of events at this site with the original realm and assumed powers of Woden. He said that on the day when he consecrated the Shepherds' Chapel anew, after centuries of desecration, in order to serve as a funerary chapel, a brass band were playing hymns in front of the small chapel. It was a calm, sunny autumn day. All of a sudden a violent gust of wind shook the oak trees, raining acorns into the brass instruments of damaging some of them. "Should the old Woden have made himself felt in his former dominion?" pastor Böck mused. Storms, oak trees, grave yards, the season of autumn and the site of the chapel were all associated with him. Such phenomena of "resonance" of events with fields of significance have been reported from Neopagan events in research, as stated by a scholar of Neopaganism, René Gründer, in his presentation "Die Evidenz der Götter – Zur Bedeutung von 'Personal Gnosis' in neuheidnischen Gruppenritualen" delivered at conference of the Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft für Parapsychologie (WGFP) in Offenburg, October 27, 2013. These manifestations agree well with the powers ascribed to Woden by tradition (Kleinhempel, 2014b, p. 45). The knowledge of the religious significance of the chapel in Pagan times has changed perceptions about the chapel. It has become inscribed in a collective mental map of Pagan sites of Franconia. [92]

Interestingly, in terms of "spiritual landscape", during research for the book, the chapel could be linked to a site of nature, a small waterfall and a cave, nearby, which by local legend was a site of worship to the "devil" in the "olden days", which could be identified as a probable shrine in nature in pre-Christian times (Hicke, 2016, pp. 42-66). Suggestions for a

spiritual walk on the “Woden’s Trail”, a walk through the woods by a river, connecting these sites, was accordingly included in her article.



Fig. 7. The chapel of Amorsbrunn with the pond of fertility fed by the spring which wells up in the chapel. Photographer: Wolfam Murr [93]

Pagan histories also surfaced in other places during research for the book. Thus a strongly matriarchal Pagan stratum emerged for the region of “Lower Franconia” with its numerous shrines, chapels and sites dedicated to the Virgin Mary and her apparitions on such sites. In some of the sources, a half-conscious wareness of the Pagan substratum which informed the character of the form in which the Virgin Mary appeared in visions and dreams, still existed (Kleinhempel, 2016, pp. 198-201). Thus, a shepherd’s vision of the Virgin’s appearance in a black elder tree at a site not far away from the ancient chapel of Amorsbrunn, built above a fountain, which by tradition, brought fertility to women, is preserved in memory. The black elder was a sacred tree to the goddess Holle, in German: “Mother Holle”, an honorific eponym meaning “the benign one”, who is identified with the goddess Frigg or Frijja (Reaves, 2008) and designates the specific cultural shape she took in the region of Lower Franconia and in the state of Hessen. Likewise, the realm of fertility also belongs to this goddess with fairy tales and legends attesting the connection, as in the tale of Mother Holle retold by the Grimm brothers (Grimm, 1819).



Fig. 8. View of the fountain beneath the floor of the chapel of Amorsbrunn, creating an image of access to the underworldly realm of “Mother Holle”. Photo: Wolfram Murr [94]

While visiting the site to take photographs, we encountered esoterically oriented visitors who came from Cologne, three hours’ drive away, to collect some bottles of the worderworking water of this pond. Telling of the project of this book raised sympathetic

interest and provided us with some new information about other sites with Pagan prehistory in the region. Evidently, knowledge about the religious history of such sites introduces them as significant sacred sites in a perceived “spiritual landscape” on a new basis, to readers of various orientations. The Pagan element becomes significant in various contexts and gives rise to new ways of relating to such sites in a spiritual way, in most cases in the embodied form of “pilgrimage” which is open to various interpretations. The book *Kraftplätze in Franken* has addressed a demand for guidance in this perspective. Following the demand a second volume is to be published.

By publishing studies such as those of this book, which integrates the Pagan aspects with other aspects of spiritual interest, the awareness of the environment (the “Lebenswelt”) and the meaning of special sites in it changes, being transformed for all who take notice of it. Readers may include the Pagan element in the sites described in embodied ways of relating to them, by pilgrimage, by meditation or by other forms of symbolic performative acts and indications are that they do. Effects of this endeavour to retrieve spiritual, geomantic and Pagan elements of the landscape and to bring them to awareness have already lead to changes in perceptions. The granite stele or the labyrinth at a site of power in the park of the spa in Bad Kissingen, a world-famous resort in the 19th century, may be understood as sculptural markers of such sites enabling visitors to relate to these features.

In conclusion, the formation of “geomantics” – both as a sociologically identifiable group and network and as a set of beliefs, perceptions and forms of embodied semi-ritual action – appear as the key means by which historically Pagan sites have become accessible in a spiritual and experientially oriented way to a wide audience of readers in the public. The claim of geomantics to experiential verification, provide a pathway of empirical access to such sites which would otherwise be inaccessible conceptually to the spirituality of many readers. In this process the part of the historian [95] of religion can be to provide sound scholarship about the history of such sites, which lends credibility to the endeavour or retracing old sites and of creating new pathways of a spiritually motivated access. The book may be seen to be contributing to this process by which the meaning of the landscape is redefined. A review published in a common supplement to various regional newspapers of Franconia, entitled (in translation): “47 places full of magic recharge your reservoirs of

energy” tells that these sites of power are presented with their spiritual qualities, yet in a restrained style which encourages a personal experience (Knauber, 2017). It comes as an indication that this intention is being favourably received.



Fig. 9. *Labyrinth at a site of power in the park of Bad Kissingen. Photographer: Wolfram Murr*
[96]

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On the author:



Fig. 10. Portrait Ullrich R. Kleinhempel, Photographer: Wolfram Murr

Ullrich R. Kleinhempel is a theologian and a scholar of religion.

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