

THE GROUNDING OF MYTHOLOGY

Sacred places are a significant element of the mythic traditions we are exploring, and that they comprise a common genre is, of course, enough reason to consider them here. But even more than their presence in the world's myths, such stories are important because in them the mythic breaks through into our present world, embodying the very kinds of boundary crossing that are so central to all mythological thinking. Such stories give us a chance to see, to feel, the presence of mythic truth in the midst of our perceptions of contemporary reality. Whether they are the repositories of national or ethnic identity or the site of supernatural revelation or visitation, whether they are actual places where we can stand and hear the echoes of long-ago battles or imaginary places shaped by the requirements of mythic vision, sacred places serve to teach and remind us of who we are and how we ought to behave in our day-to-day lives.

This claim may seem somewhat overblown. We members of the mainstream, 21st-century American society like to think of ourselves as practical, realistic, down to earth. The mythological has nothing to do with us—except perhaps as an object of curiosity and intellectual interest. But wait a minute. How “down to earth” are we *really*? We take this phrase to mean “realistic” or “sensible,” yet, when we think for a moment, it might be argued that in our highly technological and technology-dependent society the very last thing we are is “down to earth.” Sacred places, especially in the various senses that Native Americans use the term, call out to us to *become* “down to earth,” to remember and honor and revitalize our essential connections to the earth and the natural world, to the *sacred* all around us. They invite us to associate the spiritual with such natural material phenomena as mountains, rivers, lakes, trees, and caves. The study of stories about sacred places might just allow us to see such opposed binaries as past versus present, realistic versus mythological, or spiritual versus material as not so mutually exclusive. As Vine Deloria has pointed out, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, with its battlefield and its National Cemetery, serves as a sacred place in our creation of national identity. Other places similarly “hallowed” come to mind as well: the Alamo, Pearl Harbor, Con-

cord Bridge. Places such as these are sacred “because the location is a site where, within our own history something of great importance has happened” (Deloria 1993, 272). Deloria is right, as far as he goes, but there is something deeper that makes such sites sacred. What makes them important is that they *embody* and provide a *location* that dramatizes complex notions about nationhood and individual identity as well as the various contradictions that constitute the human condition such as bravery and fear, aggression and altruism.

Such sites are, of course, actual places. We can go there today, stand, look, and know we are in *the* place. Yet, at the same time, these actual places are mythic because they embody meanings far beyond the scope of the events that happened and even beyond the limits of the physical locations themselves. In that sense, they are *imaginary* places. We imagine them to be far more than any real place can be in and of itself. Does this fact mean the sacred meanings are not real? Not at all. We could say the abstract meaning becomes real, becomes accessible, becomes visible, becomes imaginable *because* it is connected with a real place that we can see and with real events that we can remember. Thus, for example, a visit to Gettysburg can make concrete such abstract notions as “casualties” and “the *United States*” in a way that a visit to another Pennsylvania pasture cannot. In short, this particular sacred place brings a great many abstractions about nationhood and warfare “down to earth.” But national shrines are only one kind of sacred place. Let’s consider what other kinds there may be.

GULLIFORD'S NINE CATEGORIES OF SACRED PLACES

Andrew Gulliford, in his analysis of Native American sites, argues there are nine categories of sacred places: (1) sites associated with emergence and migration tales; (2) sites of trails and pilgrimage routes; (3) places essential to cultural survival; (4) altars; (5) vision quest sites; (6) ceremonial dance sites; (7) ancestral ruins; (8) petroglyphs and pictographs; and (9) burial or massacre sites.

Each of Gulliford’s categories refers to a specific, identifiable location that has a mythological dimension not unlike that which has attached itself to Gettysburg or the Liberty Bell. Gulliford’s categories are particularly apt in reference to sacred American Indian places. As such, they describe sites closely tied to the historical events, spiritual practices, and identity-reinforcing activities so important to Indian culture. But, even as a typology of sacred Indian places, Gulliford’s list is incomplete. What about sites that have been sanctified by the divine touch? The Modoc Indians of northern California, for instance, considered the dormant volcano Mount Shasta sacred because the Chief of the Sky Spirits made it as a dwelling for himself and his family. Indeed, the Chief’s own daughter became the mother of the human race when the winds that perpetually blow at Shasta’s summit whisked her off the mountain and, ultimately, into the care of the Grizzly Bears living at its base. The Jicarilla Apache saw Taos as the center of the earth and revered this place because “the Ruler” led them to this propitious site shortly after they emerged from the earth. The Brulé Sioux associated the Badlands with ancient evil and horrific wonder, believing its rock formations to be the bones of Unktehi, the primordial water monster

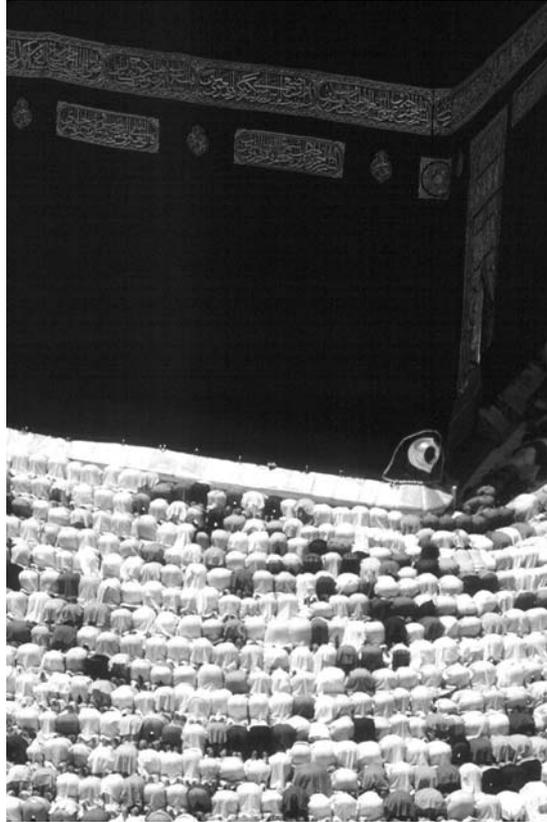
who, before she was defeated by Tunkashila (Grandfather Spirit), drowned the entire world in a great flood. These Sioux consider the red pipestones which are part of the Badlands multicolored rock formations to be sacred because they are the flesh, blood, and bones of their drowned ancestors. Smoke from pipes made with this stone is said to be the breath of the ancestors whose power can be felt when these sacred pipes are smoked during ceremonies.

These real-world locations were made sacred by events that happened in the mythic, rather than the historical past. Therefore, what is needed is a typology of sacred places that describes all the possible associations that make a place holy.

DELORIA'S FOUR CATEGORIES OF SACRED SITES

Vine Deloria, author of *Custer Died for Your Sins*, offers another way of categorizing myths about sacred places in his *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*. While Deloria's work also focuses on Native American cultures, his categories are open-ended enough to be useful in looking at sacred sites around the mythic world. Instead of nine, Deloria presents four categories of "sacred places," arranged on a scale of "agency"—entirely human agency at one end versus the agency of "Higher Powers" at the other. Gettysburg, in Deloria's view, is sacred entirely through human agency. In his second category, one he calls "deeper, more profound," places become sacred because they are the location of events through which "the sacred or higher powers have appeared in the lives of human beings" (1993, 273). Deloria cites Joshua leading the Hebrews across the River Jordan dry-shod on their way into the Holy Land after the death of Moses as a Western example of such an intervention (272). The Jicarilla Apache's divine "Ruler" leading the people to Taos is a similar story of human and divine activities making a place sacred. These are the places, to use Judeo-Christian terms, where miracles have been recorded. And, since Judeo-Christian traditions are revealed religions (i.e., God reveals himself and his will to human beings through miraculous events and prophetic utterance), there are numerous biblical stories that illustrate this idea. But similarly sacred locations are not unknown in our modern world. For example, think of Lourdes, France, where believers assert that the Virgin Mary continues to make her healing presence felt. Similarly, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the Kaaba, a Muslim sacred site, holds a black stone, possibly a meteorite, believed to contain divine miraculous powers. Both these places are sacred because the Divine revealed itself through miracles in those specific locations. In this notion of sacred places, the limits of the ordinary are revealed, *here*, in *this* place, to be permeable to the supernatural.

In Deloria's third category, places become sacred because the Higher Powers, rather than just being the unseen agents of events in this world, "on their own initiative have revealed Themselves to human beings" (1993, 275). Deloria cites Moses speaking with the Burning Bush as an Old Testament example of this sort of revelation. A Medicine Wheel, where Indian youths seek and receive a life-defining vision, is sacred in this same sense. To these examples we could add the cave of the oracle at Delphi, Greece, and Ayres Rock, Australia, as places where the Divine was and is said to speak to humans through prophets and dreams. In these cases, the human being shares some degree of agency when he or she fasts and seeks the vision,



The Kaaba (Baytullah) and the Hajar-e-Aswad (the Black Stone). Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the Kaaba to faithful Muslims who turn and pray toward this structure five times a day. The building and its surrounding precincts were, however, sacred to a variety of Arabic peoples centuries before Mohammed. Ishmael and Hagar (Ismail and Hajira) are said to be buried here and the sacred healing waters of the well Zamzam are made available to the millions of pilgrims who visit the site each year. In addition to the mysterious Black Stone, another sacred stone, the Maqam-e-Ibrahim, is said to retain miraculously the footprints of Mohammed who stood upon it when building the Kaaba.

Source: © Robert Azzi/Woodfin Camp and Associates

yet the place becomes sacred at the revelation of the Higher Powers. According to Deloria, places where such revelations occur tend to transcend local history, and the world is full of places where communication and communion with Higher Powers are said to be possible. For example, Alistair Shearer, describing the origins of sacred places in Asia, writes in a similar tone:

First comes the earth, ancient mother of the gods, intrinsically holy, irrepressible womb of the Divine. Then here and there across the landscape, shrines spring up, separating and protecting what is particularly holy ground: that place, be it mountain, tree or rock, where the invisible presences that govern our world are known to congregate, where they have been felt or seen, either in direct revelation, or by their witnessed effects. Some miraculous event, a punishment, a healing or a vision, shows that the hidden forces are breathing through such a place, bending the commonplace boundaries of time and space and infusing them with a numinous power that puts the visitor in contact with new levels of being. (Freeman and Shearer 2000, 10)

In Deloria's fourth category, he calls for the possibility of new sacred places, underscoring even more the present, ongoing nature of the kinds of interactions between the human and the spiritual realms. Sometimes the politics of the ongoing interactions surrounding sacred places can be tortured. Recently, two statues of the Buddha (each more than 100 feet tall) carved into the rock walls of a gorge in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, were destroyed by order of Mullah Omar, the leader of the now-scattered Taliban militia, on the grounds that they were idols that might lead "the people" astray.

Similar conflicts have arisen in North America, where sacred places exist in a world in which some property is designated as "private" and where "public" land is owned by a government sympathetic to the pecuniary interests of miners, loggers, ranchers, and real estate developers. Whereas the dominant culture views the possession of land and the quest for profit as fundamental human rights, native cultures usually see at least some land as the necessary locations of religious ceremonies that literally maintain the prosperity and even the life of the world as a whole (Deloria 1993, 275–76). Because of the unique complexities that come out of the intersection of competing ways of seeing the world—political, religious, mythological, economic, historical, to name a few—discussions about actual places that have been labeled "sacred" by minority populations are often at odds with the dominant culture.

One thing worth noting from our comparison of Gulliford's and Deloria's schemes is the necessity, or at least the descriptive effectiveness, of viewing their categories as markers along a continuum which has the "entirely mythic" (or metaphoric or imaginary) at one extreme and the "real world" at the other. Throughout this book, we have made the point that such a continuum need not embody a hierarchy of values in which the "real world" is positive, understandable, and believable in ways that "mythic" cannot be. Myth is a serious way of knowing the world—just as serious as our "practical" understanding of how things are—and therefore sacred stories about places that cannot be located on the map are no less powerful for their being imaginary. For examples, such mythic locales as Heaven and Hell, Eden and Shangri-La, the Cave of Wonders and the Enchanted Forest have long affected various people's behavior and belief. Thus Gettysburg and the Grand Canyon are wholly "actual" (though note these two places are sacred for very different reasons), while Mt. Olympus is both "actual" and "imaginary" at the same time, and the Garden of Eden is, if not wholly "imaginary," impossible to locate on any map. Yet wherever we might place them along a continuum between the wholly mythic and the wholly actual, each of these sites has the power to affect behavior, belief, and worldview.

SITES OF LONGING AND FEAR

Some mythical places are sacred because they dramatize our fears of and resistance to the inevitable facts of aging, weakness, disease, and death. For example, the Yiddish story of Alexander the Great's search for the Waters of Eternal Life depicts a wish to escape the harsh facts of our mortality.

Other imaginary places dramatize other longings. The Nordlander Isak's voyage to Utröst, the Tibetan Rinchen's accidental encounter with the King of the Castle in the Lake, and the Chinese K'o-li's adventures to the Treasure Mountain of Yao enact hopes and anxieties arising from the need to earn our daily bread. In each of these stories, the protagonist discovers the source of unlimited material wealth; and, in the last two cases, there is reflection on the ways wealth can complicate our existence. This childlike longing for comfort, security, and stasis also forms the basis for Eliade's claim that all myths are myths of return to the "sweet time" of beginnings. Myths which take us to a sacred place where rejuvenation or immortality is possible—whether that place is a garden, a forest, a mountain, a well, lake, stream, fountain, or river—have the effect of transporting us back to the primordial and womblike condition that preceded our quotidian struggles with money, relationships, and the eventual loss of our physical and mental powers.

COMBINING INTERPRETIVE STRATEGIES

Thus we can locate sacred places along two axes. The first locates a sacred place along a continuum from historical/actual to imaginary/metaphorical. The second axis locates a sacred place along a continuum from human to divine agency. Let's take Deloria's example of Gettysburg and "read" it in terms of the analytical tool now before us. As Deloria suggests, Gettysburg is a comparatively simple case and, to reverse his previously quoted terms, exemplifies a "shallower, more mundane" sense of the sacred than, say, India's Ganges River or Peru's Machu Picchu. At first glance, anyway, there is no need to go outside the boundaries of everyday life to comprehend Gettysburg as a sacred place. As Deloria points out, even mere days after the conflict, this Pennsylvania battlefield was accepted as hallowed ground, at least in part because, as Abraham Lincoln said in his "Gettysburg Address," the soldiers there gave "the last full measure of devotion" to a "sacred cause." Deloria would stop there; for him, human sacrifice is enough to explain a site's sacredness. But is this explanation enough? Soldiers equally brave and self-sacrificing have perished in bloody agony in many battles before and after Gettysburg. What then makes the Gettysburg soldiers' sacrifice more holy than others' sacrifice?

If we think of Gulliford's categories, it is possible to see Gettysburg as sacred in several ways. It is not only a place of ultimate past sacrifice but a place where we now make pilgrimages to honor those past actions; it is a site of "altars and shrines"; it could even be said to embody a relatively "ancient" emergence narrative. Here, in this place, "the Union" was saved. The idea of the United States of America was preserved—and, more than preserved, a new vision for what America could be in the future was embodied in the successful sacrifice of these cultural heroes and offered

to the rest of the nation (including us) by the vibrant rhetoric of Lincoln's Address. In that sense Lincoln used the battle to sell the war to the citizens of the North in terms of higher abstractions, but in that sense, too, thousands of Americans journey to Gettysburg every year even now because it is a site that somehow embodies "imaginary" or "abstract" or "mythological" meanings that are still important to us and to our sense of belonging to a larger, national whole.

TWO SACRED PLACES OF HUMAN ORIGINS

Let us turn our attention to the myths we have selected to illustrate ideas raised in this chapter. We have seen that the mythic functions of sacred places are numerous, even when the places in question are actual and have been made sacred "only" by the actions of men. When we move from actual places made sacred by human agency, like Waterloo, Flanders Field, Gettysburg, or Pearl Harbor, to actual places made sacred by divine agency, like Lourdes, the Kaaba, the Ganges, or Bighorn Medicine Wheel, the mythic resonances increase.

Perhaps the most richly resonant sacred places are those for which determining whether they are actual or "simply" mythic is difficult. For example, the location of their Emergence Myth in the Grand Canyon by contemporary Zuni leaders connects the mythic origins of a people with an actual place—a place that continues to be sacred today in various of the senses that Gulliford and Deloria suggest. But consider Western culture's own myth of origin—the story of the creation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Many readers would accord Adam and Eve greater credence than they would the Zuni Emergence story, even though the Zunis claim an unbroken knowledge and ritual line that can be traced back to their own origins, and even though, when you consider the details carefully, the believability of the two stories does not appear markedly different. A story of the first two humans, made of lumps of mud animated by the breath of God, who conspire to disobey that God because of the interference of a talking serpent is no more or less realistic than the Zunis' multiple worlds from which people were led by "elder brother priests" into the world of light so that Father Sun might have people to offer him prayer sticks. And while we can actually visit the Grand Canyon, Eden exists nowhere on earth.

We cannot, in either case, point to better evidence or greater plausibility; therefore, comparing them to show which is true and which false is a doomed enterprise. Only the faith and reality that our cultural surroundings authorize for us would cause us to choose talking snakes over gradual emergence from underground cave-worlds. In either case, a literal reading of the creation narrative closes off all further discussion. But if we consider the *meaning functions* of the respective myths, we are led to a number of interesting questions. What, for example, do these myths of place hold for those who created them? To what degree are place and people connected? And what kinds of power do myths of place exert on those of us who consider them from intellectual or scholarly points of view?

Let us dig a bit further into the two origin stories just mentioned to see what we might learn about culture, identity, and a sense of place if we move beyond notions



The Grand Canyon

Source: © Corbis

of true and false to consider the ways myths function. In the Eden story, humans were placed in a perfect setting by a beneficent God, but they rejected lives of perfect ease and became estranged from the “Higher Power” through an act of disobedience. The human race then lives in an ill world, marked by disharmony, broken relationships, suffering, and death, all because of the actions of the primal pair (and the snake, of course). We have, especially in the Christian era, a promise of future healing, a return to harmony and perfect existence, but we must struggle through childbirth, ceaseless labor, and a constant state of emptiness, yearning for lost fullness in the here and now because of those first human decisions. In this story we move from perfection and harmony to imperfection, struggle, and disharmony.

In the Zuni tale, on the other hand, humans existed in a dark, imperfect world, and their relationships were broken or destructive. At the calling of Father Sun, they emerged from this dark chaos into a world of light and healthy relationships and harmony with their fellow inhabitants, including nonhuman creatures and with the earth itself. When the aboriginal Zunis emerged into the sun-kissed fourth world, they found that Death and the kind of evil magic that causes sickness and strife were

already there. But, from the point of view of this myth, such circumstances are simply part of the way it is and not a punishment for moral failure. Thus the Zuni tale moves from disharmony to harmony, from imperfection to perfection, from emptiness to fullness. According to their myth, the Zunis came into the world to complete rather than wreck the divine plan.

The two tales leave us—the readers who must now live in the post-Eden/post-emergence world—in fundamentally different places, one defined by suffering we may hope to escape from “one glad morning when this life is over,” the other a beautiful, if not trouble-free place in which to worship and celebrate the perfection of the bright dawn. In addition, the two stories frame differing cultural attitudes toward the earth itself. From the Judeo-Christian myth, we get the sense that the earth is as much a prison and proving ground as it is a home. Adam and Eve are told that they must leave Eden and, through blood, sweat, and tears, force an indifferent planet to yield sustenance and shelter. The feeling one gets from the Zuni myth is that the earth is the perfect environment for human happiness. The first Zuni emerge to find a world perfectly suited to their basic needs, including connection to their god. The point of this comparison is not that one culture’s story is better than another, but that we can see powerful values inscribed in such stories. And those cultural values ultimately become our own sense of what is real and right and normal.

READING SACRED PLACES MYTHS

When studying myths about sacred places, we need to consider not only questions about actuality and agency but also the general tropes or myth types that are in operation as well. Some important tropes are (1) myths of sacred waters; (2) myths of sacred landforms such as mountains, canyons, and caves; (3) myths of sacred trees, gardens, or forests; and (4) myths of blessed isles or magic realms.

Whether they focus on rivers, lakes, wells, or oceans, myths of sacred waters abound. Varanasi, a city in northern India where the Buddha is said to have taught, is sacred because of the River Ganges. As Alistair Shearer writes:

Varanasi is what she is because of where she is: on the banks of the holy Ganges. Personified as the mighty goddess Ganga, she first descended from heaven with such power that Shiva had to filter her mighty flow through his matted locks . . . Starting as a crystal clear rivulet at the “Cow’s Mouth” of Gangotri in the high Himalayas, she widens and lengthens over 1,250 miles, sanctifying site after site, to end by exploding into the profusion of waters that empty joyously into the Bay of Bengal. She is the Hindu’s link to the pure vastness of the Himalayas, where only the saints and gods can dwell, and as “Mother Ganges” she is the bringer of life to the north Indian plains. (Freeman and Shearer 2000, 63–64)

Part of the holiness of the Ganges is that she connects India to the holy mountains, another worldwide mythic trope. Olympus was sacred to the Greeks as the very dwelling place of the gods. Similarly, many Romans revered the volcano Etna as the home of the smith-god, Vulcan. Mount Shasta, as mentioned above, is sacred



Woman praying in the Ganges. Benares, India.

Source: © Courtney Milne

in northern California to the Modoc and several other California tribes, and Denali, “the Great One,” in Alaska is similarly sacred to several tribes there. Kilimanjaro in Kenya features prominently in myth. Fuji is a sacred symbol of Japan even today, and myths about the goddess of Fuji are among the most ancient in Japan. All these sacred mountains are actual, but there are mythic mountains as well. The biblical Mount Zion is not a literal mountain but a symbol for the stability of God’s chosen nation. Mount Sumeru, in Buddhist and other Asian traditions, is the center of the universe and site of several important “beginnings,” but it does not exist on a map. The idyllic mountain kingdom of Shangri-La is also more imaginary than real.

In addition to sacred waters and mountains are sacred trees, gardens, and forests. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life stand at the heart of the Adam and Eve story—at the heart of the Garden of Eden. The Norse creation myth in chapter 2 mentions Yggdrasill, the mighty ash upon which the three worlds in Nordic cosmology rest. Where Yggdrasill came from is uncertain, but it will apparently outlast even gods and men when Ragnarac—the great conflagration at the end of time—finally occurs. The Tree of Liberty in Boston is sacred much like Gettysburg is sacred, but, as we have seen, even that “simple” sort of sacredness is a rich mine of possible meanings with far-reaching implications. The areca tree from Vietnam and the willow and chestnut trees linked with Kobo Daishi in Japan are sacred in the sense of Deloria’s second category, where the Higher Powers have made their presence known through interventions in the natural world. The

fig tree in the Garden of Enlightenment in Bodh Gaya, India, under which Prince Gautama achieved enlightenment and became known as the Buddha, is sacred in Deloria's third sense and in a number of the categories Gulliford offers and Shearer highlights.

The fourth trope, myths of "blessed isles," evokes locations that are nearly or entirely mythic. "Blessed isles" here refers not necessarily to literal islands; rather, the blessed isle is a discrete, often tiny land that most often suggests paradise lost. In such stories, the lands are usually described as being far away, hidden, or exceptionally difficult to reach. Often these blessed isles are guarded by monsters or demons or treacherous terrain; but just as frequently, if the hero perseveres, he or she finds a surprisingly warm reception and usually receives gifts of great worth. In many stories, like the story of Alexander the Great's search for the "Water of Everlasting Life," the blessed isle (in this case, the mountain kingdom of the archdemon Asmodeus) is discovered accidentally. In another story that follows, the blessed isle of Utröst is discovered only after the fisherman Isak is blown off course by a fierce storm. Just when he knows that his life is over, Utröst heaves into view. Another characteristic of blessed isles is that they are places of Edenic ease and material wealth. Asmodeus possesses vast wealth and, more important to Alexander (who strongly resembles King Solomon in this story), the deepest secrets. And no sooner does he land than Isak discovers that the bowls and cups of "father Cormorant" remain perpetually full.

In yet another story included below, a young Chinese, K'o-li, is given the keys to a mysterious treasure cave from which he draws implements that never fail to produce unlimited abundance. This cave most properly falls under the rubric of "sacred landforms," but its unlimited wealth suggests the carefree ease of paradise. And these are but a few examples. We learn of Atlantis from a few tantalizing lines in Plato's *Timaeus*, the Elysian Fields from Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, and Valhalla from the Eddas. If we also explore fairy tales and science fiction and fantasy novels, we are certain to find many fairy kingdoms, extraterrestrial civilizations, and lost continents which entail significant hardship and luck to find, which are well-guarded against the unworthy, and which enjoy idyllic ease, endless wealth, and rational, benign governments.

Thus, as Eliade suggests, the world is filled with rivers, trees, and mountains that have been and are still seen as points of contact between the sacred and the profane. In the stories that follow we present tales that feature these tropes in various ways. We hope that our readers will consider not only which tropes are at work but the degree to which the places mentioned below are actual and mythic, and the degree to which they are humanly and divinely consecrated. Explorations of the meanings of place and the senses in which place becomes mythically sacred can and should take off from here in many directions.

The Zuni and the Grand Canyon

Zuni (Modern Account, Arizona)

This modern version of the Zuni emergence myth was written by Harry Chimoni of the Zuni Cultural Advisory team and E. Richard Hart, Institute of the North American West, in consultation with the other members of the Zuni Cultural Resources Advisory Team and a number of Zuni religious leaders. Chimoni's account was first presented at the 1994 annual meeting of the Western History Association, Albuquerque, New Mexico, October 22, 1994.

The Zunis first emerged out of Mother Earth's fourth womb at a sacred place deep within the Grand Canyon. Zuni religious leaders explained that the Zunis came out of *Chimik'yana'kya dey'a* in a group which included those peoples now known as the Havasupai and Hualapai. The Hopis emerged at the same time but at a different location. The Zunis, or A:shiwi as we call ourselves, came into the first light of Sun Father at a beautiful spot near Ribbon Falls. Naturally the first things that happened to us and the first things that we saw became prominent in our prayers, ceremonies and religion. The point from which the first ray of sunlight reached us over a spot on the canyon rim; the plants that grew along the stream that flows from Ribbon Falls to the Colorado River; the birds and animals that we saw as we traveled out into the world; the brilliantly-colored minerals in the rock walls of the canyon; all of these things are recounted sacred in our prayers, and have a central place in our religious activities and way of life.

After emerging into what non-Indians now call the Grand Canyon, we began a long search for *Idiwana'a*, the "Middle Place," a place where equilibrium and stability could be achieved, and where we could sustain ourselves for the foreseeable future. Many stops were made journeying up the Colorado River. Villages were built and offerings were made. When ancestral Zunis died they were buried near those villages with accompanying ceremonies and blessings.

At certain places during the later migration along the Little Colorado, the *Kokko*, our supernatural beings, delivered sacred information to the Zunis. Many of these villages and sacred places are remembered in our prayers and in the religious narratives that tell the story of our migration to *Idiwana'a*, the "Middle Place."

Still searching for the "Middle Place," the A:shiwi continued up what is now known as the Little Colorado River, stopping and settling at villages periodically, before moving on in their search. At the junction of the Little Colorado and the Zuni River the migrating A:shiwi had important interaction with the *Kokko* and supernatural beings. This spot came to be the place where all Zunis go after death, and is known in Zuni as *Kolhu/wala:wa*, or "Zuni Heaven."



MAP 6.1 Zuni territory and the Grand Canyon

Eventually the Zunis located the “Middle Place” near the headwaters of the Zuni River and settled there. The current village of Zuni is located at that “Middle Place” and we have been living there ever since, for many hundreds of years. The point of emergence, the place where Zunis go after death, and the village of the living Zunis, these three places and all their ancient villages and shrines in between them are all tied together by the sacred flowing waters of the Zuni River, the Little Colorado River, and the Colorado River. The water of these rivers is of central importance to Zunis’ prayers and offerings. The history of the A:shiwi is not only told in the prayers and religious narratives maintained by Zuni religious societies today, but in the ancestral ruins, graves, shrines, trails and sacred places left along these rivers and their tributaries from the time when Zuni was undertaking its great migration.

Zuni religious activity is oriented towards bringing rain, prosperity and stability to Zuni and to the rest of the world. Periodic visits and pilgrimages to locations along the Zuni migration route are necessary in order to carry out the duties of the various Zuni religious societies. At these sacred locations, Zunis say prayers and make offerings. Zuni religious leaders also collect samples of plants, pigments and water, and take those samples back to Zuni where they are used in religious ceremonies. Many ceremonial activities cannot be undertaken without these samples, which must be collected at the precise locations mentioned in the ancient Zuni prayers.

It has been thousands of years since the Zunis first emerged into the world in the Grand Canyon; long, long before Europeans ever set foot upon this continent, or on

Zuni territory. Zunis, consequently, have been making pilgrimages to shrines and sacred places on the Zuni River and in the Grand Canyon for many centuries.

Zunis do not make the same distinctions concerning “living” and “non-living” that many non-Indians make. To Zunis, the earth is alive. The walls of the Grand Canyon, the rocks, the minerals, and pigments there, and the water that flows between the walls of the canyon are all alive. Like any other living being, the earth can be harmed, injured and hurt when it is cut, gouged, or in any other ways mistreated. So, we believe that the Grand Canyon itself is alive and sacred. The minerals used for pigments, the native plants and animals mentioned in our prayers and religious narratives, and the water of the river and its tributaries are sacred to us and should be protected.

The Emergence

Zuni (Traditional Account, Arizona)

The following reading is a traditional Zuni account collected by Ruth Benedict during the first half of the 20th century. Compare this narrative with the previous, modern version. In both stories, the idea of process, of journeying from a state of incompleteness to a state of perfection gives the plot of each its direction. In the modern account, the emergence of the Zuni from the “beautiful spot” near Ribbon Falls and gradual migration from there to the “Middle Place” permits the myth-teller, Harry Chimoni, to reiterate his people’s connection to various sacred sites where their ancestors settled temporarily or received instruction from the *Kokko* that ultimately established Zuni religious practice and culture. In the more ancient account, the focus is less on the people and more on the actions of Elder and Younger Brother, Zuni divinities that gradually lead and gradually perfect the people as they make their lengthy journey from the subterranean “fourth world” into the daylight world of Father Sun. Both stories, however, suggest that this world is sacred and a place of “equilibrium and stability” perfectly suited for the Zuni to live and worship.

They were living in the fourth world. It was dark. They could not see one another. They stepped upon one another, they urinated upon one another, they spat upon one another, they threw refuse upon one another. They could not breathe. They lived there four days [years]. The Sun took pity upon them. He saw that the world was covered with hills and springs but there were no people to give him prayer sticks. He thought, “My people shall come to the daylight world.”

The earth was covered with mist. He threw his rays into the mist and there in the world his sons stood up. Their hair was tangled, they had long noses, long cheeks. Next day they played together. The third day the younger brother said to the elder, "Let us go and look for beautiful places. I will go to Corn Mountain and you shall go to the south Where the Cotton Hangs." The third day they went. The younger looked over the world and he saw that nobody lived there. He said to himself, "Tomorrow we shall be old enough to work."

When the next day came he called his brother. Elder Brother came and said, "What is it that you have to say that you have called me?" Younger Brother said, "We are four days old and we are old enough to work. This is a good world and nobody lives in it. Let us go to the southwest. There below the people are living in the fourth world. They are our fathers and mothers, our sons and daughters. There is no light there, no room to move about. They cannot see one another. They step on one another, they urinate upon one another. They should come to this world where they can see our father Sun."

Elder Brother answered, "It is as you say. We will go and try."

The two went to the southwest and they came to the entrance to the fourth world. They went in and came to the first world. There was just a little light there. They came to the second world. It was dark. They came to the third world. It was darker still. They came to the fourth world. It was black. The people could not see each other. They felt one another with their hands and recognized their faces. They said, "Some stranger has come. Where is it that you have come from? It is our fathers, the bow priests." They ran to feel them and they said, "Our fathers, you have come. Teach us how to get out of this place. We have heard of our father Sun and we wish to see him."

The two answered, "We have come to bring you to the other world where you can see him. Will you come with us?"

The people answered, "Yes, we wish to go. In this world we cannot see one another. We step upon one another, we urinate upon one another, we spit upon one another, we throw refuse upon one another. It is nasty here. We wish to see our father Sun. We have been waiting for someone to show us the way, but our brothers must come too. As the priest of the north says, so let it be."

The two "needed" the priest of the north. He came and said, "I have come. What is it that you wish to ask?"

"We want you to come into the daylight world."

"Yes, we shall be glad to come. We want to see our father Sun, but my brothers must come too. As the priest of the east says, so let it be." [Repeat for east, south, west.]

They said to them, "Do you know how we can get to the daylight world?" Younger Brother went to the north. He took the seeds of the pine tree and planted them. He turned about and, when he looked where he had planted, the pine had already grown. He turned again and, when he looked at the tree, the branches were grown to full size. He tore off a branch and brought it back to the people. He went to the west and planted the seeds of the spruce. He turned about and, when he looked where he had planted, the spruce had already grown. He turned again and, when he looked at the tree, the branches were grown to full size. He tore off a branch and brought it back to the people. He went to the south and planted the seeds of the sil-

ver spruce. He turned about and, when he looked where he had planted the seeds, the silver spruce had already grown. He turned again and, when he looked at the tree, the branches were grown to full size. He tore off a branch and brought it back to the people. He went to the east and planted the seeds of the aspen. He turned about and, when he looked where he had planted the seeds, the aspen had already grown. He turned again and, when he looked, the branches had grown to full size. He tore off a branch and brought it back to the people. He said, "This is all. We are ready to go up to the upper world. My people, make yourselves ready. Take those things that you live by."

The bow priests took the long prayer stick [elbow length] they had made from the pine of the north. They set it in the earth. The people went up the prayer stick and came into the third world. There was rumbling like thunder. It was lighter in that world and the people were blinded. The bow priests said, "Have we all come out?"

They answered, "Yes. Is it here that we are going to live?"

They answered, "Not yet. This is not the upper world." They lived there four days [years]. The bow priests took the crook of the west that they had made from the spruce. They set it in the earth. There was rumbling like thunder and the people came up into the second world. It was twilight there and the people were blinded. The bow priests said, "Have we all come out?"

"Yes. Is it here that we shall live?"

"Not yet." They remained there four days [years] and the two took the long prayer stick that they had made from the silver spruce of the south and set it in the earth. There was rumbling like thunder and the people came up into the first world. It was light like red dawn. They were dazzled and they said, "Is it here that we shall live?"

They answered, "Not yet." The people were sad. They could see each other quite plain. Their bodies were covered with dirt and with ashes. They were stained with spit and urine and they had green slime on their heads. Their hands and feet were webbed and they had tails and no mouths or exits. They remained there four days [years]. The bow priests took the long prayer stick they had made from the aspen of the east and they set it in the earth. There was rumbling like thunder and the people came up into the daylight world. The two bow priests came first and after them those who carried the medicine bundles, the *ka'etone*, *tcu'etone*, *mu'etone* and *le'etone*. When they came into the sunlight the tears ran down their cheeks. Younger Brother said to them, "Turn to the sun and look full at our father Sun no matter how bright it is." They cried out for it hurt them and their tears ran to the ground. Everywhere they were standing the sun's flowers [sunflowers and buttercups] sprang up from the tears caused by the sun. The people said, "Is this the world where we shall live?"

"Yes, this is the last world. Here you see our father Sun." They remained there four days [years] and they went on.

They came to Slime Spring. They lived there four days [years] and the bow priests said, "It is time our people learned to eat." They took the corn of the witch and they put it in the fields to *itsumawe*. When it had grown they harvested it and the men took it home to their wives. They smelled it, but they had no way to eat. The bow priests were sad and Younger Brother said, "Older Brother, the people have made *itsumawe* and I am sorry for them that they cannot eat. Let us cut them so that they can enjoy food."

Elder Brother agreed and his brother said, “When everyone is asleep we shall go to each house and cut mouths in their faces.”

That night after the people were asleep, the bow priests took their [ceremonial] stone knives and sharpened them with a red whetstone. They went to each house. They cut each face where the skin of the mouth was puffed up. The knife made the lips red from the red of the whetstone. They went home. When the sun rose the people found that they had mouths. They said, “What makes our faces so flat?” They began to get hungry and the men brought in corn and water and they ate. That night they were uncomfortable because they had no exits. They could not defecate.

Younger Brother thought, “We should cut the anus so that they can defecate.” He went to his brother and he said, “These people should have the anus. Let us cut it tonight when they are asleep.” Elder Brother agreed and they took the [smaller] stone knives and sharpened them on a soot whetstone. They cut the anus for all the people and the soot colored those parts black. Next morning the people were uncomfortable and they went outside. They thought they had broken open in their sleep.

They tried to break up the corn so that they could eat it better. They took whetstones in their webbed hands and rubbed the corn on the hearthstone. They mixed porridge and made corncakes. After they had made it, it was hard to clean their hands for they were webbed, and the Younger Brother said to Elder Brother, “I am sorry for my people that their hands are webbed. Let us cut their fingers apart.”

Elder Brother agreed and that night they took the [larger] stone knife and cut the webbed hands and feet of the people. In the morning the people were frightened but when the sun had risen they did not notice any more. They worked better with fingers and toes.

The next day Younger Brother said to the older, “Our people have been cut. They still have tails, and horns. Let us cut them away.”

Elder Brother agreed and they took the [smaller] stone knife. They went to each house and cut the tails and horns from their people. In the morning the people were frightened but when the sun rose they did not mind any more. They were glad that they were finished.

Bighorn Medicine Wheel

Northern Cheyenne, Northern Arapaho,
Eastern Shoshone, and Crow (Wyoming)

The following account, written by Andrew Gulliford, is neither a myth nor, strictly speaking, mythology. We have broken with our own organizational pattern by including this chapter from a “secondary” source because it illustrates the immensely complex



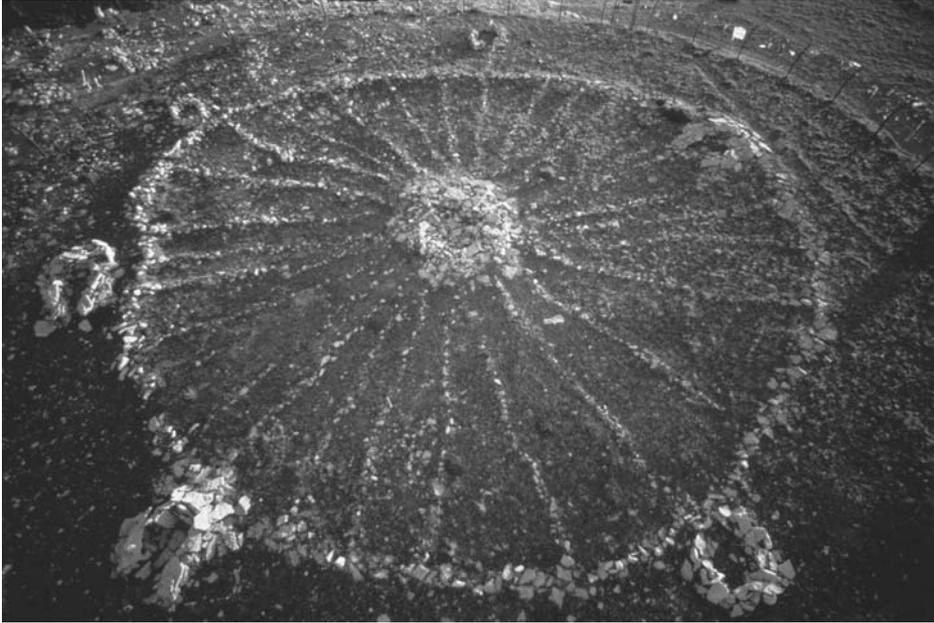
MAP 6.2 Approximate pre-contact area of the Blackfoot Nation and the location of the Bighorn Medicine Wheel.

present-day sociopolitical and economic interests that can collide at sacred sites.

Located atop Medicine Mountain at 9,642 feet in the Bighorn National Forest of Wyoming, the Medicine Wheel is one of the most intriguing combinations of archaeological features and sacred sites west of the Mississippi River. Situated above timberline, Medicine Mountain represents over 10,000 years of Native American culture in a spectacular setting that generates its own weather and spiritual power. A National Historic Landmark since 1970, the Medicine Wheel attracted the attention of anthropologists and historians early in the twentieth century, and it is one of dozens of wheels scattered across the northern Great Plains and southern Canada; eighty feet in diameter, it is the largest in the United States.

Northern Cheyenne elder William Tall Bull explained that the Medicine Wheel “is an altar for the mountain,” and the Historic Preservation Plan developed in 1996 to manage the wheel represents one of the best case studies in sacred site access, compromise, and preservation protection. The preservation plan’s purpose “is to ensure that the Medicine Wheel and Medicine Mountain are managed in a manner that protects the integrity of the site as a sacred site and a nationally important traditional cultural property.”

The medicine wheel complex of cairns, spokes, teepee rings, lithic scatters, buried archaeological sites, system of ancient travois trails, and rock clusters is revered by mountain and Plains tribes, including the Northern Arapaho, Eastern



Bighorn Medicine Wheel, Bighorn National Forest, Wyoming. This sacred site has astronomical as well as spiritual significance. It is aligned to the four sacred directions and various points along its axes align with the summer and winter solstice sunrise.

Source: © Courtney Milne

Shoshone, Northern Cheyenne, and Crow Indians. A stone tool quarry close by may be thousands of years old. Classic U-shaped vision quest enclosures are at the site, in addition to small stone circles. Possibly constructed 1,500 years ago, the wheel has been utilized, built, rebuilt, and formed over centuries and is still an actively used religious site both for local tribes and native peoples from all over the nation who come on pilgrimages and leave offerings of cloth, sage, sweetgrass, beads, and bundles. Approximately 245 feet in circumference, with a central cairn, the wheel includes twenty-eight spokes that radiate to the outer rim of the circle. Around the rim are six smaller cairns, four of which face the center; one faces north and the other east. At one time, the smaller cairns may have been covered with skins placed atop wooden posts. The central cairn is the largest and measures twelve feet by seven feet.

Who built the cairn and why remains a mystery, though Crow Indians insist it was built “before the light came” and “by people without iron,” possibly the Shoshonean band of Sheepeaters who lived at high elevations and hunted mountain sheep. A piece of wood found in the wheel has been dated to AD 1760, a trade bead dates to the early 1800s, and other radiocarbon dates vary from 420 to 6,650 years ago. A projectile point has been found nearby that dates to 9,000 years before the present, and trails leave the wheel from all directions as they go up and over the Bighorn Mountains toward the Great Plains to the east or the Yellowstone Country to the west. The Medicine Wheel may be an ancient astronomical observatory, with

cairns placed at specific locations to mark rising stars during the summer solstice. Other scholars suggest the structure resembles the Sun Dance Lodge or Medicine Lodge so important to Plains Indian religious traditions. The Crow believe that spokes of the wheel are also similar to the placement of poles for tepees and that the wheel was built to demonstrate how to correctly construct homes.

A contemporary Cheyenne cultural leader explained,

The tribes traditionally went and still go to the sacred mountain. The people sought the high mountain for prayer. They sought spiritual harmony with the powerful spirits there. Many offerings have always been left on this mountain. The center cairn, once occupied by a large buffalo skull, was a place to make prayer offerings. Vision questers would have offered prayers of thanks for plant and animal life that had, and would, sustain them in the future. Prayers of thanks were offered for all of creation. Prayers are made for families and for loved ones who are ill. Atonements are made for any offense to Mother Earth. When asking for guidance, prayers for wisdom and strength are always part of this ritual. All of this is done so that spiritual harmony will be our constant companion throughout the year.

Young men go to the wheel for vision quests today as they have done for centuries, and many chiefs and prominent Indians have fasted there. A Crow story relates the vision quest of Red Plume, a Crow chief of the early nineteenth century who found spiritual medicine at the wheel during four days there without food or water. Red Plume was visited by little people who inhabited the wheel. They took him into the earth where they lived, and he learned that the red eagle would be his spirit guardian, so he always wore the small feather from the back of the eagle, above its longer tail feathers—hence the name Red Plume. As he lay dying, he told his people that his spirit would live at the wheel and that they could talk with him there.

John Hill, from Crow Agency, Montana, said, “The Medicine Wheel is very dear to the American Plains Indian tribes; in fact, the Medicine Wheel itself is the root of the Plains Indian religion.” Enemy tribes would approach the wheel at certain times of the year and would “come up to the foot of the hill and lay down their arms and prepare their candidates for the fasting program or their vision quest programs and others would prepare those candidates for the pilgrimage up the hill to the Medicine Wheel itself and they would meet up there, these enemy, these warring tribes.”

Hill further explained that the Medicine Wheel “is a religious shrine, it is a prayer site, it’s a spiritual site [similar to] holy places throughout the world—the Vatican in Rome, the Temple in Salt Lake City, other places across the seas. It is not the church that is powerful; it’s the spirit transmitted through the church, and here we have a site that we observe and recognize as a spiritual prayer site.”

For tribes, the Medicine Wheel is an ongoing religious site of paramount importance, but for most of the twentieth century, the U.S. Forest Service, which manages Medicine Mountain, misunderstood the site and thought of it only as an interesting archaeological site with no contemporary significance. Forest Service personnel insisted on managing the site within the ideological framework of “multiple use” for a variety of timber, grazing, and other interests. A district ranger for the Bighorn National Forest once stated at a public meeting, “That pile of rocks could be bulldozed over the side of the mountain” for all he cared, as long as the Forest

Service complied with certain regulations. Religious values at the site were ignored, and local nonnative residents insisted they had never seen Indians near the Medicine Wheel and that it was not important to nearby tribes.

But as the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office noted, “To contemporary Native Americans, the Medicine Wheel and the surrounding terrain constitute a uniquely important and sacred landscape that figures prominently in tribal oral and ceremonial traditions. To Indian people, the rock alignments and cairns that comprise the Medicine Wheel represent religious architecture rather than inanimate archaeological data.” Quietly over the years, Indians had secretly used the wheel for vision quests and made special pilgrimages to the mountain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries despite the fact that white Indian agents on reservations prohibited travel for traditional religious purposes. Native Americans are reluctant to talk about sacred sites, and as *National Register Bulletin #38* revealed, “Particularly because properties of traditional cultural significance are often kept secret, it is not uncommon for them to be ‘discovered’ only when something threatens them—for example, when a change in land-use is proposed in their vicinity.”

Imagine the consternation when, in 1988, the superintendent of the Bighorn National Forest, in conjunction with businessmen in Lovell, Wyoming, sought to erect at the sacred wheel a massive metal overhead observation platform, a parking lot for 200 vehicles including recreational vehicles, road improvements, and huts for cross-country skiers and snowmobilers. Years of Indian silence came to an end. The tribes became incensed at this commercialization of their religious shrine. The Medicine Wheel Alliance targeted the Forest Service’s proposal to cut timber on Medicine Mountain, and the Medicine Wheel Coalition was formed to stop the threat to the wheel because of its National Historic Landmark status. Both groups insisted that the U.S. Forest Service abide by national preservation laws, and they successfully thwarted local development of the site and demanded that the Bighorn National Forest staff consider other alternatives.

The U.S. Forest Service prepared an environmental assessment and, to their surprise, received over 800 letters; 95 percent of the letter writers “wanted nothing done at the site except to protect it for Native American spiritual use,” stated Mary Randolph, who was the Bighorn Forest’s public affairs officer. She remembered,

No one was quite sure how to deal with this. At forestry school, they don’t teach you religion or spirituality, or how to manage a sacred site. Meetings between state and federal agencies and Native American organizations involved were not going well. Meetings between the parties were antagonistic, unproductive and usually ended with less and less trust.

Eventually, as the nonnative land managers came to understand Indian spirituality and began to act as interested individuals instead of federal bureaucrats, discussion began.

Seven parties consulted on the Wheel, including the Medicine Wheel Coalition, the Medicine Wheel Alliance, the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation, the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Big Horn County Commissioners, and the U.S. Forest Service. The FAA got involved because a little over one mile east of the wheel is a radar dome that tracks

airplanes crossing the northern Rockies. Issues focused on development and access. Native Americans agreed that tourists could continue to visit the site but said that it should be closed for traditional cultural use for religious ceremonies. Development should be minimal, and the site should be treated with respect. In 1995, 16,275 visitors came to the site, including 840 Native Americans.

Final completion of the Medicine Wheel Historic Preservation Plan in 1996 represents one of the best models of cooperation among tribes and federal agencies, although the agreement took years to work out because relationships between Indians and land managers were originally hostile. Before the eventual compromise was reached, several USFS employees had been transferred or resigned because of heated pressure and public debates. Forest Service managers and Big Horn County Commissioners also threatened preservationists. According to Alan Stanfill of the Advisory Council for Historic Preservation,

More than once, the Forest Supervisor met with State and Council officials in unsuccessful attempts to have staff members of the SHPO and Advisory Council dismissed from the negotiations and their jobs. Newspaper articles quoting the commissioners and the Forest Service appeared regularly and invariably contained personal insults, accusations of impropriety, misinformation, and political posturing to promote public and political sympathy.

Defending Indian sacred sites is never easy in the West, especially when locals favor development dollars over First Amendment religious freedoms.

Controversy began with the ill-conceived plan to publicize the wheel and to install a massive observation tower that tourists could climb. In order to reduce vandalism to the prehistoric spokes and stone alignments, the wheel was already encased in a chain-link fence with barbed wire jutting out at the top. Crow Indian John Hill explained that in 1991, a Pennsylvania family picked up a rock at the wheel during their vacation and took it home with them, only to experience much bad luck and numerous accidents in the next several months. Hill related that, in desperation, “the family wrapped up their rock very neatly, very nice like a Christmas present, and they sent it back to the Postmaster of Crow Agency” with a plea to have the rock returned. Hill continued:

So that was in December and the Medicine Wheel is the hardest to get to at that time of year with snowdrifts sometimes as high as fifteen feet. So we took it up the 12th of July, took the rock up there and went through what we call a cleansing ceremony for the rock itself, used sweetgrass, sweet cedar, sweet sage, Indian tobacco, not from North Carolina, but native Indian tobacco from right here, and we used medicine root and smudged the rock.

Hill and a friend restored the rock to the Medicine Wheel and simultaneously restored the health and safety of the family who had taken it.

As for the wheel itself, Alan Stanfill explained that the sacred qualities of this special place “still exist because people cared enough about it to become involved in deliberations over its future. The destruction of the Wheel was as likely as its protection. The reason that some assurance of its protection resulted from the consultation effort is because enough people put enough pressure on the decision makers to make it too painful to decide otherwise.”

A key facet of the Historic Preservation Plan requires all new Forest Service staffers to meet with concerned tribal members and be briefed on the significance of the wheel before they take on their new responsibilities. In this way, the acrimony and misunderstandings of the past will not be repeated, and Native Americans will be part of the training process to ensure that new USFS personnel understand the mysteries of the wheel and its deep and abiding religious importance; thereafter, “when leadership changes in the agency occur, management direction will not.” The plan “is meant to be an ongoing living document which adapts to the needs of the site and the people who use and treasure it.”

In the final preservation plan, the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office stated,

The Medicine Wheel, and the surrounding ethnographic, historic, and archaeological localities comprise a set of uniquely significant cultural resources that merit the greatest possible protection under the law. The Native American traditional use areas and other sites that occupy Medicine Mountain express a profound spiritual heritage, as well as anthropological values, that are connected by the common thread of centuries of use by Native Americans. It is one of the very few historic reserves in the United States where the prehistoric past and ethnographic present are unequivocally linked.

As the preservation plan indicated, “Ceremonial activities are ongoing today, resulting in the continued creation, renewal, or modification of these sites.”

This is the dynamic nature of ongoing religion. Multiple uses such as grazing, camping, timber management, and commercial pursuits will now be excluded from the area near the wheel. Mary Randolph stated that the Medicine Wheel Preservation Plan “has become a model for management of sacred sites across the country and for many federal agencies.” Though working on the plan was difficult, she added that “for many of us it represents the highlight of our careers in federal government.”

According to the National Register nomination, “The Medicine Wheel clearly represents a continuity of Native spiritual symbolism that extends into an unknown and distant past and is now recognized among virtually all contemporary Plains tribes.” Indian religion is highly individualistic, and the nomination said, “Each different practitioner acts within a deep and complex spiritual tradition, but within that tradition he acts as his own direct connection [with the Creator] when the Spirit moves him,” and thus Indians may realign stones or set up new stone features at an ancient site, as Bill Tall Bull did. Though religious practices among tribes differ, common sacred site requirements include land that “must be largely undisturbed, the plants and animals and rocks and waters must be accessible, there must be opportunities for solitude, and free movement and access to the Mountain must be available.” This is essential because “there must not be such intensive intrusion into the natural landscape that the spirits inhabiting the landscape are forced to leave. All this requires a National Historic Landmark of some size.”

The Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office is now in the process of expanding the boundaries for the Medicine Wheel National Historic Landmark to fully accommodate associated trails, shrines, cairns, petroglyph sites, and other religious features not fully understood when the wheel itself was discovered by settlers and scientists a century ago. Adjacent sites include staging areas for religious

activities, such as sweat lodges in the lower valleys. Local people over the years had helped to protect the wheel and suggested it be fenced to deter vandalism. Now the Medicine Wheel is both protected and properly interpreted as a sacred place, and tribes will be contacted to help provide on-site interpreters. Visitors must walk a mile and a half to the site, and for a minimum of twelve days between July 1 and November 1 the site is subject to a voluntary closure to allow Native Americans privacy to conduct ancient ceremonies and initiations. Otherwise, visitation is encouraged, provided the site is approached in a respectful manner. At the wheel, Indians also gather plants, herbs, and other materials for ceremonial, religious, or traditional cultural purposes. At 10,000 feet in elevation, the viewshed of the Medicine Wheel is an important value of the sacred site, and currently, the Federal Aviation Agency's Long Range Radar Facility is a jarring visual factor on the landscape directly to the east of the wheel. As the satellite global positioning technology system (GPS) becomes perfected, it is hoped the dome will be removed within the next 20 years.

To stand on Medicine Mountain at dawn on a summer morning is to sense the power of the peak and the sacred spokes of the wheel. When the fog slowly lifts, one may feel spirits there among the stones and offerings carefully hung on the fence and placed in vision quest sites by those seeking knowledge. When the Framers of the Constitution drafted the First Amendment to protect religious freedom, the Medicine Wheel was already centuries old. To be there at dawn is to know the power of a sacred place.

The Medicine Wheel

Hyemeyohsts Storm (Wyoming)

According to his website, Hyemeyohsts (Wolf) Storm was raised on the Northern Cheyenne and Crow reservations of Montana and was from an early age apprenticed to the Maya Indian "Zero Chief" and holy woman Estcheemah, who was born during the Indian Wars of the late 1800s. According to Storm, she was one of the most powerful Medicine Chiefs of her time and was the one who passed on to him the histories and knowledge of the Zero Chiefs that preceded her. After maturing in the self-discipline that Estcheemah taught him for over 20 years, Storm emerged as a teacher in his own right and has spent the last 30 years transmitting her revelations to others as artist, writer, and lecturer. Since the publication of his first book, *Seven Arrows*, from which the following excerpt is taken, Storm founded and directs the Circle of the Earth Temple and Institute and the International School of Metis Art.

Source: Excerpts from pages 4–7 of *Seven Arrows* by Hyemeyohsts Storm. Copyright © 1972 by Hyemeyohsts Storm. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

In the previous reading, we learned about the cultural and political complexities of designating the Bighorn Medicine Wheel both a sacred place and a national park. In what follows, we read about the spiritual and symbolic significance of medicine wheels from the perspective of someone for whom these sacred places are a crucial part of his religious practice. It is interesting to note that native American religion as Storm practices it has much in common with the mystical traditions of the world's so-called major religions inasmuch as it, too, teaches that all beings and things in the universe are interconnected and of equal importance. The medicine wheel both mirrors and orients the practitioner to the totality of the universe and teaches that everything is, by nature, in harmony with everything else in the cosmos.

While this reading is, like the previous one, not, strictly speaking, myth or mythology per se, it helps provide a worldview context necessary for reading many Native American myths in this book and elsewhere.

In many ways this Circle, the Medicine Wheel, can best be understood if you think of it as a mirror in which everything is reflected. "The Universe is the Mirror of the People," the old Teachers tell us, "and each person is a Mirror to every other person."

Any idea, person, or object can be a Medicine Wheel, a Mirror, for man. The tiniest flower can be such a Mirror, as can a wolf, a story, a touch, a religion, or a mountain top. For example, one person alone on a mountain top at night might feel fear. Another might feel calm and peaceful. Still another might feel nothing at all. In each case the mountain top would be the same, but it would be perceived differently as it reflected the feelings of the different people who experienced it. This book, *Seven Arrows*, is such a Mirror. It is a Medicine Wheel, just as you are.

Here is a drawing of a simple Medicine Wheel. (see fig. 6.1). Among the People, the Teachers usually constructed it from small stones or pebbles, which they would place like this before them upon the ground.

Each one of these tiny stones within the Medicine Wheel represents one of the many things of the Universe. One of them represents you, and another represents me. Others hold within them our mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and our friends. Still others symbolize hawks, buffalo, elks and wolves. There are also stones which represent religions, governments, philosophies, and even entire nations. All things are contained within the Medicine Wheel, and all things are equal within it. The Medicine Wheel is the Total Universe.

Our Teachers tell us that all things within this Universe Wheel know of their Harmony with every other thing, and know how to *Give-Away* one to the other, except man. Of all the Universe's creatures, it is we alone who do not begin our lives with knowledge of this great Harmony.

All the things of the Universe Wheel have spirit and life, including the rivers, rocks, earth, sky, plants and animals. But it is only man, of all the Beings on the Wheel, who is a determiner. Our determining spirit can be made whole only through the learning of our harmony with all our brothers and sisters, and with all the other

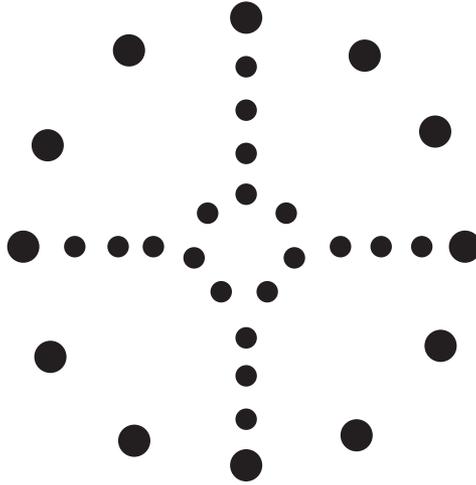


FIGURE 6.1 Simple Medicine Wheel, as illustrated in *Seven Arrows*.

spirits of the Universe. To do this we must learn to seek and to perceive. We must do this to find our place within the Medicine Wheel. To determine this place we must learn to *Give-Away*.

The *Vision Quest*, or perceiving quest, is the way we must begin this search. We must all follow our Vision Quest to discover ourselves, to learn how we perceive of ourselves, and to find our relationship with the world around us.

THE POWERS

Among the People, a child's first Teaching is of the Four Great Powers of the Medicine Wheel.

To the North on the Medicine Wheel is found Wisdom. The Color of the Wisdom of the North is White, and its Medicine Animal is the Buffalo. The South is represented by the Sign of the Mouse, and its Medicine Color is Green. The South is the place of Innocence and Trust, and for perceiving closely our nature of heart. The West is the Looks-Within Place, which speaks of the Introspective nature of man. The Color of this Place is Black. The East is marked by the Sign of the Eagle. It is the Place of Illumination, where we can see things clearly far and wide. Its Color is the Gold of the Morning Star.

At birth, each of us is given a particular Beginning Place within these Four Great Directions on the Medicine Wheel. This Starting Place gives us our first way of perceiving things, which will then be our easiest and most natural way throughout our lives.

But any person who perceives from only one of these Four Great Directions will remain just a partial man. For example, a man who possesses only the Gift of the North will be wise. But he will be a cold man, a man without feeling. And the man

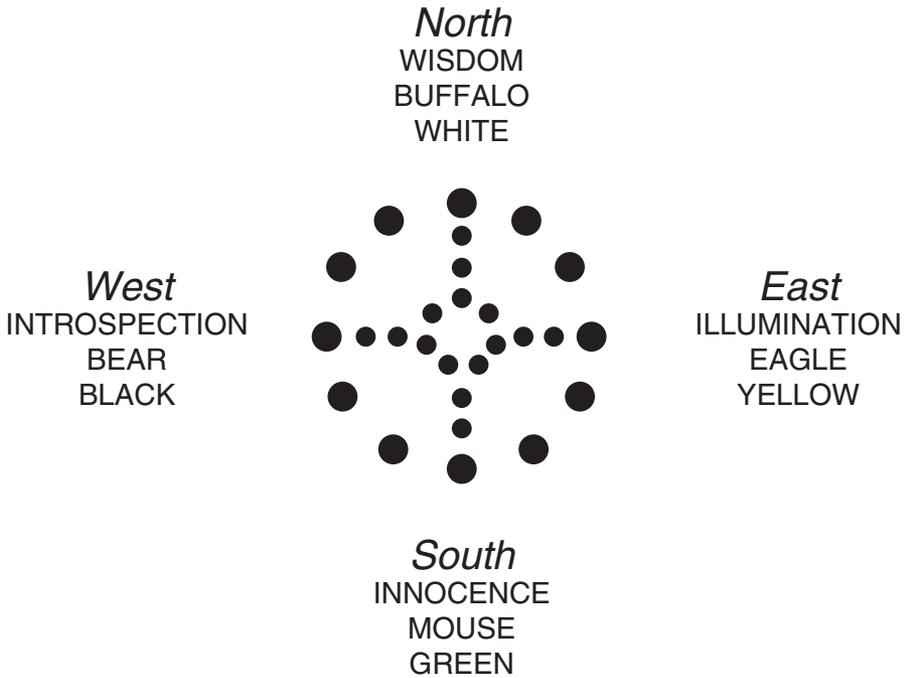


FIGURE 6.2 The Four Great Powers of the Medicine Wheel, as illustrated in *Seven Arrows*.

who lives only in the East will have the clear, far sighted vision of the Eagle, but he will never be close to things. This man will feel separated, high above life, and will never understand or believe that he can be touched by anything.

A man or woman who perceives only from the West will go over the same thought again and again in their mind, and will always be undecided. And if a person has only the Gift of the South, he will see everything with the eyes of a Mouse. He will be too close to the ground and too near sighted to see anything except what is right in front of him, touching his whiskers.

There are many people who have two or three of these Gifts, but these people still are not Whole. A man might be a Bear person from the East, or an Eagle person of the South. The first of these men would have the Gift of seeing Introspectively within Illumination, but he would lack the Gifts of Touching and Wisdom. The second would be able to see clearly and far. But he would still not know of the things of the North, nor of the Looks-Within Place.

In this same way, a person might also be a Golden Bear of the North, or a Black Eagle of the South. But none of these people would yet be Whole. After each of us has learned of our Beginning Gift, our First Place on the Medicine Wheel, we must then Grow by Seeking Understanding in each of the Four Great Ways. Only in this way can we become Full, capable of Balance and Decision in what we do . . .

THE TOUCHING

To Touch and Feel is to Experience. Many people live out their entire lives without really Touching or being Touched by anything. These people live within a world of mind and imagination that may move them sometimes to joy, tears, happiness or sorrow. But these people never really Touch. They do not live and become one with life.

The Sun Dancer believes that each person is a unique Living Medicine Wheel, powerful beyond imagination, that has been limited and placed upon this earth to Touch, Experience and Learn. The Six Grandfathers Taught me that each man, woman, and child at one time was a Living Power that existed somewhere in time and space. These powers were without form, but they were aware. They were alive.

Each Power possessed boundless energy and beauty. These living Medicine Wheels were capable of nearly anything. They were beautiful and perfect in all ways except one. They had no understanding of limitation, no experience of substance. These beings were total energy of the Mind, without Body or Heart. They were placed upon this earth that they might Learn the things of the Heart through Touching.

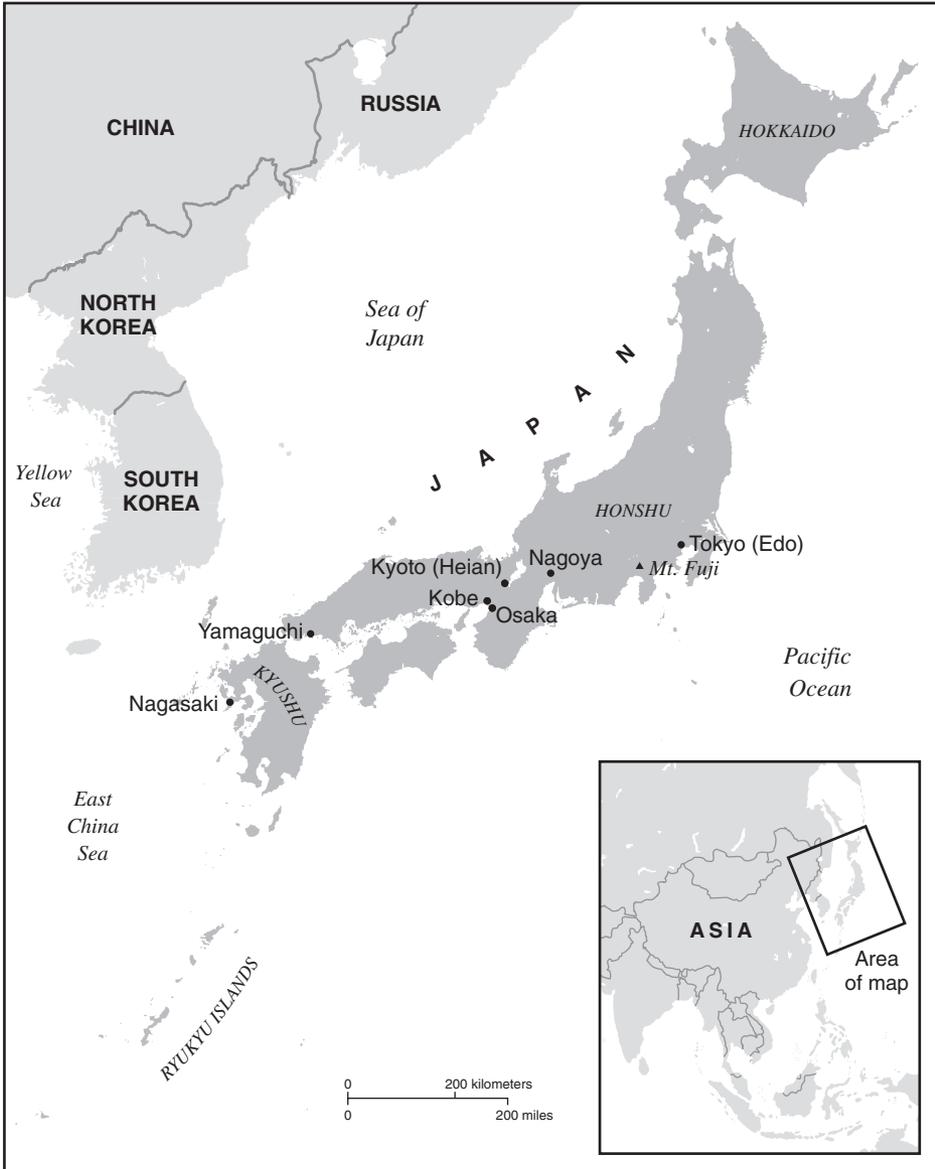
According to the Teachers, there is only one thing that all people possess equally. This is their loneliness. No two people on the face of this earth are alike in any one thing except for their loneliness. This is the cause of our Growing, but it is also the cause of our wars. Love, hate, greed and generosity are all rooted within our loneliness, within our desire to be needed and loved.

The only way that we can overcome our loneliness is through Touching. It is only in this way that we can learn to be Total Beings. God is a presence of this Total. *Heamavihio*, the Breath of Wisdom, and *Miaheyyun*, Total Understanding, are but two of the words in the Cheyenne language which express this wholeness.

Sacred Landforms in Japan

Japanese

All cultures tell stories about sacred places, but it may fairly be said that sacred places are particularly numerous in Japan. This may well be the case because the native religion of this country, Shinto, views all landforms—indeed, all things—as being closely associated with a particular *kami* (god). In the *Kojiki*, the mythical account of Japan's origins, we read of the *kami* of wheat, the *kami* of a particular lake, the *kamis* of mountains, stones, and trees. Thus, each natural thing in the material world has its own *kami* and practitioners of Shinto believe that the natural world is sacred



MAP 6.3 Japan

and that one draws close to the gods when one is in nature. Indeed, natural objects are worshipped as embodiments of the gods.

After the arrival of Buddhism to Japan in the 7th century CE, the two religions merged to a significant degree. Shinto practitioners tended to view the Buddha as a *kami* and Buddhists tended to think of the *kami* as Buddhas and venerable ancestors. Indeed,

many weddings in modern Japan are performed by Shinto priests while most funeral services are conducted by Buddhist priests. This cross-pollination of spiritual traditions is particularly noticeable in the following story in which the mountains Yatsu-ga-take and Fuji are associated with their respective deities, but Buddha Amida is called upon to settle their dispute about which is loftier. In the Japanese stories that follow, mountains, wells, trees, and springs are the sites of shrines, notable deeds, and are respected as sacred, emphasizing the traditional importance that Japanese culture has placed on nature and particular landforms as places where the divine is revealed.

In ancient times Yatsu-ga-take was higher than Mt. Fuji. Once the female deity of Fuji (Asama-sama) and the male deity of Yatsu-ga-take (Gongen-sama) had a contest to see which was higher. They asked the Buddha Amida to decide which one was loftier. It was a difficult task. Amida ran a water pipe from the summit of Yatsu-ga-take to the summit of Fuji-san and poured water in the pipe. The water flowed to Fuji-san, so Amida decided that Fuji-san was defeated.

Although Fuji-san was a woman, she was too proud to recognize her defeat. She beat the summit of Yatsu-ga-take with a big stick. So his head was split into eight parts, and that is why Yatsu-ga-take [Eight Peaks] now has eight peaks.

The Mountain of the Lotus and the Fan

Japanese

The beautifully symmetrical, snow-capped cone of Mount Fuji, or Fujiyama (The Never-Dying Mountain), is recognized the world over. It symbolizes, for many Japanese, the permanence of beauty, tranquility, and divine mystery in a world of change and secular striving.

Poets and street-corner philosophers have likened its majestic presence to a white lotus or an inverted, wide-stretched fan. The reference to the lotus blossom links it to the sacred flower of the Lord Buddha, the eight points of which are said to symbolize Buddha's Eightfold Path of Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. For centuries, poets and artists have found inspiration in Fuji. The following poem suggests the religious and aesthetic appeal of this sacred place.



The 12,388-ft. snow-capped peak of Mount Fuji looms above a rural road. Since much of the surrounding land is near sea level, Fuji can be seen from great distances on clear days.

Source: © Digital Stock

In fact, for many contemporary Japanese, the myths surrounding Fuji are forgotten—or, if not forgotten, seen as quaint antiques. Nevertheless, Mt. Fuji-san (Japanese usually add the honorific term “san” to Fuji’s name) is a particularly interesting case of multilayered significances for a sacred place as seen by local peoples. As the stories about Fuji-san we present show, the mountain has very ancient mythic roots. But Fuji is not simply the locus of ancient myth; she is sacred in another sense as well. For many Japanese Fuji-san serves as an emblem of the nation of Japan. To view the rising sun (another national emblem) from the rim of the crater of Fuji is thus a doubly powerful goal for the many thousands of pilgrims who hike to the top of Fuji in the middle of the night, stopping at mountain huts at numerous stages along the way for tea or beer or noodles or a short sleep—or to purchase bottles of oxygen since altitude sickness is common among climbers who mostly live near sea level.

Fuji Yama,
Touched by thy divine breath,
We return to the shape of God.
Thy silence is Song,



Mount Fuji. Ink and color on silk by Katsushika Hokusai, seventeenth century. This idealized image of Fuji emphasizes the symmetry of this summit. Notice that Fuji's crater is smoking in this painting. The last major eruption of this still active volcano in historic times occurred about the time this painting was executed.

Source: *Boy and Mt. Fuji* by Katsushika Hokusai. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1898.

Thy song is the song of Heaven:
 Our land of fever and care
 Turns to a home of mellow-eyed ease—
 The home away from the land
 Where mortals are born only to die.
 We Japanese daughters and sons,
 Chanting of thy fair majesty,
 The pride of God,
 Seal our shadows in thy bosom,
 The balmiest place of eternity,
 O white-faced wonder,
 O matchless sight,
 O sublimity, O Beauty!
 The thousand rivers carry thy sacred image
 On their brows;
 All the mountains raise their heads unto thee
 Like the flowing tide,
 As if to hear thy final command.

Behold! the seas surrounding Japan
 Lose their hungry-toothed song and wolfish desire,
 Kissed by lullaby-humming repose,
 At sight of thy shadow,
 As one in a dream of poem.
 We being round thee forget to die:
 Death is sweet,
 Life is sweeter than Death.
 We are mortals and also gods,
 Innocent companions of thine,
 O eternal Fuji!

Yosoji and the Goddess Fuji

Japanese

Yosoji's mother, in common with many in the village where she lived, was stricken down with smallpox. Yosoji consulted the magician Kamo Yamakiko in the matter, for his mother grew so ill that every hour he expected her to be taken from him in death. Kamo Yamakiko told Yosoji to go to a small stream that flowed from the southwest side of Mount Fuji. "Near the source of this stream," said the magician, "is a shrine to the God of Long Breath. Go fetch this water, and give it to your mother, for this alone will cure her."

Yosoji, full of hope, eagerly set forth upon his journey, and when he had arrived at a spot where three paths crossed each other he was in difficulty as to the right one to take. Just as he was debating the matter, a lovely girl, clad in white, stepped out from the forest and bade him follow her to the place where the precious stream flowed near the shrine of the God of Long Breath.

When they reached the stream Yosoji was told to drink himself, as well as to fill the gourd with the sparkling water for his mother. When he had done these things the beautiful girl accompanied him to the place where he had originally seen her, and said: "Meet me again at this place in three days' time, for you will require a further supply of this water."

After five visits to this sacred shrine Yosoji rejoiced to find that his mother was quite well again, and not only his mother, but many of the villagers who had also been privileged to drink the water. Yosoji's bravery was loudly extolled, and presents were sent to the magician for his timely advice; but Yosoji, who was an honest lad, knew in his heart that all praise was really due to the beautiful girl who had been his guide. He desired to thank her more fully than he had hitherto done, and for this purpose he once more set out for the stream.

When Yosoji reached the shrine of the God of Long Breath he found that the stream had dried up. With much surprise and not a little sorrow he knelt down and prayed that she who had been so good to his mother would appear before him in order that he might thank her as she so richly deserved. When Yosoji arose he saw the maiden standing before him.

Yosoji expressed his gratitude in warm and elegant language, and begged to be told the name of her who had been his guide and restored his mother to health and strength again. But the maiden, smiling sweetly upon him, would not tell her name. Still smiling, she swung a branch of camellia in the air, so that it seemed that the fair blossom beckoned to some invisible spirit far away. In answer to the floral summons a cloud came down from Mount Fuji; it enveloped the lovely maiden, and carried her to the sacred mountain from which she had come. Yosoji knew now that his guide was none other than the Goddess of Fuji. He knelt with rapture upon his face as he watched the departing figure. As he gazed upon her he knew in his heart that with his thanks love had mingled too. While he yet knelt the Goddess of Fuji threw down the branch of camellia, a remembrance, perhaps a token, of her love for him.

The Ten Thousand Treasure Mountain

Yao (China)

If myth were history, Chinese civilization would have begun sometime after the giant Pan-ku (or Pangu) created the universe and a succession of sage-emperors, including Yandi (Fiery Lord) and Huangdi (Yellow Emperor), who taught the people everything from how to communicate to how to provide themselves with food, clothing, and shelter. The archaeological record suggests interesting parallels with these myths of early invention and conquest. In fact, many of the ancient place names mentioned in the myths led archaeologists to important prehistoric sites. Today, most scholars agree that the first truly Chinese civilization, the Xia Dynasty, emerged and flourished between the 21st and 16th centuries BCE. The quality of its urban centers, bronze implements, and tombs suggests that this period marked an important evolutionary stage between the late Neolithic Age and the characteristic feudal urbanity that emerged during the Shang and Zhou dynasties.

The dynastic system, through which a ruling family passed the reins of power from one generation to another, persisted from the Xia Dynasty until the Nationalist revolution began in 1911—more than three millennia! Over time, the emperor became known



China's Yangshou mountains. The Yao people, with whom the story of the Ten-Thousand Treasure Mountain originated, have worked farms at the base of these mountains for centuries. These unusual peaks have inspired a number of stories.

Source: Photo: Andre van Huizen/www.imaginaire.nl

as the Son of Heaven who ruled with the all-important Mandate of Heaven. In ancient Chinese belief, venerable ancestors and the gods chose the people's leaders for them and the leader's word was law—or at least it was until he showed signs of weakness or incompetence. Such signs would suggest that the emperor had lost the Mandate of Heaven, whereupon members of the royal family, or powerful nobles in the provinces, or the people themselves would revolt and install a successor deemed more worthy. It is not surprising, then, that the political history of China is one where strong leaders and strong imperial families retained the throne and weaker ones did not. Thus one dynasty lasted 800 years, another only 15.

Chinese myth, according to a number of scholars, tends to emphasize the importance of industrious labor, perseverance, self-sacrifice, respect for elders and departed ancestors, rebellion against oppression, passionate love, and virtuous deeds. A kind of humanism pervades Chinese myth, where gods, animals, and ghosts share our very fleshly appetites, passions, fears, and aspirations. The creator, Pan-ku, for example, is a giant with human form who dies after his enormous primal labors are concluded. In



MAP 6.4 China, with Guangxi Province, location of the Yangshou Mountains, highlighted

addition, Chinese myths tend to evince a kind of fatalism which encourages individuals to view their needs as subordinate to those of a larger community—whether that community is one’s family, one’s ethnic group, or one’s kingdom. Likewise, Chinese myths tend to illustrate Buddhist ideas about karma and Confucian ideas about virtue by showing that those who are humble, work hard, and deal honestly and generously with others are rewarded, whereas those who are greedy, lazy, and violent are punished.

In the following story, K’o-li and his mother embody the virtues of self-sacrifice, honor for one’s elders, and hard work. It is significant that within the first few paragraphs, K’o-li shows respect for his mother, the mysterious “old father,” and the property of the young maiden, Mi-mi. Given the opportunity to grab bags full of gold and precious stones inside the Ten Treasure Cave, the young man demonstrates filial piety and industry by choosing to follow his mother’s advice and remove instead a mill with which he can earn an honest living. The action of the story takes place in the Kwangsi (Yangshou) Mountains where the Yao extracted a great deal of gold and silver. This fact and the oppressive noble

and king who seek to appropriate the Ten Thousand Treasure Mountain suggest the intertwining of historical fact and mythical fiction that also characterizes Chinese myth.

Deep in a valley amidst high mountains there once lived an old woman and her son named K'o-li. Every day he went to the mountains to dig the roots of the turtle foot plant. Beating the roots to shreds, rubbing and sieving them in a large wooden drum filled with water, the white starchy powder settled at the bottom. This was steamed and used as a staple since they were far too poor to have rice or corn. But one day K'o-li had a sore foot that prevented him from digging more than a small amount. Now there would be only a small bowl of the powder for their meal!

"Mother, you eat it," the unselfish boy said. "I'm not hungry."

"My child, you eat it," the kindly mother replied. "I don't feel hungry either."

As the mother and son were urging each other to eat the pitifully small bowl of powder, an old man with a long, white beard appeared outside the door. He was so pale looking, and seemed so feeble and shaky. Holding a peculiar walking stick to support himself, he leaned against the door.

"Old man, you must be starved," the mother called out.

The beggar nodded without saying a word.

"My child, you don't feel like eating nor do I. Let us give this to the old father."

K'o-li instantly handed the food to the old man who finished it in a few mouthfuls. Then he made a gesture indicating that he wished to go home.

"Old father," K'o-li said as he brought out a large basket, "Let me carry you home."

The old man nodded again, and K'o-li helped him into the basket, strapped it over his shoulders and set out in the direction where the old man's fingers pointed.

K'o-li walked through a forest, crossed deep gorges and climbed mountain slopes until they reached a big stone cave under a cliff. A lovely maiden hurriedly came forth to welcome the old man and exclaimed, "Old father, you have come back!"

The old man jumped out of the basket and greeted the maiden Mi-mi. All of a sudden he could speak! "This young man is truly wonderful! Take off your earrings and make them into keys so he can open the mountains to get some treasures."

The maiden immediately removed a gold earring from her right ear and a silver one from her left ear, hammered one into a golden key and the other into a silver key. Giving them to K'o-li, she said, "Young brother, on the right side of this mountain there is a Ten Thousand Treasure Mountain. In the saddle of the mountain is a big stone cave called Ten Thousand Treasure Cave. You will see a big yellow stone just like a door at the entrance. Put the golden key into the tiny hole in the stone, and it will open. Within are countless treasures that you may take according to your heart's desire. The stone door will automatically close as soon as you have entered the cave. When you wish to come out, use the silver key by inserting it into a tiny hole at the back of the door. Take care not to lose the silver key or you won't be able to get out again."

"How can I take your earrings?" K'o-li asked with concern.

"Hurry! Go now," the old man shouted. "A tiger is coming to eat you up."

K'o-li looked around but saw no sign of any tiger. At that instant the old man took the maiden by the hand and went into the stone cave. A large stone dropped

down fitting snugly into the cave entrance. Only a pair of shiny keys were left lying at his feet, and all around was quiet.

At last K'o-li picked up the keys and wandered home to relate what had happened. His mother listened thoughtfully and said, "My child, we dig turtle foot roots day after day just to get a little of the pulp. That is really not the way to live. See what implements are in the cave. If you bring something to help us farm, that won't be a bad idea."

K'o-li took the keys and went to the Ten Thousand Treasure Mountain where he found the stone cave with the yellow stone door sealing the entrance. He entered by using the golden key and the door closed behind him with a BANG. K'o-li saw countless treasures, precious pearls, silver and gold objects. He looked east, west, and all around. The dazzle and sparkle confused him, and for a long time, he wondered what to take home. Then he recalled his mother's suggestion and decided to pick an implement. "There—that white stone grinder lying in the corner—I'll take that home to earn my living by grinding grains. That will be good," he thought as he took the grinder.

He then inserted the silver key as the maiden had instructed, and the door opened instantly. When he walked out of the cave, the door closed behind him with a BANG. The lad then went happily homeward.

His mother put the white stone grinder in the middle of the room and turned the stone lid a few times to see how it worked. Many grains of corn suddenly rolled out. The more they turned, the more rolled out until corn spilled all over the ground. The old mother and her son laughed with joy until their jaws ached. "How can the two of us ever finish all this? Let us give some to poor people," she finally said. So K'o-li filled a large basket to the very top with grains and distributed them among the neighbors. Everyday the stone grinder turned out grains of corn, and each day some were given away.

It was not long before the story of the white stone grinder reached the ears of the king who immediately sent a high official with troops of soldiers to K'o-li's house. Off went the stone grinder to the palace. The happy king walked over to feel the grinder. With just one touch—*si-sa!*—it turned into a pile of white lime. The king was so furious, his face turned blue. "Behead that useless official!" he ordered the soldiers.

The old mother was very upset, and asked, "My son, do you still have the keys?"

"Yes, I'm carrying them close to my breast," he replied.

"Then return to The Ten Thousand Treasure Mountain and find something else," she urged K'o-li.

K'o-li went back and this time took a yellow stone mortar. They tried using it by pounding with a wooden pestle, and pearly white rice instantly fell out! The more they pounded, the more fell out!

The story soon reached the king who once again dispatched soldiers together with a high official to take away the stone mortar. The happy king walked over to examine it, but this time took care to feel it very gently. Yet with just one touch—*si-sa!*—the stone mortar turned into a heap of yellow clay. The king was so enraged, even his beard bristled, and he shouted to his soldiers, "Behead that useless official!"

Once again K'o-li returned to the Ten Thousand Treasure Cave and this time brought back a hoe. He moved the hoe merely once over the barren ground in front

of their hut, and strange to say, a great big cornstalk having many giant ears of corn instantly shot up. He moved it back and forth ten times, and ten giant cornstalks shot up; then a hundred times, and one hundred cornstalks shot up, then. . . . Again, mother and son were overcome with laughter. K'o-li once more gave a generous amount to the neighbors. Soon everyone was talking about the magic hoe, and, of course, the news reached the king who said, "This time we are not going to take away the hoe. So far everything has turned to either lime or clay. Bring the young fellow here for questioning."

Thus a high official with soldiers went to K'o-li's house where he was bound hand and foot and carried to the palace. The king sat on his throne flanked by executioners with axes and knives. "Where did your treasures come from? Speak out," the vicious king commanded, "and you will be rewarded. Otherwise I'll have you beheaded."

The executioners shouted in unison to threaten K'o-li. But why should he be afraid? He remained silent but racked his brains for the best way to keep the secret. All of a sudden it dawned on him and he replied, "My treasures were obtained from the Ten Thousand Treasure Cave in the Ten Thousand Treasure Mountain. There is so much treasure there, it is endless."

The king laughed aloud with happiness and said, "Very good, we will go to take it all. Give me the key at once. Take the lead and guide us there."

The king was born aloft in his sedan chair accompanied by troops who carried huge empty baskets while K'o-li guided them. On their arrival the king took out the golden key from his vest, rushed into the cave, followed by all his soldiers, officials and attendants. BANG! The stone door closed behind them.

"King, you wicked one," K'o-li shouted from without, "the silver key is in my hand. Stay in the cave forever!"

K'o-li hurried home to tell his mother what had happened. "You are a clever, good son," she said thankfully. "We still have the hoe so let us till the land for corn."

"Ma-ma, the maiden Mi-mi, gave me two keys," K'o-li said in dismay as he suddenly remembered that there was now only a silver one. "What can I do? They are her earrings."

"I'll go with you to return it and we can apologize for the loss," she replied.

Mother and son each carried a basketful of corn on their shoulders. They passed through the forest, crossed the deep gorge and climbed the mountain slopes until they saw the old father, his long, white beard swaying gently in the breeze, and his granddaughter sitting at the entrance of the stone cave.

"I'm so sorry that the golden key was lost," K'o-li said as he returned the silver one. A soft rosy hue spread over her face as she silently took the key. She twisted it back into an earring, and placed it in her left earlobe.

The mother said, "Old father, here are two baskets of corn. They are really not much more than a taste, but it is all from your precious hoe."

"Old woman, I don't need your corn. Better keep it for the poor people. Your son is honest and diligent so I'll give my granddaughter to him in marriage." As soon as he finished talking, he walked into the cave. A big stone door dropped, sealing the cave entrance, and the maiden was left behind. The old woman looked tenderly at the lovely young maiden, then at her beloved, strong son. She took one hand of her daughter-in-law, and the other of her son, and smiling, went home.

Kobo Stories

Buddhist (Japan)

In Japan, local legend, the ancient nature-focused Shinto religion, and Buddhism combined to create a rich tapestry of stories in which sacred waters play an important role. Shintoism's veneration of departed ancestors and its respect for all spirits, particularly angry ones, manifests itself in numerous shrines and numerous stories about the various acts of heroism, passion, and compassion that surround wells, streams, rock formations, and other landmarks. When Buddhism came to Japan, indigenous stories about various sacred waters were revised by the adherents of the new religion to attribute their miraculous power to the Buddha, his priests, and various temples and statues. For example, images of the Buddha were said to cry and wiggle if robbers came to cart them off.

Many stories refer to Kobo Daishi, the founder of Shingon Buddhism in Japan, a tradition that features a variety of esoteric and magical practices. In some stories, Kobo Daishi wandered the countryside in disguise, rewarding the generous and punishing the greedy. The following cluster of short Kobo stories will give readers a sense of the many hundreds of similar tales.

ST. KOBO'S WELL

There is a spring by the name of St. Kobo's Well in the village of Muramatsu, Ninohe-gun. The following story concerning this well is told in this district. A girl was once weaving alone at her home. An old man, staggering, came by there and asked her for a cup of water. She walked over the hill more than a thousand yards away and brought back water for the visitor. The old man was pleased with her kindness and said that he would make her free from such painful labor. After saying this, he struck the ground with his cane. While he was striking, water sprang forth from the point struck by his cane. That spring was called St. Kobo's Well.

The old man who could do such a miraculous deed was thought to be St. Kobo, however poor and weak he might look.

THE WILLOW WELL OF KOBO

There is a well in the compound of Zempuku-ji in Azabu. In ancient times while Kobo Daishi was staying in this temple, in order to get the water for offering to the Buddha, he put his staff into the ground, praying to the god of the Kashima Shrine [a large shrine where warriors prayed before going into battle].

Then clear water gushed forth. Later Kobo Daishi planted a willow tree by the well to commemorate it forever. So it is called the Willow Well.

THE KOBO CHESTNUT TREES

In the mountains around Fukiage Pass in Nagura-mura, Kita Shidara-gun, grow chestnut trees called Kobo chestnuts. Those trees bear fruit very young, even when they are only three feet high.

Hundreds of years ago there was a big chestnut tree on this pass. Boys would rush to climb it to pick the chestnuts, but little children could not climb the tree. One day while they were weeping, a traveling priest passed by, saw the little children crying, and said: "Well, you shall be able to pick the chestnuts from next year on."

The next year every small young chestnut tree bore fruit so that the little children could pick them easily. The villagers thought that the traveling priest must have been St. Kobo, and since then they have called these the Kobo chestnut trees.

THE STREAM WHERE KOBO WASHED HIS GARMENT

Long ago Kobo Daishi went on a pilgrimage throughout the country. He came to Momotomataga in Toyoda-mura, and he took off his dirty clothes. He washed them in the Hinomoto River. The villagers who saw him did not know that he was a virtuous priest, and criticized him for washing dirty clothes. St. Kobo went away without saying anything. He went to Takatsu-mura, and he washed his clothes on the bank in Suko. For this reason, in Momotomataga the river dries up in summer and people often suffer from lack of water. On the other hand, in Suko, through the mercy of the priest, no one has drowned in the river.

At present almost every year the water is dried up in Hinomoto and gushes out in Kadoi.

The Waters of Eternal Life

Jewish (Italy, ca. 11th Century)

Jewish history is well-documented and so for the purposes of this introduction it is sufficient to remark that while this people enjoyed a brief reign as a major power in the Mediterranean world during the 10th century BCE, they have largely been a distinct ethnic group maintaining their religious and cultural traditions within other, larger cultures. Before their Solomonic glory days, the Hebrews were a small shepherd tribe living among the more culturally advanced Canaanites, slaves to the Pharaohs in Egypt, and an antagonistic rival of the Philistines. A few generations after Solomon's reign, the Jews were subjugated first by the Babylonians



MAP 6.5 Mediterranean world

under Nebuchadnezzar, later by the Persians under Darius, the Greeks under Alexander the Great, and finally by the Romans under the Caesars. It was during the Roman occupation that the Jews were scattered throughout the ancient world in what is known as the Diaspora.

This long history of subjugation to foreign and often hostile rule has influenced Jewish literature in at least two important ways. First, Jewish literature, like Jewish culture itself, has assimilated some of the knowledge, customs, and artistic conventions of each of the nations to which the Jews were subjugated or exiled. Thus Yiddish folk stories from the *shtetls* and *ghettos* of pre-Holocaust Europe have a distinct flavor and range of concerns that distinguish them from the stories told in the *maghrebs* of Northern Africa. The children of the Jews deported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar returned to the land of Israel with new metaphysical ideas that were gradually assimilated into traditional Jewish belief. It is notable, for example, that post-exilic Jewish literature begins to discuss heaven and hell, angels and demons, and the fate of the individual soul after death, whereas the Torah and pre-exilic prophets do not mention them. Moreover, the long and troubled history of the Jews has tended to make the themes of struggle, alienation, and survival central to its literature. Numerous folk stories about famous Jewish teachers and not-so-famous tradesmen outwitting or conciliating hostile emperors, soldiers, and popes by holding fast to the teachings and religious traditions of

their ancestors amply illustrate this sense that the Jews are always “strangers in a strange land.” Scores of stories show that God rewards those who keep the Sabbath or keep kosher or practice charity and hospitality in the face of strong pressure—or even threats of violence—to do otherwise. Indeed, it is the struggle to survive as a distinct people and to preserve religious traditions and a cultural identity that date back nearly three thousand years that constitute the background of a great many novels, plays, and folk stories.

In addition to these influences, Jewish myth and literature have a long evolutionary history as well. Literacy—at least the ability to read Hebrew script well enough to recite one’s daily prayers and take part in public and private religious observances—has been central to Jewish life at least since the return from the Babylonian exile. The Torah, the five books of law that outline the divine history of the Jews and that define its religious culture, is held in such high regard that, were it to be accidentally dropped, all those present would be bound by rabbinic tradition to fast during daylight hours for 40 days. At least since the European Middle Ages, all Jewish males were required to chant a passage from the Torah in order to be considered *bar mitzvah*, a “son of the good deed.” In addition to the Torah, an extensive oral tradition of commentary upon biblical law came into being throughout the years of the Roman occupation. Later, this oral tradition was codified and written down in what is now called the Talmud. Torah and Talmud are sacred texts, though Torah is considered by the orthodox to be the direct and literal expression of God’s will while the Talmud is considered the collected wisdom of the sages. A third, less authoritative, literary tradition complements and to a large degree supplements the Torah. This tradition, or Midrash, is a vast collection of stories about the Jewish patriarchs, matriarchs, and other important biblical persons that often finds its way into sermons and rabbinic teachings. These stories serve to fill in some of the blanks of the biblical record. For example, one *medresh* (a story from the Midrash) describes the relationship between Adam and Lilith—the powerful sorceress to whom Adam was said to have been married before God created Eve. Generally speaking, the stories in the Midrash provide allegories, parables, and illustrations of the Torah’s main teachings.

The following story, then, has more in common with Midrash than other sacred Jewish literature. Its purpose is to put into play the religious principles derived from Torah and Talmud within the context of human needs, desires, hopes, and fears. The fact that Alexander the Great embodies these longings in a Jewish tale from 11th-century Italy demonstrates the degree to which Jewish tradition has assimilated and transformed histories, persons, events, and traditions from the many cultures with which it has had con-

tact during the past three thousand years. Interestingly, the story of Alexander's search for secret knowledge and his encounter with Asmodeus, king of the demons, has numerous parallels in stories told about King Solomon. One of the most famous of these, the story of Solomon tricking Asmodeus into serving him by leading him to the *shamir*—a mysterious object that made it possible for Solomon to obey God's command that no iron implement could cut the stones from which the Great Temple was to be built—has many similarities to Alexander's adventures. Readers interested in reading more stories of this kind will find Howard Schwartz's *Miriam's Tambourine* and *Elijah's Violin* excellent places to begin.

The birth of Alexander the Great was preceded by many signs, read by many astrologers. For two stars were seen together in the sky at night, a pair of twin suns burning brightly. All the diviners recognized this as a sign of greatness, but they also saw in it the prophecy of an early death. So it was that Alexander always knew of the destiny foretold for him, and he fulfilled the first part to the hilt, conquering the world. But once he had succeeded in this enormous quest, Alexander began to worry about the second part of the prophecy, that his life would be brief. So it was that he undertook his second great quest—to locate the Waters of Eternal Life.

The legend of such miraculous waters is found in every land, and Alexander heard of it wherever he went. Since he had managed to conquer the world, he undertook the quest to locate those waters without fear or hesitation for above all he longed to conquer death.

Alexander set out with a dozen of his finest soldiers, well aware that many obstacles might lie before him. From an old soothsayer—one of those who had foreseen his birth—Alexander learned that the Waters of Eternal Life were to be found beyond the Mountains of Darkness. But none who had tried to go there had ever returned. This did not discourage Alexander; he set out at once, confident that nothing was insurmountable.

Thus the king and his men traveled for many weeks, and at last they reached the towering mountains. Alexander saw that it would take his men several more weeks to cross them, and he was loathe to take that much time. Then he noticed several giant eagles flying overhead, and an astonishing idea occurred to him to leash some of those eagles together, to carry him to the other side of those mountains. Alexander decided to try such a crossing for himself, while his men would cross on foot. If he succeeded, he would meet them on the other side of the mountains in a few weeks.

So it was that Alexander ordered his warriors to bring him four of those giant eagles. Before long four of the largest were captured in a net. The king then ordered their food to be withheld for three days. Meanwhile Alexander ordered his men to weave a basket that was large enough to carry him, with a lid that could be closed to protect him from falling out during flight.

Next Alexander ordered that four long iron spikes be affixed to a board, with four pieces of meat affixed to the spikes. After that Alexander told the men to take the four eagles and bind their legs to the four corners of the board. And he had ropes hung from the board, from which the basket was suspended, with Alexander inside

it. The eagles, seeing the meat above them, flapped their wings attempting to reach it. Thus the basket was carried high into the clouds. And from a narrow slot in the basket, which had been left so that he could view the land below, Alexander looked with amazement upon the mountains beneath him. And as he was carried higher, he began to see the entire continent, which seemed to him like a cup floating on the waters of the ocean.

When the heat of the sun began to weary him, Alexander pulled a rope, which turned the spikes downward, so that the eagles followed them in that direction until they finally landed on the earth. When Alexander emerged from the basket he released the eagles and then looked about. He found that he had indeed been carried across those Mountains of Darkness and had landed beside a mighty river. The land on which he stood was barren, but across the river he saw a great many trees, filled with fruit. He wished that the eagles had landed on the far side of the river but since they had not, he had to find a way to reach it, for there he could sustain himself. Alexander decided to build himself a raft.

He bound logs together and then strapped the basket to the raft and climbed inside. Now the currents of that river were quite swift, with many dangerous rapids. Before the raft had crossed the river half way, it split apart and the basket with Alexander in it was cast into the currents, where it floated on the waters like a barrel. Inside it, Alexander was turned over and over, tumbling ceaselessly. At last the basket was cast out of the waters and onto the shore. When the weary Alexander climbed out, he found that he had indeed reached the far side of the river where the rich fruit grew.

Now Alexander was famished after all he had gone through to fly over those mountains and cross that river, and the fruit of these trees beckoned him as no other food had in all his days. Alexander reached out and plucked one of those ripe, alluring fruits, but the moment he did he heard shouting from all sides, and in an instant he found himself surrounded by strange and frightening looking beings. Although their form was human, they had wings and cast no shadows. Even so, Alexander was not afraid, but before he could do anything, four of the beings took hold of him, and in an instant Alexander found himself wrapped in chains. His captors then set out through the forest with Alexander as their prisoner.

So it was that Alexander found himself taken to a magnificent palace, far greater than that of any king he had known. He could barely believe his eyes as he stared at the mighty size of that palace. He asked the guards who walked at his side whose palace it was, and they told him it was the palace of Asmodeus, king of demons. Alexander was deeply shaken, for now he realized who had captured him, and while he had no fears among men, he knew nothing of the ways of demons.

So it was that Alexander the Great, conqueror of the world of men, was brought in chains before Asmodeus, king of demons. Asmodeus had a very stern and frightening bearing, and Alexander began to fear that he might have reached the end of his days. Asmodeus spoke loudly, and said, "You, sir, are accused of very serious crimes. First of all, none born of woman are permitted to set foot in this land, the kingdom of the demons. The penalty for this crime is death! Second, you have been accused of picking one of the fruits of the trees in my royal orchard. The penalty for this crime is also death! Therefore you have twice been condemned to death. Is there anything you wish to say in your defense before the sentence is carried out?"

Alexander was well aware that only his wits could save him. He replied, “My lord monarch, I have come to your realm on a quest, for I am seeking the fabled Waters of Eternal Life. Instead it appears that I have found an early death.”

Asmodeus was much impressed both by the directness of Alexander’s reply and by the nature of the quest. And he wished to know more of his captive. So he said, “Tell me, before the sentence is carried out, who you are, so that your fate will not be lost to the world.”

Alexander then revealed his name, and when Asmodeus discovered the identity of his famous prisoner, he was greatly surprised. The king of demons rose from his throne and embraced Alexander, much to Alexander’s amazement. “Welcome, oh great king,” Asmodeus said, “for the conquests of Alexander are known not only in the world of men, but in our world as well. Had I only known who you were, you would never have been subjected to such trials. For a king such as yourself is always a welcome guest.”

Alexander could scarcely believe his ears, for the very stern judge of a moment earlier was now embracing him as an equal. Alexander gratefully acknowledged the kind gestures of the king of demons, and then said, “Some men believe that I care for nothing except conquering. But this is not true. Above all, I am an explorer, drawn to the far corners of the earth. And now that my days of conquest are behind me, I have chosen to devote myself to searching for these secret waters. If you can help me in this quest in any way, I would be eternally grateful and I would seek to repay you in any way that I could.”

Now Asmodeus could be the most deadly enemy, but he could also be the most trusted friend. And he had long admired the exploits of Alexander, who at such a young age had conquered the world of men. Thus Asmodeus replied, “Would that I could lead you there myself, my lord Alexander. But this is not possible, for it has been decreed in Heaven that neither angels nor demons may reveal the locations of those miraculous waters to mortal men. But since you have overcome all obstacles to reach this distant land, I will assist you as much as I can. And if I may not reveal the location myself, I can at least tell you how this secret can be learned. For the only one permitted to reveal this secret is the Speaking Tree.”

Alexander was astonished to hear that there actually was a tree that spoke. “Where, then, can this Speaking Tree be found,” Alexander asked, “for I am prepared to set out even today to seek it out.”

Asmodeus was pleased that Alexander was truly devoted to his quest. “Stay with me tonight and be a guest at my table,” he said, “and in the morning I will tell you how to reach this tree and send you on your way.”

This Alexander readily agreed to, and so his hunger and thirst were quenched that night at the table of the king of demons.

So it was that Alexander was the first of men ever to taste the far more exquisite food of demons. Alexander asked Asmodeus why this was, and the king explained that the wonderful taste of those foods derived from the fruits that grew only in that royal orchard in which Alexander had been discovered. For they were enchanted fruits, which Asmodeus himself had brought into being by a spell.

That night Alexander slept in a bed fit for a king, and in the morning he breakfasted with Asmodeus, who revealed the only way possible to reach the Speaking Tree. First, he must travel to a certain forest, in the midst of which were sweet

waters. There Alexander must go upstream until he reached a cave from which the waters flowed forth. Then he must wade through that cave to their source in a spring, beyond which he would see at once a large red tree—that was the Speaking Tree. It spoke on the third hour of the day and would reply to whatever was asked of it, except to reveal the day destined for a man's own death.

Alexander was deeply grateful to learn this, and he asked Asmodeus if he could show his gratitude by bringing him some of the Waters of Eternal Life when he had found them. But Asmodeus explained that he and all other demons were immortal, and therefore had no need for these waters. However, Asmodeus added that there was one thing Alexander could do for him, which he would greatly appreciate. Alexander vowed to do whatever the king asked of him, and Asmodeus said, "The Speaking Tree replies to three questions; three and no more. For one of these questions I would like you to ask where a glowing pearl can be found. For I have every kind of jewel in my crown except for the glowing pearl, and if you should bring me the reply to this question, I would be very grateful. And if you should somehow happen to bring back one of these pearls, I would give you a great reward."

Alexander assured Asmodeus that he would make this one of his three questions to the tree, and, if fate permitted, he would seek out the glowing pearl as well. Then he set out on the quest. He found the way to the forest exactly as Asmodeus had described it, in the midst of which sweet waters were flowing. The king then followed the path alongside those waters until he reached the entrance to a cave. Alexander was certain that this must be the cave beyond which lay the Speaking Tree.

Alexander waded through the waters of the cave for twenty-nine days. And though the waters were up to his neck—and sometimes even a bit higher—he often found himself wondering what the third question to the Speaking Tree should be. Alexander knew that he could not ask the tree how long he would live, since this question alone was forbidden, so he decided to ask how he would be remembered in the future. For the impression a man leaves behind is even more important than the perception of him during his lifetime.

At the end of twenty-nine days Alexander at last reached the source of the stream and stepped out of that cave into the light. The first thing he saw there was a towering red tree, and he knew at once that this must be the Speaking Tree. Alexander looked at the sun and decided that it was almost the third hour of the day, the hour when the tree could speak. So Alexander approached it and asked his first question: "Tell me, oh Speaking Tree, where can the Waters of Eternal Life be found? I have come here from very far to hear your reply."

Alexander had to wait only a moment, for exactly when the third hour arrived, the Speaking Tree replied: "You have taken the right path. Continue on and you will reach those waters. For it is destined that you will find them." Alexander was filled with joy when he heard this, for he was certain that if he reached those waters he would achieve his ultimate aim—eternal life.

Then Alexander asked the second question: "Where can one of the glowing pearls be found?" And the Speaking Tree replied: "Whoever descends into the Well of Living Waters will find it on the very bottom."

This reply threw Alexander into a dilemma. The tree would reply to only one more question, and he wanted to ask about his future reputation. But he did not know

where the Well of Living Waters could be found, nor might he ever find out if he did not ask the Speaking Tree. So Alexander had to ask, "How can the Well of Living Waters be reached?" The Speaking Tree replied, "The first light of the full moon shall reveal the well."

Now this reply mystified Alexander, for the tree had not told him where to go. He decided to meditate upon the words of the oracle, and since night was about to fall, Alexander sat down beneath the Speaking Tree. Before long he saw a feather of light on the horizon and soon realized it was the first light of the rising moon. As Alexander watched, this feather seemed to gain wings, which shone on a single spot in the forest. Alexander suddenly recalled the words of the Speaking Tree, and rushed to the place illumined by the light, which was inside a circle of trees. But when he got there, he was disappointed; he had hoped to be led to the Well of Living Waters, but there was nothing there but a clearing in the forest. He sat down and soon fell into a deep sleep.

As he slept, Alexander dreamed he was floating on the waters of a river, drifting as if weightless. It was a very pleasing dream and it lasted all night. When Alexander awoke at dawn he recalled the dream and wondered at its meaning, especially since he had been searching for a well.

As he thought about this, Alexander noticed the outline of a circle around him. He felt with his hand and discovered it was a circle of stones, with only a small portion of each stone protruding from beneath the earth. Suddenly it occurred to Alexander that this might be the well he was seeking, and that it was covered with a layer of dirt. Alexander began to dig there at once, and although he only had sharp stones to dig with, he managed to clear away several feet, so that he was soon digging from the bottom of a pit. Then, all at once, the crust of earth on which he stood broke, and Alexander fell a great distance, finally plunging into ice-cold water with a great splash. Any other man would have been terrified, but Alexander was delighted, feeling certain that this must be the Well of Living Waters.

Yet even if this were so, what good could it do him if he remained trapped in that well? As Alexander treaded water there, wondering how he might find his way out, he suddenly noticed a light glowing from the very bottom of the well. Alexander was quite curious to know what this might be, so he took a deep breath and dived below. He descended a great distance, and began to run out of breath just as he reached the bottom. He picked up the glowing object in his hand and shot to the surface as fast as he could, gasping for air as he emerged. When he reached the surface of the water, he saw at once that things had changed, for when he had dived below the waters were pitch black, and now a light shone on every stone—the glowing pearl! He had found it. And when Alexander realized this, he regained his confidence and felt certain that he would not only find a way out of that well, but also complete his quest to find the Waters of Eternal Life.

With the light cast by the glowing pearl, Alexander examined the sides of the well. He spotted a stone ladder that had been built into the round wall. Alexander swam over to the wall and just as he was about to grip the first stone rung, he remembered that this was, in fact, the Well of Living Waters. He wondered what was special about those waters, so before he climbed out he decided to taste them. He put the pearl in his pocket, and filled his cupped hands with water. No sooner had he

tasted that wonderful water, than he felt refreshed and filled with strength. Alexander understood that these were indeed living waters that brought new life to whoever tasted them.

With his newfound strength Alexander was able to ascend the ladder inside the well, the glowing pearl held in his teeth to light the way. It took him several hours, but at last he climbed out of that deep well. By then he was exhausted, and he decided that he must have some more of those refreshing waters, but there was no bucket to be found. So Alexander plucked a gourd which grew in that place, hollowed it out, and made a long rope out of vines. And when this rope and bucket were ready, he lowered them into the well until they reached the waters far below, and when he had filled the gourd, he pulled it back up. When he tasted those waters this time, they seemed even more delicious, since he had made such great efforts to obtain them.

Invigorated once more, Alexander turned his thoughts back to the quest that had brought him there in the first place—the Waters of Eternal Life. For although the waters of this well were surely wonderful, he was seeking the even more wonderful waters that provided not only vigor, but also eternal life. He recalled the oracle of the Speaking Tree, which had guided him to continue on the same path. Yet what path was it, since he had traveled on so many? While Alexander was considering this matter he happened to notice that the light cast from the glowing pearl in his hand seemed to form a path before him. It was a miracle, Alexander decided, and holding the pearl in front of him, he followed that path wherever it led.

In this way Alexander was led a great distance through the forest, and after he had traveled for many days and nights, sustained by the fruit that grew wild on those trees, Alexander came to a great gate. Before that gate shone a mighty light, like a small sun. Alexander was very curious to know what garden that was, and what was the source of that light. He hurried toward the gate, shielding his eyes from the light, and when he reached it and stood off to one side, he was able to see that the light was given off by a flaming sword being spun at amazing speed by a mighty angel stationed at the gate. And when Alexander saw such a gatekeeper, he knew that this must be the Garden of Eden, of which he had often heard. Inscribed on the gate of the Garden, which arched above the angel, letters were engraved, which read:

Lift up your head, O ye gates, and be elevated, ye gates of the world.
For this is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter.

Alexander gazed in amazement at the angel with the spinning sword of fire, and he wondered if it had been placed there to guard the way to the Waters of Eternal Life. Alexander decided that he must find a way to enter that Garden, although it appeared to be impossible. Then Alexander explored the wall of the Garden, which rose up to such a great height that he could not see the top of it. It seemed to be circular, and great trees grew around it, with their tops reaching into heaven.

Alexander studied that wall and decided that the only way to climb it would be by climbing one of those immense trees. Therefore he sought out a branch within his reach and pulled himself up, for he had climbed many trees when he was a boy, though none were of such a great height. At the end of the first day of climbing, Alexander still had not climbed the first third of the tree. He had to climb another

full day to reach the second third. And only after the third day of climbing did he reach the top of that tree and look down from that dizzying height at the world below.

But now, for the first time, he could see the top of that high wall, which was within his reach. So it was that Alexander very carefully climbed from the top of that mighty tree onto the high wall. And when he looked down, he saw the most splendid sight of his life—a Garden that looked like a paradise, perfect in its abundance, with four rivers branching from a spring that flowed forth from a mighty tree in the center of the garden, its top branches reaching into the palaces of heaven. Alexander then knew for certain that he had reached the fabled Garden of Eden, and he sensed at once that the Waters of Eternal Life could not be found anywhere else; perhaps they were the very waters flowing from the roots of that wondrous tree.

Alexander then decided to climb down into the garden, and by holding on to the thick vines that grew against the inside of the wall, Alexander was able to descend to the world below. Climbing down went much faster than climbing up, and before long Alexander found himself on the ground once again. Then he hurried over to one of the rivers that flowed nearby. He was filled with curiosity to know if these were indeed the waters he had sought so long. But how was he to find out? Suddenly an idea occurred to him. He opened up his pack, in which he carried his provisions, and he took out a salted fish. He quickly tossed that fish into those waters, and instantly it came to life and swam away, its tail swishing back and forth. Alexander rejoiced to know that he had finally reached the precious waters. Now he would be able to obtain eternal life.

Alexander leaned over and filled his cupped hands with water and was just about to drink when a solemn voice said, “Wait! Before you drink of those waters, do you not want to know the consequences?” Then Alexander looked up and saw a radiant being standing before him, like the one at the gate of the Garden, and he knew it must be an angel. Alexander was filled with awe. The eyes of that angel cast an aura, and when Alexander felt that light upon himself, he felt the presence of the angel all around him, and knew its sacred purpose. Alexander said simply, “Yes, please tell me.” Then the angel Raziel—for that is who it was—said to Alexander, “Know, then, that whoever drinks these waters will know eternal life, but he will never be able to leave this garden.”

These words greatly startled Alexander, for had the angel not stopped him, he would already have tasted of those waters and become a prisoner in that paradise. For a life of peace and meditation in that garden was not what Alexander wanted. Instead, he longed to explore every hidden corner of the world and to found a great city that would bear his name. Alexandria. At that moment Alexander understood that he could not drink those waters, for he preferred to live in the world of men, even if it meant giving up eternal life. All at once he found himself standing outside the Garden walls once again, not far from the angel that guarded the gates, its flaming sword still spinning.

Then Alexander turned around, and much to his amazement, he saw the palace of Asmodeus before him. He could not understand how that was possible, and when he turned back to the Garden gate, he found that it was no longer there. Somehow he had returned to the palace of the king of demons, far away from the Garden in which he had stood just moments before. Alexander was very confused.

When Alexander stood before the king of demons once more, he asked how it was possible for the king's palace to be so near the Garden, he had traveled such a great distance from one to the other. Asmodeus replied, "In this kingdom, Alexander, distances are not what they seem. They are different for each man, according to his fate. When you set out on your quest, you had many trials and obstacles to overcome. But after your decision to give up the Waters of Eternal Life, even when they were in your grasp, your fate was changed, and the distance reduced itself to almost nothing. But I see that you have brought the glowing pearl with you. Know that at the very moment you picked it up from the bottom of the Well of Living Water, another such pearl appeared in my crown, glowing for all the world to see." And it was true. A pearl just like Alexander's glowed from the king of demons' crown. Asmodeus continued, "The pearl in your possession, Alexander, is therefore your own. Let it lead you for the rest of your days and you will not go astray."

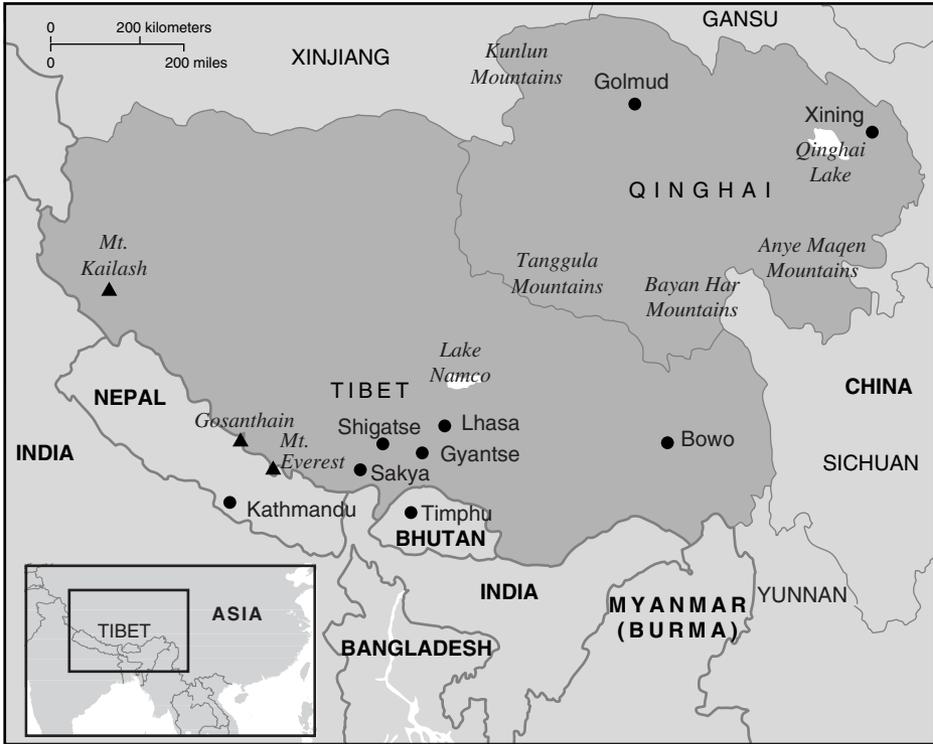
So it was that Alexander realized that his quest had not been in vain after all, for that glowing pearl was invaluable, since it would guide a man wherever it was that he had to go. Then Alexander thanked Asmodeus for helping him, and set out on his own with the light of the pearl leading the way. For it was time to return to the Mountains of Darkness, to meet his men, who were about to descend the final peak. And when they did, they found Alexander waiting there, though they had no idea of how far he had traveled since they had parted.

When they were reunited, Alexander told his men of his adventures, and showed them the glowing pearl. Now the men were astonished at this tale, but the thought of turning back when they had just crossed those mountains distressed them greatly. Then Alexander asked the glowing pearl to show them the shortest way across, and all at once it shone upon the entrance to a cave, which none of them had noticed before. They entered that cave, which the pearl illumined for them better than any torch, and before a day had passed they reached the other side of the Mountains of Darkness, simply crossing beneath them. After that they let the glowing pearl lead them wherever they needed to go, for it always led them to the right place. And so it was that although the life of Alexander was not long, as had been prophesied at his birth, his days were filled far more than those of most men, and his life was a rich one.

The Castle in the Lake

Post-Buddhism Bon (Tibet)

Tibet, known to its people as the "Roof of the World," is situated upon a vast, fertile plain surrounded by snow-capped mountains and arid plains that cover an area roughly the size of western Europe. According to a creation myth that would seem to derive



MAP 6.6 Tibet

from Tibet's native, shamanic Bon religion, in the beginning there was nothing but the primeval void. From the void emerged a black and a white light: *myal ba nag po*, Black Misery, and *'od zer ldan*, Radiant. A rainbow also emerged from the chaos and, from its five colors, the five qualities—hardness, fluidity, heat, motion, and space—also came into being. These five qualities fused in the form of a great cosmic egg over which Black Misery and Radiant hovered. From the egg, Black Misery produced the darkness of nonbeing, disease, death, and a host of demons responsible for misfortune, drought, and pain. Radiant produced the light of auspicious becoming, robust health, joy, and a host of beneficent gods responsible for prosperity, longevity, and delight. The gods and demons, it was further said, mated and filled the world with their progeny and, for traditional Tibetans, the earth and all that it contains are the dwelling places and physical manifestations of this host of gods and demons. Human beings have been assigned to the earthly realm, the gods live in the heavens, and the demons dwell beneath the earth's surface. Only the entranced shaman has the power to travel the three spheres and to rightly understand the causes of disease and misfortune and to retrieve human souls

abducted by spirits—and to prescribe the sacrifices and “ransoms” necessary to placate offended or malicious spirits.

Bon tradition suggests that before human history a succession of demonic races settled the land of Tibet, each possessing knowledge of such crucial technologies as bows and arrow, hammers and axes, slings and catapults, the forging of iron, black magic, and shields and armor. When humans finally arrived on the scene they were given the settled earth as a home and the technologies necessary to survive upon it. But where did human beings come from? According to a later Buddhist myth, the Tibetan people are descended from the mating of an ape—an emanation of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion—and an ogress—an emanation of the goddess Tara. Their offspring gave birth to the Tibetan people in the Yar Lung valley. The early Tibetan nation was without a ruler until 127 BCE, when it is said that an Indian king named Rupati fled over the Himalayas and arrived in the Yar Lung valley after suffering a defeat in the war described in the *Mahabharata*. Twelve Bon priests, believing that Rupati had descended from heaven, gave him the name Nyatri Tsenpo and declared him king.

Most Westerners know Tibet as a Buddhist nation and the ancestral home of the Dalai Lama, but Buddhism didn’t become the state religion until well after its introduction in 173 CE. Indeed, if we can read the legendary battle between the great Buddhist sage Milarepa and the great Bon shaman Naro Bon-chung as history, it wasn’t until the 11th century that Buddhism fully displaced Tibet’s native religion. In any case, historical and archaeological records confirm that Buddhism was only gradually assimilated into the Tibetan way of life and that the new religion was itself significantly transformed by Bon rituals and beliefs. Buddhist clergy adopted over time the Bon talismans of the helmet, lance, armor, the divination arrow, the magic mirror, reinterpreting each of them as symbols of the Buddha’s life and teaching. From the feathers, horns, bones, and fur of the shaman’s cloak, Buddhist priests created dramatic costumes and dances celebrating the attributes of the eagle, stag, snow lion, and skeleton that are now said to illustrate Buddhist doctrine. Tibetan Buddhists still believe that the heavens, earth, and underworld are teeming with gods and demons, but now these divinities have been “converted” to protect and promote Buddhist teachings and practices. Even the fascinating landscape of the afterlife discussed in rich detail in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* derives more from the shaman’s experiences while under trance than the recorded teachings of the Buddha.

The following story, then, draws upon native Tibetan belief in a spirit world that lies hidden in various sacred landforms and bodies of water. The opening lines describing the fearful stories

told about the spirits and fire-dogs believed to emerge from “Castle Lake” at night might suggest pre-Buddhist beliefs about demons lurking in the shadowy places of the world ready to pounce upon the unprotected and the unwary. The “actual,” beneficent nature of those dwelling beneath the mysterious waters of the lake suggests the post-Buddhist belief that the demons of the world have been tamed by the virtue and wisdom of Buddhas and sages and that only a person’s deeds create his or her misfortune. But, ultimately, the following story isn’t about religion as much as it is about the deepest wishes of the human heart for a return to the womb—a condition usually expressed in myth as a source of unlimited wealth and magical power that frees the lucky from worldly care.

In the land of Tibet, there was a beautiful lake surrounded by hills and mountains. So beautiful and clear was the lake that people who passed by would gasp in wonderment. Some would say that when the sun was high in the sky, casting the shadows of the mountain peaks across the calm expanse of water, it looked just as if there was a castle in the lake, a castle of such vast proportions that it filled the water. So the lake soon came to be known as “The Castle Lake.”

Many stories grew up around the lake and its castle. Sometimes it was said that when the moon shone full and the stars gleamed like diamonds on the water, people could be seen rising from the lake, strange people, with eyes of fire and flowing hair hanging like wet leaves around their faces. Or fiery dogs would appear to tear the flesh from lone travelers walking the beach in innocence.

But, as is often the case with legends, father told daughter and mother told son through many generations, until the stories grew bigger and bigger with each telling, and finally they conveyed much more than the original teller intended. Soon it was generally accepted that there was indeed a castle in the lake, and that the castle had a king. The king, it was said, had many retainers, men who by some misfortune had fallen into the lake, or who had been captured while walking alone on its shores and were thereafter forced to remain in the service of the king.

One day a young herdsman was tending his yaks on the eastern side of the lake. Feeling a need for refreshment, he left his herd and made his way down to the water’s edge. After he had splashed the cooling water onto his face, he lay back against a large rock, took his cheese and barley bread from his bag, lit a small fire to heat up his butter tea, and began to have his lunch.

While he was eating, Rinchen began to reflect upon his life. His mother was a cruel woman; she forced him to work hard so that she could buy new clothes and eat well, while he had to be content with a few cast-off rags and the scraps of food his mother did not want. Thinking thus, Rinchen began to cry. The tears rolled down his cheeks and sobs shook his body; he could work no harder and yet his mother wanted more and more.

As the boy began to pack away his things he looked up and saw a man standing at the water’s edge. The man was tall and dressed in a black *chuba* dripping with water, looking just as if he had come up out of the lake. Recalling the stories he had

heard about The Castle Lake and the king's retainers, Rinchen began to panic, and was just starting to run away when the man spoke.

"Why do you cry so?" the man asked. Rinchen turned to the man and saw that his face was gentle and kind, and heard that his voice was soft and melodious. All fear seemed to leave his body and he walked toward the tall man standing in the shallows of the lake. The man repeated his question and Rinchen told him about his mother and how she forced him to work harder and harder in order to keep her.

"Come with me into the lake," the man said, "for the king is a kind man and may be able to help you with your problem." The young herdsman felt fear begin to well inside him once more, for he was sure that if he went into the lake he would never return. The tall man sensed the boy's fear but in gentle tones which fell like music on the ear, he persuaded the young herdsman that he need not fear for his life.

"I am one of the king's retainers," said the man. "I will take you to see him and see that you return safely."

The young herdsman thought for a moment, "What have I to lose? My mother is so cruel that even death would be better than spending the rest of my life in her bondage." And so, throwing his fear away, Rinchen followed the king's retainer into the lake.

The water was warm and friendly, and the boy was surprised that he could breathe quite freely. The king's retainer asked him to close his eyes as he led the boy through the water to the castle. When they stopped and Rinchen opened his eyes he saw that he was standing in a large hall, elaborately decorated in gold, shining silver, and beautiful shell. At the end of the hall was a throne, and on the throne sat an old man, the king.

The king beckoned to the boy to come forward and as he did so Rinchen noticed that he was not alone in the room with the king and his retainer, for standing on each side of the throne were more retainers, dressed in black *chubas* just like the tall man who met him on the shore of the lake. When he reached the foot of the king's throne one of the retainers sprang forward and placed a small stool in front of the throne for the boy to sit on. Nervously, Rinchen sat down and looked up into the watery blue eyes of the king.

"Why do you come here," asked the king in a deep voice which resembled the distant rumblings of thunder. The boy told the king his story, just as he had related it to the retainer on the shores of the lake.

The king listened, and when Rinchen had finished his story he turned toward his group of retainers and motioned for one of them to come to him. The retainer approached the king and bent low while the king whispered instructions into his ear. The young herdsman strained but could not hear what the king was saying. The retainer left the hall and returned a few minutes later with a dog.

"Take this dog," said the king to the young herdsman, "but take care that you feed it before you feed yourself, that is very important." Rinchen took the dog, and with eyes closed let himself be led to the shores of the lake. When he opened his eyes he was alone with the dog.

The young herdsman went home with the dog and from that day on everything he desired appeared before him. He would wake up in the morning and find that barley had been placed in the barley chest, butter in the butter chest and money in the

money chest. Even new clothes appeared in his clothes chest. He was very happy and always took great care of the dog, heeding the king's instructions to always feed it before feeding himself.

Rinchen's mother was amazed that her son should suddenly become so wealthy, and one day she decided to go out with the herd of yaks to see if she could discover the source of infinite plenty. While his mother was out of the house the young herdsman decided to watch the dog, for he was curious and wanted to know how the animal managed to produce the money and food. Hiding himself in the house, he watched the dog as it entered the door, walked over to the hearth, and violently began shaking itself.

Suddenly, the dog's skin fell to the ground, revealing a beautiful woman, the most beautiful woman Rinchen had ever seen. The woman went to the barley chest, opened the lid, and placed in it the barley, which appeared from nowhere. Then she did the same with the butter chest, the tea chest, the money chest, going all about the house producing everything that the boy and his mother needed.

Rinchen could contain himself no longer. He seized the dog's skin and threw it into the fire. The beautiful woman begged him not to do so, but it was too late, the skin burned quickly and was soon just a pile of ashes. Frightened that the chief's son would see the woman and take her for his wife, Rinchen covered her face with soot to hide her beauty, and kept her in the house away from the eyes of the people.

Soon, the young herdsman grew very rich, and with his wealth he grew exceedingly bold. "Why do I worry," he thought, "I have much money; the chief's son will not dare to steal the woman from me, for I can buy weapons and men." Thinking this, Rinchen washed the soot from the beautiful woman's face and took her into the town to show her to the people, for he was very proud of her beauty.

The chief's son was in the town and saw the woman. He was determined that she should become his wife, and sent his men to fetch the woman to him. The young herdsman was distressed and called upon the men of the town to help him, but they were too afraid of the chief and his son, and not one man would come forward to help Rinchen save his woman.

Feeling very sad, the young herdsman went down to the shore of the lake, sat down by the large rock and began to cry. Just as before, the king's retainer appeared. "Why do you weep this time?" he asked.

"I have lost my woman," the boy replied and told the whole story of how he had burned the dog skin and kept the beautiful woman hidden from the eyes of the people by covering her face in soot, but growing bold he washed her face, showing her beauty to the chief's son, and so lost her forever.

The retainer asked Rinchen to follow him into the lake again, for the king needed to be told the story. "Perhaps," said the retainer, "the king may be able to help you again." The young herdsman soon found himself in front of the throne once more at the feet of the king of the lake. After he heard the story of how Rinchen had lost the beautiful woman, the king gave him a small wooden box.

"Take this box," the king said, holding it out to the young herdsman. The boy took the box from the king. "Now," the king continued, "go to the top of a high hill and call the chief's son to war. When he has assembled his armies at the base of the hill, open the box and shout '*Fight!*'"

This the young herdsman did, and when he opened the box and called “*Fight!*” thousands of men charged out of the box and defeated the chief’s son’s soldiers.

Rinchen won back his beautiful woman and took her for his wife. He also took half of the chief’s lands and became a rich, benevolent leader of the people. The young herdsman also returned the box to the king of the lake, thanking him and living in fruitful contact with him for all of his life.

The Cormorants from Utröst

Norland (Northern Norway)

Utröst, like the Irish Tir-nan-Og and the undersea kingdom to which Urashima Taro traveled in Japanese tradition, is an “Isle of the Blessed,” a home of the gods, often underwater, where every human need is granted and no mortal ages. Utröst stories are typically presented as actual experiences and some have suggested that these stories were created to explain how it often happens that fishermen find straws of wheat tangled around the rudders of their ships or grains of barley in the stomachs of the fish they catch. According to legend, this normally soil-based vegetation indicates that they have passed over the undersea realm of Utröst or another of the *huldre* lands, the inhabitants of which live much like the Norlanders themselves, farming and raising cattle, fishing and sailing their boats.

On Vaerøy Island, close to Röst, there once lived a poor fisherman called Isak. He owned nothing more than a boat, and a couple of goats, which the wife kept alive on fish offals and the few blades of grass they managed to gather on the mountain, but his hut was full of hungry children. Nonetheless he was always satisfied with the way Our Lord had arranged things for him. The only thing he complained of was that his neighbor would never leave him alone. This was a rich man who thought he should be better off in every way than a wretch like Isak, and he wanted to have him out of the way so he could have the harbor that was outside Isak’s hut.

One day Isak was fishing several miles out to sea when a dense fog came over his boat. All at once such a violent storm blew up that he had to throw all the fish overboard in order to lighten the boat and save his life. Still, it was not easy to keep afloat, but he turned the vessel quite neatly in and out among the heavy seas that were ready to suck him down at every moment. After he had been sailing at great speed for five or six hours, he thought he ought to be coming to land somewhere. But he sailed on and on, and the fog and the storm grew worse and worse. Then he



MAP 6.7 Norway

began to realize that he was heading out to sea, or else the wind had turned. At last he knew it had to be true, for he sailed and sailed and did not reach land. All at once he heard a terrifying shriek ahead of the bow, and he thought it was none other than the *draug* singing his burial hymn! He prayed to Our Lord for his wife and children, for now he understood that his last hour had come.

All at once, as he sat there praying, he caught a glimpse of something black, but when he came closer there were only three cormorants sitting on a floating log, and whoops! he was past them. On and on he sailed, both far and long, and he became so thirsty and hungry and tired that he did not know what to do and sat half asleep,

with the helm in his hand. But all at once the bottom of the boat scraped against land, and it stopped with a jolt. Then Isak opened his eyes. The sun broke through the fog and shone over a beautiful landscape. Hills and mountains were green all the way up to the top, fields and meadows sloped up to them, and flowers and grass seemed to have a sweeter fragrance than he had ever noticed before.

“God be praised! Now I’m saved! This is Utröst!” said Isak to himself. Right in front of him lay a field of barley, with spikes so big and full of grain that he had never seen anything like it. And through the field went a small path leading up to a green, peat-roofed earthen hut that lay above the field. On the roof grazed a white goat with gilded horns, and its udders were as big as the udders on the biggest cow. Outside, on a stool, sat a little, blue-clad fellow, sucking on a briar pipe. He had a beard so bushy and long that it hung way down on his chest.

“Welcome to Utröst, Isak,” said the old fellow.

“Blessings on the meeting, father,” replied Isak. “Do you know me then?”

“That very well might be,” said the old fellow. “I dare say you’d like me to put you up for the night.”

“If that were possible, then the best is good enough, father,” said Isak.

“The trouble is with my sons; they can’t stand the smell of a Christian man,” said the old fellow. “Haven’t you met them?”

“No, all I met was three cormorants, sitting and shrieking on a floating log.”

“Well, those were my sons,” said the old fellow. Then he knocked the ashes out of his pipe and said to Isak, “You’d better come in for the time being. I imagine you must be both hungry and thirsty.”

“Much obliged, father,” said Isak.

But when the man opened the door, it was so richly furnished inside the hut that Isak was out-and-out dazzled. He had never seen such wealth before. The table was decked with the tastiest dishes: clabber and haddock, reindeer steak, great piles of Bergen twists, loaves of bread and fish liver covered with molasses and cheese, spirits and ale and mead, and everything good! Isak ate and drank as much as he was able, and still the plate was never empty and the glass was just as full. The old fellow did not eat much, nor did he say much either. But suddenly, as they were sitting there, they heard a shrieking and a rattling outside the door and then he went out. After a while he came back in again with his three sons. Isak started a little when they came in the door, but the old fellow had probably managed to calm them down, for they were quite gentle and good-natured. And then they said he would have to mind his manners and remain seated and drink with them, for Isak had wanted to leave the table. He had had enough, he said. But he humored them, and they drank dram after dram, and in between they took a drop of the ale and the mead. They became friends and were on good terms, and at last they said that he was to sail a few voyages with them, so he could have a little to take home with him when he left.

The first voyage they made was in a violent storm. One of the sons sat by the helm, the second by the tack, and the third was halyard man. Isak had to use the big bailer until the sweat poured off him. They sailed as if they were raving mad. Not once did they reef the sail, and when the boat was full of water, they sheered up on the waves and ran before the wind, so the water poured out the stern like a waterfall.

After a while the storm abated, and then they started fishing. There were so many fish that they could not get the sinker to the bottom for the shoals under them. The sons from Utröst hauled in fish without stopping. Isak also had good bites, but he had taken his own fishing equipment along, and every time he got a fish to the gunnels, it got away again, and his creel stayed empty. When the boat was full, they rushed home to Utröst, and the sons cleaned the fish and hung it up on flakes to dry. But Isak complained to the old fellow because it had gone so badly with his fish. The fellow promised that it would go better the next time, and gave him a couple of fish-hooks. And on the next voyage he pulled in fish just as fast as the others, and when they came home, he was given three flakes filled with fish as his share.

Then he grew homesick, and when he was ready to go the old fellow presented him with a new, eight-oared fishing boat filled with flour and fine sailcloth and other useful things. Isak thanked him, and as he was leaving the old fellow said he was to come back in time for the launching of the *jagt*. He wanted to take a cargo of fish to Bergen along with the next group of *jagts* from Nordland, and then Isak could come with him and sell his fish himself. Well, Isak was only too willing, and asked which course to follow when he wanted to come back to Utröst again.

“Straight behind the cormorants, when they head out to sea. Then you’re on the right course!” said the old fellow. “Good luck on your journey.”

But when Isak had shoved off and wanted to look around, he saw no more of Utröst. He saw nothing but the sea as far as his eye could reach.

When it was time, Isak showed up for the launching. But such a *jagt* he had never seen before. It was so long that when the mate, who stood watch in the prow, wanted to shout to the man at the helm, the fellow could not hear him; and so they had to put a man in the middle of the vessel, beside the mast, who shouted the mate’s call to the helmsman. And even then he had to shout as loud as he could. They put Isak’s share of the fish in the prow of the *jagt*. He took the fish off the flakes himself. But he could not understand how it happened: new fish constantly appeared on the flakes in place of the ones he took away, and when he left, they were just as full as when he had come.

When he got to Bergen, he sold his fish and got so much money for them that he bought himself a new *jagt* that was fully equipped, and with a cargo and everything that belonged to it, for the old fellow had advised him to do so. And late in the evening, before he was going to sail for home, the old fellow came on board and told him not to forget the ones who lived the way his neighbor did, for now he’d become a rich man himself, he said. And then he prophesied both good fortune and prosperity for Isak with the *jagt*.

“All is well, and everything will withstand the storms,” he said. By this he meant that there was someone on board that no one could see who supported the mast with his back when things looked bad.

From that time, Isak always had good fortune. He knew well where it came from, and he never forgot to leave something good for the one who stood watch during the winter, after he put the *jagt* up in the autumn. And every Christmas Eve, lights blazed from the *jagt*, and they could hear the sound of fiddles and music and laughter and noise, and there was dancing in the cabin.

The Areca Tree

Vietnamese (Vietnam)

The areca tree, scientific name *Areca catechu*, resembles a thin coconut palm. The fruit of this tree, the betel nut, is chewed—casually like gum or chewing tobacco—by millions of people throughout Asia and the south Pacific Islands, especially in India, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Philippines, the Marianas, American Samoa, Belau, and Bangladesh. In most countries, the betel quid—or betel cud—consists of a crushed betel seed, a pinch of lime (calcium oxide, not the fruit), and such spices as cardamom or nutmeg, all wrapped in an areca leaf. Some Pacific Islanders also add tobacco to the betel quid, which tends to increase the sense of well-being and alertness that this natural stimulant produces. Archaeologists working in the Pacific Islands have discovered evidence of betel-nut chewing far back into antiquity. Today, betel nuts are used medicinally to treat a variety of intestinal disorders as well as headache, venereal disease, and depression. Whatever its efficacy in treating these conditions may be, it has been demonstrated, both from the archaeological record and modern observation, that chewing betel nut stains and wears down the teeth, but, at the same time, it also prevents cavities.

The practice of chewing betel nut is on the wane, especially in the cities. The gift of betel nuts to begin a courtship and during the exchange of vows, however, which was once widespread in Vietnam, is reflected in the connection between the areca tree and marital fidelity which figures prominently in the following story. In this version, the pleasant properties of the areca tree and the betel nut are discovered by King Hung Vuong II, whose heart is moved by the story of love and devotion told about the brothers Tan and Lang and the woman they both love, Thao. But some have seen in this myth a contest between Chinese and especially Confucian cultural norms and the indigenous practices of the Vietnamese people over whom they ruled for approximately the first thousand years of the Common Era. Polygamy was not uncommon among the Vietnamese before and during much of the long era of Chinese occupation, nor was the practice of *levirat*, the custom of marrying a dead brother's wife in order to produce offspring to honor his memory. Interestingly, this custom is also condoned in the Hebrew scriptures and continues to be practiced in some parts of India and southeast Asia as well. In any case, some versions of the story have the older brother, Tan, leaving on a trip from which he



MAP 6.8 Vietnam

does not return. Believing him dead, Lang marries Thao, as custom required. Tan, however, is not dead and eventually returns to find his brother now living with his wife. But this is no Cain and Abel story. Tan understands perfectly his brother's actions and the three propose to live together harmoniously. Lang finds the situation awkward, however, and soon leaves on a trip of his own. In a sequence of events much like the ones recounted in Thich Nhat Hanh's version of the myth, Lang dies while away, becoming a white stone. Tan and, later, Thao go in search of Lang, eventually undergoing the transformations depicted in the story. The site of this miraculous testimony to fraternal and marital love becomes a

shrine and the locals come frequently to this pleasant place to offer incense and reflect.

In the version of the story presented here, the customs of *levirat* and polygamy are submerged. Even so, certain narrative details suggest their importance in earlier versions of the story. We see, for example, that the brothers, though they are not twins, are nevertheless “as alike as two drops of water.” To an audience that might otherwise have been scandalized by such goings on, this fact provides an innocent explanation for the mutual love triangle that develops between the brothers and Thao—and for Thao’s “mistakenly” embracing Lang at one point. In addition, the narrator chastely observes that when Thao transforms into a vine, she clings to her husband even in death: “the roots of the vine began deep beneath the rock which it stretched across before twining gracefully up the tree. It almost seemed to be supporting the tree to stand upright.” Yet her roots begin under Lang’s stone body and drape across him/it before they climb the trunk of Tan’s tree body as if in perpetual support. Thus, while the version of the myth we present here shows the influence of Confucian values, it nevertheless preserves the themes of love and loyalty, provides the origin story for a sacred place, and explains the birth of the widespread custom of chewing betel nut.

Tan and Lang were brothers. Though Tan was a year older than Lang, they were as alike in looks as two drops of water. No one could tell them apart. No one, that is, except the lovely Thao, whose father taught the village youth. During their years of studies together, Tan, Lang, and Thao became the best of friends.

At first Thao could not distinguish between the two brothers. They wore identical clothes and their hair was cut the same way. Then one stormy night when the brothers stayed late at their teacher’s home, Thao saw her chance. She prepared rice porridge for their meal and brought out one bowl and one pair of chopsticks and placed them on the table between the two brothers. She returned to the kitchen and watched them through a crack in the door. One brother motioned to the other to eat first, a privilege reserved for an elder brother. Now Thao knew which brother was Tan. She quickly brought out a second bowl for Lang. All evening, she observed the brothers carefully, until she managed to discover one small difference between them. Lang had a tiny mole on his right ear.

After that, her father and classmates were impressed by Thao’s ability to tell the brothers apart. She never handed Tan’s notebook to Lang, and she always greeted each brother by his own name. Over time, Thao noticed differences in the brothers’ personalities. Tan was outgoing and talkative. Lang tended to be quiet and pensive. Gradually, she could tell them apart merely by looking into their eyes. And although their voices were similar, she was sensitive enough to hear each boy’s nature expressed in his words.

One New Year’s Day the two brothers came to offer their respects to Thao’s father. Suddenly Thao realized that Tan was in love with her. She couldn’t explain ex-

actly why, but the look in his eyes let her know beyond the shadow of a doubt. And as for Lang? Thao was so shaken by Tan's look, she did not notice Lang's.

Not long afterwards, Tan's parents brought the traditional offering of salt to Thao's parents to ask for her hand in marriage to their elder son. Thao's parents agreed. With some regret, Thao left the home of her parents to go live with her husband's family. She wished that her people still followed the old custom of having the groom live with the bride's family. But she loved Tan and was happy to be his wife. On their wedding day, Tan wore a robe the cheerful color of green banana shoots. Lang's robe was a deep shade of violet.

Each day, Thao saw how deeply her husband loved his younger brother. When she and Tan strolled beneath the moonlight, drank tea, went horseback riding, or played chess, Tan always invited Lang to join them. In fact, Lang wanted the couple to enjoy time alone, but Tan insisted on Lang's presence. Lang pretended to enjoy these occasions, while deep down he longed for more solitude. He found great contentment spending quiet moments on his own. Tan was unable to understand this need in his brother and could not bear the thought of Lang being left alone. Thao tried to speak to Tan about Lang's special needs, but Tan would not listen.

A new discovery added to Thao's concern. Lang was also in love with her. Love burned within him like a fiery volcano. Although he appeared cool and indifferent on the outside, Thao was sensitive enough to know the truth.

One day Lang told them he wanted to retire to a remote mountain hut where he could tend a garden and compose poems. Thao hoped her husband would support Lang's idea, but instead he insisted Lang remain with them.

One dark evening when the brothers returned from a day's labor in the rice fields, Thao mistook Lang for her husband when he entered their hut first. She opened her arms to greet him. Lang hastily removed himself from her embrace and Thao realized her error.

The next morning as they shared rice porridge, Lang informed Tan and Thao that he was taking the day off. Though he laughed as he spoke, Thao detected his anguish. She loved her husband, but that did not prevent her from feeling Lang's pain.

Lang did not return that evening. Ten days passed and there was still no word from him. Frantic, Tan left home to search for his brother. Ten more days passed and neither brother had returned. Thao was beside herself with worry. She left home herself to look for Tan. Like both brothers she followed the road that led out of the capital city's southern gate. There the road forked. One side led up into the mountains, the other down to the sea. She chose the mountain route.

Thao walked for days until her sandals were no more than shreds and her feet were swollen and bloody. Matted locks of hair fell into her eyes. All she had left was a straw hat to protect her from the sun. She felt almost too weak to continue. Her heart was filled with dread.

Somehow she knew that Tan and Lang had passed by this same way and that knowledge alone kept her going. She tore strips of cloth from her shirt to wrap her blistered feet and trudged on until she came to the banks of a wide river. It was evening, and there was no ferry in sight. A slight wind rustled overhead leaves, and a few birds called in shrill voices. Thao was prepared to spend the night by the river, when she noticed a tiny hut perched on stilts a couple hundred yards away on her

side of the shore. A sudden gust of wind sent dry leaves flying. Black clouds gathered at the horizon. Thao knew a storm was brewing. She made her way to the hut and climbed up the ladder to knock on the door. She was greeted, somewhat cautiously, by a woman who looked at her oddly but then urged her to enter. She took Thao's hat and invited her to be seated on a low bamboo bench. Dinner was spread out on a simple mat. Thao greeted the woman's husband, who was feeding their baby spoonfuls of rice.

The woman took out an extra bowl and chopsticks for Thao, but Thao politely declined. She was too exhausted to eat but gladly accepted a bowl of hot tea. There was a sudden crash of thunder outside. Wind howled and rain beat against the hut. The sounds of the storm momentarily quieted the storm raging in Thao's own heart. The highland farmer lit a small lamp which cast a dim light. His wife put their child to bed in the next room, the strains of her lullaby drowned out by the raging storm.

When the baby was asleep, the woman rejoined them. Thao asked the couple, "Have you, by any chance, seen a young man in a green robe pass by this way recently?"

Neither the man nor his wife spoke. The man looked at Thao with a strange expression. Frightened, Thao asked, "Has something happened? Have you seen him then?"

The man slowly answered, "Yes, we did see such a man. What's more, we saw another man who looked just like him but was dressed in white. But I don't think you'll be finding either of them now. Please spend the night with us. You can't go out again in this storm. Tomorrow you can return safely home."

A chill ran down Thao's spine. A feeling of doom closed in around her, as she listened to the woman speak, "Move in a little closer so you can escape the draft that sneaks in by the door. I'll tell you everything we know."

"One afternoon, about a month ago, I saw a man dressed in white approach the river. He was empty-handed and didn't have even a hat or jacket. My husband was still working in the fields. I wanted to run out and tell the man that he had just missed the last ferry of the day, but I was occupied with the baby and couldn't go out right then. The man looked as if he was searching for something. It was odd, Miss, how he looked up at the sky and down at the ground. He turned his head this way and that before sitting down on the riverbank and holding his face in his hands. He began to shake and I could tell he was weeping. I felt uneasy and wanted my husband to hurry home so he could invite the poor fellow up to our hut. It began to rain lightly, and the man raised his head to the sky again. Then I thought he saw something, because he stretched out his arms as if to embrace someone. But, Miss, all he embraced was the empty air. The rain started coming down harder and soon I could not make him out very clearly. When my husband returned from the fields, I handed him a rain jacket and asked him to go down and fetch the fellow."

The highland farmer took a long sip of tea and said, "I found him sitting like a stone down by the riverbank, not flinching a muscle in all that wind and rain. I asked him several times to put on the jacket and join us inside, but he only shook his head. Finally, I left the jacket on the ground beside him and returned alone. The rain was really pouring by then."

“It was a storm like tonight,” said the woman. “We couldn’t fall asleep thinking about that poor fellow. All we could hope was that he’d get up out of the rain and return to his home. At dawn, all that was left of the storm was a light drizzle. I looked out the door and thought I saw the man still sitting by the riverbank. I put on a jacket and made my way out. Imagine my surprise when I realized it wasn’t the man at all but a large white rock. Next to the rock was the rain jacket my husband had left the night before.”

The man spoke, “It was so strange, Miss. That pure white rock hadn’t ever been there before. We don’t see any rocks like that up in these parts. It seemed unlikely that the man had dragged it there in the night. Anyway, I don’t think four men could have budged a stone that size. Rocks don’t just spring up out of the earth overnight. We couldn’t figure it out. As for the man, we guessed he’d returned the way he’d come or perhaps even thrown himself into the river. That’s what my wife thought, anyway, but I couldn’t imagine what would drive a man to such desperate measures.”

The farmer lit his pipe and took a long, thoughtful puff. His wife continued, “Ten days later another man dressed in green came. He looked all around him, too, like he was lost. Then he came up to our house and asked if we’d seen the other man dressed in white. When my husband told him all we’d seen, his eyes filled with tears. He cried out, ‘My brother has turned to stone!’ He ran to the river to find the rock just as it was beginning to rain. We had another storm and though we tried to convince the man to come inside, he refused to budge from the rock. He leaned against it and wept bitterly. Once again, my husband and I spent a sleepless night. In the morning, when we went outside, we didn’t see the man, but there was a tree of the palm family, tall as a ten-year-old child, growing beside the rock. That tree hadn’t been there before. What kind of tree grows that fast? I told my husband that the man dressed in green must have turned into the tree and that the rock was the man dressed in white. I believe the two men were brothers who loved each other deeply. Some terrible sorrow or misunderstanding must have taken place between them. But you, Miss, are you related to those men? Why are you looking for them? It’s another stormy night. Please don’t think of going out again. Stay with us tonight, I implore you.”

Thao wiped tears from her eyes and made an effort to smile. To ease the mountain couple, she pretended to make light of the whole affair, “Don’t worry about me. I’m the housekeeper of the man dressed in green. The man dressed in white is my master’s younger brother. I’m sure they simply crossed the river early in the morning after the storms. I’ll be crossing the river tomorrow myself. I’m sure I’ll find them. I doubt they’ve gone too far. Please don’t worry—I have no intention of venturing out in this storm tonight. I’d be grateful to spend the night here and then I’ll catch the first ferry in the morning.”

Having reassured them, Thao asked for a mat to serve as a blanket and after the couple retired to the back room, she lay down. Wind shrieked and battered at the walls as Thao’s tears soaked her mat. The lamp’s wick cast a bare flicker of light that trembled in the cold drafts seeping in through the doorway. A deafening clap of thunder made Thao wonder if heaven and earth had been reduced to dust.

The storm's fury seemed endless. But at long last, the winds died down. Shortly before dawn, all was quiet. Thao rose, careful not to make a sound. She opened the door and climbed down the ladder. A bright moon emerged from wisps of cloud. By its light, Thao could easily make out the white rock by the shore. Slowly she walked towards it.

It was just as the kind couple had described. A tree with bright green leaves and trunk stood by the rock, slightly bending over as if to protect it. Thao knelt by the rock and put her arms around the tree. She hid her face in its leaves and wept. Some of her warm tears fell on the rock and seemed to sizzle. Clinging to the tree, her knees sank into the soft, muddy earth.

When the couple awoke, the young woman was gone. They went down to shore and asked the ferryman if he had carried her across the river. He replied, "No, this is my first trip of the day. I haven't carried anyone across yet."

They asked if days before he had carried a man dressed in green or a man dressed in white. Again the answer was no. The couple walked to the white rock. The tree had grown a good two feet in the night and clinging to it was a fresh, green vine. The roots of the vine began deep beneath the rock which it stretched across before twining gracefully up the tree. It almost seemed to be supporting the tree to stand upright. They plucked a vine leaf and crumbled it. It gave an ardent fragrance which reminded them of the young woman whose gaze had been so deep the night before.

One summer afternoon, a party on horseback, led by King Hung Vuong II, came to rest along the riverbank. They noticed a small shrine sheltered beneath several large trees. King Hung dismounted close to the shrine. There he sat down on a smooth white rock while fanning himself. An attendant offered to wave the fan for him, but the king shook his head and smiled. He pointed to the tall straight trees around them and asked the attendant, "What kind of trees are these? The upper branches are laden with fruit. And do you know whose shrine this is?"

The attendant did not know, but seeing the king's curiosity, he climbed one of the trees and picked two of the fruits. Another attendant standing nearby said, "Your majesty, I do not know the name of these trees or fruit, but I do know something about their origin and why the shrine is here."

He told the king the story of Tan, Lang, and Thao as though he had once heard it in detail from the mountain couple.

"Your majesty, the white rock you are sitting on is the kind of rock Lang turned into. The fruit in your hand comes from the kind of tree Tan turned into. And the green vines which you see twining around the trees are like the vine Thao became. People in these parts say that the white rock represents Lang's pure heart. The tall, straight trees which shade the rocks represent Tan's desire to protect his younger brother, and the graceful vine shows the spirit of Thao who even after death remains at her husband's side. When the parents of these young people came looking for them, the farmer and his wife explained what had happened. The two families had this shrine built. Since then, local people have continued to light incense here to honor the memory of Tan, Lang, and Thao."

King Hung regarded the fruit in his hand for a long moment. He looked at the trees and vines and gently patted the white rock as though it were a small child. He

was deeply moved by the story. He handed the fruit to his attendant and said, "Please cut this fruit so I might taste it."

The attendant took out a knife, peeled the fruit, and cut it into eight sections. Each slice of the white fruit held a portion of a smooth pink seed. The king placed a slice in his mouth. It was not sweet like a guava but had a special tang he found refreshing. He crumbled a vine leaf and chewed it along with the fruit. The combined taste was even better. His mouth watered and he spat. A few drops of his saliva fell on the white rock and turned as red as blood. The king put a finger in his mouth and pulled it out but there was no trace of red on it. He asked his attendant to scrape off a small chip of rock which he chewed with the fruit and leaf. His lips were soon stained as red as a young maiden's.

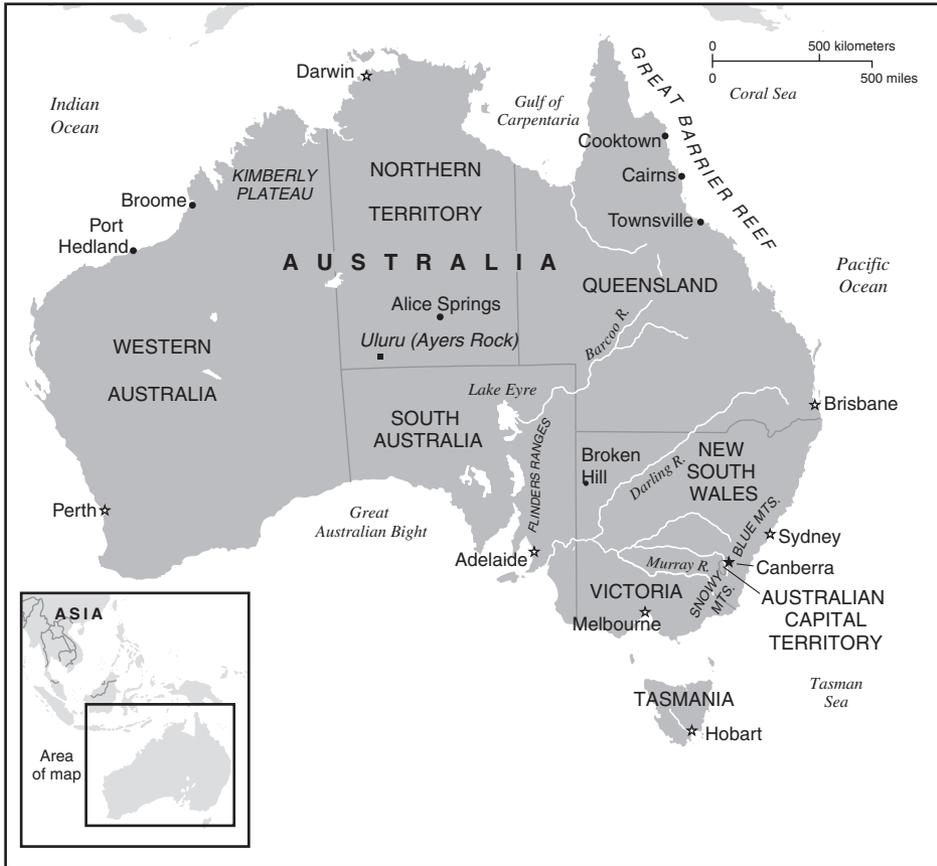
He invited his companions to taste a bit of fruit with leaf and rock. They all found the tangy taste most agreeable, and soon their lips were stained red, as well. King Hung spoke, "The love and bond between two brothers and husband and wife has borne a deep and ardent fruit. I decree that from now on this fruit and leaf and rock will be used in place of the traditional offering of salt for marriage proposals and weddings. They shall be symbols of love and fidelity."

The others bowed to acknowledge the king's decree. Soon after that the trees and vines were planted throughout the kingdom. The trees were named "Cao" after Tan and Lang's family name, and the vine was called "Lu" after Thao's family name. Thus the custom of chewing areca wrapped in a betel leaf with a sliver of quicklime began among the people.

Biriwilg Becomes a Painting

Aboriginal Australia

Aboriginal Australia offers a uniquely powerful example of the layers of meaning and the ongoing political and social implications of sacred places in myth. Aboriginal myths share with many other mythic traditions the notion of a previous Golden Age, the Dreamtime, in which spirit beings shaped the world as we know it. However, unlike most of the world's Golden Age myths, Aboriginal Australians do not consider the connections to that previous time to be lost or even particularly ancient (even though the aboriginals are justly proud that their heritage is one of the oldest unbroken cultural lines in the world). In fact, the relationship of the current people to their spirit ancestors is a fluid one, and the relationship between the ancient Dreamtime and the ongoing



MAP 6.9 Australia

manifestations of the Dreaming is, similarly, not one of separation and loss, but rather one of ongoing creation. Thus, through ritual practices, current people enter into the Dreaming and commune with primal forces directly. In some sense, the current dreamer *becomes* her or his ancestor for the sake of receiving revelation, wisdom, guidance, understanding, and creative energy. An Aboriginal writer, Mudrooroo, puts it this way:

The Dreamtime, the time of creation, symbolizes that all life to the Aboriginal peoples is part of one interconnected system, one vast network of relationships which came into existence with the stirring of the great eternal archetypes, the spirit ancestors who emerged during the Dreamtime.

At the beginning, when the Earth was a featureless plain or, in some myths, covered with water, these archetypes, our creative ancestors, in many shapes and forms,

stirred and found themselves in the void, the featureless landscape, the waveless ocean. Some, like the giant serpents who had been sleeping under the ground, pushed upward and writhed across the void, creating as they went along the landscape in which we live today. Other ancestors descended from the sky or came from the sea and when they reached the land they commenced their work of creation, not only making all things but naming them. The creative ancestors are responsible for everything there is, including the laws, customs and languages which order the different Aboriginal tribes and communities.

The creative period of the *Dreamtime* is as much metaphysical as an epoch in time. Aboriginal people can bring into present the *djang*, the spiritual energy of those times, by engaging in rituals which the ancestors taught and connecting up with them. They believe that the spark of life, the soul which energizes them, is part of that ancestor, so by stimulating that part through ritual and ceremony a breakthrough can be made into the timeless time of the *Dreaming*, when all things are made and continue to be made. (1994, 52)

Also, and perhaps most important in terms of the role of sacred sites in aboriginal mythology, the land itself is the embodiment of the Dreamtime (in the sense of the distant creative roots of the world as we know it) as well as the contemporary manifestation of living spirit beings and mythological truths that are every bit as much alive and active now as at any other time. Even time itself is seen here as a much more fluid than it is in Western cultures. We might agree the past is always part of the present, in the sense that current attitudes, institutions, and behaviors emerge from previous ones, but in aboriginal worldviews, such aspects of the “past” are very much more active in the “present.” When, through ritual practice, the aboriginal enters the Dreaming, he or she literally becomes one of the ancestors, and the realities of the Dreamtime are fully accessible to the current practitioner. Thus the land, which embodies the Dreamtime, is sacred not only in the sense of honored past but also in the sense that every stream, every boulder is a living part of the primal forces of the universe.

Perhaps the most famous aboriginal sacred place is Uluru, or Ayers Rock. As Mudrooroo writes:

Uluru is perhaps the most sacred place for Aboriginal people right across Australia, for here the many *song lines* and *Dreaming tracks* come together in a unity of myth which is celebrated by the giant sandstone monolith rising nearly 400 meters above the surrounding countryside. The monolith was built in the *Tjukurrpa* or *Dreamtime* by two boys who played in the mud and rain . . .

The custodianship of Uluru is with the Pitjantjatjara and Yankuntjatjara people and ownership has been inherited from both mothers' and fathers' sides. The rock itself is divided into the sunny side and the shady side, which not only refers to generational divisions but also to the division between two great myth cycles whose central themes motivate most of central Australian Aboriginal society Opposites meet here in an uneasy tension which was resolved in a great battle which marks the end of the Dreamtime age and the beginning of our own age.

The mythology of the "shade" concerns the Kuniya, the Rock Python people. They came in three groups to Uluru, from the west, south and north. One of the Kuniya carried her eggs on her head, using a *manguri* (grass-head pad) to cushion them. She buried these eggs at the eastern end of Uluru. When I was at Uluru a few years ago I watched a woman performing what has become an age-old ritual at the base of the rock. In the *dance* her feet dragged in the sand, leaving the tracks of a snake.

While they were camped at Uluru the Kuniya were attacked by a party of Liru, poisonous snake warriors. At Alyurungu, on the southwest face of the rock, are pock marks, the scars left by the warriors' *spears*, and two *black*-stained watercourses there are the transformed bodies of two Liru warriors. When it rains the water channels down these watercourses but often they are dry and thus only marks.

The battle centered on Mutjitjulu, a section of the northeastern part of the rock. There is an Aboriginal settlement there. Here a Kuniya woman fought with her digging stick and her features are preserved on the eastern face of the gorge, while the features of the attacking Liru warrior can be seen on the western face, where his eyes, head wounds (transformed into vertical cracks) and severed nose form part of the cliff. Above Mutjitjulu is Uluru rock hole. This is the home of a Kuniya who releases water into Mutjitjulu.

The Liru had been called down upon the Kuniya by the Mulga Seed men, for they had also refused the Mulga Seed men's invitation to their ceremonies. They too were defeated and retreated to the east.

There are also stories of other ancestors who entered into this vast battle, a veritable battle of the scale which occurs in the Indian epic *Mahabharata* and signals the end of an era, the creative period of the *Dreamtime*. (1994, 169–70)

The pair of stories we present below introduce Aboriginal myths that appear in several of the themes that Mudrooroo men-

tions. This pairing of tales also represents another important aspect of Aboriginal mythic tradition and Aboriginal societies: many of the deep mysteries of Aboriginal myth are in the keeping of one sex or the other. Men and women are careful to preserve their independent yet mutually supporting ritual truths and practices. When it comes to *yawulyu*, or “women’s business . . . men’s opinions . . . [are] neither sought nor required” (Bell 1983, 11) in the preservation and practice of Aboriginal women’s myths and rituals. Diane Bell, a white anthropologist who studied women’s lives among the Aboriginals of central Australia, is careful to restrict her study to women’s lives because their gender separation is so significant that cross-gender study by an outsider is virtually impossible (as Bell says, “it was unproductive and even dangerous to work with members of the opposite sex” [8]).

Ronald and Catherine Berndt, a married team of anthropologists who lived with and studied Aboriginal peoples for over 50 years, found themselves similarly constrained. In their essential collection, *The Speaking Land*, from which we selected the male and female versions of the myth of Biriwilg becoming a cave painting, each presents tales gathered exclusively from his or her own gender among their Aboriginal hosts. Both the Berndts, as well as Bell, also are careful to report only tales that their informants label as acceptable for general public attention. Much of the heart of Aboriginal mythology cannot be spoken in the hearing of (or be made available in any other way to) the opposite sex or of strangers or non-Aboriginal people.

BIRIWILG BECOMES A PAINTING (TOLD BY MEN)

An old woman named Biriwilg was camped at Gwoyurbir on the western side of Red Lily Lagoon, near Oenpelli. She went walking around, to Bandalgwoyu and to the long billabong of Inawelag (close to the Landing), looking for lily roots to roast. She became tired of doing this. “It is better that I go to that long ‘pocket,’ that corner, at Magagur,” she thought. So she camped at Walg, Red Lily (*wurumanin*) billabong. After a while she went to Indju-mandagag, a large rock nearby; and then on to Umer-ngam, another hill outside the plain where there is a billabong of red lilies. There she collected roots and roasted them for eating. Continuing, she came to Mandjалан, where she made a “road” (a dry place) across the middle of Mandjалан billabong. She walked to another billabong.

At Yalwunbenen, where she found more lily roots, she camped and slept. Next morning she went on to Ridjewad (Uridjawad) on the plain: there is a large rock here, with a cave. She climbed up to this place, Won-ganengg, and cleaned out the cave. She put her belongings inside it, including her lily root collecting bag, and she brought up soft paperbark to make a bed and to cover herself. She sat down there for a long time. She left the cave from time to time to catch tortoises and snakes in the

nearby billabongs, but returned to her home to cook and eat them. She also went to the Yarugiwig hills, but she always returned to Won-ganengg.

One day, however, from her cave entrance she saw two “men,” one chasing the other: Dingo chasing long-tailed Rock Goanna, Malawamb. “Ah,” she thought, “Men are coming!” She went farther back into her cave. Rock Goanna came in, and she went back still farther. [The two men had intended to go past her cave!] Biriwilg then “made herself” a picture on the cave wall. “No human being drew that picture. She turned herself into a spirit on the wall of the rock. She is there now!”

Today, men and women come to this cave and “feel” that drawing—they touch her there. She is standing up like an ordinary drawing. And when they touch it she sends out plenty of children [spirit children] to enter women everywhere.

BIRIWILG (TOLD BY WOMEN)

Biriwilg set off, coming and camping on the way, looking for honey and meats and vegetable foods. She came to Wiridjeng, where she met Ngalmoban, who was carrying *man-gindjeg*, bitter yams, and asked her, “Where shall we go?” Ngalmoban said, “We’ll go this way, north, in search of a place.” So they came on together. They camped at Gun-roidbi-boro, a red-ochre place name, and talked together. Ngalmoban told her, “I’m going higher up, and you go this way. We’ll go separately. I’m taking *man-gindjeg* yams.” Biriwilg agreed: “I’m going to the Garigen area, I’m not going that way.” Ngalmoban went off with her yams. She was throwing them about at different places so they would grow there, and naming the places as she did so.

Biriwilg went on by herself. At Gara-morug on the plain, eating *man-gulaid* nuts, she said, “I’ll go north and look for a place to put myself!” She came on, crossing the fresh water at Mula, and settling down for a while at Ngaraid-wodi-daidgeng where White Cockatoo had cut the rock with a boomerang. Still she came on. “I’m looking for a house where I can put myself and stay always.” On the way she was eating long yams. “I’ll stay here for a while, at Inyalbiri, eating these yams.” Then she went on again. At Gun-ngad-bo she gave the place its name, because “here I dug a soak, and I drank water.” She came on, climbing up, camping on the way, and crossing the water at Yawagara. She said, “I’ll go this way, where there is a big stretch of water, and I’ll cross over.” She crossed a big creek at Wolgal, went on, looked at the place, and said, “Here I’ll put myself, where the place is good and the cave-house is good, where I’ll stay always.” She went on, and was digging for soak water. As she dug the ground, she saw that it was only a little hole. She got up, and dug in another place. This time she was digging a big hole. Then she went, and was swimming about in it. When she had finished swimming, she climbed up out of the water and went to the cave. She said, “Here I’ll put myself. I am Biriwilg. I came a long way. Ngalmoban and I came together, then we said farewell to each other. She went on. I came this way, and here I’ll stay for ever: I put myself. I stand outside, like a drawing [painting] I stand. But I am a woman. I started off far away. Here the name of the place is Gun-gangin, where I put myself. I stand like a person, and I keep on standing here for ever.”

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