

Dark or Paranormal Tourism: A Major Attraction Throughout History

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Abstract: Modern travel-tourism can be traced back to historical pilgrimages to “sacred or enchanted” places that were imbued with an aura of holiness, mystery, or the supernatural. Such excursions did not focus solely on sites in nature, special buildings, or religio-cultural festivals but included quests to see holy persons, relics, and people with real or imaginary ‘magical powers’. We discuss the nature of the general attraction to sacred spaces, which can be classified either as *natural* occurring places or *created* holy spaces. While this fascination is an expression of a continuation of ancient traditions, the business of dark-paranormal tourism has thrived within today’s secular societies arguably due to humankind’s loss of spirituality. This dark side of the unknown—including the great mystery of death—attracts many people on a superficial level via activities like the commercialization of Halloween, ‘Black’ guides, ghost tours, and paranormal entertainment media. Modern illusionists performing in more ‘real-world’ environments likewise operate in the twilight between trickery, double-bluffs, and more rarely, the truth. Against this background the ongoing tourist attraction of the ‘paranormal, trickery, and horror’ can be interpreted as the pursuit for a lost magic and spiritual worldview—a search in the proverbial dark for some form of cosmic light.

Keywords: dark paranormal tourism, haunted sites, holy places, numinosity.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings have a natural curiosity to discover new, hidden, or unexplained things. They are puzzled and attracted by the unknown and show great awe towards it. For Plato, *thaumázein*, ‘to be amazed’, ‘to marvel at’, ‘to wonder’, is the beginning of all philosophy, as he lets Socrates say to Theaetetus: “For this feeling of wonder shows that you are a

philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning of philosophy ...” (Theaetetus, 155d). This numinous feeling is evoked through a direct contact with nature, in special places like caves, mountains and summits, near rivers and at wells. Water was generally regarded by many cultures to be an entrance to the underworld, like the rivers Styx, Acheron, and Kokytos in Greek mythology. Moreover, healing qualities have always been attributed to such natural ‘sacred places’ as wells and spas. Special trees were also regarded as holy, and an example is the sudden appearance of the sacred site *Sea Henge*, which was uncovered by a storm in the sand on the coast of Norfolk in England: It was a Neolithic site consisting of a circle of wooden poles with a tree stem dug into the earth upside down in their center—according to the radiocarbon analysis the tree was felled exactly in 2050 BC.

The time gap in the appreciation of the numinous in nature from pagan times to today is sometimes bridged. An advert for such an event is labeled: “Terror in the Trees.” Held at the Beamish Hall Hotel in County Durham, England beginning in 2019, it was said to be the “North East’s biggest Halloween event” (Beamish Hall, 2021). The hotel is a former manor house dating from the Norman times and is associated with a rich collection of ghost stories related to the building. The natural awe seems to have been deficient in satisfying human religious needs and is one of the forces that led to the active construction of holy places (Devereux; as cited in Groth, 2005, p. 11). Plato in his dialogue “Timaeus” (48e-53c), distinguishes between a place which can be recognized with the senses, Greek *tópos*, and a place which can be not only perceived by the senses but would also require a special state of consciousness, Greek *chôros*, a kind of “dreaming with open eyes.”

Over time the material aspects of places, whose coordinates can be exactly measured, have become the focus of attention, while the *chôros* of the place apparently became neglected. It was more or less ignored by science, even if according to numerous accounts people reported an overwhelming impression of the “power of the place” at certain sacred or holy sites. We would describe places that raise such strong dream-like sensations with the Greek terms “hagios choros”—*hágios* meaning “holy.” The main characteristic of a holy place was defined by John E. Smith (1992) as follows:

It is set apart from what is ordinary in human life, because of the sense that the Holy is powerful, awe-inspiring, dangerous, important, precious, and to be approached only with fitting seriousness and gravity. The Holy stands over against the profane, which is, by contrast, open, manifest, obvious, ordinary, and devoid of any special power to evoke awe and reverence. (p. 239)

Additionally, a holy place has to awaken historic associations, which resemble the experiences of the holiness as it was experienced in the past. And it must be structured, too, in a way that it can alter our consciousness (Paul Devereux on Smith, as cited in Groth, 2005, p. 25).

“Hierotopy”—from Greek *hierós*, holy, and *tópos*, place—is a neologism, created by the Byzantine specialist Aleksey Lidov for the “creation of sacred spaces regarded as a special form of creativity” (Lidov, 2006, p. 32); that is, as a type of conscious creativity, which is “deeply rooted in human nature. In the process of self-identification as a spiritual being, the Man, first spontaneously and then deliberately, creates a concrete milieu of his connection with the transcendental world” (p. 33). Hierotopy for Lidov is not a complicated concept but rather “a form of vision that helps to recognize the presence of a special stratum of cultural phenomena” (p. 35).

Furthermore, sacred spaces (which have been research topics for Mircea Eliade, Rudolf Otto and Pavel Florensky) that are actively created spaces in the sense of hierotopy require an array of means like rituals, songs, incense, images and so on for their creation. As a representative of this type of active creation of sacred spaces in the West, Lidov (2006) mentions the Abbot Suger, who “created a concept of the first Gothic space in the Cathedral of St. Denis” (p. 36). As representatives of creators in the sense of hierotopy in the Eastern Christian world, Lidov following the Byzantine tradition, names the emperor Justinian as the saint “concepteur” of Hagia Sophia, the Great Church, and the emperor Leo the Wise with his project of the Imperial Door in Hagia Sophia. It has to be pointed out that in creating this spatial milieu around the Main Entrance of the Great Empire, Leo combined venerable relics, miraculous icons, mosaic murals, verse inscriptions, special rites as well as images of the miracle stories. This milieu seems to have contributed to reports of repeated miracles by numerous pilgrims (pp. 36-37).

Naturally, there is a curiosity in humans to investigate strange and puzzling phenomena. It is often said we want to bring light into the darkness and clarity into the obscure—indeed, the Latin word *obscurus* means ‘dark’, ‘hidden’, ‘secretly’. It is not only the phenomena, but also the places themselves where something mysterious supposedly took place (or still takes place), which stimulate human curiosity. Seen from this background, it is understandable that historical and scholarly literature on poltergeists and apparitional cases in the German speaking area in the 1600s and 1700s often used the term *curiosities* for the description of the range of unexplained, strange and paranormal phenomena.

Likewise, it is not surprising that tourism was always steered by this basic human characteristic of being attracted to puzzling phenomena and mysterious places where unusual or curious events occur. This fascination

expresses itself as the wish for a personal, direct, and pure experience of the paranormal. On the other hand, people are sometimes also driven to discover the origin of mysteries. This means the superficial fascination by the ‘darkness’ of a paranormal phenomenon might very well be just the first step of a journey into the world of the unknown, whereas the final aim of this search might lie beyond.

Since the foundation of the *Society for Psychical Research* in London in 1882, the paranormal has triggered an intensive and complex research field that splits nowadays into two major areas: (i) psychical research, which concerns spontaneous experiences, and (ii) laboratory-based research. This has led to an extensive corpus of data providing a strong composite case arguing for the reality of some purported anomalous phenomena. Yet, as Kant said about apparitional cases, every single case can be doubted (Kant, 1776/1900). The search is for the singular tightly confirmed case. This, William James’ ‘white crow’, would upset ‘the law that all crows are black’. However, critics maintain this proverbial white crow is still missing (for example, see Houran, Lynn, & Lange, 2017).

In the context of this article, no attempt is made to judge the authenticity of each single paranormal case, and we have to limit this burning question to occasional comments. Nevertheless, a distinction needs to be made between apparently real phenomena and those that are actively faked or manufactured, between ‘real magic’ and ‘stage magic’, even as we will see later if the border between both types is surprisingly thin. Independent of the question what is real and what is not, it is a fact that paranormal phenomena, as people perceive them (even if they are indeed based on deception, misperception or error), are much more frequent and normal than generally believed. Many surveys have found out that the paranormal is not *para*, ‘on the side’ of the normal, but rather normal given that roughly 50% of the population in Western societies report having had paranormal experiences (Irwin, 2009).

The paranormal includes a huge range of unexplained phenomena, such as extrasensory perception (ESP) and psychokinesis (PK) including poltergeist cases. In addition there are phenomena that have explanations, but no *consensus* explanation, such as out-of-body experiences (OBEs), near-death experiences (NDEs), end-of-life experiences (ELEs), after-death communication (ADCs), apparitions of the living and of the deceased (ghosts), hauntings, paranormal dreams, lucid dreams, healing and many other phenomena. Over the centuries certain phenomena attracted the public attention more than others, and we will lift out a few of a wide range of examples that have been documented during the last millenniums from several parts of the world.

The topic of the paranormal itself is much wider and much more complex than it can be fully and exhaustively demonstrated here. Each of

the categories of the paranormal, such as hauntings or healing, meanwhile has developed into its own independent research field. The inclusion of the numinous, sacred and holy extends our topic even more, since these qualities often cannot be separated from paranormal phenomena, and all of the phenomena enter the border between life and death, and some of them—as haunted places—even claim to stretch beyond life. By touching on the mystery of death, potentially everyone is attracted by the implications of paranormal experiences, experiences of awe, miracles and healing at sacred or holy sites. Although the contemporary *Zeitgeist*—latest since the Age of Enlightenment and Kant's (1781/1998) *Critique of Pure Reason*—tries to hinder the searching mind on its tour into the sacred spiritual realm, the curiosity and openness towards it has survived, as testified by the ongoing interest and tourism to paranormal places and sacred sites.

HOLY SITES IN NATURE AND THEIR SECRET POWER

Every natural feature on earth has its own fascinating beauty and charisma, and some places have a secret power worthy to be admired or perhaps even worshipped. The recognition of this special quality of a *chora*, according to Plato would happen in a slightly altered state of consciousness. The perception of the sacred quality concerns all major features in nature, like wells, rivers, lakes, the sea, trees, rocks, and mountains. Examples include:

- Holy wells in and outside Europe as the Pinnacle well in county Clare in Ireland;
- The river Ganges as the most holy of all rivers in India, which is the personification of the goddess 'Mother Ganges';
- Lough Derg in county Donegal in Ireland;
- The Sea of Galilee;
- The Thorn Tree of Glastonbury;
- The Tule Tree of Mexico;
- The mountains Croagh Patrick in the Irish county Mayo; and,
- The Kailash in Tibet which is regarded as the most holy mountain of the world.

We should remember too that the sun, moon and planets once gained a divine quality, in terms of Gods and Goddesses, and were objects of worship in advanced civilizations (e.g., Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome). Nature as a whole was a focus for awe and certain places were experienced as holy in facilitating healing and enlightenment. People made

long and dangerous journeys, expecting support and healing directly from the great power of Mother Nature. Special natural sources like wells, trees and mountains were so holy to them as to make hazardous journeys.

An example in Alsace is a remarkable spring coming out of a rock whose water is still supposed to have healing qualities for eye problems. Reports of this refer to the experience of the Holy Odilia from Alsace (c. 660–723), who claimed that her congenital blindness was healed by its water. The mountain was later referenced in French as ‘Mont Sainte-Odile’, and her father ordered the construction of one cloister at the top of this mountain and another cloister at the foot of the mountain near the well. The exact place was shown to Odilia in a vision of John the Baptist, a place which originally was a holy Celtic site.

Since the antiquities, healing power has been ascribed to special trees. In rustling sounds from the holy oak tree in the Oracle Dodona the voice of the god Zeus was prophesying the future. Old Austrian sagas told about a holy tree near Salzburg at the foot of the legendary mountain Untersberg: the Wild Pear Tree on the Walser field. When this flowered and produced green leaves and fruits—a rare event for this type of tree—traditional belief considered this a negative omen possibly predicting even a war. Because of this the tree was repeatedly felled, but when the new tree grew and would be full of leaves again, crowds of people came from Salzburg to see the miracle tree (Limpoeck, 2016).

All over the world many exciting features in nature which attract tourists, are anchored in mythology. Just one example is the stunning Halong Bay with its 1600 limestone islands as the greatest tourist point in Vietnam: The bay was believed to be shaped by a family of dragons, sent by the Gods, for defending the country against invaders. They spewed forth Jade and other jewels, which turned into islands.

SACRED CONSTRUCTIONS AND BUILDINGS

A huge tourist attraction throughout the last six or seven thousand years are the standing stones of the Megalith Culture all over Europe, and also in North Africa and the Middle East. The original purpose of the ‘huge stone’—as the Greek term *megalith* translates—to some extent remains to be an unsolved mystery, and the exact art of their construction and the transport of the stones to their final places triggers the deep human desire for the unexplained. What is generally agreed about historical sites such as Stonehenge and Avebury in the South of England, concerns their function for spiritual and nature festivals like the solstice. It is at this date that the sunrise can be seen in Stonehenge through the openings in the horseshoe-

like shaped stones, and in Avebury through the middle line of the outer and inner rings of the standing stones.

The megalith grave Newgrange in the Irish county Meath, which like Stonehenge is more than 5000 years old, is also a major attraction for tourism. It is called Brú na Bóinne, the place of the river Boyne, probably meaning originally the home of the Goddess Bóinn. The winter solstice is seen when the light is coming as a beam through the roof until the whole chamber is lit up. Visitors take part in a lottery each year in September, since only a limited number of visitors are allowed to see this amazing spectacle at the time.

In Scotland, on the Isle of Lewis, on the Hebrides, there is the prehistoric site of Callanish, which is the greatest Megalith site in the whole of the British Isles with an estimated age of at least 5000 years if not 7000 years. Extraordinary claims associated with standing stones at megalith sites, have of course their origin in folklore tradition. There are legends of stones making movements at midnight, and of their healing power when one touched them, and that the water poured over them gained a healing quality. Ghosts and fairies are said to appear at the stone rings and graves, and that people even become bewitched. Modern claims for megalith sites concern mysterious lights, people receiving electric shocks or falling into trances and hearing strange sounds coming from the stones.

Such claims led to the foundation of the Dragon Project Trust (DPT) formed by a group of interdisciplinary researchers in 1977/1978 for the purpose of investigating these rumors from traditional folklore as well as from modern anecdotes (director Paul Devereux and trustees Alan Murdie, Charla Devereux *et alia* (The Dragon Trust Project, n.d.). The attempt in 1990 to test the energies or forces associated with the sacred or power sites, the “Ancient Sites Dreamwork Programme” involved one of the most respected researchers on altered states, Stanley Krippner as consultant. This part of the project focused on the dreams that participants would report having had at those places; that assessing whether or not ancient sites can influence human consciousness. The project was set up as an equivalent to the ancient Greek incubation sleep in temples in that the participants slept at the sites (see below).

Ancient sacred power sites were selected which possess a geophysical anomaly: a holy hill in the Preseli Hills, Wales, and three sites in Cornwall (a Neolithic dolmen, a Celtic holy well, and an Iron Age underground passage). The sleeping volunteers were awoken as soon as they reached the rapid eye movement state (REM) of vivid dreaming. The study was ‘low tech’, meaning that the REM periods were identified by an observer watching the eyes rolling. The participants’ dream experiences—including many lucid dreams—were then recorded (The Dragon Trust Project, n.d.). Unfortunately, this highly novel project was never fully

completed, nor its data systematically analyzed, due to a lack of funding, but it has produced “a unique body of dream reports that will potentially provide a valuable database for future researchers” (Devereux, 2011, p. 18).

One of the most popular sacred features in Great Britain is the holy hill of Glastonbury Tor with the remaining tower of two superimposed churches of St. Michael on top of the hill. The hill overlooks the Isle of Avalon, Glastonbury and Somerset, England, located close to the legendary Glastonbury Abbey. According to Celtic mythology the hill is supposed to be the entrance to Avalon, the otherworld.

There are of course countless other ancient constructions, but three more are certainly worth mentioning: The city of temples in Angkor Wat, Cambodia, is the largest religious monument in the world, and stretches over 400 square km. It was built between 1113 and 1140 and dedicated to the Hindu deity Vishnu. Today the city temple is still used by Buddhists for worship, and more than half the tourists of the site hail from other countries.

Amongst “The New Seven Wonders of the World”, selected in 2007, and therefore ranked amongst the most popular tourist places, are the mysterious Inca city Machu Picchu from the 1500s, and the Taj Mahal, built in the 1700s by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal.

SACRED FESTIVALS, PILGRIMAGES, TEMPLE SLEEP, AND DREAM INCUBATION

Holy days are actually *holidays*, and this connection between words has a deep meaning: “They are days on which normal work comes to a stop so that the community can take part in collective celebrations” (Sheldrake, 2019, p. 175). The evidence for such ceremonial activities dates back 40,000 years in time (cf. “Holidays and Festivals” in Sheldrake, 2019, pp. 175-208).

The Eleusinian Mysteries, which took place in Greece from about 1500 BC, are an example of such a huge pagan event with paranormal and spiritual aspects. These continued for a period of almost 2000 years, until (as recorded by Eunapios) the raising power and popularity of Christianity led to their closure in the 4th century. The festival was a cult celebration for Demeter, the goddess of life, fertility, agriculture and life, and her daughter Persephone, the goddess of death and the underworld. They were held annually in Eleusis, a small town northwest of Athens: The so-called Lesser Mysteries were celebrated in February and March, which had the purpose of cleansing, while the Greater Mysteries followed in September and October with the function of initiating the worshippers into the mysteries of life, death and the here-after (Britannica, 2021).

Amongst all religious rites in ancient times, the most important, were cleansing and contact with the divine. “Initiation rites united the worshipper with God including promises of divine power and rewards in the life after death.” (Eleusinian Mysteries, 2021). The Mysteries became a pan-Hellenic event on a greater scale, and participants flocked from Greece and beyond. They first prepared themselves for their initiation by going on a pilgrimage for a week, including a ritual bath in the sea, a special diet with fasting followed by sacrifices to the goddesses. Just before the climax of the initiation process, the night after the 6th day, the initiates received a sacred drink, the *kykeon* made of barley and mint (*mentha pulegium*). It is likely that the drink also contained a psychoactive substance, and if that was the case the substance may have been the parasite fungus ergot growing on a wild grass in the Mediterranean area. This is related to a psychoactive parasite fungus still used today by South Mexican Indians (Wasson, Ruck, & Hofmann, 2008; see also Pollan, 2019, p. 109). Participants in this ritual were forbidden under penalty of death to reveal the nature of their divine experiences. The requirements for taking part in the Mysteries were firstly a lack of “blood guilt” (i.e., not to have ever committed murder, and secondly not being a barbarian, meaning that they were able to speak Greek). If the requirements were fulfilled, then admittance was granted to men and women, free persons, and slaves.

The importance of the initiation is mirrored in the 7th century Homeric Hymn (unknown author, quoted after Morford, Lenardon & Sham, 2013):

Happy is the one of mortals on earth who has seen these things. But those who are uninitiated into the holy rites and have no part never are destined to a similar joy when they are dead in the gloomy realm below.

Albert Hofmann (1992) saw the Eleusinian Mysteries as an ideal example taken from the antiquities, which showed how the material basis of our existence can be balanced with the spiritual and transcendental needs of human life:

The allowance to the material bases of our existence must be brought again in the balance with the spiritual, transcendental needs of the human being. The Eleusinian mysteries is a great example of such a balance to us in the Greek antiquity.¹ (Hofmann, 1992)

¹ Die Zuwendung zu den materiellen Grundlagen unserer Existenz muss wieder ins Gleichgewicht gebracht werden mit den geistigen, transzendentalen Bedürfnissen des menschlichen Seins. Das große Beispiel eines solchen Ausgleichs bieten uns in der griechischen Antike die Eleusinischen Mysterien

Festivals celebrating the paranormal were part of many other ancient traditions as for instance the Celtic celebrations of the transition between the seasons: These are today almost completely forgotten, but still have a shadowy presence amongst the immense business of Halloween on the night of 31st October. This is almost certainly the Christian form of the pagan Irish Samhain, the beginning of the year, and the Nos Calan Gaeaf, the Welsh start of the winter season—time for the return of the ghosts. It is then ironic how the original meaning of the participation in the Eleusinian Mysteries for the spiritual development has come to stand in sharp contrast to the ‘profane’ materialistic function of today’s Halloween. It is only its fascination with horror that carries a glimpse of the deep awe towards death and afterlife.

Ever since the Middle Ages thousands of pilgrims every year would walk from France and Spain along the route to Santiago de Compostela, a city in the Northwest of Spain, in order to visit the shrine of the apostle St. James the Great in the cathedral of Santiago. Undoubtedly, the best known pilgrimage route, the Camino de Santiago, increases in popularity, with pilgrims nowadays following their own routes from all over Europe. Today there is a global renaissance of pilgrimages: 250,000 on the Camino to Santiago, 2 million on the Muslim Hajj to Mecca, 20 million on the Arbaeen to Karbala (which is 60% of Iraq’s population) and 100 million on the Hindu Kumbh Mela to four sacred river-bank sites (British Pilgrimage Trust, 2019). Since 2014, the British Pilgrimage Trust has supported the growing worldwide interest in pilgrimages by reopening the original pilgrim’s routes in the United Kingdom so that “You can make a pilgrimage anytime, along a Great Route or from your back door”, adding that “British Pilgrimage is Open to All, with or without religion”. Amongst these paths that the BPT has reopened is one of Britain’s most notable routes, the authentic 250-mile journey from Southampton to Canterbury, from the Gough map dated c. 1360.

In ancient Greece, the ideal place for experiencing a miraculous healing, or getting help with any other problem, was a temple or room in a holy building. Here the person would sleep in order to receive responses to questions, predictions of the future, or healing. The answers, prophecies, or healing effects were said to come directly from the god or goddess in the form of dreams. Many such temples were to be found throughout the antique world: in Athens, Delphi, Olympia, Megara, Korinth, Pergamon, Cilicia, and on the islands of Kos, Crete, Delos and many others. The most known and popular was the temple of Asclepius, the God of the medical arts, in Epidauros.

The dream incubation technique was called in Greek *enkoimesis*, in Latin *incubation*. However, the use of dreams for healing and advice was already popular amongst shamanic Indians of North America (Ojibwa) who

also used it for initiation into adulthood. Currently, courses in dream incubation appear to be popular, but it is rare to find them linked to special holy places or buildings. The exception is the opportunity to participate in scientific studies (such as Barrett, 1993; and “The Dragon Trust Project”, n.d.) carried out by Devereux, Krippner, and co-workers. Currently, we are developing in cooperation with Rupert Sheldrake and Guy Hayward (British Pilgrimage Trust, 2019) dream incubation courses linked to holy sites on pilgrim routes. The ideal starting point is the Holy Island of Lindisfarne in Northumberland near the Scottish border, located on the 62 miles of St. Cuthbert’s way. We might note here that sleep (and by extension, dreams) still constitute an important part of modern travel-tourism exploits. According to the J. D. Power (2019) North America Hotel Guest Satisfaction Index (NAGSI) StudySM, quality of sleep was one of the most important components of a hotel guest experience with the potential to drive overall satisfaction and brand loyalty, although the majority of hotels do not deliver better-than-expected sleeping conditions.

ORACLES, MIRACLES, HEALERS, AND FORTUNE-TELLERS

Oraculum is Latin for ‘divine announcement’ or ‘prophecy’. Oracles have a pre-Christian origin, and they were used by many people, including those of high status. The ambiguous prophecies by the Sibyls were used to make political and military decisions. The oracular sayings were answers from the gods or goddesses and more often from the priestesses themselves who received them in trance-like states. At Delphi, the trance-like state was possibly triggered by ethylene gas, which issued from well under the temple (as described by Plutarch who was himself a high priest in Delphi for 20 years and recently confirmed by the geologist Jelle de Boer (De Boer, Hale, & Chanton, 2001). Oracle sites like Delphi, Dodona, Klaros, Olympia, and Cumae, which are located in modern Greece, Italy, and Minor Asia, were extremely popular, and some places (e.g., Dodona in Epirus) were constantly restored and extended with other buildings. Dodona dates back already to Pre-Grecian times, and it was originally consecrated to Gaia, the Goddess of Earth.

Whereas in ancient times, holy sites and temples functioned as centers for receiving help from the Divine, in later centuries the role of the gods and goddesses was taken over by those individuals, who were actually announcing the prophecies and performing the healing. This function for centuries resided mainly in the hands of so-called witches, who were finally prosecuted for these acclaimed psychic gifts. Women or men with the reputation of being witches, sorcerers, or magicians could indeed attract some tourism for a time. So was the case for the active sorceress and

fortuneteller of Dormitz in Germany. People arrived in large numbers in order to consult her and to use her service, with the result that her incredible popularity clearly provoked the City Council of Nuernberg to intervene (Behringer, 1997).

Besides the modern form of ‘witchcraft’ (i.e., Wicca) movements, there are popular fortune-tellers or seers and seeresses. In Berlin, for instance, Gabriele Hoffmann is an officially-registered professional ‘fortuneteller’ and is well-known internationally for her consultations with prominent persons including politicians and business leaders. Most psychics regard themselves as mediums and channels for higher spirits, and these are usually spirits with individual names known only by the medium herself or himself. As such many claim to be able to create contact with the deceased.

In recent times, Indian gurus attracted Europeans as spiritual seekers. Undoubtedly, the travel business received some stimulation through the tourist visits to Stylianos Atteshlis, the Magus of Cyprus (also called Daskalos) and Sai Baba (see Haraldsson, 2013). This was not necessarily so in the case of ashrams since tourists would stay directly in the ashram.

HAUNTED HOUSES, CASTLES ... AND HOTELS

The belief in the activities of the spirits of the deceased as part of human history has been colored by strong feelings of ambivalence. A haunting never relates to a peaceful event or ghost story, but to a ‘restless soul’, due to a crime, early death, accident, inadequate funeral ceremony, or to unfinished business. The oldest documented story refers to an “ill reputed” and absolutely uninhabitable” haunted house in Athens. The case was reported by Pliny the Younger in a letter to Sura (Pliny the Younger, 1993-2020) and according to this letter, the philosopher Athenodoros dared to rent this house. Although we do not get to know if the notoriety surrounding the haunting led to visits to the house becoming popular it is clear in recent centuries that haunted houses, castles and public houses are places that draw great public interest and are a source of revenue (see Puhle, 2005; Puhle & Parker, 2017).

In the United Kingdom, hotels can receive an award as the most haunted hotel of the county: The 17th century Schooner Hotel in the otherwise quaint and peaceful village of Alnmouth, Northumberland, uses the following advertisement: “This spooky reputation has made Schooner Hotel the #1 Halloween night spending spot among ghost and paranormal activity enthusiasts” (Schooner, 2016). However, our own inquiries found nothing to substantiate “the approximate number of ghosts sightings” of “around 3000”, involving “at least sixty different spirits”.

The commercial interests in pubs and hotels, especially those in the UK and in the USA, try hard to compete on the market with their “fear evoking reputation” in order to be amongst “the top scariest or haunted pubs and hotels” (Telegraph, 2019; see also WatchMojoUK, 2017).

Germany also has a long history of haunted houses, and it is said there was a time when all the castles were occupied by a ghost or a White Lady (Avenarius, 1987). Although less exploited than in the US and UK, it is not surprising that Germany also uses the paranormal thrill for tourism—for example, ‘Spukhotels in Deutschland’ [‘Haunted Hotels in Germany’] (Spukhotels in Deutschland, 2019).

In Sweden, there are claims of haunted castles and manor houses—for example, Engstö Slott, situated in Vaesteras not far from Stockholm, advertises the building thus: “*så mycket mer aen spoeken*” (“so much more than spooks”) (Engstö Slott, 2019). In 2003, Countess Catharina Piper, the hostess of the manor house organized a study day on poltergeists with William G. Roll and others (including the present authors). (Publicity can help of course the running of the costly manor house.) One of the most popularized ghost legends at Engstö concerns a dwarf. After the lectures we all assembled around the fireplace: A journalist took a photo, published the next day in a major Swedish newspaper that clearly showed a small dwarf-like figure apparently wearing historic shoes and leaning in front of the fireplace. The nature of the mysterious encounter was resolved thanks to a video recording which was able to be synchronized in time and place with the camera image. The ghost turned out to be the host: A distorted image of the countess (Fjellander & Parker, 2003).

Ghosts or spirits are also reputed to live in the Swedish Drottningholm Palace, the current residence of the royal family. While presenting the palace on a TV show, Queen Silvia stated that one of the rooms was haunted by the ‘Little People’, and insisted that the spooks do exist (ExpressenTV, 2017). This caused a media sensation, not only in Sweden (Expressen, 2017) but also internationally. (BBC World News, 2017).

The English newspaper *The Guardian* published an article concerning the “Top ten haunted houses in the UK”, including castles, inns, hotels and a farm (Wills, 2008). The Jamaica Inn, Bodmin Moor, in Cornwall was the Number 1 winner. Prominent as Number 2 on this list is the 700 years or more old Chillingham Castle in Northumberland, famous for its ‘Blue Boy’ amongst other spirits. Yet, when we interviewed Lady Violet, the late wife of the former owner of the castle, she maintained she did not believe in these stories and that she herself never experienced anything paranormal while resident there.

Another paranormal seller is centred on the home of Henry VIII, Hampton Court Palace. The palace is infamous for its haunted gallery, and

the major attraction is the ghost of the executed Anne Boleyn who is said to be seen walking around carrying her head under her right arm.

Buildings that are associated with ill-deeds have always attracted visitors, but regarding the tourist goal of personally witnessing paranormal events, it seems that this is conditioned more by the psychology of individual tourists. Studies at Hampton Court Palace (Wiseman et al., 2003) and in the famous Edinburgh Vaults (Houran et al., 2002) have shown how factors such as hypersensitivity to light and sound changes, expectancy, prior belief and fantasy proneness can all be at least partial explanations to what is experienced. The situation becomes even more complicated if we take into account the fact that even skeptical researchers can be biased as to what they experience (Parker, 2002).

More questions arise with cases, which on the face of it seem persuasive by virtue of the information they give such as occurred in the visions in the Treasurer's House in the city of York in Yorkshire, England. The visionary experiences by the young engineer Harry Martindale when he worked in the alleged cellar of this 2000-year-old building contained the appearance of a phantom legion of Roman soldiers, coming in through the wall and marching straight across the cellar, carrying shields in a particular form:

Suddenly, he heard the sound of a trumpet and saw the top of a soldier's helmet apparently emerging from the wall against which he was working. He leapt from his ladder, watching in disbelief as behind the trumpet player plodded a horse, and about twenty soldiers walking two abreast. They were carrying lances, round shields and short swords. According to Harry, the men looked tired and dirty. Terrified, he shot upstairs. He bumped into the curator who said, before Henry could utter a single word: 'By the look of you, you've seen the Romans!' (National Trust, 2019)

There was indeed a buried Roman road, and the soldiers held in fact shields with exactly that specific unusual shape:

Henry's account of the men carrying round shields was at odds with contemporary ideas about how Roman soldiers were equipped. They were generally believed to have only used rectangular shields and some used this 'fact' to discredit his story. However, later research has revealed that during the fourth century AD the Sixth Legion was withdrawn from York and replaced by troops that carried distinctive, round shields. In addition, later archaeological research revealed evidence of a Roman road – 18 inches below the current cellar floor. (National Trust, 2019)

POLTERGEISTS

Modern research still uses the German term ‘poltergeist’ to refer to unexplained noisy and sometimes ‘destructive’ phenomena. The term was most likely used first by Martin Luther—German *poltern* means ‘making noises’, and *Geist* stands for ‘ghost’. The late researcher William Roll used the less committal term ‘recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis’ (RSPK).

In opposition to long-lasting hauntings, which sometimes could even continue for centuries, poltergeist cases occur over a much shorter time-span; on average, a few months. Since they have a limited duration, they naturally attract only people during their active period. Certain poltergeist cases became famous even in times before digital media, so that houses in which they occurred quickly gained notoriety and attracted people who wanted to witness typical poltergeist phenomena such as apparently unaccountable stone throwing.

The most famous historical examples of poltergeist cases known for this kind of mass attraction can be listed as: (1) the house in Dibbesdorf in Germany (the so-called “Kloppeding” or knocking ghost of Dibbesdorf”; Puhle, 1999) in 1767/68 (about the phenomena in Dibbesdorf); (2) the house of the physician Barthold Florian Gerstmann in Dortmund, Germany in 1713 (Gerstmann, 1714; Puhle, 2001); (3) the house of Melchior Joller’s family at Stans on the lake Vierwaldstaettersee in Switzerland (Joller, 1863; Puhle, 2005; Vogel, 2011); (4) the relatively recent Enfield case outside London (1977-1979); (5) the office of the lawyer Sigmund Adam in Rosenheim, Bavaria, Germany—probably the most thoroughly investigated poltergeist case (cf. Bender 1968; Resch, 1967-1968, 1969-1970).

What is common on all these cases, besides the knocks, stone throwing and inexplicable movement of objects, is the fascination and sometimes hysteria that these case produced amongst the local population. There were however notable respected and serious witnesses such as Theodor Lessing who said about the Dibbesdorf case: “this is as far as my Latin gets me”, by which he meant it is beyond his comprehension. The Enfield case received much media attention (Playfair, 1980, 2011), and although it bore little resemblance to the actual events, the case was recently made into the film “The Enfield Haunting” (Campbell, 2015). However it is the Rosenheim case that was remains an enigma having been investigated and documented by various agencies specialist departments of the local government.

While avoiding the irresolvable question concerning the reality of the phenomena, the most famous and equally questionable case of a ‘spook house’ should be mentioned. This concerned Borley Rectory in Essex, England. The claimed phenomena started in 1863 and stretched far into the 1900s. Borley rectory gained enormous public attention, mainly due to the

involvement of the fame-seeking psychical researcher Harry Price (1881-1948) and the press.

A MODERN EXAMPLE OF SPIRIT FOLKLORE IN GERMANY TODAY

The annual spectacular celebration of St. Nicholas Day, which takes place in the German Alps around December 5 and 6, originates from pagan rituals and has survived Christian customs and festivities. Twenty different variations of this tradition are still vibrant today (Peter, 2012), in the Southeast of Germany in and around Berchtesgaden, which is located in the nature reservation *Berchtesgadener Land*. The event attracts crowds of visitors who gather every winter to watch the men dressed-up as wild nature spirits passing through the streets and alleys of the town accompanied by the enormous rattling of their bells. The tradition involves two types of spirits: the *Buttnmandl* represent fertility spirits, and the *Kramperl* are representative spirits of the devilish aspect of spirits. The *Buttnmandel* are performed by young men completely wrapped in straw and wear wooden masks with fur and carry huge cowbells on their backs. The *Kramperl* wear horns and are fully covered with dark fur.

Despite the popularity and cultural heritage of the tradition, its continuation had to be actively defended against Catholicism. A concession to the Catholic Church is that the ghostly group now is led to the town square by St. Nicolas who holds a cross and the Bible in his hands. On his side, young girls dressed as angels give sweets to the people. Meanwhile the ghoulish *Kramperl* jumps into the public, and hits the women with willow-rod whips (as symbols for fertility), or quickly paints the faces of girls black. Eventually St. Nicolas is followed by a host of angels, *Buttnmandl* and *Kramperl* enter chosen family homes with small children with the express purpose of checking on their good behavior during the year.

Another surviving pagan custom is the belief of the Wild Hunt. Horse-riders roam through the forest and towns bringing wind and storm in the so-called *Rauhnaechten* (the etymology of German '*rauh*' is uncertain, meaning either 'rough' or 'smoke, incense'; '*Naechte*' means nights). These nights usually are limited to the 12 nights following Christmas Eve (December 25 to January 6). The belief in the Wild Hunt has many different variations, but these particular ghosts were believed to be real spectra and were not rituals performed by humans as the *Buttnmandl* are. Consequently, they cannot compete with the spectacular street performances of the *Buttnmandl* and *Kramperl*. Generally they are associated with more remote areas like the Bavarian forests. The Wild Hunt is a widely spread Germanic pagan motif of ghostly hunters—these are ancestral souls, mostly of dead warriors, led by the Nordic God Odin. The ghosts not only pass quickly

through the air in a very rough and wild manner but they can also take with them some of the living. Accordingly, rituals, using magic herbs and incense, are popular as defensive magic against these ghosts. The British Peterborough Chronicle reports a sighting of a great number of horrible ghostly black huntsmen in the year 1127 in the park of the town Peterborough, and in the woods, and from there all along the way to Stamford.

BLACK GUIDES, GHOST TOURS, AND PHOTOGRAPHY OF THE TWILIGHT

‘Dark tourism’ concerning places of folklore mysteries, haunting and horror today is promoted for instance by a German book series of 21 volumes, called literally *Die Schwarzen Führer* [*The Black Guides*] (Eulen Verlag, 1994-2001/2008). These travel guides include the history, sagas and mysteries of selected German federal states and districts.

Ghosts tours may have first gained their popularity in the prototype of a haunted country, the United Kingdom, but they are now worldwide. In Berlin alone, a large number of possibilities are to be found: For example: Gruseltour durch die Hauptstadt [Creepy tour of the Capital]; Dunkle Geheimnisse und düstere Geschichten [Dark Secrets and Gloomy Stories]; Mystische Stadtführung [Mystical City-Tour]; Kneipentour zu Halloween [Pub Tour for Halloween], Ghost and Vampire tours (Popular Ghost & Vampire Tours in Berlin, 2008-2021).

One of the most traditional ghost tours is the guided tour through Canterbury, advertised as “Celebrating 25 years of Ghost Tours – Trip Advisor Award Winners 2013-2018” (Canterbury, 2017). “Ghosts walk a special path through our national psyche”, writes Peter Ackroyd about the spirits of England, about spooks, phantoms, ghouls and wraiths. He explains the English ghost tradition—in England they see more ghosts than in any other country—with the mingling of the Germanic, Nordic and British superstition. The English would be “in many respects obsessed with the past”, and “ghosts therefore may be seen as a bridge of light between the past and the presence, or between the living and the dead” (Ackroyd, 2011). A recent development—although apparently suspended during the lockdowns—is the popular Free Walking Tours, where voluntary (tax free?) tips are given, as for example the “Free Ghost Tour” to “Discover the Dark Side of Old Edinburgh”.

Magical ‘travelling guides’ into the twilight realm are depicted in the richly illustrated books by British photographer Sir Simon Marsden (1948-2012). Marsden’s photography captures in an aesthetic way the semi-dark and spooky atmosphere of paranormal sites and buildings on many reputedly haunted sites throughout Europe. The black and white photos

taken with infrared enable a perfect impression to be made of the intermediate atmosphere between light and darkness and almost suggest a real other-world experience. Marsden's photographs are of historical sites, houses and castles, which for centuries have been known to be mysterious and haunted such as Versailles (Marsden, 1994) and Glamis Castle (Marsden, 2003). Marsden's artistic photography, shown in several famous museums like the J. Paul Getty Museum in California, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, are ideal examples of the *dichotomy*, one could say, between brightness and darkness, light and shadow, of real-life.

MENTALISTS, MAGICIANS, AND MEDIA HORROR: REMINDERS OF A LOST SPIRITUALITY

The irrepressible showmanship of contemporary magicians and mentalists, such as The Amazing Kreskin, Paul Daniels, and David Copperfield—or in earlier times, for example, the famous Harry Houdini—obviously satisfies the human need for witnessing what seems to be magic even if it is faked. The change of the *Zeitgeist* towards reductionism and materialism appears to have even supported the popularity of mentalism and illusionism. Both street and stage magic, with their pseudo-paranormal performances, fulfill a double purpose: one for *closed-minded* skeptics and another for more *open-minded* observers. For the first group they confirm that paranormal events are illusory and ultimately only deceit—that is, 'false magic'. For the other group, there is an appeal to the underlying curiosity and sense of wonder, as if there might be something 'real' in the apparent display of magic. Yet, there is a more profound paradox at play here. Many professional illusionists report privately of having encounters that gave rise to their own belief in real magic; something paranormal that occurs surprisingly during their performances (two studies reported that over 80% of illusionists endorse a belief in the paranormal phenomena).

Other mentalists today, such as Derren Brown, exploit 'double-bluffs' to deceive audiences. They claim to use pure psychology, for instance, that they can read subtle body language, when they in fact accomplish their dramatic demonstrations via ordinary magic tricks, information obtained beforehand, or with secret technical equipment. Interestingly the 'double-bluff' has even more attraction than 'ordinary' trickery, and it unfortunately leads to an over-belief in psychology (instead of parapsychology) amongst the audience (see Parker, 2014).

There are now innumerable television shows and newspapers in Western media that promote tourism to paranormal or otherwise sacred and enchanted places. Interestingly, media promotion is not a new phenomenon,

but rather already evident in historic printed media. A well-known example would be “A True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs Veal” by Daniel Defoe, to which we refer in his study of historic accounts of cases of apparitions and ghosts in Great Britain (Defoe, 1705; and summarized in Puhle & Parker 2017, pp. 161-165, 220).

Television shows promoting sites where there are paranormal occurrences started in 1959 with the “One Step Beyond” series of productions (ComicWeb Classic TV, 1959). A recent popular example is the paranormal ‘reality television’ series “Most Haunted” (Living TV, 2002-2010), with Derek Acorah as the star medium whose ‘psychic’ statements were indeed based on ordinary information he received beforehand. Another popular show is *Dead Famous: Ghostly Encounters* (Living TV, 2004-2006). And television channels like the American Discovery, and The Fox Broadcasting Company, made regular use of TV viewers’ attraction to the dark topic. In Sweden, the television series *Det Okaenda [The Unknown]* was screened from 2004 to 2019 and concerned mainly hauntings.

DISCUSSION

One can ask if the strong attraction towards both sides of magic—the ‘false’ vs. the ‘real’—has a shared deeper motivation in the form of a search for something beyond the materialistic and consumeristic societies we live in now. And perhaps this was always the case for most visitors, pilgrims, or curiosity seekers. Festivals held at sacred places date back to ancient times, and also fortune-telling has a history thousands of years old, then known as oracles. The profound need for spiritual insights, and even for spiritual and bodily healing through contact with the divine, is dramatically expressed in the Eleusinian Mysteries, and the use of dream incubation in antique temples. Consider the motivations for such excursions—for example, (i) “healing waters or sites” *to gain mental or spiritual nurturance*; (ii) “Oracles, shamans, and seers” *to gain knowledge and wisdom to face life’s challenges and hardships*; (iii) “temples, nature’s power spots, or spook houses” *to encounter the divine* or otherwise witness evidence of one’s sociocultural and religious beliefs. Today’s retreats for relaxation and *restorative experiences* are arguably ‘old wine in new bottles’.

This perspective, discussed at length by Houran and colleagues (Drinkwater et al., 2020; Houran et al., 2020a, 2020b), implies that tourist-hospitality businesses can miss the mark with consumers if services and product development focus exclusively or chiefly on the differentiators associated with ‘cost, comfort, or convenience’. The same pitfall might apply to businesses that strive for ever-increasingly ‘better or bigger’

experiences by means of the experience economy. To sum it up: We conclude that people are superficially searching for a thrill in the experience of anything unknown, but thrills eventually wear off leaving at least some seekers now with a need for a more profound understanding. The entertaining ‘rush’ that the experience of ‘dark phenomena’ creates might then give way to longing to understand the deeper nature of perception and consciousness. Indeed, preliminary research on tourist psychology suggests that the classic “experience economy” is evolving to an “enchantment economy” (Houran et al., 2020a, 2020b). In the best case, the confrontation with frightening paranormal events—real or unreal—might give them more than a shiver; namely, an existential feeling of awe or meaning. If these phenomena affect the tourists on such profound levels, they confront them with one of the oldest burning questions driving philosophical debate “*What is death?*” It is the one destination all humankind shares, with dark-paranormal tourism serving to challenge the worldview of today’s materialism.

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