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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ECOLOGY OF SHRINES IN SPAIN

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This essay examines the geographical relation of Spanish shrines to the people they serve. It is a preliminary presentation of ideas and observations from an ongoing study of Spanish sacred places and apparitions. The strategy is to see whether observations about village shrines apply to an important regional shrine, Guadalupe. The aim is to understand better the practical and symbolic significance of the setting of shrines in their hinterlands.

1. Shrine Location: Village Shrines

The hand of God is behind the choice of location of Spanish shrines according to the typical village legends, which justify the shrines' location supernaturally. Many legends include episodes in which other villages try, but fail, to raid a madonna and carry her off. Instantly she becomes too heavy to budge, even with a pair of oxen. In other legends if the madonna yields to the raiders and they carry her off, she mysteriously returns to her favored village at night. She is loyal to her chosen village. Both the legend behind each shrine and the orientation of the shrine demonstrate the shrine's affiliation to a particular place. The majority of village shrines are within sight of the village; where the shrine is out of sight of the village, it usually faces the village.^{1/}

The shrine, then, is clearly of the village. But it is also beyond it. For shrines are places to go to, and a certain amount of inconvenience of access is essential.

Typically, the trip is the individual's penance, his way of repaying God, praising God, or asking God for something. The expenditure of effort is at once the pilgrim's offering, and his proof to God and to himself that he really believes in Divine intervention. The pilgrimage is a witness of absolute faith, that surety which, since the miracles of Christ, has been considered a necessary precondition for the beneficent intervention of God in the world of men. As an expenditure of a discrete amount of effort, depending on the distance traveled, the means of travel, and the condition of the traveler, the pilgrimage provides a way to quantify devotion. The basic unit is effort, and the network of shrines is predicated on the expenditure of effort, not its minimization. For this reason shrines--unlike markets--are peripheral, not central, places.

The typical shrine is from two hundred meters to five kilometers beyond the village center. But more important than this kind of distance is the shrine's cognitive and ecological distance from the village. Some shrines, for example, lie on the brow of steep hills very near their villages, but to get to them requires a stiff climb fully as tiring as a long walk. Similarly, the shrine is typically located in a setting as radically different as possible from the village itself, although still within a reasonable radius of the village. In the green valleys of northern Spain, shrines are on barren mountain tops, or in isolated cirques. In Castille and La Mancha, arid and flat, the shrines tend to be in green hollows

or on riverbanks. In this sense, then, village shrines are found in ecological oases, which clearly correspond to their use as spiritual oases.

The effort of the trip and the distinctiveness of the site combine to produce a sense of detachment in the pilgrim. The effort--a walk over a hot plain or up a steep hill--is followed by the release: the emergence into a new realm. Because of the ecology of the shrine the pilgrim feels he has attained something even before entering the sanctuary itself. He experiences a physiological catharsis that prepares him for his confrontation with the Divinity in the shrine.

In this respect we can distinguish several types of these pilgrimage sequences, which correspond to several types of shrines. Each shrine location is characteristically approached by its opposite in visual and sensual experience, and each location highlights a critical conjunction in the ecosystem.

The mountain-top shrine is found across the north of Spain. The visual field changes from closed valleys with little sky to an open sky--from a closed to an open configuration. It may be significant here that the Atlantic fringe of Spain has the most variable climate, and the most unpredictable. The mountain-tops can be seen as mediation points between earth and sky. The pass shrine, found in every mountain complex used for grazing, is superficially similar,

but actually quite different. The villages that make pilgrimages to pass shrines are located on the slopes of the mountain valleys, and the shrines are located at link points with other valley systems. The pilgrim experiences a change from isolation to connection. The pass shrines, like the mountain-top shrines, are at mediation points, this time between lower and upper pasture. The ceremonies take place in transitional periods--upon the melting of the snow, and just before the pass is closed for the winter.

The visual experience of the port shrine is similar to that of the mountain-top shrine--a change from a blocked to an open horizon. The mediation point here, of course, is that between land and sea, or harbor and sea. Just as the upper pasture is one of the two focal points for the whole transhumant culture, so the sea is the main source of wealth, and the main source of anxiety for the fishing and mercantile communities of the coast. The plains shrine (or vega shrine) is located at the opposite end of the transhumant routes from the pass shrine, outside the major cities of the plains in Andalusia, Extremadura, and the Levant. Here the visual experience of the pilgrim is the reverse of his experience with the mountain-top and the port shrine--the sequence is from openness to enclosure. The shrine is often in a hollow, sometimes in a cave. While the progression in the other pilgrimages is from shade to light; from dark to exposure to the sun; these typical farming shrines lead the pilgrim from heat to cold, from brown to green, from the sun to escape

from the sun. The mediation is between the surface of the earth and its interior; the vega shrines can be seen as consecrating the entrance points of water into an arid ecosystem. In all the types of shrines cited the pilgrimage sequence involves a reversal, and the shrine is a mediation point at a critical environmental junction.

Most pilgrimages (romerías, aplechs) occur in village groups at regular dates that usually fall in the vernal or in the autumnal agricultural hiatus (after sowing or after harvest). At that time the entire village can take the day off, moving from town to shrine in procession, sharing the experience described above. These are the only occasions when the entire village moves corporately out of the village. The ritual egress is in some places rewarded by the distribution of free food, paid for by the village council. Non-participation is sometimes subject to a municipally-levied fine. This desire to ensure complete village participation points to a societal aspect of the shrine location, over and above the shrine's impact on the individual's spiritual life. Removed in the company of his fellow villagers from his village and his work, the pilgrim experiences as much as possible his social environment abstracted from his normal physical environment. This experience is made possible only by his translation to a foreign place--another significance of the shrine's location beyond the village. Abstracted from the village, values that transcend the village, or even challenge it, have more meaning. The shrine is the

site where the group, as well as the individual, balances its accounts with the divine. Its location, strategic for the material welfare of the peasant community, points to the intimate connection that the villagers perceive between the divine system and the ecosystem. The divine actively participates in the landscape and assures its regular renewal. The pilgrimage functions on the village level as a ritual of renewal because it involves a corporate, sanctioned round trip to the borders of the territory.

The village is the place where most people spend most of their time. Shrines are located on the periphery of the village territory. (In some cases the apparitions at the origin of the shrine seem to have marked the boundaries of the village territory.) The periphery is by its very nature less well-known and less commonly visited. It is also the locus of fears and anxieties, the night domain of the wild beast. This is where the apparitions, so often at the origin of the shrine devotion, have taken place. It is the zone where the purity of the non-human world and the potential danger in the non-human world meet. It is in such territory that the shrines are located, and surely this location must bestow upon the shrine some of its awe, some of its mystery, and ultimately, some of its attraction. The cave, the mountain, the cirque, and the port are all points at which man faces a portion of the universe unknown to him, the borders of his everyday world. Such a

confrontation, irrespective of the micro-ecological form it takes, holds for the peripheral zone in general, and thus for all types of village shrines mentioned.

The village, the center, is the ordinary place. And given ordinary problems, they can be solved in the ordinary place. The routine problems are dealt with in the family, in the village council, or in the church. But an extraordinary problem--an army call-up, a prolonged drought, a family crisis, the spectre of a premature death--is dealt with at an extraordinary site. The shrine is such a site. That so many apparitions have occurred to shepherds, at least as reported in shrine legends, should not be surprising. For the village sheep are taken out daily into the badlands, "beyond the fringe" and the shepherds are among the few villagers who frequent this otherwise useless territory. The territory normally belongs to the village. But in a sense it belongs to no one. In the same sense it belongs to God. This takes us back to the observation that most shrines unequivocally belong to a village. Surely it must be significant that they are to be found in a territory that belongs to the village as a whole, yet which remains uncultivated, and thereby belongs to God at the same time. This then is the way a village possesses its God.

2. Regional Shrines

While most villages in Spain have shrines, not all the shrines are the domains of particular villages. In

fact, two of the types of shrines mentioned are multi-village shrines: mountain-top and pass shrines. The pass shrine links at least two valleys, and is located in the upper pasture shared by a number of villages. The distinctive mountain-top has symbolic significance for villages on all sides of it, although all may not go up on the same day. Other multi-village shrines include those for a diocese, for a pays, for a province, for a major region (like Montserrat for Catalonia, and Guadalupe for Extremadura) or for the entire nation (Pilar).

It is the argument of this paper that whatever the size of their hinterlands, regional shrines have most of the features described for the village shrine. They must be unequivocally of their hinterland, and they must be beyond it. Just as the legends and location of the village shrine emphasize the village's particular privilege in it, so a shrine with a regional hinterland will have well-defined boundaries marking its territory of grace. Such territoriality is usually consecrated in phrases like "Patrona of Extremadura." In the past there has been a natural tendency to arrange divine patronages in networks congruent with the nation's temporal hierarchy. This partially accounts for the clear identification of given administrative or feudal districts with a shrine's territory of grace. Also, legends associated with some regional shrines explicitly delineate the boundaries of the shrine territory--as when

the Virgin appears, orders a shrine to be built, and specifies the number and names of the villages that should attend.

Just as the location of the shrine in respect to the village is skewed, so, it seems, is the regional shrine's location within a region. The people of the region must go to the shrine; the shrine must therefore be located away from major centers of population. In addition to the reasons proposed for the village shrines, there are special social reasons why this must be so for the regional shrine. Only that which is conspicuously non-local can afford to be regional. Shrines in large cities (Valencia, Grenada, Seville, Zaragoza) can draw from beyond the city because of their very impersonality; the city itself is large enough to have lost a day-to-day sense of corporate identity. Therefore the outsider, especially if he comes from the region of which the city is the capital, does not feel alien there. But in smaller towns, and especially in villages, the citizens tend to feel possessive about their shrines. In some cases the priest himself, if he is not a native of the village, feels excluded from the shrine devotion. The multi-village shrine must be on neutral ground, which necessarily entails its isolation.

A geographer has examined the regional holy sites of India, using a hexagon model, to see if they fall into a central place pattern.^{2/} His findings were negative. And not surprisingly so, for his initial assumption--that shrines

are located, like markets, for the convenience of their users--was most probably incorrect. Regional shrines, like village shrines, seem to be located for the inconvenience of their users, within limits. Thus the major shrines of Spain and France today, for instance, are not located in the centers of these nations, or close to the population centers, but rather on the periphery. Sites less accessible than Lourdes or La Sallette in France; Monserrat, Covadonga, and Guadalupe in Spain; or, for Western Europe in the Middle Ages, Santiago de Compostella, can hardly be imagined.

The regional shrines cannot be so neatly pigeonholed as the village shrines. Their role in the ecosystem is not so immediately obvious. More people come to them from a greater variety of places for a greater variety of reasons. Is there more devotion to a particular image from within rather than from outside a declared territory of grace? Can there be allegiance to more than one shrine within a region, or must allegiance be to one shrine only? Do shrines compete, or is devotion an unlimited commodity that increases with its expenditure? For the regional shrine is there a regional equivalent for the mediation of the village shrine at critical junctures of the ecosystem? For instance, might a regional shrine link two ecologically complementary regions? Does the regional shrine mediate or does it epitomize?

For a tentative answer to some of these questions we

examine geographical information about the devotion to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in the Extremadura region of western Spain. We visited the shrine, which is maintained by Franciscan monks, in the summer of 1967, and obtained records of incoming automobile license plates from the local police, as well as the list of subscribers to the shrine magazine. We used this information to map and study the hinterland of the shrine: what are its limits; and which towns within the hinterland come more or less than one might expect, controlling for their size and distance from the shrine.

For the measure of devotion to the shrine of Guadalupe we settled on the subscription list of its bi-monthly magazine, Guadalupe. Guadalupe seems geared to the family market, and includes a page of jokes and a crossword puzzle, as well as moral advice, historical vignettes of Guadalupe monks, and a page describing favors granted by the Blessed Virgin. It is possible that the magazine's subscribers may be slightly wealthier than the average devotees, for the one hundred peseta (\$1.45) subscription rate might deter the poorest families.

As a check on the validity of the subscription list as a measure of devotion we compared the distribution of the subscription with the license plates from cars and buses collected during the months of May and June 1967 by the diligent Guardia Civil. (We assumed four passengers

to each car, and forty to each bus.)

The Provincial Origin of Devotees of
Guadalupe

| | Visitors, May-June 1967 <u>(N= 6,184)</u> | Subscribers 1967 <u>(N= 3,446)</u> |
|-----------|---|--|
| Madrid | 37% | 22% |
| Badajoz | 17 | 31 |
| Caceres | 17 | 29 |
| Sevilla | 3 | 5 |
| Toledo | 5 | 3 |
| Barcelona | 3 | 2 |
| Others | 18 | 8 |

The two lists are similar, except that the license plates show the distant provinces--Madrid and others--with a higher percentage than the subscription list. This discrepancy we attribute to tourism. The subscriptions are the better measure of the actual distribution of devotion, for the subscriptions indicate a commitment to the shrine that goes beyond a casual visit.

The subscription list provided a town by town measure of devotion. Using this measure, then, we controlled for the influence of each town's size and distance from the shrine. Our measure of each town's size was the number of households in the 1960 census, on the assumption that it would be unlikely for more than one person in a household to subscribe to the magazine. We measured the distance from each village

by the shortest road route. The assumption is that the relation between subscriptions (interaction), population size, and distance from shrine would be of the form of the "gravity model":

$$\frac{\log I_{ij}}{P_i P_j} = K + b(\log D_{ij})$$

where I = Interaction
P = Population
D = Distance
i, j are towns
K, b are constants.

In order to obtain values for b and K a regression analysis was performed. At the same time the partial regression coefficients were obtained. In effect we predicted the number of subscriptions from each town, based upon its size and distance from the shrine. Then we analyzed the deviations of the actual number of subscriptions from the predicted number, in order to discover what other factors might help to explain the villages' subscription rates. The difference between the actual subscriptions and the predicted subscriptions for each town is a residual. We have interpreted it as the amount of devotion, or lack of it, of each town that remains unexplained after the town's size and distance from the shrine are accounted for.

Two sets of these residual values were calculated, for two zones around Guadalupe: first, a zone consisting of the two provinces that make up Extremadura--Caceres and Badajoz; and second a zone around the shrine with a 150 km road radius, which included portions of the provinces of Avila,

Toledo, Ciudad Real, Cordoba, Badajoz, and Caceres. (See Map) The partial regression coefficients for the two zones are given below.

| Size | -.07 | Distance | Size | .008 | Distance |
|-----------------------------|---------------|----------|--------------------------------|---------------|----------|
| +.54 | | -.49 | +.52 | | -.51 |
| | Subscriptions | | | Subscriptions | |
| All Extremadura (372 towns) | | | 150 km road radius (295 towns) | | |

Various sets of residuals were then compared for differences in their means. Negative residuals indicate that the towns in question are less devoted to the Guadalupe shrine than would have been predicted by population and distance from the shrine alone; positive residuals indicate that the towns in question are more devoted to Guadalupe than would have been predicted by population and distance from shrine alone.^{3/}

The results of the analysis throw some light on the questions asked about regional shrines. As noted above, the zone with a 150 km road radius contains other provinces besides those of Extremadura. Comparing, for this zone, the residuals of Extremadura with those of other provinces, we find that people from Extremadura come to Guadalupe more than a distance-interaction model would have predicted, and the people from outside Extremadura come less.

Mean of Residuals, for the 150 km zone

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| All towns (N= 295) | -.18 |
| All Extremadura (N= 176) | +.75 |
| All Non-Extremadura (N=119) | -1.60 |

The effective hinterland of Guadalupe seems to be Extremadura, although the shrine is located quite near the edge of Extremadura. Towns from nearby Toledo have far less devotion than the size/distance model predicted. The border of Extremadura does seem to have an effect. The mapped residuals drop off steeply as soon as the Extremadura border is crossed. It even seems that towns in Caceres, but near the border, are actually more devout because they are border towns, while towns on the border in Toledo and Avila are actually less devout because they are border-towns.

Mean of Residuals, for the 150 km zone

| | |
|--|-------|
| Caceres (Extremadura) border towns (N= 12) | +2.74 |
| Toledo and Avila border towns (N= 9) | -3.36 |

This dramatic difference in devotion between towns just over the border from one another indicates the importance of the border itself as a boundary for the shrine's hinterland.

Further evidence also supports our contention that this regional shrine is the symbol of one region rather than the link between two regions--that regional shrines, like village shrines, epitomize rather than mediate. From its location it might be supposed that the Guadalupe shrine is a mediating link between Extremadura and Old Castile. Since a major sheep-herding trail (La Canada Laonesa) passes within twenty kilometers of Guadalupe, we thought it possible that the shrine acted as a transition point, the cultural equivalent of a toll town. From the examples of the pass shrine and the vega shrine it was clear that

there was an association between shrines and transhumant pastoralists. In point of fact, the shrine seems to draw disproportionately from towns on the sheep route, but only from those that lie within the provinces of Caceres and Badajoz--only those within Extremadura, Guadalupe's territory of grace.^{4/}

Mean of Residuals, for the 150 km zone

| | <u>Towns on Sheep Route</u> | <u>Towns not on Sheep Route</u> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| In Extremadura | +2.3 (n=20) | + .5 (n=156) |
| Not in Extremadura | -2.7 (n=10) | -1.5 (n=109) |

The relation of Guadalupe to other shrines around it also points up the special role it plays for Extremadura. In our trip we compiled a list of the most flourishing local shrines throughout Spain. In the following table the means of the residuals for shrine towns inside and outside Extremadura are compared with those for non-shrine towns.

From the All-Extremadura zone:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------|
| Extremadura shrine towns (n=27) | +1.1 |
| Extremadura non-shrine towns (n=345) | -.6 |

From the 150 km zone:

| | |
|--|------|
| Non-Extremadura shrine towns (n=5) | -5.1 |
| Non-Extremadura non-shrine towns (n=115) | -1.3 |

Within Extremadura, being devout at a smaller shrine would seem to increase the likelihood of devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. But devotion to shrines near, but outside of, Extremadura means less devotion to Guadalupe. From what is

known of Catalan, Asturian, Galician, Andalusian, and Basque shrines, the hypothesis would be that in regions culturally distinctive, where the resident has a strong regional identification in addition to the village identification, there will be a shrine on each level of identification, and shrines on different levels will be non-competitive and additive in effect. A symbolic manifestation of this intra-regional hierarchy of shrines can be seen in the processions of village patron saints to the capital city of the region when the regional patron is crowned (Cuenca, 1957, Santander, 1962).

The last point that emerges from the data bears on the type of person who comes to the shrine from within Extremadura. There was no appreciable difference in regard to devotion to Guadalupe among towns of the region in terms of dialect, crop type, or terrain. But one intra-regional finding is that towns that have what Deutsch calls "socially mobilized" people come most to Guadalupe.^{5/} There are more subscriptions from county seats on paved crossroads. Such towns most likely have the highest proportion of educated persons--professionals, merchants, students, and priests.

Mean of Residuals, for the Extremadura zone

| | <u>Towns at Paved Crossroads</u> | |
|-------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| | Yes | No |
| County Seat | Yes +7.5 (n=6) | +1.0 (n=20) |
| | No +3.3 (n=3) | -1.0 (n=343) |
| | All Extremadura (N=372) | -.5 |

There are three possible factors contributing to this finding. The first is that these towns are likely to have the highest proportion of persons who can afford automobiles, and who can thereby reach the shrine most easily. The second is that educated persons would be most likely to appreciate the shrine magazine, and be least bothered by its price. The third relates to the role of religion in much of southern Spain. Extremadura, with Andalusia, has the lowest rate of church attendance of any region in Spain--less than 30% of the population attends regularly. Like Andalusia religious devotion is centered in the towns, not in the countryside. The leading townsmen, rather than the peasants, then, are to be expected at Guadalupe. Catholicism in southern Spain has long been an elite ideology.

This study, of course, has provided no definitive answers to the questions it raised concerning regional shrines. Guadalupe is only one shrine. It does, however, provide the questions, a way to answer them, and some tentative answers. The data on Guadalupe largely support the parallel between village and regional shrines. The shrine is of the region. Therefore it does not conflict with the region's local shrines, although it competes with devotion to extra-regional local shrines. Guadalupe does not seem to mediate between regions in any major way. Its peripheral location, in a mountainous sector, is equivalent to that of the village shrines. It is relatively distant from the

major centers of population it serves--Caceres, Badajoz, and the towns of the Serena. In one way, however, the parallel between village and regional shrines was not upheld. For the village shrines we specified a number of sites where they may be expected--critical points in the village's ecosystem. There seems to be no equivalent location for Guadalupe. Perhaps for historically defined regions like Extremadura, it does not make sense to speak of a regional ecosystem.

The study of shrines, their networks, and their relations with their hinterlands will prove to be an area in which cultural geographers and anthropologists may fruitfully collaborate in the study of what might be termed sacred ecology. This paper is a first step in that direction.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Sanchez Perez, El Culto Mariano en Espana (Madrid, 1943); Juan de Villafane, Compendio Historico ... (Madrid, 1740); and Narciso Camos, Jardin de Maria (Barcelona, 1657).
2. Robert Stoddard, Hindu Holy Sites in India (Ann Arbor, 1966) pp. 41-45, 146-147. Stoddard notes that the Hindus often make it inconvenient for themselves in their pilgrimages, but he was unable to incorporate this observation into his analysis.
3. In a few cases of very distant, very small towns without subscriptions the residual was small and positive, meaning that zero subscriptions to the shrine magazine was more subscriptions than one could have expected. As this does not make sense, such values were arbitrarily called zero when sets of residuals were being compared. This explains why the mean of all the residuals in each of the two zones is not, in fact, zero, but rather a little less than zero (in the Extremadura zone $-.5$, in the 150 km zone $-.18$).
4. Although 40% of the subscriptions do come from Extremadura, most of them come from cities, especially Madrid, Barcelona, and Seville. These are the cities

Extremenos are most likely to migrate to.

5. Karl Deutsch, Nationalism and Social Communication
(Boston, 1966).
6. Rogelio Duocastella et al., Analisis Sociologico del
Catolicismo Espanol (Madrid, 1967), p. 47.