



Pilgrimage Centers as Persistent Places: Spiritual Magnetism, Affects, and Atmospheres

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Abstract

Pilgrimage centers are persistent places due in part to spiritual magnetism, defined as the power of a place of pilgrimage to attract devotees. In most studies, scholars claim that humans confer spiritual magnetism on pilgrimage centers based on events or cultural, social, or historical factors associated with a center. Here I contend that spiritual magnetism comes from the atmospheres that emerge at a center due to assemblages of humans, places, materials, objects, substances, and more. To demonstrate this, I explore how the intersection of the natural landscape, water, and human bodies at the Marian pilgrimage center at Lourdes, France, generates affects and atmospheres that have and continue to attract pilgrims. From this perspective, spiritual magnetism can be studied archaeologically and can help archaeologists better grasp the importance of pilgrimage centers throughout history. To show how archaeologists might examine spiritual magnetism at ancient pilgrimage centers, I conclude by discussing spiritual magnetism at the Emerald Acropolis, a precontact Native American pilgrimage center associated with the eleventh century city of Cahokia.

Keywords Pilgrimage · Spiritual magnetism · Affect · Atmosphere · Lourdes · Emerald · Cahokia

Introduction

Pilgrimage centers are persistent places. Most have long, complex histories of meaning and visitation; some have been sacred destinations for pilgrims from several different religious traditions for centuries (e.g., Bowman, 1991). Of course, the reason that certain locales become and remain pilgrimage centers through time varies,

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but it often has to do with a center's power to attract devotees, or what some call *spiritual magnetism*. I believe this little-used term is worthwhile because it highlights the influence that pilgrimage centers have on humans and broader historical trends. That said, the term has anthropocentric and static undertones, at least as it is typically used today; from this perspective, the source of spiritual magnetism is misplaced, and this causes scholars to overlook some of the key reasons pilgrimage centers endure and change history.

In this paper I attempt to reinvigorate this term by considering what draws people to a pilgrimage center. Spiritual magnetism, I argue, comes from complex relationships between humans, other-than-human entities (spirits, divinities, apparitions), places, landscapes, objects, substances, symbols, narratives, memories, and more that continually converge at pilgrimage centers (cf. Feldman, 2014; Hellman, 2022; Kapusta, 2022; Schramm, 2011; Skousen, 2016, 2018; Van Vlack, 2012). More specifically, these assemblages generate unique “atmospheres” – defined as bundles of affects that emerge from relationships at a particular place – that are the root of spiritual magnetism. To demonstrate this idea, I discuss how an assemblage of landscape features, water, and bodies at the Marian pilgrimage center of Lourdes, France, generate a certain atmosphere that makes the place attractive (Fig. 1). Given the material and spatial underpinnings of the assemblages and atmospheres that create spiritual magnetism, archaeologists can and should think about these concepts in their studies of ancient pilgrimage. These ideas help identify pilgrimage centers using archaeological data and are fundamental to understanding the power and importance of pilgrimage centers throughout history. I also discuss the Emerald Acropolis, a precontact Native American pilgrimage center in southwest Illinois, to

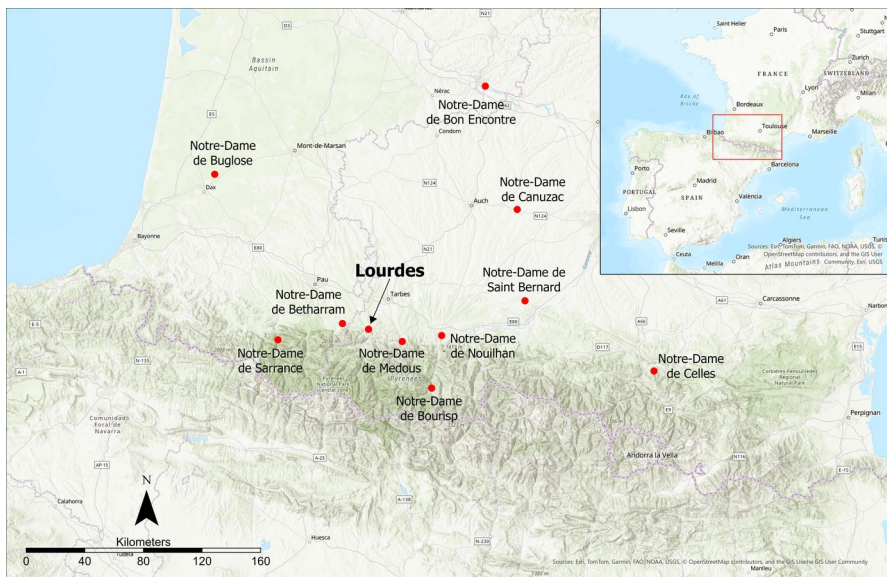


Fig. 1 Location of Lourdes, France, and other Marian pilgrimage shrines in southern France, 1858. After Harris, 1999, Fig. 2

show how archaeologists might use these concepts to better understand the spiritual magnetism of more ancient places using archaeological data (Fig. 2).

Spiritual Magnetism, Assemblages, and Atmospheres

James Preston (1992: 33) originally defined spiritual magnetism as “the power of a pilgrimage shrine to attract devotees.” According to Preston, spiritual magnetism was not inherent to or a natural quality of a pilgrimage center but was a result of “human concepts and values, via historical, geographical, social, and other forces that coalesce in a sacred center” (Preston, 1992: 33). Preston identified four primary causes of spiritual magnetism: the association of a center or shrine with miraculous cures, apparitions of supernatural beings, sacred geography, and difficulty of access (Preston, 1992: 33). He acknowledged that other variables could cause or contribute to spiritual magnetism, such as the presence of relics or a center’s role in creating and perpetuating national identity (Preston, 1992: 38). Still, he believed that “human concepts and values” were the primary reason for a center’s attraction; this point will be discussed later. Perhaps most importantly, these concepts and values were measurable, and Preston believed they could be used to order pilgrimage centers and shrines into hierarchies (Preston, 1992: 33). According to this classification system,

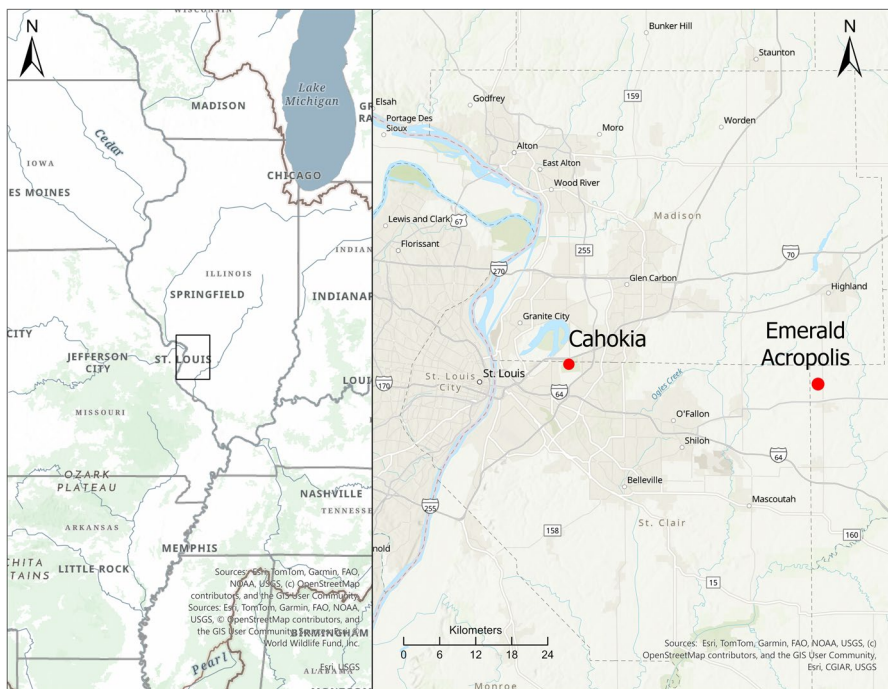


Fig. 2 Location of the Emerald Acropolis in relation to the precontact Native American city of Cahokia in southwest Illinois

larger pilgrimage centers and shrines had more spiritual magnetism and thus were more attractive, while the spiritual magnetism at smaller shrines was more restricted in scope and thus harder to identify and measure.

Generally, I like this term because it acknowledges that pilgrimage centers *do* things. They are affective places that encourage people to visit and act in certain ways, perform certain movements or gestures, think about certain things, remember past events or people, and feel certain emotions; moreover, they influence larger political and economic structures, religious institutions, and social practices and sentiments over long periods of time. Apparently, a handful of scholars also like this concept and have adopted it in their own research (e.g., Buresi, 2012; Eade, 1992; Kelly & Brown, 2012; Palka, 2014; Spadola, 2019; Stanton, 2017). Spadola (2019: 224), for instance, suggests that spiritual magnetism is a center's appeal, or what he refers to as "the call of the shrine," that ultimately attracts devotees. Belaj and Hrovatin (2018: 344) claim that spiritual magnetism is the "reputation" of a center or shrine, suggesting past events can attract pilgrims. Palka (2014: 7) argues that Maya places of pilgrimage "accumulate" spiritual magnetism because of their "unique physical features and material indicators of ritual, such as shrines, offerings, and burials." Thus, scholars' understanding and use of the term spiritual magnetism draws on Preston's original definition and acknowledges the affectivity and power of pilgrimage centers in some way.

However, I take a slightly different tack and contend that while "human concepts and values" associated with a pilgrimage center are key to spiritual magnetism, it is far more complex. Indeed, from this rather anthropocentric perspective, a pilgrimage center itself can never draw pilgrims to it unless humans assign certain meanings or values to it in the first place (see Belaj & Hrovatin, 2018; Eade & Sallnow, 1991). I contend instead that relationships between all kinds of phenomena that coalesce at a pilgrimage center – and not just assigned human meanings and designations – are the underlying cause of spiritual magnetism. These sets of relationships can be viewed as assemblages, or ever-changing gatherings of heterogeneous phenomena that impact but do not define each other and the wider world (following DeLanda, 2006; Deluze & Guattari, 1987). These impacts are better defined as affects, or the capability of something to affect or be affected by something else (see Skousen and Antoniuk, this issue). Sunlight, for example, has many affects – it excites electrons in atoms, it spurs photosynthesis, it warms human bodies, it sparks human memories, it sustains life, it gets trapped inside the earth's atmosphere by greenhouses gases. The grouping of all kinds of affects that coalesce in certain places and contexts generate atmospheres (see below). Spiritual magnetism, I believe, is a worthwhile concept because it recognizes the relational, dynamic, alluring, and transformational nature of pilgrimage centers.

This view of spiritual magnetism parallels recent theoretical developments in the social sciences that question the centrality of humans in social life, reject dichotomies that are common in Western ontologies (e.g., human vs. non-human, mind vs. matter, nature vs. culture, sacred vs. profane), and seek to examine and understand the larger webs of relationships between the vibrant, ever-changing phenomena that constitute the world (e.g., Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2001, 2010; Henare et al., 2007; Viveiros de Castro, 1998; Watts, 2013; see also contributions in Eade & Stadler,

2022 for examples in pilgrimage studies). Similarly, other studies acknowledge that places have power to alter human movements, emotions, and experiences due to their association with things, materials, substances, bodies, memories, histories, and more that exist outside and independent of humans (e.g., Baires, 2017; Barrett, 1999; Basso, 1996; Bradley, 2000; Ingold, 1993; Palka, 2014; Pauketat, 2013; Tilley, 1994).

The focus on relationships does not mean that human thoughts and beliefs do not play a role in instigating or the overall experience of pilgrimage, or that pilgrims do not engage in placemaking or other forms of meaning-making like recognizing the affective power of a center (see Antoniuk, this issue; Randall, this issue; Skousen and Antoniuk, this issue; Weiner, this issue). For example, believers often recognize and visit a place where someone encountered a divine being, which in turn encourages additional visits from pilgrims and subsequent visions and miracles. However, such events are always more complex in that they involve a multitude of material and spatial qualities, properties, movements, and flows that continually intermingle (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; DeLanda, 2006). The upshot is that assemblages, including those that converge at places of pilgrimage, are rarely fully dependent on or dictated, controlled, or orchestrated by humans (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Deleuze & Guatari, 1987; Eade & Sallnow, 1991; Eade & Stadler, 2022; Harris, 2021; Ingold, 2000, 2011, 2015; Pauketat, 2013; Skousen, 2016, 2018).

Furthermore, spiritual magnetism depends on the continual shifting of these assemblages. All phenomena are in continual motion, and thus their associations are always being refigured and negotiated (Baires et al., 2013; Ingold, 2007, 2011, 2015; Pauketat, 2013; Skousen & Buchanan, 2015). This corresponds with the ideas of Ingold (2011, 2015), which consider life as a meshwork of intertwined lines that are fundamentally and continually on the move. Moreover, pilgrimage centers have multiple, complex, and often conflicting meanings and interpretations. They are not arenas for a single belief system that is predetermined, fixed, or uniform; instead, they are locales ripe for negotiation and ever-changing meanings and practices (e.g., Coleman, 2002; Eade & Sallnow, 1991; Thomas et al., 2018). Thus, each individual experience at a pilgrimage center is never the same due to the continual flow of bodies, beings, spirits, objects, substances, emotions, memories, time, and more; these movements and entanglings, in fact, endow a center with vibrancy and energy (Skousen, 2016, 2018).

The dynamism of the assemblages that underlie pilgrimage centers problematizes the idea of pilgrimage as a “metastructure,” or “an element of social life that is so integral to a cultural core that it transcends political and temporal parameters” (Palka, 2014: 4; see also McCorriston, 2011). True, pilgrimages, broadly speaking, are common in many societies, but pilgrimage is a catch-all word for a variety of qualitatively and quantitatively unique journeys that mean different things through time and space. In modern times, for instance, it is often difficult to differentiate pilgrimage from tourism and other forms of spirituality and ritual travel (e.g., Badone and Roseman, 2004; Bowers & Cheer, 2017; Sahin & Guzel, 2024). Moreover, the assemblages that make up pilgrimage events are always different because they are embedded within specific relational fields (Pauketat, 2013). This means that the actual practice and experience of a pilgrimage is inextricably tied to the social,

historical, political, economic, and religious context in which it occurs. Similarly, the ways a center draws individuals are numerous and variable because, like all assemblages, the phenomena that coalesce at any given center are always unique and in flux. This constant change at a pilgrimage center surprises participants and is the primary reason why pilgrimages generate a sense of “enchantment” (Skousen, 2018).

It is worth noting that some scholars recognize that specific objects and places, and not just humans, help create spiritual magnetism. Preston himself acknowledged that certain objects (relics), substances (water), natural landscapes (cliffs, springs), and deities at pilgrimage centers helped create spiritual magnetism; however, he still claimed that humans, not the relationships between these phenomena, gave these centers meaning. Spadola (2019) builds on this theme, claiming that Preston believed that special objects associated with a place of pilgrimage create a “sacred trace,” or a mark of the presence or passage of a person, object, or occurrence. Thus, objects are a tangible link to a story about or memory of a place, event, individual, or happening in the past (cf. Chapman, 2000; Jones, 2007). For Spadola (2019), this link between spiritual magnetism and the materiality of a center or shrine causes fundamentalist Muslim groups to destroy burial places of “exemplary Muslims” or “Muslim saints” that often double as pilgrimage destinations; for Muslim fundamentalists, such non-Hajj related pilgrimages are a form of idolatry. The importance of pilgrimages in the Maya region, according to Palka (2014), depends on “sacred landscapes,” or caves, mountaintops, lakes, and other natural features where shrines, altars, ancient ruins, burials, offerings, and more have been constructed or placed. While Palka sees human ritual and ceremony as the ultimate way landscapes became sacred, he demonstrates that materiality matters – certain features, constructions, and objects are critical to the potency of pilgrimage events. Taken alone, however, these tangible traces of persons, places, objects, and past events are not what creates spiritual magnetism – it is the affects that stem from the relationships and dynamism between them.

In sum, I contend that the definition of spiritual magnetism is worthwhile. However, the root causes of spiritual magnetism come not just from human-assigned meanings but the affective qualities that emanate from assemblages between all kinds of phenomena that continually congregate at pilgrimage centers. The term atmosphere is key to this idea. There are many definitions of atmosphere. According to Harris and Sorenson (2010: 152), “atmospheres are one aspect of emotional worlds that emerge at the intersection of people, places and things, and typically in architectonic settings.” Thus, for them, atmosphere is closely tied to emotions that arise as humans engage with certain spaces and things (see also Anderson, 2009; Sorensen, 2015; Stewart, 2011). Ingold’s (2015: 73) definition also focuses on emotions – atmosphere is “all about sensory experience: it is a space of affect...an ‘indefinite spatially extended quality of feeling’.” However, he clarifies that atmosphere is not simply a human emotional state caused by external stimuli, but a result of an individual’s immersion in and relationships with their surroundings, including people, beings, things, spaces, and, importantly, the weather (Ingold, 2015: 76–77).

I decouple atmosphere and human emotion (though atmosphere can certainly trigger emotions; see Jones, 2020) and instead define atmosphere as a bundle

of ever-emerging affects that are tied to a particular place and historical context. Atmospheres exist regardless of whether humans witness, instigate, or have feelings about affects, whatever they are. For example, places, even without humans present, still alter larger relational fields and phenomena through the complex entanglings that constitute them (e.g., Martinez-Moreno, 2024; Skousen and Antoniuk, this issue). Thus, atmospheres at pilgrimage centers are the ongoing movements, assemblings, and negotiations of various phenomena at these special places, and in many instances, these atmospheres alter human experience and emotions in ways that do not occur in other locales (Skousen, 2018). The point is that spiritual magnetism is not solely assigned or determined by humans, nor is it an unchanging quality.

To better convey these ideas, I examine the vibrant, ever-emerging assemblages that underlie the atmosphere of the Marian pilgrimage center at Lourdes, France. Scholars have long noted the importance of natural features, landscape, water, and human bodies in creating Lourdes's spiritual magnetism (e.g., Agnew, 2019; Baunvig, 2023; Eade, 1992; Munro, 2022). The assemblage of these phenomena, and specifically their unique properties and qualities (not to mention those of other things, spaces, and materials too numerous to discuss here), create an atmosphere at Lourdes that has enticed pilgrims for generations and will continue to do so in the future. This example also highlights the material and spatial underpinnings of spiritual magnetism.

Lourdes

The small town of Lourdes, situated in a narrow valley at the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains in southern France, is one of the most famous Marian shrines and international pilgrimage centers in the world (see Fig. 1). In 1858, a 14-year-old French girl named Bernadette Soubirous was searching for firewood along the banks of the Gave de Pau River just outside the town. According to legend, she noticed a gust of wind from a nearby shallow cave along the river; upon investigating, a young girl dressed in white appeared, who Bernadette and others later claimed was the Virgin Mary (Harris, 1999). Over the next several months, the apparition appeared to Bernadette 17 additional times in this cave. During one of these events, the Virgin directed Bernadette to dig in a particular spot in the cave, and upon doing so Bernadette uncovered a spring. In the years following these events, the cave and surrounding landscape was transformed into a massive sanctuary to commemorate Bernadette and the Virgin as well as enhance the experience of pilgrims who, after the first apparition, began to flock to Lourdes to witness these occurrences for themselves (Dahlberg, 1991; Harris, 1999; Kaufman, 2005; Rinschede, 1986). The rise of Lourdes corresponded with an increase of Marian apparitions and shrines throughout the region at the time, all of which were part of a rising opposition to the Catholic Church's power, authority, and doctrine (Harris, 1999).

Only vestiges of the mid-nineteenth century village of Lourdes remain today. The town and pilgrimage center are products of the modern world and the religious and economic trends of the past century and a half. The sprawling 130-acre shrine complex consists of the river, the cave in which the apparition appeared (now called

the Grotto of Massabielle), the spring Bernadette uncovered, outdoor faucets, bath-houses, three massive basilicas, several dozen chapels, administrative offices, hospitals, convents, and large plazas that are connected by a series of well-maintained paths and walkways (Fig. 3). Adjacent to the complex is the modern town of Lourdes which, despite still being relatively small, has dozens of shops, hotels, and restaurants that serve pilgrims, tourists, and other visitors (Dahlberg, 1991; Rinschede, 1986). Since the 1990s, millions of pilgrims visit Lourdes annually, a testament of the center's importance and spiritual magnetism (Harris, 1999; Baunvig, 2023).

Landscape Features

The landscape features of Lourdes are vital to its spiritual magnetism due to their properties and qualities and the way they intersect with the senses and a host of other phenomena (e.g., Casimiro et al., 2024; Laferriere, 2019). The visual beauty of the mountain and valley landscape surrounding Lourdes attracts both pilgrims and non-pilgrims for skiing, hiking, and other activities popular among nature tourists (Harris, 1999) (Fig. 4). Moreover, the entire complex itself is a sensory-rich place. Munro (2022: 71–72) captures this sentiment and its connection with spiritual magnetism in the following statement:

“The mystery surrounding the place acts like a magnet. Lourdes’ spirit of place is very much influenced by its environmental beauty, its river, trees, mountains, sacred landscape, colors, fragrance, and sounds. The architecture



Fig. 3 View of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, the central and largest basilica at Lourdes. “Lourdes – France” by Vasic64 is licensed under CC BY 2.0



Fig. 4 Overview of the modern town and shrine of Lourdes, France, viewed from Pic du Jer. “File: Lourdes from the Pic du Jer.jpg” by Kristina D.C. Hoepfner from Wellington, New Zealand is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

and lay-out of the sanctuary combine a tasteful combination of various building styles, old and new, above ground and underground...The natural setting of the Grotto means that it is always surrounded by the murmuring of the river, rustling of the tree leaves and in the daytime, the song of birds. During the night, the Grotto offers peace and quiet, time for reflection while all maladies are safely tucked away in bed. Certainly, the Grotto can also be regarded as a thin space, a place where Heaven and earth meet.”

However, the wilderness and natural features in and surrounding Lourdes drew people long before Bernadette’s experiences and the modern shrine complex was constructed. This is apparent in the numerous prehistoric animals and human groups who frequented the caves in the immediate region throughout time; the objects recovered from some of these caves suggest they were places of ritual (Omnès, 1987). In historic times, caves were seen as the home of supernatural creatures and miraculous occurrences (Harris, 1999: 33). The local population saw the Grotto of Massabielle in particular (Fig. 5) as a “local religious hotspot,” a liminal place of spiritual activity where extraordinary events took place (Baunvig, 2023: 50). Indeed, many Lourdes residents believed that “supernatural, fantastic creatures reigned” in the grotto, and further that the surrounding landscape “was where fairies, witches, werewolves, and demons lived” (Baunvig, 2023: 50; see also Harris, 1999: 53–54,



Fig. 5 View of the Grotto of Massabielle. “Grotto in Lourdes, France 3–20–2004” by Beyond Forgetting is licensed under CC BY 2.0

77–78). Even after the Catholic Church established control over the town and constructed the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception directly above the grotto in the 1860s, the grotto itself never shed its “animistic associations” (Harris, 1999: 171; see also Kaufman, 2005). Thus, well before any person or institution attributed importance to the grotto due to the apparitions, the grotto’s characteristics and qualities already set it apart as a place of spiritual and religious power, and it continued to be for years after. This is not surprising; numerous studies have shown how the physical properties and sensory conditions of caves alter human thought and practice – the total sensory deprivation of deep caves, for example, instigates hallucinations, trances, and dreamlike states (Ustinova, 2009). Therefore, caves are recognized through time and space as symbolically and cosmologically important and as special, affective places where liminal beings reside and alternate realities emerge (e.g., Machause Lopez & Skeates, 2022; Skeates, 2016; Woodfill, 2021).

The larger Pyrenees Mountain region in which Lourdes is located is also home to many other pilgrimage shrines and centers (see Fig. 1). Lourdes is situated at an important crossroads between major Marian pilgrimage centers in southern France (e.g., Notre-Dame de Sarrance, Notre-Dame de Bourisp, Notre-Dame de Medous) and northern Spain (e.g., Santiago de Compostella), many with their own visually appealing landscapes as well as caves, enclosures, rock formations, and springs that, like those at Lourdes, have attractive properties and qualities (Harris, 1999). Since medieval times, small towns throughout the

Pyrenees region like Lourdes were flooded with stories of the Virgin and other apparitions appearing at these and other places. Residents made pilgrimages to these regional centers and shrines and participated in feasts, festivals, and dances to celebrate these events as well as witness miracles, despite attempts by Church authorities to eradicate such practices (Harris, 1999: 33–39). The point is that the apparitions were not surprising, given the historical and geographical context of Lourdes and the abundance of certain kinds of natural features in the region that had certain affects (Harris, 1999).

Water

Water is and always has been woven into Lourdes's landscape. It has long been a vital aspect of the center's attraction, in part because of the cultural association of water with purity and renewal in Christian theology (though this has been downplayed in recent years by the Church; see Hastings et al., 2000) but also because of its qualities and the way it shaped and still shapes the place and its visitors. Water from the spring Bernadette uncovered is the central focus, so much so that soon after the apparitions, the spring was tapped to produce water for visitors; it now produces a flow of tens of thousands of gallons of water every day (Ausina & Prodomi, 2002; Harris, 1999; Turner & Turner, 1978: 226–227). While early analysis revealed that this water has no spiritual or magical properties (Barbe, 1894), some of it is pumped into a series of outdoor faucets where pilgrims can collect the water to drink or wash, and premade bottles of spring water are sold to pilgrims from vendors throughout the town (Eade, 1992). Much of the spring water is diverted into a sprawling, one-story bathhouse, originally constructed in 1955, where pilgrims bathe and wash in separate cubicles with the hope that the water will cure their physical and spiritual ailments (Dahlberg, 1991; Eade, 1991, 1992, 2023a, b). This water is so cold that it shocks bathers, and on damp, cool days the chill of the water is difficult to reverse or forget (Eade, 2023a). The intimate, embodied engagement of individuals with the cold, clear, pure Lourdes water from the spring – and not just its symbolic associations – is significant.

While the water from the spring is specifically associated with healing and miracles, the water from the Gave de Pau River also shapes pilgrims' experiences. The river itself is large and winds through both the town and shrine complex (Fig. 6). The river edge once reached the limits of or partially flooded the grotto where the apparitions appeared in 1858, which is generally viewed as the most spiritually charged location in the entire complex. Its flow can be heard by visitors, especially by those walking to the grotto along the river walkway. The river also dictates the movements of pilgrims. Early in the shrine's history, formal walkways were constructed along the river to provide easy access to the grotto (Harris, 1999). Even today the river occasionally floods and thus restricts pilgrims' access to the grotto (AFP New Agency, 2024; Eade, 2023a). Thus, the river provides a rich sensory experience and is a constant reminder of the power and influence of water at Lourdes.



Fig. 6 Gav du Pau River. “Morning in Lourdes, France 3–20–2004 006” by Beyond Forgetting is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Bodies

While spiritual magnetism does not depend solely on humans, the materiality, movement, and transformation of human bodies is a vital part of Lourdes’s allure. Obviously, all pilgrimage centers are known for the assembling of often large numbers of people. Indeed, all kinds of human bodies of various ages and genders, religious convictions, economic situations, and political persuasions converge at Lourdes, and the affective impacts of the masses – the murmurings of the crowd, amplified voices of priests giving masses and sermons, shuffling of feet, aromas of smoke and body odor, feelings of claustrophobia – are not unlike those at other pilgrimage centers around the world. However, Lourdes is unique because it is seen as a place of physical healing and thus draws individuals with serious, non-curable, chronic diseases and ailments, so much so that the physicality of sick bodies was featured prominently in the earliest formal written accounts of Lourdes with the aim of “making the divine manifest” (Garrigou-Kempton, 2020: 445). Ever since Lourdes became a place of pilgrimage, there have been thousands of purported cures, often through interactions with spring water or visiting spaces within the complex; however, only 70 cures are officially recognized as miracles by the Catholic Church, with the latest occurring in 2008 (Beauvais et al., 2020; Whitaker, 2022). Because of this, and despite the financial and logistical hardships in making the journey, many pilgrims come hoping to be healed (Dahlberg, 1991). Though only a small percentage of

Lourdes's visitors are physically ill, they choose to visit Lourdes over other Christian pilgrimage centers in Europe due to its reputation; even physically healthy pilgrims come to witness cures or experience spiritual healing themselves (Agnew, 2019). In short, the long-standing presence of ailing bodies at Lourdes has and continues to be a draw for pilgrims.

The presence of chronically ill bodies has also shaped the landscape, composition of crowds, and overall feel of the sanctuary. For instance, long lines of visitors wait for entry into the bathhouse, where they bathe in marble tubs filled with spring water in the hope they will be healed, or at least receive a spiritual blessing (Beauvais et al., 2020). The pathways throughout the complex are wide and smooth enough for the safe passage of those using wheelchairs, carts, and crutches. Attendants, caregivers, and nurses help the ill move around the sanctuary and bathhouse as well as provide basic care (Beauvais et al., 2020; Eade, 1991). This gathering and movement of bodies with different needs, specifically those that are ailing, conveys that Lourdes is a place where all bodies belong and, in rare cases, may be fundamentally transformed through interactions with spiritual or holy phenomena (Beauvais et al., 2020). This creates a unique atmosphere that is lacking at other pilgrimage destinations.

Spiritual Magnetism in Archaeology

What are the implications of these ideas for archaeologists studying pilgrimage? For one, spiritual magnetism is not merely an ephemeral and immaterial phenomena that cannot be studied in past contexts. Because spiritual magnetism is constituted by assemblages of, among other things, material and spatial phenomena – objects, materials, substances, places, landscapes, and more – archaeology is well equipped to identify and examine spiritual magnetism's root causes and thereby explain why and how pilgrimage centers are historically significant. Many of the earliest studies of pilgrimage in archaeology, in fact, sought to identify material correlates of pilgrimage centers (e.g., Judge, 1989; Ray, 1994; Silverman, 1994). Silverman (1994), for instance, argued that pilgrimage centers in the pre-Columbian Andes had shrines, sacred objects, and religious symbols; sporadic occupation; foreign occupants or visitors; evidence of large-scale gatherings and ceremonies; and formal roadways or routes that converged at the center. Additional studies have found that these correlates are archaeologically identifiable and are indeed associated with pilgrimage centers through time and space (e.g., Bauer & Stanish, 2001; Bradley, 1999; Candy, 2009; Drennen et al., 2017; Lucero & Kinkella, 2015; Mack, 2002; McCorriston, 2011, 2013; Palka, 2014; Skousen, 2016; Spivey et al., 2015; Van Dyke, 2007).

A more salient point is that these past studies not only demonstrate that archaeologists can identify pilgrimage centers using archaeological data, but also that the assembling of these things at pilgrimage centers is affective – their qualities and properties shape the pilgrimage experience and are often the reason that pilgrimage centers have broader impacts. Thus, once a pilgrimage center is identified using these correlates, archaeologists can shift their focus to the relationships between these things, their characteristics and qualities, their affects, the atmospheres they

create, and their historical implications. For example, once an archaeologist identifies a shrine at a pilgrimage center, they could then consider the shrine's association with specific relics, materials, or substances (as well as their material properties) and the deity the shrine is dedicated to. After the archaeologist establishes the presence of non-local individuals at a pilgrimage center, they could next investigate where they came from, the connections these individuals had with locals, the resources and logistics they needed to make the journey, and the routes they took to get there. When an archaeologist identifies locations used for large ceremonies at a pilgrimage center, they could then think about the space used for the ceremony, the kinds of special objects used in the ceremonies, and what these ceremonies did and how they made participants feel. The list of potential avenues of exploration is endless. The point is that the foundation of traditional archaeological studies of pilgrimage – identifying whether spaces, materials, and objects indicate pilgrimage centers and activities – can also be used to think about why and how these centers appeared in the first place, create spiritual magnetism, and impact larger religious, economic, environmental, and historical trends.

The importance of tracing these material and spatial relationships in archaeological contexts will be clear in the following section, where I present an archaeological example from the Emerald Acropolis, a precontact Native American pilgrimage center in what is now southwest Illinois. Although vastly different from Lourdes, Emerald clearly had spiritual magnetism based on its relationships with very similar phenomena – landscape features, water, and bodies – all of which are apparent in the archaeological record.

The Emerald Acropolis

The precontact Native American city of Cahokia, located in the American Bottom floodplain opposite modern-day St. Louis, was constructed beginning around 1050 CE (see Fig. 2). Cahokia boasted over 100 earthen mounds, over 15,000 residents, and thousands of pole and thatch buildings. While archaeologists debate the exact reasons underlying Cahokia's emergence, archaeological evidence shows it was a rapid, unprecedented process (Pauketat, 2004). As part of this process, the entire landscape was restructured, with local groups and thousands of immigrants from outside the region settling in Cahokia and a series of smaller villages and farmsteads in the hinterlands (Pauketat, 2003). New building and pottery styles appeared, as did a new religion that involved ceremonies and practices that focused on fertility and renewal (Alt, 2018; Baires, 2017; Emerson, 2015; Pauketat, 2013). Political figures and/or religious specialists from Cahokia traveled to distant locations to settle, trade, and proselytize with varying success (Emerson & Lewis, 1991; McNutt & Parish, 2020; Stoltman, 1991).

Sacred journeys were a key part of Cahokia's rise (Skousen, 2023). One example of a sacred journey centered on the Emerald Acropolis, a "shrine complex" situated on a high glacial ridge 24 km east of Cahokia (Pauketat et al., 2017; Skousen, 2016; see Fig. 2). This ridgetop was first visited or inhabited by a handful of individuals or families in the early 1000s; around 1050 CE, Emerald witnessed a construction

boom that coincided with Cahokia's rise (Skousen, 2016). Thereafter, Emerald became a place of pilgrimage or, more accurately, the central node of a processional circuit undertaken by select families or social groups from Cahokia as well as individuals from more distant locales (Skousen, 2016, 2018). We know this from archaeological evidence uncovered at Emerald (which parallel many of the archaeological correlates of pilgrimage centers mentioned earlier), including abundant short-term houses and special-use buildings, small shrine structures, a relative lack of domestic debris and storage pits, the presence of non-local pottery, and a formal roadway that connected Emerald to Cahokia as well as a number of other nearby shrine complexes (Skousen, 2016, 2018).

Landscape Features

Like Lourdes, Emerald's spiritual magnetism was dependent in large part on the specific location where the Acropolis was constructed. Unlike most other large Mississippian mound complexes throughout the Midwest and Southeast, Emerald is situated in the uplands east of Cahokia, away from floodplains and large waterways, a fact that puzzled some archaeologists (Koldehoff et al., 1993). However, it is now clear that the Acropolis was built on this glacial ridge because the ridge naturally aligns to lunar standstill events – more specifically the northern maximum moonrise or southern maximum moonset – that occur every 9.3 years (Pauketat, 2013; Pauketat et al., 2017) (Fig. 7). Several pre-1050 buildings at Emerald were oriented to this same alignment, indicating that people recognized the correlation between this ridge and the moon decades before Emerald was enlarged. This relationship was formalized in 1050 CE when this alignment became the organizing principle for the entire Acropolis, or what Pauketat (2013) calls the “Emerald Axis.” Recent archaeological excavations show that soil was added to the sides of the ridge to recontour it and accentuate its lunar association; additionally, Mound 12 (the largest mound at Emerald) and two lines of circular flat-topped mounds constructed along the edges of the ridge all conform to this orientation (Pauketat et al., 2017).

Water

Water was a key element in the construction of and doings at Emerald and undoubtedly played a key role in this place's spiritual magnetism. A now-defunct spring lies at the base of the glacial ridge on which Emerald was constructed (Walton, 1962) (see Fig. 7). The source of the spring water was a perched water table suspended in the ridge, and even though the spring is gone, water still oozes from the ridge in the springtime and after rainstorms (Alt, 2018). Interestingly, the fill that was used to construct Emerald's mounds likely came from the spring area – modern LiDAR imagery shows that this section of the ridge was artificially carved out, presumably during the eleventh century (Pauketat et al., 2017; Skousen, 2018). The spring water was likely mixed with the borrowed soil to create plasters that were smeared on the surface of Mound 12, making the thin “blanket mantles” identified in mound profiles (Pauketat, 2013; Skousen, 2016, 2018).

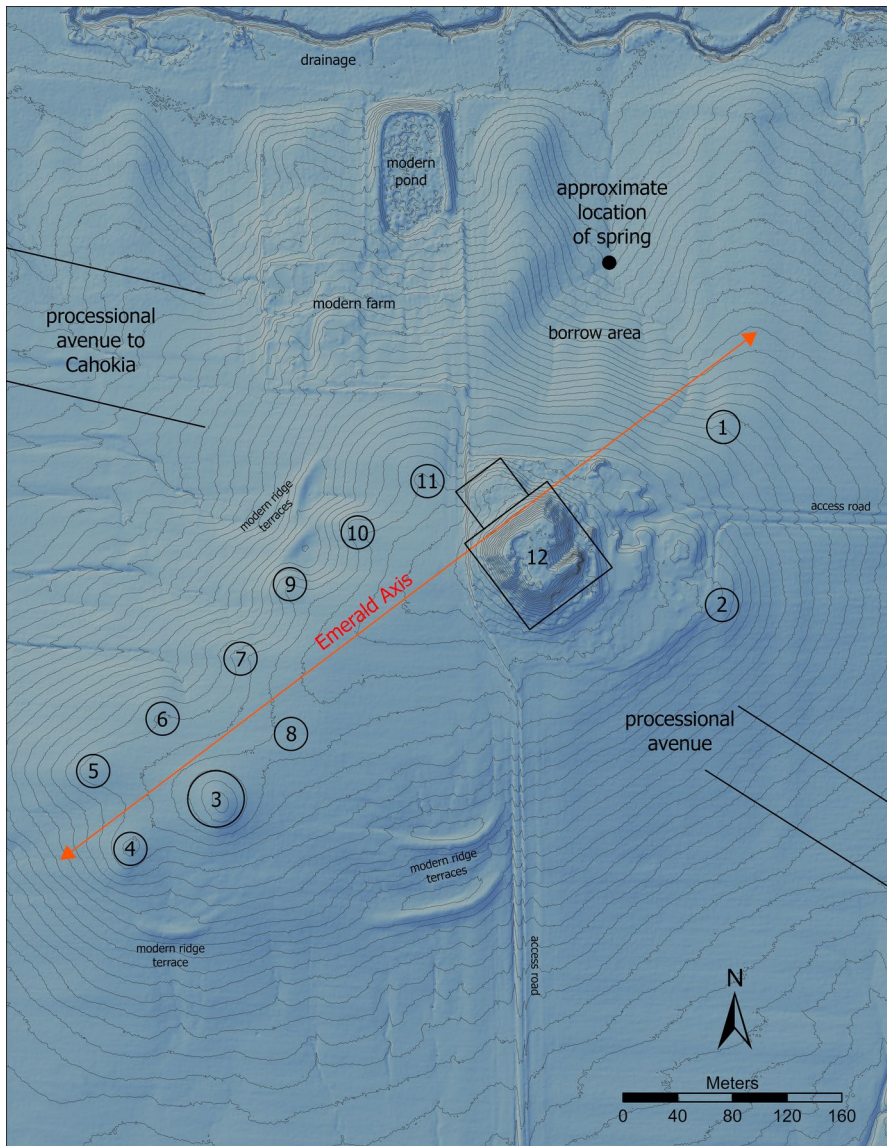


Fig. 7 Emerald Acropolis. Orientation of the natural ridge and mounds measures 53 degrees of azimuth, which aligns to northern maximum moonrise and southern maximum moonset events that occur every 9.3 years. Note the location of the spring at the base of the ridge as first recorded in the early 1900s. LiDAR data copyright Board of Trustees, University of Illinois; courtesy of the Illinois State Archaeological Survey

Of course, the other key source of water at Emerald came from the sky. Spring thunderstorms in the area are common that even today bring drenching rains (Fig. 8). This would have provided life-giving water for both crops and people near



Fig. 8 Summer thunderstorm over the Emerald Acropolis, facing northwest. The clump of trees covers Mound 12. Photo by the author

Emerald as well as throughout the entire Cahokia region. At Emerald, however, people engaged with rainwater in a unique way. Many of Emerald's small, semi-subterranean shrine buildings were dismantled, leaving open holes or "basins" where these buildings once stood. During rainstorms, water ran into the basins and left behind thin layers of water-washed silt; not long afterward, these depressions were backfilled with offerings and specially-prepared soils (Alt, 2017). People at Emerald engaged directly with the water by standing in the basins during or right after rainstorms – excavations have uncovered human footprints in several of the silt layers (Pauketat et al., 2017). In some cases, water may have deliberately been poured into these open basins by visitors, mimicking the inundations from spring rainstorms. Additionally, water-washed silt deposits, almost certainly the result of torrential storms, covered surfaces on Mound 12 during construction lulls; these layers of silt were incorporated into the mound's construction (Skousen, 2016) (Fig. 9). These patterns are not found at Cahokia or other related sites in the region.

Bodies

Archaeological evidence shows that Emerald was replete with human bodies, but only at certain times. The hundreds of ephemeral buildings uncovered during excavations at Emerald were likely short-term habitations, and the shrines and other special use religious buildings (e.g., council houses, medicine lodges, sweat lodges) were used during ceremonies (Pauketat et al., 2017; Skousen, 2016). This, along



Fig. 9 Profile of unit in Mound 12. Note fill layers interspersed by water-washed laminated layers. Photo by the author

with a relative lack of everyday domestic refuse, indicates that few people lived at Emerald year-round and large numbers of people visited Emerald periodically and for short periods of time, likely during lunar standstill events (which last for several months; see Pauketat, 2013). During these visits, people constructed or added to the mounds, conducted rituals within the special buildings, traded, shared stories, and more. Ceramic vessel forms suggest that many of these visitors likely came from Cahokia itself, while the presence of non-local pottery styles indicates that others came from more distant locations (Barzilai, 2020; Skousen, 2016).

As implied earlier, human bodies were not the only ones that mattered at Emerald. Many celestial bodies, including the moon, are considered by many Native American Tribes as powers, forces, deities, or ancestors that are sentient and powerful (Hall, 1997). This seems to have been the case in the Cahokian world. Indeed, the moon was clearly important in everyday life in the Cahokia region – among other things, its movements dictated the construction and orientation of numerous settlements in the region, including Cahokia and Emerald (Pauketat, 2013; Romain, 2024). The moon was also connected to fertility, reproduction, rebirth, water, the underworld, and a female deity, often called First Woman or Corn Mother, the mother of all things (Alt, 2018). The thousands of pilgrims who visited Emerald during standstill events would have witnessed the body of First Woman aligning with the landscape and thus balancing the world. Even if people visited at times other than standstill events, the orientation of Emerald's mounds, buildings, and ridge would have referenced these events and the movements and power of First Woman.

Discussion

Both Lourdes and Emerald provide examples of how to think about the material and spatial components of pilgrimage centers and how these things can be used to identify pilgrimage centers archaeologically. Most of the material correlates of pilgrimage centers, which are traditionally the focus of archaeologists (see above), are present at Lourdes and Emerald. Both complexes had massive features and special use buildings – Lourdes with its large basilicas and grotto and Emerald with its mounds and shrine structures – that contrast with nearby residential areas and locales. The local population of Lourdes is small relative to the masses of pilgrims who visit the shrine – archaeologically, this would be apparent through the abundant hotels, stores, shops, restaurants, and bars all over the town that were constructed to serve pilgrims. Similarly, domestic buildings at Emerald were short-lived and domestic debris was minimal, suggesting that most people at Emerald were short-term visitors.

Of course, many of the material and spatial correlates that archaeologists could use to identify Lourdes and Emerald as pilgrimage centers can also be used to reconstruct, infer, or imagine details about the pilgrimage experience (e.g., smells, sounds, crowds, movements, emotions; see Hamilakis, 2013) and why these places were important and powerful. They are, in short, part of the assemblages that underlie the atmosphere and ultimately create spiritual magnetism at these locales. At

Lourdes, spiritual magnetism comes from the water bubbling from of the spring, coursing through the river, sloshing in the stone basins, flowing from the faucets, and freezing bodies. It includes the smell of incense and flowers, the chirping of birds, the stoniness and darkness of the grotto, and the jostlings of crowds. It includes the presence and movement of all kinds of bodies – some with wheelchairs, carts, and crutches – through the open spaces and pathways crossing the complex. It includes the smoothness of walkways, the manicured trees and flowers, the vastness of the basilicas' interior spaces, the benches and seats that accommodate visitors and provide a place for rest and contemplation, and views of the surrounding mountain landscape. At Emerald, spiritual magnetism came from water falling from the sky, oozing from the ground, and flowing into house basins and across mound faces. It included the sensuous qualities of earth and water being mixed into plasters, and the act of smearing them on mound surfaces and shrine floors. It included people walking along the formal roadway to and from the Acropolis, Cahokia, and nearby shrine complexes. It included the large crowds that gathered at Emerald to construct mounds, participate in ceremonies, and watch the moon move across the sky and align with the landscape.

Importantly, landscape features, water, and bodies are only parts of the assemblages that created and still create the atmospheres underlying spiritual magnetism at Lourdes and Emerald. Moreover, despite the landscape, water, and bodies being important at both places, the power of each of these phenomena alone at both places was insufficient to draw pilgrims, or at least large numbers of them; only together did they make these places alluring. As with all assemblages, these phenomena at both Lourdes and Emerald were and are so intimately related that they can hardly be separated. At Lourdes, for example, water is part of the landscape, since water itself shaped and continues to shape the grotto and the river channel through which it runs. Bodies are intimately associated with water. Many sick visitors come specifically to Lourdes to bathe in the frigid water due to its healing properties; even those who are not physically ill wash with and drink the water for spiritual renewal and cleansing. Water was also key to Emerald, but for different reasons. It was part of and shaped the landscape, and visitors engaged with it by mixing it with special soils, walking it in, watching it fall from the sky and flow and deposit sediment. It was also closely associated with First Woman, fertility, the underworld, and the moon. The way these assemblages of phenomena articulated at Lourdes and Emerald were unique, and cannot and were not found anywhere else.

Like all assemblages, those at pilgrimage centers are always changing. This is apparent at Lourdes because, as conveyed by individual pilgrims and shrine workers, each journey to and experience of Lourdes is unique. One pilgrim who regularly visits Lourdes, for example, stated that “every year, every experience is a new one, and you’ve got memories of the old ones to rely on as well” (Agnew, 2019: 41). Experiences at Emerald also shifted; around 1200 CE, for example, there was a distinct change in the way pilgrims visited and used Emerald – fewer people visited and mound construction ceased aside from several mounds being capped (Skousen & Huber, 2018). Thus, each individual journey is a new experience because assemblages always shift, even if only slightly and regardless of whether it was immediately recognized by pilgrims. The experience of change, regardless of the scale

and even if not recognized in the moment, are key parts of spiritual magnetism – it creates a feeling of awe, wonder, and amazement that occurs when assemblages coalesce in surprising new ways (Skousen, 2018).

Though pilgrimage events are never the same and each pilgrim experiences pilgrimage events in different ways, the atmospheres at both Lourdes and Emerald created emotions and sentiments that many pilgrims (especially those who visited for specific reasons) experienced collectively. At Lourdes, for example, ill pilgrims and volunteer nurses have very different affective experiences despite both moving together through the same spaces and engaging with the same substances and objects; still, both generally find fulfillment (Dahlberg, 1991; Eade, 1991). While access to Emerald, especially during standstill events, may have been restricted, most people who saw Emerald from a distance or heard about what happened there likely recognized that it was key to ensuring fertility, plentiful rain, abundant harvests, community harmony, and the overall balance of the world. Ultimately, this opposition between different experiences and collective atmospheres and emotions is why pilgrimage is enchanting and why pilgrimage centers persist.

I make one final point. Throughout this paper, I have treated spiritual magnetism as something closely associated with large pilgrimage centers like Lourdes or Emerald due to Preston's (1992) claim that larger centers have more spiritual magnetism because they draw more people. While large centers certainly have spiritual magnetism, smaller centers or local shrines do too – they still are attractive to certain individuals because of their qualities and the assemblages of phenomena that coalesce there. Thus, spiritual magnetism is not only associated with large centers that draw a certain number of people – any place of pilgrimage, regardless of its size, structure, and formality, can have spiritual magnetism due to the relationships and atmospheres that coalesce there. Again, it is a matter of identifying the relationships that converge at the center and the affects and atmospheres they generate.

Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to reinvigorate the term spiritual magnetism, defined as the power of a pilgrimage center to attract devotees, by arguing that relationships, and more importantly the affects that emanate from them, are the underlying source of spiritual magnetism. Spiritual magnetism is rooted in atmosphere, or an assemblage or bundle of ever-emerging affects associated with a particular place and historical context. Additionally, spiritual magnetism is not dictated solely by humans. While human-assigned meanings, classifications, and prominence based on historical, geographical, social, and other factors often contributes to the importance and influence of a pilgrimage center as Preston (1992) originally suggested, the material, spatial, and sensorial properties and qualities of the center – all of which are beyond human control – are just as important. These relationships and their impacts create atmospheres, and this draws pilgrims to a pilgrimage center. The continual fluctuation of these relationships means that atmospheres, and by extension spiritual magnetism, change through time; these shifts make pilgrimage centers and their

atmospheres correspond with the ever-changing political, economic, and social contexts in which they are embedded.

Thinking about spiritual magnetism in this new way better explains why pilgrimage centers are persistent places, highlights the affective qualities and history-changing potentiality of pilgrimage centers, and sheds light on the experiences of individual pilgrims. For example, assemblages of landscape features, water, bodies of all kinds, and more constitutes the unique atmospheres at both Lourdes and Emerald in the past and present. In both cases, they were not generated by or dependent on humans alone, but on a complicated assemblage of objects, substances, spaces, and more. These atmospheres stimulated various feelings that depended on the contexts in which they emerged. They changed and continue to change the lives of millions.

Archaeologists studying pilgrimage should think hard about the theoretical underpinnings of spiritual magnetism, how best to study it using archaeological data, and how it can be used to evaluate the historical importance and persistence of pilgrimage centers. To do this, archaeologists must, at minimum, carefully investigate the relationships between all kinds of phenomena to better understand and convey the experiences of pilgrims and explain the lasting impact of pilgrimage in a particular historical context. That said, this paper is not meant to be a manual or set of guidelines on exactly how to do this – there are an infinite number of ways to think about assemblages and the atmospheres they generate at pilgrimage centers and how these assemblages and atmospheres were and are always changing. That said, with their focus on relationships and material and spatial phenomena, archaeologists are well-situated to explore new ways this might be done.

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