

THE POWER OF PERCEPTION: AUTHENTIC INAUTHENTICITY OF CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE SITES IN THE GALILEE

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Archaeology holds the precarious position of being both a subjective and an objective science. The subjectivity lies in the interpretation of the archaeologist at the point of the trowel, while the objectivity lies in the dates and facts of the laboratory. In the unique field of Biblical Archaeology, a collection of manuscripts exist to add both ancient and contemporary textual evidence to the archaeological record. Archaeological objectivity is often molded to fit the desired subjectivity of the discoverer. The practice of ascribing biblical significance to otherwise nameless archaeological sites goes back to the mother of Constantine the Great: Helena. She traveled to the Holy Land and created numerous Christian sites in the fourth century which would become the foundation for the panoply of Christian pilgrimage sites in the Holy Land today (Smith 2007: 2). Archaeologically, many of these sites are not congruent with their alleged historical backgrounds. However, through the actions and faith of pilgrims, these sites have become sacralized and authenticated pilgrimage sites. Through centuries of pilgrimage and ritual activity, meaning is created among and within these sites; and their meaning and influence as authentic pilgrimage sites comes to transcend their archaeological ambiguity. This is what I call “authentic inauthenticity”—where the pilgrim does not concern themselves with whether the biblical action or event actually took place in a given site according to archaeological evidence, but rather with their faith in the sacred narrative presented at the site.

In this paper, I focus on the veracity of Christian pilgrimage sites in light of contradictory archaeological evidence. First, I highlight the emergence and nature of pilgrimage sites in the Holy Land. By understanding that these places can function simultaneously as empirically driven archaeological sites and spiritually revered religious pilgrimage sites, we can begin to dismantle notions that these two characterizations are mutually exclusive. Then, I discuss the creation of sacred narratives at these sites. Before the birth of archaeology

as a standardized field, biblical sites in the Holy Land still existed, and narrative was the primary documentary evidence for the history of place. Lastly, I will show how sacred narratives are legitimized by faith and ritual activity, which together create authenticity. In this paper I will be using experiential and ethnographical data from field work done at Christian pilgrimages sites in the Holy Land in 2015.

To fully understand the nature of the formation of sacred narrative we must understand the landscape in which these narratives were created. After the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, Jews, along with Jewish ideologies of place, left Palestine. The Romans laid foundations and cities in the Holy Land for the next 250 years, but this relatively novel Roman pagan ideology had no special connection with the land in which they inhabited. So, when the Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and legalized the practice of it in 313 CE, the Holy Land was an ideological *tabula rasa*. Jewish religion and sense of place were no longer present with the arrival of the Romans, and the Romans laid a superficial ideological foundation (Drijvers 2013: 316–322). Constantine and his mother Helena, aimed to take advantage of this ideological vacuum and create a uniquely Christianized Holy Land. In the middle of the fourth century CE the Holy Land was actively and purposely constructed to reflect the nascent Christian identity of the Roman Empire.

Helena engaged in the haphazard declaration of sites through perceived Christian connections with the Holy Land. For example, she chose the spot of Golgotha in Jerusalem, the biblical site in which Jesus was crucified and buried, because cavities in a hill outside the walls of Jerusalem resembled a skull. This area became the foundation of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; the location of Jesus' crucifixion, descent from the cross, and burial site, and one of the most important Christian pilgrimage sites in Christendom. Smith (2007: 18) makes it clear that it is unknown, even by Eusebius, how Constantine and Helena knew the locations of Christian sites in Jerusalem. The Nativity, Annunciation, and Ascension are further events identified by Helena with associated churches constructed in her name (Smith 2007: 16). These further show the extent of Constantine and Helena's arbitrary building projects. It is increasingly clear that the location of most if not all Christian sites in the Holy Land were forgotten during the 250 years of Roman hegemony and were "remembered" by the new ruling class of Christians after the conversion of Constantine. Thus, the nebulous creation of a Christian Holy Land was based less on actual locations and events than the desire for there to be an ascribed location for certain biblical events.

From the late fourth to the seventh centuries CE, these sites became anchored to what was the fledgling milieu of a Christian landscape across the Holy Land. What we know of this time period is largely from the writing

of a few Christian pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land from Europe. They all meticulously mention their itineraries to these holy places. In the year 325 CE, Eusebius of Caesarea wrote a gazetteer called the *Onomasticon* which outlined all Christian sites mentioned in the Bible that had been accounted for (Notley and Safrai 2005). In essence, Christians were hard at work finding a real world parallel for biblical events. Presumably using the *Onomasticon*, the earliest account we have of a pilgrim, is from the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, or the Pilgrim of Bordeaux, who traveled from France to the Holy Land from 333–334 CE. He traveled to places such as Capernaum along the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth, to the location of the Annunciation, and Jerusalem. It is through these earliest writings that standardization of itinerary to pilgrimage sites in the Holy Land becomes codified into Christian memory (Feldman 2014: 1–5).

With the influx of Christian pilgrims following the creation of a Christian Holy Land, sacred narratives of these places became solidified in memory. Marcel Proust writes, “Memory is linked inescapably to tangible things that can be seen or tasted or smelled and it was to recollect and remember that Christians first set out, to trace the footsteps of Jesus” (Proust i.1909–1922). The very act of pilgrimage allows for the body to perceive smells, tastes, and sights that are not part of their everyday sensual experience. It is through this extraordinary sensory experience that perception is a prime mover in creating the sacrosanctity of a site. The fifth-century bishop Paulinus of Nola accurately describes the reason for the large influx of pilgrims and their motivations; “No other sentiment draws people to Jerusalem than the desire to see and touch the places where Christ was physically present and to say from their own experience, ‘We have gone into his tabernacle, and have worshipped in the places where his feet stood’” (Paulinus c. 409). This initial influx of Christian pilgrims in the Middle Ages leads to the sacralization of sacred narratives through continued visitation and authorization from early Christian writers. The best way to describe sacred narrative is through a slab of rock directly in the entrance to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. This exact slab is said to be where Jesus was laid after the descent from the cross, known as the Stone of the Anointing. This location has a sacred history attached to it, and has since the consecration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre by Helena in the early fourth century CE. The story of Jesus having once lain there has become a part of the physical object, the two are inseparable. Eusebius documents the discovery of the burial site of Jesus in the fourth century CE, describing it as “the most blessed place” and “most marvelous place in the world” (Williamson 1989). This type of religious language had not been used before to describe a place and because of this pilgrims flocked to see the world Eusebius described. They flocked to experience its sacred narrative and stand where Jesus stood, and worship where Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice. The creation of this sacred narrative was codified and remembered by the communities of pilgrims who

visited the site. The pilgrims, with the *communitas* (Turner and Turner 1978) which they routinely generated, have performed iterated and sustained ritual action at the very site of the Stone of the Anointing since its creation. Turner's term *communitas* is often characterized by a group experiencing liminality together, especially in the midst of ritual activity. In this instance, *communitas* is generated through a mixture of prayer, ritual activity, and faith, which also resonates with Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence describing when a community comes together and simultaneously communicates the same thought or action at the same time (Carreno 2014: 1–6). I am understanding this notion as a type of collective piety that the community of pilgrims emits through iterated ritual activity over time. A collective effervescence rising from the collectivity of pilgrims reinforces and sacralizes the sacred narratives of the place as well as solidifies the memory of the place through sensory perceptions. The sacred narrative is sacralized by the belief and action of the pilgrims, and the combination of sacred history and faith together legitimize authenticity. In this example, the sacred narrative (Jesus was laid here) encourages the ritual activity (praying and worshipping at the very spot) which, with earnest faith in the narrative from the pilgrims, legitimizes and authorizes the sacred narrative. And this connection of a believed sacred narrative and faith in it create authenticity. Thus, authenticity is created and sustained by faith in a sacred narrative, and a collective effervescence generated by the belief and ritual activity of pilgrims. From a phenomenological perspective, the pilgrim's thoughts about the sacred narrative are legitimized by seeing others believe it. This self-fulfilling cycle demonstrates the power of perception. It is worth noting that this particular manifestation of the Stone of the Anointing was placed in the entranceway of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre after a nineteenth-century renovation, further showing how little archaeological evidence matters in the authentication of modern pilgrimage sites.

Because of the implications of these phenomena, places such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem can exist simultaneously as both authentic Christian pilgrimage sites, and inauthentic archaeological sites. Any and all archaeological excavation has been unable to prove any connection of the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with the events described in the Bible and ascribed by Helena. Even though it is entirely impossible for these sacred narratives to be corroborated by empirical archaeological evidence, they still function as vibrantly authentic pilgrimage sites. Furthermore, this self-fulfilling cycle of faith and authenticity is still ongoing today. I went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the summer of 2015 and witnessed Christian pilgrims laying prostrate in tears at the Stone of the Anointing. The Stone which has been the object of such collective effervescence for so long is continually authenticated each and every day by pilgrims. Through belief in the story that Jesus once lay there, the narrative is continually legitimized.

And when pilgrims see others' perception of this site as authentic and real, their faith is heightened and encouraged. It is through this that a stone in the middle of Jerusalem can be at the same time one of the most holy places in Christendom, while also simply a piece of granite that was placed in a doorway in the nineteenth century. Archaeology has been unable to strip people away from their perceptions of faith, and so long as there is faith in the storied place, the place will be authentic. It appears that the transformative abilities of both faith and perception transcend empirical archaeological evidence.

I have chosen two case studies of pilgrimage sites in the Galilee to further show how authentic pilgrimage sites are created in direct opposition to empirical archaeological data. The first, Capernaum, is an early village along the coast of the Sea of Galilee, and second is the site of the Annunciation in Nazareth. I visited both of these sites in person as a participant observer in the summer of 2015.

Archaeological excavation at Capernaum appears suspect within the first few minutes of walking into the site. First of all, it is advertised as the "Town of Jesus". Right away red flags should be raised to a trained archaeologist. It is next to impossible to positively identify that any single human being lived or traveled through a certain site without an explicit inscription dating to the early first century describing such an event, and in the case of Capernaum no such inscription exists. Furthermore, an octagonal *insula*, or house, on the southern boundaries of the site is promulgated as the "House of Peter". This once mundane house dating to the first century encapsulates how difficult it is to positively identify a holy place through the archaeological record. Capernaum, according to the Bible, was the home of Peter, where Jesus met the first disciples, and where Jesus began his ministry in the synagogue. The property has been owned and excavated by Franciscan monks since 1894. Just as reading any historical textual source, one must be aware of potential bias in archaeology, especially before archaeological method became standardized.

Capernaum, and specifically the aforementioned "House of Peter", are thriving pilgrimage sites today. Just like the rest of the Holy Land, Capernaum saw an increase in pilgrimage activity after the conversion of Constantine. The "House of Peter" received an ecclesiastical makeover in the fourth century CE. New walls, floors, pavements surrounding it, and an arch to hold up a heavy roof were added to the house. In the fifth century CE a church was constructed around the central area of the house. So, evidence certainly exists that this area was of some importance to Christians in the fourth century CE onwards. We know that the church was used for baptisms dating back to the fifth century CE and we know by the ninth century CE the original walls of "Peter's House" were no longer standing. What we do not know is of any factual connection to Peter or Jesus. Nevertheless, pilgrimage thrived to Capernaum and the "House of Peter" from the fourth century CE all the way until Muslim rule of Palestine

in the seventh century CE (Tzaferis 1983: 198–202). The ruins were rediscovered in the late nineteenth century and excavated by Franciscan friars. It is at this point in history that Peter was inexplicably linked to the home of some importance. Pilgrimage immediately returned to Capernaum. The collective effervescence and *communitas* generated by generations of pilgrims traveling to Capernaum legitimized the claims of a relation to Peter. Capernaum today epitomizes an authentic Catholic pilgrimage site. A modern Catholic church has been built over the ruins of the fifth century CE church which was built over the ruins of the first century CE “House of Peter”. Pope John Paul II even gave his holy stamp of approval in 2000 by visiting the site. On my visit in 2015 to Capernaum, I saw a group of pilgrims singing Amazing Grace inside the modern church standing over the very center of where “Peter’s House” was. Their faith in the sacred history authenticated the pilgrimage site, while the authenticity of the pilgrimage site, as proven by a papal visit, encouraged their displays of faith. This is the self-fulfilling cycle in action. Further, this is an instance where the “House of Peter” may be a fictitious creation of place by Franciscan friars, but nevertheless functions as an authentic pilgrimage site. Thus, this is an instance of authentic inauthenticity.

My second example is the competing and contradictory sites of the Annunciation in Nazareth. In Nazareth there are both the Catholic Basilica of the Annunciation and the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation in separate places within the city, both which claim to be the exact location of where Mary was called by Gabriel. From an archaeological standpoint only one these, if either, could be the true location of the site. No evidence exists to prove that either has any cogent or logical claim to be the true location. Both are popular pilgrimage destinations and have congregations that wholeheartedly believe that they have a unique connection with the holy because of the events that took place there. Though it can be accurately asserted that it is impossible for both of these sites to be authentic archaeological sites pertaining to the exact location of the Annunciation, it is without question that these are fully functioning, popular, and authentic pilgrimage sites. Pilgrims understand that there are conflicting claims but that fact does little to mitigate the importance and religiosity of the sites. A visit on any given day will find hordes of pilgrims paying their respects through prayer and displays of faith at both locations. At these moments, the sacred historical narratives of the place and individual actions of the pilgrims combine to validate the authenticity of the pilgrimage sites. Thus, these competing sites, neither with any evidence supporting a coherent claim to be the true site of the Annunciation, function as manifestations of authentic inauthenticity.

The question at hand is not a matter of inauthenticity transforming into authenticity. Rather, I aim to explore the ways in which pilgrimage sites function autonomously from their attached archaeological sites. Too often

archaeological data does not match up with what is claimed from religious or pilgrimage perspective. If we look at these places from an archaeological perspective, they are inauthentic; they are creations. However, from this religious or pilgrimage perspective they are dynamic and authentic. The cultural identity of Christian pilgrimages is ubiquitous in places like Capernaum or Nazareth. The people, places, and objects surrounding this cultural experience have created the identity of these places as authentic pilgrimage sites over many centuries. Their identities as archaeological sites are a relatively novel designations that have done little to sully their identity as pilgrimage sites. Therefore, the contradiction of empirical archaeological data and the tradition of pilgrimage at these sites creates a phenomenon of authenticity from a pilgrimage perspective, and inauthenticity from an archaeological perspective.

In conclusion, the very nature of Christian pilgrimage sites in the Holy Land is little more than thinly reliant on archaeological fact. It is often impossible to ascertain the exact location of events that occurred 2000 years ago through the archaeological record. Without a conspicuous inscription dating to the first century, there is very little evidence to base conclusions upon. However, this lack of empirical evidence does not discredit the places as discrete pilgrimage sites. An entirely different phenomenon underlies the development of a pilgrimage site than the development of an archaeological site. After the creation of a Christian Holy Land by Helena and other early Christians, the process of authentication began. First, sacred narratives of biblical events were attached to specific sites. Then pilgrimage began. Certain pilgrims and authors like Eusebius began writing about these sites. These writings created a sacred knowledge, standardization of itinerary, and a tradition of pilgrimage which codified them into memory. Groups of pilgrims, through faith and ritual activity, generating *communitas*, sacralized and legitimized the sacred narratives. Thus, this faith in the sacred narrative itself created authenticity. And authenticity encouraged more faith and more pilgrimage and maybe even a visit from a Pope. The lived experience of pilgrims at a particular site overlays everything else. Pilgrims' perceptions of faith and authenticity drive their actions and beliefs. And it is this cycle of faith legitimizing authenticity and authenticity encouraging faith that underlies their notion that some things do indeed transcend the senses.

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