eTopoi Journal for Ancient Studies

Special Volume 3 (2012), pp. 181–188

Letty ten Harkel – Chris Gosden – Anwen Cooper – Miranda Cresswell – Chris Green – Laura Morley

Understanding the Relationship between Landscape and Identity: A Case Study from Dartmoor and the Tamar Valley, Devon, c. 1500 BC – AD 1086

in Wiebke Bebermeier – Robert Hebenstreit – Elke Kaiser – Jan Krause, Landscape Archaeology. Proceedings of the International Conference Held in Berlin, 6th – 8th June 2012

Edited by Gerd Graßhoff and Michael Meyer,
Excellence Cluster Topoi, Berlin

eTopoi ISSN 2192-2608
http://journal.topoi.org

Except where otherwise noted, content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License:
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0

Letty ten Harkel – Chris Gosden – Anwen Cooper – Miranda Cresswell – Chris Green – Laura Morley

Understanding the Relationship between Landscape and Identity: A Case Study from Dartmoor and the Tamar Valley, Devon, c. 1500 BC– AD1086

Landscape; identity; hauntology; Devon; Dartmoor; Anglo-Saxon; prehistoric.

Introduction

Identity was an issue for people in the past as it is now. Its analysis spans many disparate disciplines, including those of psychoanalysis and archaeology. This paper, written in the context of the 5-year project *Landscape and Identities: the case of the English Landscape 1500 BC—AD 1086* (EngLaId), develops a new approach to the study of past landscapes and identities by reference to a theoretical notion with its roots in psychoanalytical theory, hauntology.[1] In psychoanalytical context, hauntology seeks "to inspect the inside of reason and see how it too is haunted by what it excludes."[2] Hauntology did not enjoy widespread acknowledgement until publication of Derrida's[3] *Spectres de Marx*,[4] which departed from Abrahams and Torok's view of the spectral as "an object of knowledge" by accepting its place within the present.[5] This is also the stance adopted in this paper.

The EngLaId project investigates the complex and evolving nature of human identity from *c*. 1500 BC to *c*. AD 1086 through analysis of the creation, use, modification and abandonment of landscapes across England. Identity is seen as deriving from patterns of practice, which are structured by physical circumstances—both 'natural' landscapes and their human modifications—existing within a long-term chronological context, although time itself is not necessarily linear. This paper, starting from an early medieval vantage point, will briefly set out its theoretical stance, before applying it to a case study area: the southwestern part of upland Dartmoor (Devon) and adjacent lowland regions (Fig. 1).

Theoretical Background

Since Derrida's[6] publication of *Spectres de Marx*, hauntology has had an impact on many disciplines. The cultural geographers Maddern and Adey,[7] view hauntology as "the nagging presence of an absence," likened to an infant burial ground or—perhaps more relevant in the context of the current case study—the absence of permanent early medieval settlement in a region dotted with prehistoric remains. Amongst literary critics, Davis,[8]

1 Abraham and Torok 1978.
2 Buse and Stott 1999, 1.
3 Derrida 1993.
4 Davis 2005, 373–374.
5 Davis 2005, 379.
6 Derrida 1993.
7 Maddern and Adey 2008, 291f.; also see Matless 2008.
8 Davis 2005, 373.

Fig. 1 | Location of case study area (black grid squares) showing hundred boundaries in this region. Area of Fig. 2 is outlined in red. Map was created using ArcGIS® software by Esri. ArcGIS® and ArcMap™ are the intellectual property of Esri and are used herein under license. Copyright © Esri. All rights reserved.

regarding ghost and folk stories as subconscious metaphors for events from the past, has stated that hauntology "[replaces] the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive."

The field of archaeology, with its long-term perspective, is suited *par excellence* to explore the notion of hauntology, but this has not yet happened explicitly. Nevertheless, the spectral was an important driving force for archaeological investigation, especially during the early days of the discipline. The late 19th to early 20th-century writer Mary Butts,[9] emphasising the relationship between archaeology and storytelling, stated how "archaeology had begun to interest [her]" as she realised the taboos associated with certain Neolithic earthworks where "no shepherd, no farmhand will go … after dark." Or, as Franklin[10] has stated, "stories were associated with archaeological features in an attempt to explain their existence and origin when … the true nature of their origins was unknown."

The evidence for Anglo-Saxon perceptions of prehistoric remains has been comprehensively analysed by Semple.[11] Emphasising the importance of folk stories and mythology, Semple highlights the recurrent literary interpretation of prehistoric barrows as the dwelling places of evil spirits in sources such as *Beowulf* and the 8th-century *Life of St Guthlac*. More recently, Franklin[12] has pointed out that certain topographical circumstances, such as uplands and moors, also tend to be associated with evil spirits: *Beowulf* (Ch. 1, 10) describes Grendel as an inhabiter of moors and fens, whilst the dragon in Part 2 (Ch. 31) inhabits a barrow in an upland zone.

Hauntology can take analysis of early medieval perceptions of landscape forward by moving beyond an understanding of the past as a static entity, a situation that has been described as "the logic of the corpse," which was only interested in "the broken, the static and the already passed."[13] As Madern and Adey[14] have stated, hauntology is well-equipped to "animate silenced agencies and forgotten voices and histories, while also attending to the political aspects of those voices and histories." As such, hauntology is able to describe "the fluidity of identity among individuals … both in the present and over time."[15]

An Hauntological Perspective on the Anglo-Saxon Landscape of Dartmoor

Dartmoor is an upland region well known for its excellent survival of Bronze Age field systems.[16] From the late Bronze Age, however, Dartmoor became increasingly marginal, a development traditionally attributed to climatic change,[17] although more recently this has been questioned.[18] Iron Age hillforts were constructed around the moor edge, drawing communal focus away from the earlier ritual monument groupings on the high moor.[19] During the Roman and early medieval periods, permanent settlement only occurred in the lower-lying regions surrounding the moor, with Dartmoor mainly used for seasonal transhumance,[20] even if the period after *c*. 800 AD witnessed a warm and dry climatic spell. The Anglo-Saxon association of uplands and barrows with evil spirits and monsters may suggest, therefore, that the moors were left uncolonised (partially) for metaphysical

9 Butts 1998, 349–350.
10 Franklin 2006, 146.
11 Semple 2002.
12 Franklin 2006, 147.
13 Thrift and Dewsbury 2000.
14 Maddern and Adey 2008, 293.
15 Hewicker and Rinder 2010.
16 Fleming 2007; Wickstead 2008.
17 Quinnell 1996, 75.
18 Caseldine 1999, 32.
19 Quinnell 1996, 80.
20 Fox 2012; Taylor 2007, 25, 27.

reasons. To leave it at that, however, is to view the past as static, to adhere to 'the logic of the corpse.' This paper argues instead that the ghosts of ancestors—quite literally—continued to structure the world of the living.

Fleming's[21] mapping of Dartmoor's reaves revealed evidence for their continuity as parish boundaries (originating as early medieval estate boundaries) and hedge lines, revealing the long-lasting structuring role of these tangible prehistoric boundary features. In addition, the boundaries of many of the geographical and administrative divisions known as "hundreds" in south Devon, followed rivers and streams—many retaining their original British names—over large distances. Rivers, streams and linear earthworks are natural boundaries and routeways, making them an obvious choice to delineate territory. However, the degree of long-term continuity respects a continuing respect for the past. As Butts[22] has stated, "a place can be more than its assembly of wood and leaf and stone visible to us," and the ritual significance of water has often been emphasised, especially in the context of votive metalwork deposits.[23]

Too much emphasis on continuity, however, results in a biased understanding of the Dartmoor landscape. Other boundaries were less tangible, their location known only from documentary evidence such as charter bounds. They are frequently associated with prehistoric features such as burial mounds and standing stones.[24] This suggests that these boundaries were also steeped in folklore and engrained in patterns of practice for many centuries, but none of these would have been static. After all, not *all* prehistoric features fulfilled a similar role; for example, a cluster of hut circles in the north of Plympton Hundred is avoided by all boundaries (Fig. 2). Interestingly, situated around this cluster are three stone crosses, none of which—in contrast to many other crosses within the case study area—correspond to boundaries. Is it possible to suggest that these crosses were erected instead to ward off evil spirits who were perceived to reside still in the hut circles? After all, ghosts were usually confined to specific locales,[25] possibly imprisoned there, as Semple's[26] reading of *The Wife's Lament* suggests.

The selective approach to prehistoric remains echoes Butts'[27] observation that ghost stories and taboos were associated only with certain monuments. These stories were not static; for example, the eighth-century charter bound describing the Crediton estate to the northeast of Dartmoor includes references to *cains æcer* (Cain's acre) and *grendeles pit* (Grendel's pit), the latter representing the attribution of Germanic pre-Christian folklore to a region that had still been British little over a century earlier. Franklin[28] has argued that folk tales from Dartmoor spread to the south Devon coast in the context of seasonal transhumance, providing further evidence for the fluid relationship between landscape and folklore, and between present and past.

Conclusion

This brief paper has tried to demonstrate how the concept of hauntology can help us understand the interaction between past and present, and between memory, identity and landscape. Human identities shaped and were shaped by patterns of practice, which were engrained in memory and folklore that continued to exercise an active role within

21 Fleming 2007, 24, 64.
22 Butts 1998, 350.
23 Bradley 1998.
24 Franklin 2006, 146; Hooke 1994; Turner 2006, 135–139.
25 Matless 2008, 337–339.
26 Semple 2002.
27 Butts 1998, 349–350.
28 Franklin 2006, 152–154.

Fig. 2 | Hundred boundaries and prehistoric remains in Shaugh Prior, Plympton Hundred (parish boundaries do not fall within the small part of the case study area that is depicted) in relation to the First Edition Ordnance Survey Map, provided by EDINA Historic Digimap. © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2012). All rights reserved (2004).

the present. In other words, the present can only exist in relation to the past and the future, but the relationship between past, present and future is complex, as the Anglo-Saxons alternately rejected the spectral presence of their ancesters (as was the case with the hut circles in Plympton hundred) or continued to allow the past to structure their present (and future). The ghosts from the past, whoever and wherever they were, thus continued to shape the identities of the living, whilst the identities of the spectral were also, irrevocably, changed in the process.

Bibliography

Abraham and Torok 1978
N. Abraham and M. Torok. *L'Écorce et le noyau*. Paris: Flammarion, 1978.

Bradley 1998
R. Bradley. *The Passage of Arms. Archaeological Analysis of Prehistoric Hoards and Votive Deposits*. Oxford: Oxbow, 1998.

Buse and Stott 1999
P. Buse and A. Stott. "Introduction: a Future for Haunting". In *Ghosts. Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*. Ed. by P. Buse and A. Stott. London: Macmillan, 1999, 1–20.

Butts 1998
M. Butts. "Ghosties and Ghoulies. Uses of the Supernatural in English Fiction". In *Ashe of Rings and Other Writings*. Ed. by M. Butts. New York: McPherson, 1998, 331–364.

Caseldine 1999
C.J. Caseldine. "Archaeological and Environmental Change in Prehistoric Dartmoor. Current Understandings and Future Directions". *Journal of Quaternary Science* 14 (1999), 575–583.

Davis 2005
C. Davis. "État present. Hauntology, spectres and phantoms". *French Studies* 59.3 (2005), 373–379.

Derrida 1993
J. Derrida. *Spectres de Marx. L'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1993.

Fleming 2007
A. Fleming. *The Dartmoor Reaves. Investigating Prehistoric Land Divisions*. Macclesfield: Windgather, 2007.

Fox 2012
H. Fox. *Dartmoor's Alluring Uplands: Transhumance and Pastoral Management in the Middle Ages*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2012.

Franklin 2006
L. Franklin. "Imagined Landscapes. Archaeology, Perception and Folklore in the Study of Medieval Devon". In *Medieval Devon and Cornwall. Shaping an Ancient Countryside*. Ed. by S. Turner. Macclesfield: Windgather, 2006, 144–166.

Hewicker and Rinder 2010
S. Hewicker and L. Rinder. *Hauntology*. 2010. URL: `http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/exhibition/hauntology`.

Hooke 1994
D. Hooke. *Pre-conquest Charter-bounds of Devon and Cornwall*. Woodbridge: Boydell, 1994.

Maddern and Adey 2008
J.F. Maddern and P. Adey. “Editorial. Spectro-geographies”. *Cultural Geographies* 15.3 (2008), 291–295.

Matless 2008
D. Matless. “A Geography of Ghosts: the Spectral Landscapes of Mary Butts”. *Cultural Geographies* 15 (2008), 335–357.

Quinnell 1996
H. Quinnell. “Becoming Marginal? Dartmoor in Later Prehistory”. In *The Archaeology of Dartmoor. Perspectives from the 1990s. Papers Presented to a Conference at Exeter University in September 1994 to Celebrate the Centenary of the Foundation of the Dartmoor Exploration Committee*. Ed. by D.M. Griffiths. Devon Archaeological Society Proceedings 52. Exeter: Devon Archaeological Socety & Dartmoor National Park Authority, 1996, 75–84.

Semple 2002
S.J. Semple. *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes to the Past: a Landscape Perspective. A Study on the Secondary Uses and Perceptions of Prehistoric Monuments in Anglo-Saxon Society*. PhD thesis. The Queen’s College, University of Oxford, 2002.

Taylor 2007
J. Taylor. *An Atlas of Roman Rural Settlement in England*. CBA Research Report 151. York: Council for British Archaeology, 2007.

Thrift and Dewsbury 2000
N. Thrift and J.D. Dewsbury. “Dead Geographies – and How to Make them Live. Environment and Planning d”. *Society and Space* 18 (2000), 411–432.

Turner 2006
S. Turner. “The Christian Landscape: Churches, Chapels and Crosses”. In *Medieval Devon and Cornwall. Shaping an Ancient Countryside*. Ed. by S. Turner. Macclesfield: Windgather, 2006, 24–43.

Wickstead 2008
H. Wickstead. *Theorising Tenure. Land Division and Identity in Later Prehistoric Dartmoor, South-West Britain.* British Archaeological Reports British Series 20. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2008.

Letty ten Harkel (corresponding author), Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford, 36 Beaumont Street, Oxford OX1 2PG, United Kingdom, letty.tenharkel@arch.ox.ac.uk

Chris Gosden, Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford, 36 Beaumont Street, Oxford OX1 2PG, United Kingdom

Anwen Cooper, Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford, 36 Beaumont Street, Oxford OX1 2PG, United Kingdom

Miranda Cresswell, Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford, 36 Beaumont Street, Oxford OX1 2PG, United Kingdom

Chris Green, Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford, 36 Beaumont Street, Oxford OX1 2PG, United Kingdom

Laura Morley, Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford, 36 Beaumont Street, Oxford OX1 2PG, United Kingdom