

SACRED PLACES OF THE WORLD

A Religious Journey Across the Globe



*Edited and Compiled by:
Robert H. Dalton*

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ABHISHEK

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PREFACE

The whole universe is a beautiful creation of God. Still some places are more scenic and sacred than the others. These places have given and are still giving its visitors peace and relief from the pestering burden of daily life. Since time immemorial people used to travel a lot to pay their homage to their respective religious places or their revered saints' tomb. Moreover, these places are known for the mental and spiritual tranquillity they provide for an all-round betterment of their visitors. In earlier days, people undertook a lot of toil to make a journey successful. Horse riding or camel riding was the only available mode of conveyance. There always remained a lot of risk during a long and tiresome journey. Now days it has become a lot easier due the availability of more and more economic and developed conveyances. The only thing required is proper information and guidance about the desired destination.

In this splendid little creation we have endeavoured our best to provide the reader with almost all the available knowledge and information about a huge number of sacred places covering almost all the religions that are spread throughout the world. With a very first hand experience we have compiled the data in a well-organised way. Readers will find it very handy as a reference book. It contains the sacred place of almost all the prominent religions; viz. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism etc. It is a concise yet exhaustive reference to the most holy places of the world. Pictures of almost all the places has been provided so that you not only read about them but also see them and imagine the beauty of the places.

CONTENTS

1.	Bethlehem - Birth Place of Jesus Christ	7
2.	The Church of the Nativity	9
3.	Capernaum, The City of Jesus	11
4.	Vatican City	13
5.	Mount Fuji	15
6.	Golden Temple - Amritsar	17
7.	The Sacred Mount Agung, Bali	19
8.	Bagan, Burma	21
9.	Mandalay, Burma	24
10.	Sacred Place for Bahai	26
11.	Haridwar, India	28
12.	Banaras, India	30
13.	Pushkar, India	32
14.	Allahabad, U.P.	34
15.	Shiva Temples of Rameshvaram and Badrinath	36
16.	The Shrine of the Bab, Bahai	38
17.	Bodh Gaya, India	40
18.	Shatrunajaya, India	42
19.	Miyajima Island, Japan	44
20.	Haguro San, Japan	46
21.	Djenne, Mali	48
22.	Bukhara, Uzbekistan	50
23.	Monasteries of Tashilhunpo and Toling, Tibet	52
24.	Jokhang Temple, Lhasa, Tibet	54
25.	The Potala Palace, Tibet	56
26.	Mt. Kailash, Tibet	58
27.	That Phanom, Thailand	60
28.	Neolithic Temples of Malta	62
29.	Kairouan, Tunisia	64
30.	Touba, Senegal	66
31.	Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe, Mexico City	68
32.	Mitla, Mexico	70

33.	Cheju-Do, Korea	72
34.	Monte Alban, Mexico	74
35.	Swayambhunath Stupa, Kathmandu, Nepal	76
36.	Monastery of Izamal, Yucatan, Mexico	78
37.	Adam's Peak, Sri Lanka	80
38.	Mihintale Buddha, Sri Lanka	82
39.	Uxmal, Yucatan, Mexico	84
40.	Chichen Itza, Yucatan, Mexico	86
41.	Mecca, Saudi Arabia	88
42.	Pilgrimage and Sacred sites in Shi'ite Iran	91
43.	Devil's Tower, USA	93
44.	Mashhad, Iran	95
45.	Shiraz, Iran	97
46.	Chaco Canyon, New Mexico	99
47.	Zoroastrian Sacred Sites	101
48.	Pir-e-Sabz shrine	103
49.	Avila, Spain	105
50.	Zaragoza, Spain	107
51.	Takht-e Suleiman, Iran	109
52.	Assisi, Italy	111
53.	Temple of Hera, Paestum, Italy	113
54.	Einsiedeln, Switzerland	115
55.	Externsteine, Germany	117
56.	Petra, Jordan	119
57.	Jebel Musa, Jordan	121
58.	The Abbey of Conque, France	123
59.	Petra, Jordan	125
60.	Durham and York Cathedrals, England	127
61.	Baalbek, Lebanon	129
62.	Canterbury Cathedral, England	131
63.	Mt. Ararat, Turkey	133
64.	Bath, England	135
65.	Bornholm, Denmark	137
66.	Black Hills, USA	139

67.	Sarnath, India	141
68.	Jagannath Temple	143
69.	Rameswaram	145
70.	Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi	147
71.	Ayers Rock, Uluru, England	149
72.	Basilique du Sacré Coeur, France	151
73.	Baptistry of San Giovanni	153
74.	Blue Mosque, Istanbul	155
75.	Ayasofya (Hagia Sophia)	157
76.	Santa Maria della Salute	159
77.	The Basilica of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva	161
78.	Mt. Athos, Greece	163
79.	The Shrine at Czestochowa, Poland	165
80.	Langalband	167
81.	Axum, Ethiopia	169
82.	Puttaparthi, India	171
83.	Deshnok - Mata Karni, India	173
84.	Sri Venkateswara Temple, India	175
85.	Mathura	177
86.	Shirdi, India	179
87.	Sabrimala, Kerala, India	181
88.	Palitana, Gujarat, India	183
89.	Kaladi	185
90.	Mount Taishan (Tai Shan), China	187
91.	St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall, England	189
92.	Chalma	191
93.	Atotonilco, Mexico	193
94.	Monte Alban, Mexico	195
95.	Knock Shrine	197
96.	Gurdwara Bangla Sahib Ji, India	199
97.	Meteora Monasteries	201
98.	Delwara Temples, Rajasthan, India	203
99.	Konya, Turkey	205
100.	Gurdwara Rakabganj Sahib Ji, India	207

BETHLEHEM - BIRTH PLACE of JESUS CHRIST



Bethlehem is the birthplace of Jesus and therefore a holy site to Christians around the world. The church is built over a grotto where the Virgin Mary is said to have given birth to Jesus. The city also is significant to Jews because it is the burial place of the matriarch Rachel and the birthplace of King David. Samuel anointed David king in Bethlehem (I Sam. 16:1-13) and David was a descendant of Ruth and Boaz, who were married in Bethlehem. The city, just 5 miles south of Jerusalem, was turned over to the Palestinian Authority as a result of the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement.

The church's large fortress-like exterior stands as a testament to its turbulent history. For centuries, it was one of the most fought over holy places. It was seized and defended by a succession of

armies - including Muslim and Crusader forces. The entrance to the church is a low doorway that has its own legends. One story is that the door was installed by the Muslims during their rule to remind Christians that they were guests in the country and must bow to their hosts. An alternative explanation is that the height of the door was designed to prevent unbelievers from entering the church on horseback. Yet another version holds that it was to protect the Christians from their hostile neighbours.

Bethlehem has a population of approximately 50,000 people, with the Muslims holding a slight majority. In Hebrew, the town is *Bet Lehem* ('House of Bread') and, in Arabic, it is *Bet Lahm* ('House of Meat'). For centuries, Christian pilgrims have made the roughly 2½ hour walk from Jerusalem to Manger Square. Today, the trip typically begins at the train station in Abu Tor and proceeds along the Hebron Road.

It is controlled jointly by three Christian denominations - the Armenian Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church.

- The Grotto of the Nativity contains the manger that is believed to be the place where the baby Jesus was laid after he was born. The grotto is encased in white marble.
- The site of the birth is marked by a 14-point star on a marble stone.
- The High Altar standing above the Grotto.

The site has been venerated by Christians since St Justin Martyr identified it as the site of Jesus' birth in the second century.

Manger Square is the focus of activity of Christmas celebrations not once, but three times a year. In addition to the traditional Western celebration which begins on December 24, the Greek Orthodox mark their Christmas on January 6 and the Armenian observance is on January 19.

THE CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY



The Church of the Nativity was built in the 4th century by the mother of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine. Helena also was the person responsible for the construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The present building, the oldest church in Israel/Palestine was reconstructed in the 6th century by the Emperor Justinian (527-565) and further repaired by the Crusaders. The church has a colourful history. When the Persians invaded in 614, they left the church intact, legend has it, because they were moved by a painting inside of the Nativity story depicting the Wise Men of the East in Persian clothes. King Edward IV of England donated wood from English oak trees for the ceiling. He also contributed lead to cover the roof, but that was taken by the Turks, who melted it down to use as ammunition in their war against the Venetians.

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their rule to remind Christians that they were guests in the country and must bow to their hosts. An alternative explanation is that the height of the door was designed to prevent unbelievers from entering the church on horseback. Yet another version holds that it was to protect the Christians from their hostile neighbours.

The church is divided into five naves by four rows of Corinthian pillars with pictures of the apostles on them. The names are written in Greek and Latin and many visitors have carved their own signatures over the centuries. The floor of the nave has a hole that allows you to see what remains of the Byzantine mosaics that covered the original church floor.

The Altar of the Nativity sits below a silver and gold chandelier. Stairways on either side of the main altar lead to a grotto. A fourteen-point silver star embedded in white marble indicates the birthplace of Christ. An inscription reads, *Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est* ("Here Jesus Christ was born to the Virgin Mary"). Fifteen lamps burn around the spot. Nearby is the Chapel of the Manger, where Mary placed the baby Jesus. Like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, various Christian denominations share control over different parts of the church. The grotto is under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Church.

The traditional midnight mass celebrated on Christmas Eve is held in St. Catherine's, the Roman Catholic Church next door to the Church of the Nativity. This is also the site of several chapels with their own historic and religious significance.

CAPERNAUM, THE City of JESUS



The city of Capernaum was built on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, about two miles west of the Jordan River. Though this ancient town is not mentioned by name in the Old Testament, it is referred to as our Lord's 'own city' (Matt. 9:1), for it became the centre of His Galilean work and ministry. Early in his account of the gospel, Matthew points out that Jesus began His Galilean ministry here in order to fulfil Old Testament prophecy. "And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people who sat in darkness saw a great light and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.'" (Matt. 4:13-16).

Prior to this ascension back into heaven, Jesus gave the Great Commission after “eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them” (Matt. 28:16). Five men from Capernaum (Peter, Andrew, James, John and Matthew) were called by the Lord to be His apostles. Jesus had often stayed in Peter’s house in Capernaum and preached in the synagogue there which had been built by a Roman centurion (Luke 7:5). The city was important enough to have a tax office, over which Matthew had presided (Matt. 9:9). A detachment of Roman soldiers was stationed in the town.

The kingdom of God encompassed a realm that extended well beyond the borders of ancient Israel. Jesus demonstrated His power to heal, for “in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon.” Jesus rebuked the demon and he came out of the man “and did not hurt him.” Witnesses of the miracle “were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, ‘What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.’ (Luke 4:31-36). As a result of this miracle a “report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region” (Luke 4:37). It was at Capernaum that Jesus paid the temple tax by having Peter “go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you.” (Matt. 17:27).

VATICAN City



Vatican City, independent state, under the absolute authority of the pope of the Roman Catholic Church. It is an enclave within Rome, Italy, with an area of 44 hectares (110 acres). The smallest independent country in the world, Vatican City was established in 1929 under terms of the Lateran Treaty, concluded by the Italian government and the papacy after many years of controversy. This treaty was superseded in 1984 by a new concordat, which, like its predecessor, recognised the full sovereignty of the Holy See (the jurisdiction of the pope) within the state of Vatican City.

Vatican City is situated on Vatican Hill in northwestern Rome, just west of the Tiber River. It is surrounded by medieval and Renaissance walls and has six gates. Many of the most renowned artists and architects of the Italian Renaissance were commissioned by popes to work on the Vatican's buildings. The most

imposing and important edifice is Saint Peter's Basilica. Built for the most part between the 15th and 17th centuries and designed by artists, including Bramante, Michelangelo, and Gianlorenzo Bernini, it is the world centre of Roman Catholic worship. In front of the Basilica is the great Piazza San Pietro (Saint Peter's Square). The other major edifice is the Palace of the Vatican, also known as the Papal Palace. It is a complex of buildings that contains more than 1,000 rooms and houses the papal apartments, the government offices of the Roman Catholic Church, several chapels and museums and a library. The most famous portions of the palace are the Sistine Chapel, with its great ceiling frescoes painted by Michelangelo (restored 1980-1990); and Raphael's Rooms, papal apartments with frescoes painted by the Italian artist Raphael.

The pope, who has absolute executive, legislative and judicial powers, governs Vatican City. The executive powers are delegated to a governor, who is responsible directly to the pope. In the exercise of his legislative powers, the pope is advised and assisted by the Sacred College of Cardinals and by the various Sacred Congregations. The judicial powers are exercised by tribunals; appeals from their decisions are heard by the sacred Roman Rota and by the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signature. The Secretariat of State represents the Holy See in diplomatic relations with foreign powers. Swiss Guards maintain internal security and protection of the pope; the Piazza San Pietro is subject to the authority of the Italian police. Castel Gandolfo, the papal summer palace outside Rome, as well as other buildings located in Rome but outside of Vatican City, are endowed with extraterritoriality.

MOUNT Fuji



Japan is one of the world's most mountainous countries, so it's not surprising that mountain worship is an historic element of Japanese culture. And of all the mountains in Japan, Mount Fuji stands out as a unique cultural symbol. At 12,388 feet, Fuji is Japan's tallest mountain. It's easily recognised and greatly admired for its perfect volcanic-cone shape, which is like an inverted fan. Japan's two major religions, Shinto and Buddhism, regard Fuji as sacred and Japanese from all walks of life attest to the power of this natural symbol so deeply inscribed in the national psyche. Unlike many other sacred mountains, belief dictates that this one should be climbed and hundreds of thousands of people, both religious adherents and tourists, climb Fuji every year. This popularity has caused a pollution problem so severe that it has prevented Mount Fuji from receiving designation as a UNESCO

World Heritage site.

Mount Fuji is a composite volcano, growing larger as layer upon layer of lava and ash built up on its slopes. Like its geologic history, Mount Fuji's sacred history has also developed over time as different religions, beliefs and myths have added new layers. Since ancient times, the mountains of Japan have been revered as sacred places, giving rise to a tradition of beliefs and rituals that scholars call *sangaku shinko*, meaning 'mountain creed'. When Shinto, the native religion of Japan, emerged sometime before the sixth century A.D., it wove this mountain creed into a wider veneration of nature. According to Shinto belief, natural features such as trees, lakes, streams, rocks and mountains are the dwelling places of spirits called *kami*, which hold influence over human affairs and respond to human prayer and ritual. *Kami* are believed to be concentrated in mountain areas and shrines have been erected to mark sacred spots.

The name 'Fuji' most likely came from an indigenous Ainu word meaning 'deity of fire'—not was surprising for a volcano that erupted often. In about 800 A.D., a shrine was built near the base of the mountain with the hope of placating the god that caused the volcano's eruptions. Fuji later became regarded as the dwelling of the Shinto goddess *Konohana Sakuya Hime*, 'the Goddess of the Flowering Trees'. Today, she is still the principal deity of the sacred mountain, revered in Shinto shrines at Fuji's base and summit, including the one originally built for the older fire god and honoured in a fire ceremony at the end of each year's climbing season.

Today, pilgrims, including members of *Fuji-ko*, still climb Mount Fuji. Some stop to worship at the shrine of *Konohana Sakuya Hime*, pray at the summit altars or ritually circumambulate the volcano's crater.

GOLDEN TEMPLE - AMRITSAR



It is a place of both stupendous beauty and sublime peacefulness. Originally a small lake in the midst of a quiet forest, the site has been a meditation retreat for wandering mendicants and sages since deep antiquity. The Buddha is known to have spent time at this place in contemplation. Two thousand years after Buddha's time, another philosopher-saint came to live and meditate by the peaceful lake. This was Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh religion. After the passing away of Guru Nanak, his disciples continued to frequent the site; over the centuries it became the primary sacred shrine of the Sikhs. The lake was enlarged and structurally contained during the leadership of the fourth Sikh Guru (Ram Dass, 1574-1581) and during the leadership of the fifth Guru (Arjan, 1581-1606), the Hari Mandir, or Temple of God was built. From the early 1600s to the mid 1700s the sixth through tenth Sikh Gurus were constantly involved in defending

both their religion and their temple against Moslem armies. On numerous occasions the temple was destroyed by the Moslems and each time was rebuilt more beautifully by the Sikhs. From 1767 onwards, the Sikhs became strong enough militarily to repulse invaders. Peace returned to the Hari Mandir. The temple's architecture draws on both Hindu and Moslem artistic styles yet represent a unique co-evolution of the two. During the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), Hari Mandir was richly ornamented with marble sculptures, golden gilding and large quantities of precious stones. Within the sanctuary, on a jewel-studded platform, lies the *Adi Grantha*, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs. This scripture is a collection of devotional poems, prayers and hymns composed by the ten Sikh gurus and various Moslem and Hindu saints. Beginning early in the morning and lasting until long past sunset, these hymns are chanted to the exquisite accompaniment of flutes, drums and stringed instruments. Echoing across the serene lake, this enchantingly beautiful music induces a delicate yet powerful state of trance in the pilgrims strolling leisurely around the marble concourse encircling the pool and temple. An underground spring feeds the sacred lake and throughout the day and night pilgrims immerse themselves in the water, a symbolic cleansing of the soul rather than an actual bathing of the body. Amritsar means 'pool of ambrosial nectar'. Looking deeply into the origins of this word amrit, we find that it indicates a drink of the gods, a rare and magical substance that catalyses euphoric states of consciousness and spiritual enlightenment. With this word we have a very clear example of the spirit, power, or energetic character of a particular place becoming encoded as an ancient geographical place name.

THE SACRED MOUNT AGUNG, Bali

This sacred mountain is to the Balinese what Olympus was to the ancient Greeks—the Cosmic Mountain. The Balinese, who consider this volcano ‘the Navel of the World’, always sleep with their heads toward Agung. The mystical Balinese believe the gods raised the mountain as advantage point to view the unceasing pageant of life below. To them, it is a central, heavenly point of reference, the geographical and religious centre of the world. With an elevation of 3,014 meters, the foot of the mountain stretches northeast right to the sea. To the southeast its slope is blocked by a line of small extinct volcanoes; to the northwest Agung is separated from Gunung Batur by a narrow valley.

The gods rest above the mountain summit and when they come down to visit the island they reside in Bali’s holiest temple complex, Besakih, six km below the crater. When the gods are displeased, Agung showers the land with stone and ruin. Its feathery heights are the source of life-giving rivers and volcanic ash, which irrigate and enrich the island’s rice fields. The lower portions of the mountain are heavily forested and farmed up to about 1,000 meters.

History of Gunung Agung

A major eruption in 1350 so fertilised the land around Besakih that year after year it has yielded enough rice to not only supply

the needs of the complex but also defray the costs of the unending ceremonies staged in the mountain's honour. Agung's most recent eruption occurred in the closing years of the turbulent Sukarno regime, in 1963. The cataclysm began during the greatest of Balinese ceremonies, Eka Dasa Rudra, an exorcism of evil staged only once every 100 years. Except for minor activity in 1808 and 1843, this was the first time the sacred volcano had blown since 1350.

Many people looked upon the disaster as a divine condemnation of the ill-fated Sukarno regime, and the subsequent failure of crops, uprooting of villages, and forced evacuation of 86,000 people contributed substantially to the communal clashes and massacres during the so-called purge of Indonesian 'communists' in 1966. Because empty land for the evacuees was no longer available on Bali, the consequences of overpopulation became acute for the first time in the island's history. No longer could farmers move temporarily to another part of the island, later returning to a land covered in fresh, fertile ash. Thousands were instead resettled in transmigration camps in central Sulawesi.

Few scars remain today. Until well into the 1970s lava streams blackened the countryside northeast of Klungkung, but the region is now replanted with fields and gardens.

BAGAN, BURMA

There are two pre-eminent ancient religious cities in Southeast Asia: Bagan in Burma and Angkor in Cambodia. Both sites are notable for their expanse of sacred geography and the number and size of their individual temples. For many visitors Bagan is the more extraordinary of the two cities and this because of the view. The ruins of the more than one hundred Angkor temples stand alone and isolated in thick jungles and only from the top of the tallest temples it is not possible to see others in the distance. Sprawling across a vast dusty plain, the ruins of Bagan are unhidden. There being no trees to obstruct the view, one may gaze over forty square miles of countryside, upon literally thousands of temples. In the early morning, from

Sulamani Temple, or in the late afternoon, from Gawdawpalin Temple, the view is among the very finest the world has to offer.

While the kingdoms of Bagan date back to the early 2nd century A.D., Bagan only entered its golden age with the conquest of Thaton by King Anawrahta in 1057 A.D. From this time, until Kublai Khan's forces overran Bagan in 1287 A.D., more than 13,000 temples, pagodas and other religious structures were built. Today, seven centuries later, approximately 2,200 temples remain standing. The river Ayeyarwady has washed away nearly one-third of the original city area, thieves have torn apart many temples in search of treasures, while earthquakes and the ravages of time have reduced hundreds of others to great piles of crumbled stones. The photographs illustrate the following temples:

Ananda Temple



King Kyanzittha completed this temple in 1091 A.D. It is modelled after the legendary Nandamula cave in the Himalaya Mountains. Soaring to 51 meters, it received its golden gilding in 1990 in commemoration of the 900th anniversary of its construction. Contained within the temple are four great statues of the Buddhas of the four ages. Kakusandha faces north, Konagamana faces east, Kassapa faces south and Guatama, the most recent Buddha, faces west.

Dhammayangyi



The largest temple in Bagan, it was built by King Narathu who reigned from 1167 to 1170.

Shwezigon



This pagoda was built as the most important reliquary shrine in Bagan. Begun by King Anawrahta and completed by King Kyanzittha in 1089, it contains several bones and hairs of the Buddha. Pilgrims from throughout Burma journey to Shwezigon each year for a great festival during the Burmese month of Nadaw, which falls in the November-December period. This festival is hugely popular because elements of pre-Buddhist Nat worship (Nats are pagan animistic spirits) were combined with Buddhist themes in the pagoda's construction.

MANDALAY, BURMA



Legends tell that Gautam Buddha once went to teach among the people of Dhannavati (now the northern Rakhine region of Burma/Myanmar). The king, Candra-suriya, requested that Gautam leave an image of himself for the benefit of the people. Buddha sat for a week of meditation under a Bodhi tree while Sakka, a king of the gods, created a life-like image of great beauty. Buddha was pleased with the image and decided to imbue it with his spiritual essence for a period of five thousand years.

According to ancient tradition, only five likenesses of the Buddha were said to have been made during his lifetime: Two were in India, two in paradise and the fifth is the Maha Muni or 'Great Sage'. Archaeologists believe the image was probably cast during the reign of King Chandra Surya, who ascended the throne in AD 146, some 600 years after the Buddha actually passed away. Little is known of the Maha Muni's travels over the next fifteen hun-

dred years. It was stolen and moved around by various kings. At other times it was buried beneath a crumbling temple in a forgotten jungle. The image was brought to Mandalay in 1784 by King Bodawpaya and placed within the specially built Payagi Pagoda. Since that time it has been the most venerated Buddha image in all of Burma.

The statue is 3.8 meters tall. Originally cast of metal, it is now entirely coated with a two-inch thick layer of gold leaf. So many different hands have applied so much gold leaf that the figure has developed an irregular outline. Many thousands of pilgrims visit the shrine each day and a great festival in early February draws hundreds of thousands.

In a courtyard of the Payagi Pagoda, near the Maha Muni, are six Khmer bronze statues - three lions, a three-headed elephant and two warriors - that originally stood as guardians of Cambodia's Angkor Wat temple. The statues of the warriors are reputed to have miraculous healing qualities. Legends tell that rubbing a body part of either of the statues will cure an affliction in the corresponding part of your own body. When these statues were originally brought to the Maha Muni temple following a long and circuitous journey around Southeast Asia, there were no healing legends associated with them. After centuries at the temple the statues came to be regarded as having healing powers, but nothing is known of when or how this legend began. It is fascinating to reflect that the healing powers of the statues seem to have been generated over time by the intention and beliefs of the countless thousands of visiting pilgrims.

SACRED PLACE FOR BAHAI

Born in 1817, Bahá'u'lláh was a member of one of the great patrician families of Persia. The family could trace its lineage to the ruling dynasties of Persia's imperial past, and was endowed with wealth and vast estates. Turning His back on the position at court which these advantages offered Him, Bahá'u'lláh became known for His generosity and kindness which made Him deeply loved among His countrymen.

This privileged position did not long survive Bahá'u'lláh's announcement of support for the message of the Báb. Engulfed in the waves of violence unleashed upon the Bábís after the Báb's execution Bahá'u'lláh suffered not only the loss of all His worldly endowments but was subjected to imprisonment, torture, and a series of banishments. The first was to Baghdad where, in 1863, He announced Himself as the One promised by the Báb. From Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh was sent to Constantinople, to Adrianople, and finally to Acre, in the Holy Land, where He arrived as a prisoner in 1868.

The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, the holiest place on earth for Bahai's and the point toward which they turn in prayer each day, is located in Bahjí, just north of Akka. It is situated along the road to Nahariyya near the Bustan Hagalil bus stop. The Ben-Ami Army Camp adjoins the Baha'i property. The room in which Bahá'u'lláh was laid to rest shortly after sunset on the day of His Ascension, May 29, 1892, had been the northernmost room in the home of

His son-in-law, Siyyid 'Ali Afnan. Shoghi Effendi, as Head of the Faith, was awarded permanent custody of the Shrine in the early 1920s. He improved the entrance of the Shrine and added the portico in 1940, and erected the carved oak door in 1957. Over the years, this Holy Place has been beautified with formal gardens extending in a large circle around the shrine.

There are two gates into Bahjí: the West Gate and the North Gate. The West Gate is on the old 'Akka-Nahariyya road. To reach the North Gate by bus, sherut or taxi, get off at the Bustan Hagalil bus stop on the old 'Akka-Nahariyya road. From the bus stop walk a few metres back towards 'Akka. Turn left into the side road, walk 450 metres to the North Gate of Bahjí and enter.

To return to Haifa after leaving Bahjí through the North Gate, walk back to the road to 'Akka. The bus stop for Haifa is to the left and across the road. When you arrive in Haifa, the bus passes through the Hadar, and you should get off at the last stop on Hehalutz Street.

HARIDWAR, India



Hardwar, or Haridwar, is one of the holiest places for Hindus in India. It is significant that pilgrims often go from Haridwar to the two great Himalayan shrines of Kedarnath and Badrinath, as Har means Shiva (the deity of Kedarnath), Hari means Vishnu (the deity of Badrinath) and Dwar means gate. Hardwar is thus the gateway to the two holy shrines of Shiva and Vishnu. The town has also been called Gangadwar, meaning 'Door of the Ganga' as it is here, that the sacred river Ganges leaves the mountains to flow out upon the Indian plains. Many years ago it was also called Kapilsthan after the great sage Kapil, who lived and meditated here. Today, Hardwar is the home of many Ashrams (hermitages and places for meditation) and Dharamshalas (rest houses for pilgrims) that have been established by various swamis, yogis and religious institutions. Throughout the year large numbers of pil-

grims come to bathe in the Ganges, especially at the Hari-kacharan ghat (also called Hari-ki-Pauri), where a footprint of Vishnu is worshipped. Pilgrims also consider it important to visit the beautiful Shiva temple of Daksheswar. A large pilgrimage festival is held every year in April at the beginning of the Hindu solar year. Every twelve years the great festival of Kumbha Mela is held and every six years an Ardh Kumbha, or half Kumbha. During these important festivals millions of pilgrims throng to Hardwar from throughout India. Hardwar is also one of India's Moksapuris, or Seven Sacred Cities, where moksha (spiritual liberation) may be more easily attained. Twenty-four kilometres north of Hardwar is another holy town named Rishikesh, meaning 'abode of the mystic sages'. These two places, Hardwar and Rishikesh, have place-names that indicate their spiritual rather than secular attributes. Nowadays both towns are bustling social centres, yet in ancient times they were quiet forests groves, nestled along rushing mountain rivers; the perfect place for contemplation and a life in harmony with the way of nature. While not speaking directly of Hardwar or Rishikesh, the following passage from the Anusasana Parva Mahabharata (a classic text of Hinduism) well expresses their magical atmosphere: Certain areas on earth are more sacred than others, some on account of their situation, others because of their sparkling waters, and others because of the association or habitation of saintly people. Lots of people visit the place annually.

BANARAS, INDIA



Banaras is the most visited pilgrimage destination in all of India. It is one of the seven Holy Cities, one of the twelve Jyotir Linga sites, one of the Shakti Pitha sites and the most favoured place for Hindus to die and be cremated. Countless hymns and myths speak of the waters of the Ganges as the fluid medium of Shiva's divine essence and a bath in the river is believed to wash away all of one's sins. The Tristhalisetu speaks of the Ganges.

There whatever is sacrificed, chanted, given in charity, or suffered in penance, even in the smallest amount, yields endless fruit because of the power of that place. Whatever fruit is said to accrue from many thousands of lifetimes of asceticism, even more than that is obtainable from but three nights of fasting in this place.

Originally known as Avimukta, Varanasi and also Kashi, meaning

'where the supreme light shines', this great north Indian centre of Shiva worship has had more than 3000 years of continuous habitation. Few standing buildings are older than the sixteenth century, however, as Muslim armies raiding from the eleventh century onward destroyed the ancient Hindu temples and erected mosques on their foundations. The Jnana Vapi, or Well of Wisdom, is said to have been dug by Shiva himself and its water carry the liquid form of jhana, the light of wisdom. The imposing Alamgir mosque stands on the site of another of Kashi's most ancient and sacred shrines, the temple of Bindu Madhava.

In Hindu Kashi, it is said there are thirty-three hundred million shrines and a half a million images of the deities. Since a pilgrim would need all the years of his or her life to visit all these shrines, it is considered wise to come to the holy city and never again leave. While this number is perhaps a trifle exaggerated, Kashi does indeed has many hundreds of beautiful temples. Some of these temples are named after the great pilgrimage centres in other parts of India - Rameshvaram, Dwarka, Puri and Kanchipuram, for example - and it is said that merely by visiting Kashi one automatically gains the benefit of visiting all other sacred places. While many pilgrims do come to Kashi with the same prayers and vows they bring to these other tirthas, some people come to spend their remaining years in the holy city. Those who come to live in Kashi with the intention of dying there are called *jivan muktas* meaning those who 'are liberated while still alive'.

PUSHKAR, INDIA



The description of pilgrimage places in the Tirtha-Yatra section of India's great epic, the *Mahabharata* (500 BC), suggests a grand tour of the entire country. The pilgrimage begins in Pushkar, sacred to the god Brahma and continues in a rambling clockwise direction throughout the subcontinent, ending in Prayaga (modern day Allahabad). As indicated by Pushkar's position as the starting point of the grand pilgrimage, the worship of Brahma was considered highly important at the end of the first millennium BC. Today, the cult of Brahma has long been eclipsed by other deities, Pushkar is the only pilgrimage shrine dedicated to Brahma in all of India and few pilgrims visit the shrine, relative to the great numbers that come to such celebrated sites as Varanasi, Tirupati, Chidambaram and Rameshvaram. It has been suggested that this waning of importance may be attributed to the fact that the func-

tion of Brahma - creating the world - has been completed, while Vishnu (the preserver) and Shiva (the destroyer) still have relevance to the continuing order of the universe. Brahma is also a god of the Aryan invaders and during Vedic times his cult temporarily displaced the more ancient indigenous Shiva and Shakti cults.

Mythological literature describes Brahma as having sprung up from the lotus originating in the navel of Vishnu. Brahma then becomes the source of all creation, the seed from which issues all space, time and causation. His consort Saraswati was manifested out of him and from their union was born all the creatures of the world. He is the inventor of theatrical art and he revealed music and dance. He performed the marriage of Shiva and Parvati, is pleased by austerities, and quickly bestows boons on supplicants, be they gods, demons, or humans. He is sometimes depicted with four heads representing the four Vedas and the four Yugas (great epochs of time), other times as Visvakarma, the divine architect of the universe. Saraswati is the wife of Brahma. Literally her name means 'the flowing one'. In the Rig Veda she represents a river deity and is connected with fertility and purification. She is considered the personification of all knowledge - arts, sciences, crafts and skills. She is the goddess of the creative impulse, the source of music, beauty and eloquence. Artists, writers and other individuals involved in creative endeavours have for millennia come on pilgrimage to Pushkar to request the inspiration of Brahma and Saraswati. According to the author's theory that shrine myths are often metaphorical expressions of the particular power of a pilgrimage place, the lake, hill and area of Pushkar have a spirit or presence that awakens and stimulates the human capacity of creativity.

Allahabad, U.P.

The city of Allahabad is 135km west of Varanasi at the confluence of two of India's holiest rivers - the Ganges and the Yamuna. The mythical Saraswati River (said to be underground - there is even some scientific research being carried out on that front), the River of Enlightenment, is also believed to join them here. The confluence, known as the 'sangam', is considered to have great soul-cleansing and sin-wiping powers thus making it a popular pilgrimage centre.

Allahabad is among one of the largest cities in Uttar Pradesh. And according to Hindu mythology, Lord Brahma, the creator God of the Trinity, chose a land on earth, to perform the Prakrishta Yaina, the land on which the three rivers would flow in confluence. Brahma also referred to it as 'Tirth Raj' or the 'king of all pil-

grimage centres'. Recorded evidence also exists in the revered scriptures – the Vedas and the grand epics, *the Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata*, as also in the Puranas – of this holy place formerly called Prayag. Thousands of pilgrims bathe here every January-February and once every 12 years the Kumbh Mela, the world's largest gathering of pilgrims, drawing millions to the confluence for a holy dip. Allahabad's Civil Lines is an area of broad avenues, Raj-era bungalows, modern shops and some outdoor eating stalls. The main bus terminus is also here. It's divided from the dense, older part of town, known as Chowk, by Allahabad Junction railway station. There's a Tourist Bungalow and office on M.G. Rd.

The main branch of the State Bank of India in Police Lines is the place to Change money. SAS Travels is an Indian Airlines agency but no flights operate from Allahabad's airport. Allahabad also has to its credit a fort built by Akbar, which overlooks the confluence of the rivers and also the Nehru family home, Anand Bhavan. Not many foreign travellers pause in this friendly city, but it's an interesting, relaxing and worthwhile stop, especially if you're fond of Indian-style stalls and sidewalk cafes. The city of Allahabad or 'Prayag' as it used to be called in the ancient times, is a city blessed by Lord Brahma, the creator who is believed to have performed a sacrifice here. The city is most known for the 'Koombh' mela held once in twelve years and it is a belief that every Hindu must take a dip in the Holy Ganga river once in his lifetime in this mela. This holy city is also a land of the Triveni Sangam where the three holy rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati meet. Thus, one can find rich cultural heritage of India in this city of Allahabad.

SHIVA TEMPLES OF RAMESHVARAM AND BADRINATH



There are several ways in which pilgrimage sites are categorised in Hinduism. One of these concerns the four Dhamas, or the 'abodes' of the gods at the four directional compass points of India. While no specific legend explains the grouping of these four sites together, they were each highly regarded by the time of the Mahabharata (500 BC), they came to be listed together by the time of the early Puranas (4th century AD) and were given further emphasis in the ninth century when the great sage and scholar Sri Adi Sankara established monastic centres at them. The four Dhamas are: in the East, the Krishna temple of Jagannath in Puri, Orissa; in the North, the Visnu temple in Badrinath, Uttar Pradesh; in the South, the Shiva temple of Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu; in the West, the Krishna temple of Dwarka in Gujarat.

The temple at Rameshwaram, besides being considered a Dhama, is also one of the twelve sacred Jyotir Linga sites. These sites,

located throughout the sub-continent of India, are where the god Shiva is said to have manifested as a towering column of fire. Among India's most ancient temples sites, they enshrine small pillars of stone, called lingas, that are worshipped as containing the creative power of Shiva. Unlike the other eleven Jyotir Linga sites, Rameshvaram has two sacred Lingas instead of just one. A legend from one of India's great epics, *the Ramayana*, explains this unique condition. A demon named Ravana had stolen Sita, the wife of Lord Rama. Following a terrific battle on the island of Lanka (modern day Ceylon or Sri Lanka) in which Rama killed the demon Ravana, Sita and Rama returned to India. At the site where they landed, Rama decided to install a Shiva Lingam to absolve him of the sin of destroying Ravana who, besides being a demon, was also a member of the Brahmin caste. Lord Rama sent his devotee, the monkey deity Hanuman, to Mt. Kailash to get a lingam from the god Shiva. Hanuman's journey took longer than expected however and as the auspicious time of worship neared, Sita quickly fashioned a lingam out of sand. When Hanuman finally arrived with a stone lingam from Kailash he was disappointed to find another lingam already installed. To please Hanuman, Rama installed the stone lingam beside the sand one and ordered that all worship should henceforth be given first to the Visvalingam brought by Hanuman and only then to the Ramalinga made by Sita.

The enormous temple of the two Shiva Lingams lies near the seashore at the tip of India. Besides the 100-foot tall gopuram towers shown in the photograph, the temple is renowned for its magnificent corridors with massive stone pillars.

THE SHRINE OF THE BAB, BAHAI



The Shrine of the Bab, one of Haifa's most prominent landmarks, is the Faith's second holiest Shrine. It is the resting-place of the Bab, regarded by Baha'is as a messenger of God whose primary mission was to prepare the way for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. The terraces of the Shrine of the Bab, opened to the public in June 2001, were designed to provide an appropriate setting and approach for pilgrims and visitors to this Baha'i Holy Place.

Because of His challenging teachings, which called for spiritual and moral renewal, the Bab was publicly martyred in 1850. His remains were preserved and concealed for almost 60 years, eventually transferred to the Holy Land, and in 1909 interred in a mausoleum on the slopes of Mount Carmel. The colonnade and

golden dome over the mausoleum were completed in 1953. Their design, by a Canadian architect, William Sutherland Maxwell, harmonizes eastern and western proportions and style. The Shrine is a place for quiet prayer and meditation where no ceremonies or religious services are held. A special prayer used by Baha is when visiting the Shrine, known as the Tablet of Visitation is hung on the wall in both the original Arabic and an English translation.

In the 78th year of His age, in the early hours of the 28th November, 1921, 'Abdu'l-Baha, the appointed Head of the Baha'i Faith, passed away in His home in Haifa. His remains were laid to rest in the northern room of the Shrine of the Bab. Another prayer used by Baha'is when visiting the Shrine of Abdu'l-Baha, also referred to as the Tablet of Visitation is hung on the wall in both the original Arabic and an English translation.

Throughout His writings, the Báb warned His followers to be watchful, and as soon as the promised Teacher revealed Himself, to recognise and follow Him. The Báb exhorted them to see with the 'eye of the spirit' rather than through their 'fanciful imaginations'. To be worthy of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' required entirely new standards of conduct, a nobility of character that human beings had theretofore not achieved: "Purge your hearts of worldly desires," the Báb urged His first group of disciples, "and let angelic virtues be your adorning...The time is come when naught but the purest motive, supported by deeds of stainless purity, can ascend to the throne of the Most High and be acceptable unto Him..."

Bodh Gaya, India



Bodh Gaya is the birthplace of Buddhism. About 2,500 years ago, Prince Siddhartha Gautam (born in 566 BCE) sat down under a papal tree (cf. Trees and the Sacred) here and received the enlightenment that would inspire one of the world's great religions. Situated in the Bihar state in northeastern India, about 65 miles south of Bihar's capital of Patna, and 7 miles from the city of Gaya, Bodh Gaya remains the most important Buddhist pilgrimage destination on Earth.

After six fruitless years of seeking the ultimate meaning of life, Siddhartha Gautam sat cross-legged under the Banyan tree and

entered a deep meditation. During the course of the night he attained enlightenment (Nirvana) and became the Buddha (the Enlightened or Awakened One). The Banyan tree, a species of fig, became known as the Bodhi or Bo (Enlightenment) tree. The Buddha's followers soon recognised the tree as sacred and it was officially revered by the first great Indian Buddhist emperor Asoka (268-232 BCE).

The Banyan tree now at the site is reputedly descended from the original Bodhi Tree. Pilgrims customarily tie scarves to its branches, lay cut flowers and small lamps around its base and burn incense. Nearby is the *vajrasana*, the Diamond Throne, a red sandstone slab marking the spot, according to tradition, of the Buddha's meditation. For Buddhist, this spot is the centre of the universe.

Bodh Gaya's main attraction is the Mahabodhi Temple, featuring a 150 foot high pyramid spire on site of Siddhartha's original Bodhi Tree, along with a golden image of the Buddha.

SHATRUNAJAYA, India



While the majority of pilgrimage places in India are sacred to the followers of Hinduism, there are numerous holy sites of other religions such as Buddhism, Islam and Jainism. Jainism is a religion and philosophy native to India founded in about the 6th century BC by the sage Mahavira. Born in 599BC near Patna which is now in Bihar state, Mahavira began the life of an ascetic at the age of twenty-eight. After years of hardship and meditation he attained enlightenment and thereafter taught for about thirty years before he died in 527 BC. An elder contemporary of the Buddha, he is referred to in early Buddhist writings as Nataputra. Jainism, which does not espouse belief in a creator god, has as its ethical core the doctrine of Ahimsa, or noninjury to all living creatures, and as its religious ideal the perfection of human nature, to be achieved predominantly through monastic and ascetic life. Jainism

teaches universal tolerance, and its attitude toward other religions is that of noncriticism. It is not competitive and has never cared for the spread of its faith. The Jain people and their temples are deeply peaceful.

According to Jain beliefs, their faith is eternal and has been revealed through the successive ages of the world by twenty-four Tirthankaras. The word Tirthankara means 'Ford maker' and is a title given to the (mostly mythical) enlightened sages of Jainism. Tirthankaras are similar to the Avatars of Hinduism in that their function is to instruct and inspire humankind while protecting the world from demonic forces. Like the 'tirthas' of the Avatars, the Tirthankaras have sanctified specific places on the earth by their birth, great miracles, or attainment of enlightenment. The 'tirthas' of Jainism are spread all over India and have been divided into two classes. Those places where the Tirthankaras and other holy persons have attained Nirvana are called 'Siddha-kshetra' ; those which have attained importance because of temples, idols, or certain miracles are called 'Atisaya-kshetra'. The primary Siddha-kshetras of the Jains are the five sacred mountains of Shatrunajaya in Gujarat, Girnar in Saurashtra, Sametshikhara in eastern Bihar, Mt. Abu in Rajasthan and Astapada, a mythical mountain of the centre of the universe.

Shatrunajaya, meaning the 'Place of Victory', is considered the most holy of the Jain sacred mountains because nearly all of the Tirthankaras are believed to have attained nirvana while meditating atop the mountain. Rising nearly 2000 feet above the town of Palitana, the rounded peak is entirely capped with an enormous complex of 863 temples. While some of the temples are as old as the 11th century (the site is far older), most date from the early 1500.

Miyajima Island, Japan



Located several miles off the coast of Hiroshima city, the holy island of Miyajima is a sacred site of both Shintoism and Buddhism and one of the most enchantingly beautiful places on Earth. To come by early morning boat across the mist-enshrouded sea, slowly approaching the island and its holy mountain of Misen San, is to enter a fairy tale realm. Long before Buddhism came to Japan in the 5th century AD, Shinto sages lived as hermits in the mountain's forested hills. Today the small island of only 12 square miles is much visited by pilgrims and tourists yet still retains its extraordinary sense of serenity and magic.

Blanketed with luxuriant primeval forests, Misen San is the highest peak on Miyajima Island, rising to 530 meters (1739 feet). From its lofty summit one has a panoramic view of many other islands in the Seto Inland Sea and the distant mountain ranges of Shikoku. Near the summit are a few small temples including the

Gumonjido, a temple founded in the early 9th century AD by the great sage Kobo Daishi on his return from China. A flame burning within the temple has burned consistently from the time of the temple's dedication to the present.

Miyajima's primary temple, the Itsukushima shrine, was first constructed in 593 AD and later enlarged to its present size in 1168. One of the world's most extraordinary examples of sacred architecture, it is listed as a National Treasure with the government of Japan. The complex of buildings includes the main shrine, several subsidiary temples, a Noh drama and dance stage, and many bridges and walkways linking the various parts of the temple. Built on tidal land and giving the appearance of floating on the sea during high tide, the shrine is dedicated to three Shinto goddesses of the sea; Ichikishima, Tagori and Tagitsu, each of whom is believed to live within the inner sanctum of the shrine. Metal nails were not used in the construction of the buildings and there are precisely calculated crevices between the floor slabs in order to alleviate the pressure of high tidal waves caused by typhoons. Some of the ancient wooden planks used for flooring are 1.5 meters wide and over 10 meters long and these enormous boards were laboriously transported to Miyajima from hundreds of miles away in northern Japan. One of the bridges leading to the shrine is known as the Soribashi or Imperial Envoy's Bridge. Constructed in 1557, court nobles sent to Itsukushima by the Emperor used it. During these times, stairs were temporarily installed, otherwise the bridge and its entrance into the temple are never used.

HAGURO SAN, JAPAN

One of the areas most frequented by the yamabushi, or mountain practitioners, of Shugendo Buddhism were the three sacred mountains of Dewa Sanzan in the Yamagata prefecture of northern Honshu. While most probably venerated in pre-historic times, the three mountains of Haguro (419 meters), Gassan (1980 meters), and Yudono (1504 meters) trace their historical sanctity to an imperial prince of the early 7th century. The prince renounced his title and position, took the name of Kokai, and became a wandering mountain hermit. While on a beach in the Dewa province, he saw an enormous black bird with three legs that led him first to Mt. Haguro and then to the other two holy peaks. Kokai stayed the rest of his years upon Haguro, where his imperial grave is maintained to this day. Mt. Haguro is the seat of one the two main Shugendo orders and the wooded peak has some of the most massive and beautiful temples in the whole Japan. Bus transportation is available yet most pilgrims prefer the traditional foot-path leading to the summit.

Beginning near the 600 year old, five-storied pagoda, the path winds its way through an enchanted forest of ancient cedars and cryptomerias while ascending 2,446 finely sculpted stone steps. Atop the mountain is the shrine of Gassai-den which houses the deities of the three mountains, Tsukiyomi-no-Mikoto, Oyamatsumi-no-Mikoto, and Ideha-no-Mikoto. After visiting Haguro, white-robed pilgrims trek upward through the mountain forests to the shrines of Gassan and Yudono. The deity of

Yudono lives, not in a building, but in a hot water fall. Pilgrims take off their shoes, and some their clothes, to bathe in the sacred cascade. The three sacred peaks attract pilgrims during spring, summer, and fall, with the largest Haguro festival being held on July 15.

A weather-beaten, red-lacquered gate marks the start of the Haguro-san trail (1.7km; roughly 1hr), which consists of three long staircases built by a monk in the early seventeenth century. The first stretch is a deceptively gentle amble beside a river, where pilgrims purify themselves, among stately cedar trees. Most of these cedars are between 300 and 500 years old but the oldest, a massive tree girded by a sacred rope, is reputed to be at least 1400 years old. After passing a magnificent five-storey pagoda, which was last rebuilt in the fourteenth century, it's uphill all the way, past a little teashop (late April to early Nov daily 8.30am-5pm) with superb views, until a large red torii indicates you've made it. If you're staying at the Saikan shukubo, it's on the left at the end of a mossy path just before you duck under the torii.

DJENNE, Mali

Djenné, the oldest known city in sub-Saharan Africa is situated on the flood lands of the Niger and Bani rivers, 354 kilometres (220 miles) southwest of Timbuktu. Founded by merchants around 800 AD (near the site of an older city dating from 250BC), Djenné flourished as a meeting place for traders from the deserts of Sudan and the tropical forests of Guinea. Captured by the Songhai emperor Sonni 'Ali in 1468, it developed into Mali's most important trading centre during the 16th century. The city thrived because of its direct connection by river with Timbuktu and from its situation at the head of trade routes leading to gold and salt mines. Between 1591 and 1780, Djenné was controlled by Moroccan kings and during these years its markets further expanded, featuring products from throughout the vast regions of North and Central Africa. In 1861 the city was conquered by the Tukolor emperor al-Hajj 'Umar and was then occupied by the French in

1893. Thereafter, its commercial functions were taken over by the town of Mopti, which is situated at the confluence of the Niger and Bani rivers, 90 kilometres to the northeast. Djenné is now an agricultural trade centre, of diminished importance, with several beautiful examples of Muslim architecture, including its Great Mosque.

In addition to its commercial importance, Djenné, was also known as a centre of Islamic learning and pilgrimage, attracting students and pilgrims from all over West Africa. Its Great Mosque dominates the large market square of Djenné. Tradition has it that the first mosque was built in 1240 by the sultan Koi Kunboro, who converted to Islam and turned his palace into a mosque. Very little is known about the appearance of the first mosque, but it was considered too sumptuous by Sheikh Amadou, the ruler of Djenné in the early nineteenth century.

The Great Mosque is built on a raised plinth platform of rectangular sun-dried mud bricks that are held together by mud mortar and plastered over with mud. The walls vary in thickness between sixteen and twenty-four inches, depending upon their height. These massive walls are necessary in order to bear the weight of the tall structure and also provide insulation from the sun's heat. During the day, the walls gradually warm up from the outside; at night, they cool down again. This helps the interior of the mosque to stay cool all day long. The Great Mosque also has roof vents with ceramic caps. These caps, made by the town's women, can be removed at night to ventilate the interior spaces.

In 1988, the old Town of Djenné and its Great Mosque were named a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

BUKHARA, UZBEKISTAN



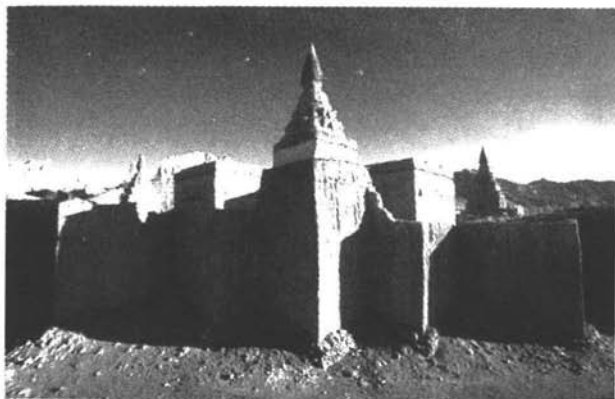
The Naqshbandi Suti order, which traces its lineage back to Ali, Abu Bakr and other central figures in early Islam derives its name from that of a 14th century Central Asian mystic named Baha al-Din al-Naqshbandi. Born in 1317 AD, in the village of Qasr al-'Arifan near Bukhara, he experienced profound visionary revelations in his youth, became a brilliant Islamic scholar before the age of twenty, made the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca three times and became a greatly venerated holy man during his life time. Visitors from across Central Asia came to Bukhara to see the sage, seek his advice and receive teachings in the school he had established. Following his death in 1388, Sheikh Baha al-Din al-Naqshbandi was buried adjacent to his school, directly upon the site of an ancient pagan temple.

Historical records from the medieval era indicate that Naqshbandi was revered as a saint and a protector of craftsman and artists,

and that pilgrimage to his grave was considered an adequate substitution for the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. Successive kings of Bukhara expanded the school and mosques surrounding Naqshbandi's grave and over the centuries the complex became the largest centre of Islamic learning in Central Asia. During the Soviet period, the mosque was turned into a 'museum of atheism' and pilgrims were forbidden to visit. In 1989 the shrine was reopened and the entire complex, with two mosques and a 16th century khanaka (a domed hall where the Sufis lived and studied), has been carefully restored. Lovely shaded gardens surround the shrine and the entire site radiates a palpable feeling of religious devotion and peaceful relaxation. Dressed in colourful traditional clothes and speaking a variety of languages, pilgrims from distant parts of Central Asia flock to the saint's grave throughout the year.

The Naqshbandi Sufi order is one of the oldest living traditional Sufi orders. The early members of the order rejected outward shows of religious expression and concentrated upon the inner spiritual life while engaged in the affairs of the world. With followers throughout Central Asia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, the Naqshbandi Sufis, as both travelling merchants and mystics, played a major role in the introduction of Islam across Asia. By the 15th century they had become the dominant Sufi order in much of Central Asia and actively influenced politics from China to India to the Middle East. Today the Naqshbandiyya is the foremost Sufi order in the world and is experiencing an unprecedented period of growth, not only in its traditional heartlands of Central Asia, Turkey, the Middle East and South Asia, but in nations of the Western world, particularly the United States and Great Britain.

MONASTERIES of TASHILHUNPO AND TOLING, TIBET



Prior to the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1951, hundreds of thriving monasteries were scattered throughout the vast country. These monasteries, many continuously occupied since the 9th century, were home to one of the world's most profound wisdom traditions as well as being repositories of great collections of sacred art - murals, sculptures and illustrated manuscripts - of unique and sublime beauty. During the 1960's and 1970's virtually all of this was systematically and ruthlessly destroyed by fanatical Chinese participating in the Cultural Revolution initiated by Mao Tse Tung. The monks were tortured and murdered, the ancient murals were burned and ripped from the walls, the golden statues were stolen and melted down and the great monasteries were blown apart by massive charges of dynamite. By 1976 the de-

struction had somewhat abated; Mao had died and there were no more monasteries to plunder.

Twenty years later however, the Tibetans continue to be violently oppressed by the Chinese. Few westerners are truly aware of the extent of the ongoing Chinese atrocities in Tibet: hundreds of monks are still imprisoned, vast areas of the country (which are off limits to foreign visitors and investigative journalists) are being stripped off their natural resources and the Chinese make no effort to provide medical or educational services to the native inhabitants. Due to the ceaseless work of the 14th Dalai Lama and that of many thousands of individuals and non-governmental organisations around the world, growing pressure is being placed upon the Chinese government to return Tibet to its people. Thus far however, the Chinese have refused to even discuss the issue and have instead sought to deceive the international community by engaging in the 'construction of the monasteries'. Naive foreigners may indeed be fooled by this smokescreen, yet it is revealing to note that only a very few monasteries have received any reconstruction assistance, and at those monasteries which have received assistance, the reconstruction has been poorly done and under funded (the most visible example of the reconstruction effort, the monastery of Tashilhunpo, is the seat of the Panchen Lama, who, before his death in 1989, was a puppet of the Chinese military).

Tibetan pilgrims visit Tashilhunpo, as they visit other ancient monastic sites, to access the spiritual presence deriving from both the terrestrial power of the place and the meditative practices of the sages who have lived there over the centuries; at Tashilhunpo they also come to pray for the spirit-health of the monastery - a health that will only return with the departure of the Chinese.

JOKHANG TEMPLE, LHASA, TIBET



Archaeological excavations have revealed Neolithic activity near the city of Lhasa yet it is probable that the actual founding of the city occurred in the 7th century AD. Songtsen Gampo (traditionally the 33rd king of Tibet, though there are no records to substantiate the entire lineage) lived from 617 to 650 AD and is credited with both the founding of Lhasa and the effective introduction of Buddhism into Tibet. While it is possible that Lhasa had some pre-Buddhist sacred importance, no myths, legends or records give evidence of this matter.

The chain of events leading up to Lhasa's emergence as the sacred city of Tibetan Buddhism begins with the marriage of King Songtsen Gampo. Tibetan sources indicate that Lhasa's first Buddhist temple, called the Trulnang, was established to house the Akshobhya Buddha, given as the dowry of the Nepalese Princess

Trisun when she married the king in 632. In 641 the king took a second wife, the Chinese Princess Wencheng. She too brought a Buddha statue in her dowry, the Jowo Shakyamuni and the Ramoche temple was built to house it. Soon thereafter (647 or earlier), the king began construction of a new temple to house the Akshobhya image but a problem arose; the work that was completed each day was mysteriously undone that night. The king and his queens sought the guidance of the deity, Thuje Chenpo and through visions and geomantic divination learned that the entire country of Tibet was situated upon the back of a great, sleeping demoness. It was understood that the demoness was exerting powerful negative influences upon the land and thereby inhibiting the introduction and development of Buddhism in Tibet, and furthermore that the demoness could only be pacified by the construction of 12 temples at precise geomantic locations in the countryside. The king attended to this work and upon its completion also constructed the temple in Lhasa, in which was placed the Akshobhya Buddha. This new temple, built upon the exact site believed to be the heart of the demoness, was called *Rasa Tulnang Tsuklakang*, meaning 'The House of Mysteries' or 'The House of Religious Science'.

In 649 King Songtsen Gampo died and Queen Wencheng, for protection against an expected Chinese military invasion, removed the Jowo Shakyamuni statue from the Ramoche and concealed it in the new temple. Uncovered from its hiding place in 710, the Jowo image remained in the *Rasa Tulnang Tsuklakang* temple which was then given its current name of *Jokhang*, meaning 'Shrine of the Jowo'. The statue of Akshobhya changed places with the Jowo and was placed, where it remains to this day, in the Ramoche temple.

THE POTALA PALACE, TIBET

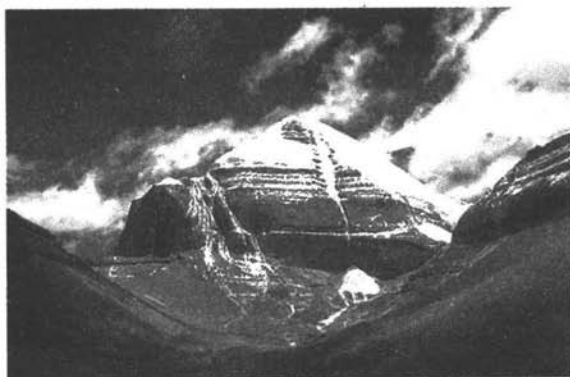


Perched upon Marpo Ri hill, 130 meters above the Lhasa valley, the Potala Palace rises a further 170 meters and is the greatest monumental structure in the entire Tibet. Early legends concerning the rocky hill tell of a sacred cave, considered to be the dwelling place of the Bodhisattva Chenresi (Avalokiteshvara), that was used as a meditation retreat by Emperor Songtsen Gampo in the seventh century AD. In 637, Songtsen Gampo built a palace on the hill. This structure stood until the seventeenth century, when it was incorporated into the foundations of the greater buildings still standing today. Construction of the present palace began in 1645 during the reign of the fifth Dalai Lama and by 1648 the Potrang Karpo, or White Palace, was completed. The Potrang Marpo, or Red Palace, was added between 1690 and 1694; its construction required the labours of more than 7000 workers and

1500 artists and craftsman. In 1922, the 13th Dalai Lama renovated many chapels and assembly halls in the White Palace and added two stories to the Red Palace. The Potala Palace was only slightly damaged during the Tibetan uprising against the invading Chinese in 1959. Unlike most other Tibetan religious structures, it was not sacked by the Red Guards during the 1960s and 1970s, apparently through the personal intervention of Chou En Lai. As a result, all the chapels and their artefacts are very well preserved.

From as early as the eleventh century the palace was called Potala. This name probably derives from Mt. Potala, the mythological mountain abode of the Bodhisattva Chenresi (Avalokiteshvara / Kuan Yin) in southern India. The Emperor Songtsen Gampo had been regarded as an incarnation of Chenresi. Given that he founded the Potala, it seems likely that the hilltop palace of Lhasa took on the name of the Indian sacred mountain. The Potala Palace is an immense structure, its interior space being in excess of 130,000 square meters. Fulfilling numerous functions, the Potala was first and foremost the residence of the Dalai Lama and his large staff. In addition, it was the seat of Tibetan government, where all ceremonies of state were held; it housed a school for religious training of monks and administrators; and it was one of Tibet's major pilgrimage destinations because of the tombs of past Dalai Lamas. Within the White Palace are two small chapels, the Phakpa Lhakhang and the Chogyal Drubphuk; dating from the seventh century, these chapels are the oldest surviving structures on the hill and also the most sacred. The Potala's most venerated statue, the Arya Lokeshvara, is housed inside the Phapka Lhakhang and it draws thousands of Tibetan pilgrims each day.

MT. KAILASH, TIBET



A great mass of black rock soaring to over 22,000 feet, Mt. Kailash has the unique distinction of being the world's most venerated holy place at the same time that it is the least visited. The supremely sacred site of four religions and billions of people, Kailash is seen by no more than a few thousand pilgrims each year. This curious fact is explained by the mountain's remote location in far western Tibet. No planes, trains or buses journey anywhere near the region and even with rugged over-land vehicles the journey still requires weeks of difficult, often dangerous travel. The weather, always cold, can be unexpectedly treacherous and pilgrims must carry all the supplies they will need for the entire journey.

Hindus believe Mt. Kailash to be the abode of Lord Shiva. Like many of the Hindu gods, Shiva is a character of apparent contra-

dictions. He at once the Lord of Yoga and therefore the ultimate renunciate ascetic, yet he is also the divine master of Tantra, the esoteric science that regards sexual union as the most perfect path to spiritual enlightenment. According to legend, immortal Shiva lives atop Kailash where he spends his time practicing yogic austerities, making joyous love with his divine consort, Parvati, and smoking ganja, the sacred herb known in the west as marijuana, Hindus do not interpret Shiva's behaviours as contradictory however, but rather see in him a deity who has wisely integrated the extremes of human nature and thus transcended attachment to any particular, and limited, way of being.

Kailash is sacred to other religions as well. The Jains call the mountain Astapada and believe it to be the place where Rishaba, the first of the twenty-four Tirthankaras attained liberation. Followers of Bon, Tibet's pre-Buddhist, shamanistic religion, call the mountain Tise and believe it to be the seat of the Sky Goddess Sipaimen. Additionally, Bon myths regard Tise as the sight of a legendary 12th century battle of sorcery between the Buddhist sage Milarepa and the Bon shaman Naro Bon-chung. Milarepa's defeat of the shaman displaced Bon as the primary religion of Tibet, firmly establishing Buddhism in its place. While the Buddha is believed to have magically visited Kailash in the 5th century BC, the religion of Buddhism only entered Tibet, via Nepal and India, in the 7th century AD. Tibetan Buddhists call the mountain Kang Rimpoche, the 'Precious One of Glacial Snow', and regard it as the dwelling place of Demchog (also known as Chakrasamvara) and his consort, Dorje Phagmo. Three hills rising near Kang Rimpoche are believed to be the homes of the Bodhisatvas Manjushri, Vajrapani and Avalokiteshvara.

THAT PHANOM, THAILAND



In north-eastern Thailand, a kilometre from the shores of the great Mekong river, stands the exotic temple complex of That Phanom on the sacred hill of Phu Kamphra. According to the earliest known legends, the original sanctity of this site derived from visits by Kakusandha, Konagamana and Kassapa, the Buddhas of the three previous ages. Long after these mythical visits the Buddha of our current age made a pilgrimage to the sacred hill to venerate the relics of the earlier Buddhas. Accompanied by his chief disciple, Ananda, the Buddha journeyed east from India to Phu Kamphra (legends say he actually flew) visiting other sacred places along the way. While at the sacred hill the Buddha telepathically communicated with another disciple, giving him in-

structions that following his death the disciple should bring the Buddha's breast-bone relic to the hill. Legends say that this relic was later brought to That Phanom and a reliquary was established to protect and enshrine it. In the Theravada Buddhist traditions of Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand it is commonly thought that the Buddha, shortly before his demise, made an extended journey throughout the region of Southeast Asia to visit sacred sites of earlier Buddhas and also to lend support to the emerging Buddhist monastic tradition. No historical evidence, however, confirms that such a journey ever took place. Scholarly interpretation of the legend suggests that it was a method the Theravada sect used to mark and sanctify Buddhist territory.

A collection of stories known as the That Phanom Shrine Chronicles tell that the first shrine was built shortly after the Buddha's demise. Archaeologists, however, date the earliest structures to between the sixth and tenth centuries AD, with the present form of the temple being established by the Lao kings of Vientiane in the fifteenth or sixteenth century. The centrepiece of the temple is a 57 meter tall That, or Lao style Chedi, decorated with 110 kilograms of gold. The Chedi is known as a popular wish-fulfilling place. Pilgrims first purchase a small bird in a bamboo cage, and then, carrying the bird with them as they walk round the temple, pray at various Buddha images and pre-Buddhist spirit-stones. Finally, they release the bird to the heavens in the hopes that it will carry their prayers to that realm. The greatest number of pilgrims assemble at the That Phanom shrine during the seven-day period of the annual festival held in late January or early February.

That Phanom is also considered an important sacred site because of its listing among the twelve pilgrimage centres of the twelve-year animal cycle. This calendar system, known in Thai as *naksat pi*, is based on a duodenary cycle of years, each year being associated with a particular animal.

NEOLITHIC Temples of MALTA



The Mediterranean island of Malta figures in the historical record of Europe due to its association with the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, who fled to Malta from the island of Rhodes in 1530. Yet this small island of 243 square kilometres has a far greater importance in European prehistory due to its extraordinary collection of megalithic temples. Situated 80 kilometres south of Sicily and 370 kilometres east of the Tunisian coast, the island of Malta appears to have been first settled during the early Neolithic period by a wave of immigrants from the island of Sicily. This appearance of Neolithic settlement is however strongly challenged by new research concerning a probable Palaeolithic influence, details of which are presented throughout this essay. Before exam-

ining this new research, let us take a brief look at the orthodox, or conventional, theories regarding the origin and nature of human settlements on the island of Malta.

According to the suppositions of orthodox archaeologists, the remains of bones, fragments of pottery, and marks of fire indicate that human beings have lived in Malta since at least 5200 BC. These early people lived in caves, but later built huts and villages. Approximately 1600 years after their arrival in Malta, these people began the erection of stupendous megalithic temples. The ruins now remaining are the bare skeletons of once magnificent structures, mostly roofed over, paved, furnished with doors and curtains and beautifully decorated with sculptures and paintings. Some archaeologists assume that the period in which the early Maltese progressed from their first rock-cut common graves to their last massive temple complexes was between 3800 and 2400 BC (assume, because there is absolutely no carbon-datable material that is associated with the large temples). Around 2300 BC this extraordinary megalithic culture went into rapid decline. A major cause seems to have been the extreme deforestation and soil loss that accompanied the increase in population and the attendant clearing of land for agriculture. Other causes may have been famine, social disruption in response to an oppressive priesthood and the arrival of foreign invaders. Following the decline of the temple culture, Malta may well have been deserted until the arrival of Bronze Age peoples around 2000 BC.

On the islands of Malta and nearby Gozo, the remains of 50 temples have been found, with 23 in various states of preservation. No particular pattern emerges from the distribution of these temples and this may be explained by the probability that numerous temples were destroyed in antiquity and that others remain to be discovered. There are also numerous menhirs and dolmens scattered across the two islands, but their spatial relationship to the larger temple complexes has not been studied in any detail.

KAIROUAN, Tunisia

Historical records relate that in 670 AD the Arab conqueror, Uqba ibn Nafi crossed the deserts of Egypt and began the first Moslem conquest of the Maghreb region of North Africa. Establishing military posts at regular intervals along his route, Uqba ibn Nafi came to the site of present day Kairouan and there decided to encamp his soldiers for some days (Kairouan, also spelled Qayrawan, means 'camp' in Arabic).

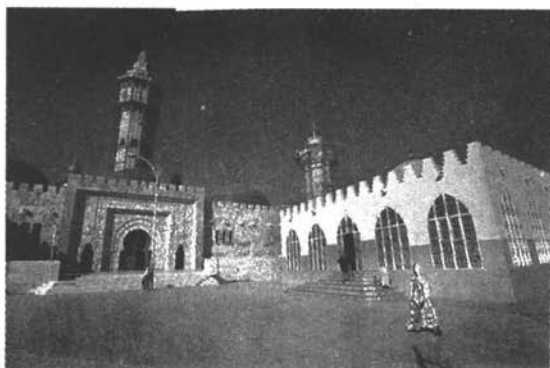
Old chronicles describe the region as completely deserted, covered with impenetrable thickets and being distant from trade routes. Apparently inhospitable as a long term settlement site, why then did this temporary military camp soon become the great-

est Moslem city in North Africa and the 4th holiest city of Islam (after Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem).

To answer this question we must look beyond historical records to the earliest legends of the site. Here we find mention of an incident that occurred during the initial encampment of Uqba ibn Nafi, an incident which, because of its miraculous nature, most history books have chosen to ignore. The legend tells of warrior's horse that stumbled on a golden goblet buried in the sands. This goblet was recognised as one that had mysteriously disappeared from Mecca some years before. When the goblet was dug from the desert sand, a spring miraculously appeared and the waters of this spring were said to issue from the same source that supplies the sacred Zamzam well in Mecca. The power of these three miracles - the mysteriously lost and then found Meccan goblet, the miraculous gushing forth of the spring, and the source of that spring - exercised a magnetic effect upon the early North African Islamic people and thereby established the site of Kairouan as a pilgrimage destination for ages to come.

By 698, following several more military campaigns in the Maghreb, the Arabs had driven the Byzantines from their garrisons in Carthage and become masters of the provinces of North Africa, called by them *Ifriqiya*. The town of Kairouan became the capital of this vast province. Governors were appointed to the province by the Ommayyad and Abassid caliphs (ruling from Damascus and Baghdad), and they exercised their rule from Kairouan. This tradition was continued over the centuries by the Aghlabid emirs (9th century), the Fatamid caliphs (10th century) and the Zirid emirs (11th century). During these centuries, the city became one of the most important cultural centres in the Arab world, witnessing a flowering of sciences, literature and the arts. Agriculture was favoured by the execution of sizable irrigation projects and an active increase in trade with the surrounding regions added to the general prosperity. Kairouan grew in size and beauty and nowhere was this more evident than in the construction and continuing elaboration of its Great Mosque.

TOUBA, SENEGAL



Soaring skyward from the dusty plains of western Senegal (170 kilometres due east of the capital of Dakar), stands the Great Mosque of Touba. Constructed in 1926 to house the tomb of the Senegalese saint, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, the enormous mosque is the most visited Islamic pilgrimage site in West Africa.

Islam has existed in Senegal for over a thousand years. The first ethnic group to accept the religion of Muhammad were the Tukulóor kingdoms during the 11th century, and by the beginning of the 20th century, most of Senegal had been entirely islamised. However, the style of Islam practiced in Senegal is significantly different than that found in most other Islamic countries. The Islam of Senegal is similar to the mystical Sufi tradition, which is characterised by its reverence of spiritual beings (alive or dead) that are believed to embody extraordinary amounts of baraka, or divine grace. In Senegal, Islamic practice takes the

form of membership in religious brotherhoods that are dedicated to the marabouts (the founders or current spiritual leaders) of these brotherhoods. The three main sects in Senegal are:

The Xaadir (Qadriyya) brotherhood, founded in Mauritania, is the smallest and oldest brotherhood in Senegal.

The Tijaan (Tijaniyya) brotherhood, founded in Algeria and practiced all over West Africa.

The Mouride brotherhood, founded in Senegal by the Senegalese saint Amadou Bamba.

Members of these brotherhoods vow obedience to their marabouts. The marabouts are considered to be stewards and inheritors of the baraka, or divine grace of their brotherhood's founder. Through the force of their personal baraka, marabouts are believed to have the power to heal illness and grant spiritual salvation to their followers. Most marabouts inherit their position and their disciples from their fathers. Marabouts of any brotherhood are expected to teach and counsel their followers, but marabouts of the Mouride brotherhood usually devote less time to study and teaching than they devote to organising their disciples' work and making amulets for their disciples (these amulets, called *grigri*, are small leather bundles containing quotes from the Koran and are believed to protect disciples from harm, sickness, or evil).

The Mouride brotherhood was begun by Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba (also known as Ahmed Ben Mohammed Ben Abib Allah or Khadimou Rassoul). Bamba was born in the village of Mbacké-Baol and lived from 1850 to 1927. The son of a marabout from the Xaadir brotherhood, Bamba was a mystic and ascetic more interested in meditation and Koranic study than in building a theocratic empire. He was also a pacifist and did not wage war on pagans as many Tijaan marabouts had done. In the first years of his religious career, Amadou Bamba had simply performed standard maraboutic functions such as teaching the Koran and preparing amulets for his followers.

NUESTRA SENORA DE GUADALUPE, Mexico City



The enormous basilica of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Mexico City is the most visited pilgrimage site in the Western Hemisphere. Its location, on the hill of Tepeyac, was a place of great sanctity long before the arrival of Christianity in the New World. In pre-Hispanic times, Tepeyac had been crowned with a temple dedicated to an Earth and fertility goddess called Tonantzin, the Mother of the Gods. Tonantzin, like the Christian Guadalupe who usurped her shrine, was a virgin goddess, also associated with the moon. The Tepeyac hill and shrine had been an important pilgrimage place for the nearby Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlan.

On Saturday, December 9, 1531, a baptised Aztec Indian named Juan Diego set out for church in a nearby town. Passing the pagan

sacred hill of Tepeyac, he heard a voice calling to him. Climbing the hill, he saw on the summit a young woman who seemed to be no more than fourteen years old, standing in a golden mist. Revealing herself as the 'ever-virgin Holy Mary, Mother of God' (so the Christian telling of the story goes), she told Juan Diego to go to the local bishop and tell him that she wished a church to be built on the hill. Juan did as he was instructed, but the bishop did not believe him. On his way home, Juan climbed the sacred hill and again saw the apparition, who told him to return to the bishop the next day. This time the bishop listened more attentively to Juan's message from Mary. He was still skeptical, however and so asked for a sign from Mary.

Two days later Juan went again to Tepeyac hill and, meeting Mary, was told by her to climb the hill to the site of their first encounter, pick a bunch of roses that would be growing there and return with the roses to Mary. Juan climbed the hill with misgivings. It was the dead of winter and no roses could possibly be growing on the cold and frosty hill. But upon reaching the summit Juan found a profusion of roses, an armful of which he gathered and wrapped in his shawl to carry to Mary. Arranging the roses, Mary instructed Juan to take the shawl-encased bundle to the bishop, for this would be her sign. When the bishop unrolled the shawl, the presence of the roses was astounding. But truly miraculous was the image that had mysteriously appeared on the inside of Juan Diego's shawl. The image showed a young woman without child, her head lowered demurely. Wearing an open crown and flowing gown, she stood upon a half moon. Soon thereafter the bishop began construction of the church.

MITLA, MEXICO

Situated at an elevation of 4,855 feet (1,480 meters) and 24 miles (38 k) from the large city of Oaxaca, the ruins of Mitla are one of Mexico's most fascinating and enigmatic sacred places. Archaeological excavations indicate that the site was occupied from as early as 900 BC. Mitla's visible structural remains however, date from between 200 and 900 AD when the Zapotecs were present, from 1000 AD when the Mixtecs took control of the site and from 1200 AD (some sources say 1500), when the Zapotecs were back in control. The word Mitla is a term from the Nahuatl language meaning 'Place of the Dead' and the earlier Zapotec name of Lyobaa means 'tomb' or 'place of rest'. These two names, as well as the findings of the archaeological excavators, indicate that the village had great importance as a place of burial during both Zapotec and Mixtec times.

The archaeological zone of Mitla includes five main groups of structures, and by the beginning of the Christian era the town had stretched for more than two thirds of a mile along either side of the Mitla River. The photograph shows part of the 'Hall of Columns' and the entrance to the main sanctuary. We do not know what these structures were called by their builders; the name 'Hall of Columns' comes from the first Spanish explorers who visited the site. The Hall of Columns, 120 by 21 feet in size, has six monolithic columns of volcanic stone that originally supported a roof covering the entire hall. The darkened doorway leads through a low and narrow passageway to the interior of another encl-

sure, now roofless, but also covered in ancient times. This chamber is one of the most astonishing artistic artefacts of pre-Columbian America. Its walls are covered with panels of inlaid cut-stone mosaic known as stepped-fret design. The motif of these intricate geometric mosaics are believed to be a stylised representation of the Sky Serpent and therefore a symbol of the pan-regional Mesoamerican deity, Quetzalcoatl.

Archaeologists are mystified regarding the use of this chamber. An early Spanish explorer, named Canseco, who visited Mitla in 1580, wrote of the Hall of Columns, "In this building they had their idols, and it was where they assembled for religious purposes, to make sacrifices to their idols, and to perform heathen rites." Regarding the interior chamber, Canseco says it was the residence of the high priest who was 'like our pope'. The oldest bit of information we have about the chamber however, and possibly the most revealing, is a legend that says the chamber was used for the final initiation of shamans who had been trained in magic and healing in the school of Mitla.

CHEJU-DO, KOREA

Sixty miles off the southwestern corner of the Korean peninsula stands the island of Cheju Do. Only 700 square miles in area, the island is completely dominated by the extinct volcano cone of Halla San. At 5850 feet (1950 meters), Halla San is the highest peak in all of South Korea. Its last recorded eruption was in AD 1007. Neither legend nor anthropological evidence gives any certain indication of the ancestral stock of Cheju Do; its people are probably a mix of the indigenous Koreans, Chinese from the north, Malaysians from the south and perhaps Japanese from the east. During Neolithic times a unique culture developed on the island and legends speak of the great mountain being the dwelling place of a race of giants and various mountain spirits.

By the end of the first millennium BC, Cheju Do had entered the realm of Chinese mythology as one of the islands of Samshinsan, or Islands of the Blest, also called the Three Holy Mountains.

These legendary isles were said to have the sacred fungus of immortality growing in great abundance. This sacred fungus was probably the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom, also called Fly Agaric, which figures prominently in the shamanic and religious mythologies of lands from far eastern China, India, and Siberia all the way to the Celts of Europe and the Laplanders of Scandinavia. Known as Soma in ancient India, this brilliant red mushroom with white spots is familiar to people of European descent because of its association with children's fairy tales, magical dwarfs, and the cape of Santa Claus.

Anthropological studies of the mythology and sacramental use of this potent psychotropic (vision-inducing) mushroom have shown its extensive associations with the emergence of proto-religious traditions throughout the world. These hallucinogenic mushrooms were once found growing in the forests of Halla San, in the Yonghsil or 'Enchanted Place' wilderness that is the ritual gateway to the sacred peak. One of the three Samshinsan holy islands was known as Yongju, which is the first of several historical names of Cheju Do Island. Yongju San, meaning 'Mountain of the Blessed Isle', was believed by the ancient Chinese to form a sort of bridge between heaven and earth. At a later date, when the Milky Way galaxy was believed by Neo-Confucian societies to form the connecting link between the heavens and the earth, Yongju San became Halla San, 'The Peak That Pulls Down the Milky Way'. This image of heavenly energy flowing down upon Cheju Do offers one explanation for the supernatural phenomena mentioned in the ancient myths of the island.

MONTE ALBAN, MEXICO

Soaring above the valley and city of Oaxaca, the hilltop ruins of Monte Alban are the second largest ceremonial sites in Mesoamerica, only exceeded in size by Teotihuacan near Mexico City. One ancient name of the site was Sahandevui, meaning, 'at the foot of heaven'. The ruins are extremely old. Elaborate yet currently undeciphered hieroglyphs found here are among the most ancient writings in all of Mesoamerica. Equally mysterious are the strange rock carvings known as danzantes, which depict humanoid figures with Negroid facial features. Similar to carvings found at Olmec sites in other parts of Mexico, these decidedly non-Mexican figures and the hieroglyphic writings seem to indicate the possibility of contact and influence by cultures far distant from the western hemisphere.

The first known buildings were constructed between 1000 - 800 BC but most of these are now destroyed or buried beneath later Zapotec structures. The Zapotec occupation of the site dates from 100 BC and most of the enormous structures standing today date from the Classic phase of 300-900 AD when Monte Alban had become the principal ceremonial site of the Zapotec empire. The complex contains great plazas, numerous pyramids, a ball game court, underground passageways and over 170 tombs. The site was abandoned as a functioning ceremonial centre during the 10th century though it continued to be used as a burial place by the Mixtecs.

Mound J has been shown to be a highly refined and complex astronomical observatory. A curiously shaped arrowhead structure, situated at an angle of 45 degrees to the main axis of Monte Alban, Mound J was aligned with the point in the western sky where Alnilam, the centre star of Orion's belt, sits. Built sometime between 100 BC and 200 AD, Mound J also has astronomical alignments with the setting positions of the Southern Cross and Alpha and Beta Centauri and the rising position of Capella.

Monte Alban is an enigmatic place. Conventional archaeological theory is at a loss to explain why this particular site was chosen; it is upon a tall, steeply walled plateau, it has no source of water, it was never used as a habitation centre and there is no evidence of it ever being used for strategic or military purposes. Furthermore, it was extremely difficult to construct; the building rocks were laboriously carried from the valley far below, the builders were small people (averaging only 5 feet tall), they had no metal stone-cutting tools and they had not discovered the transportation capacities of the wheel. Yet, given all this, the site still became the second largest ceremonial centre in Mesoamerica. Archaeologists may respond that the great structures represent a social and religious momentum, an architectural elaboration of the earlier sacred use of the site.

SWAYAMBHUNATH STUPA, KATHMANDU, NEPAL

A golden spire crowning a conical wooded hill, Swayambhunath Stupa is the most ancient and enigmatic of all the holy shrines in Kathmandu valley. Its lofty white dome and glittering golden spire are visible for many miles and from all sides of the valley. Historical records found on a stone inscription give evidence that the stupa was already an important Buddhist pilgrimage destination by the 5th century AD. Its origins however, date to a much earlier time, long before the arrival of Buddhism into the valley. A collection of legends about the site, the 15th century Swayambhu Purana, tells of a miraculous lotus, planted by a past Buddha, which blossomed from the lake that once covered Kathmandu valley. The lotus mysteriously radiated a brilliant light and the name of the place came to be Swayambhu, meaning 'Self-Created or Self-Existent'. Saints, sages and divinities travelled to the lake to venerate this miraculous light for its power in granting enlightenment. During this time, the Bodhisatva Manjushri was meditating at the sacred mountain of Wu Tai Shan and had a vision of the dazzling Swayambhu light. Manjushri flew across the mountains of China and Tibet upon his blue lion to worship the lotus. Deeply impressed by the power of the radiant light, Manjushri felt that if the water were drained out of the lake Swayambhu would become more easily accessible to human pilgrims. With a great sword Manjushri cut a gorge in the mountains surrounding the lake. The water, draining away, left the valley of present day Kathmandu.

The lotus was then transformed into a hill and the light became the Swayambhunath Stupa.

Swayambhunath's worshippers include Hindus, Vajrayana Buddhists of northern Nepal and Tibet and the Newari Buddhists of central and southern Nepal. Each morning before dawn, hundreds of pilgrims will ascend the 365 steps that lead up the hill, file past the gilded Vajra (Tibetan: Dorje) and two lions guarding the entrance, and begin a series of clockwise circumambulations of the stupa (Newari Buddhists circle in the opposite, counterclockwise direction). On each of the four sides of the main stupa there are a pair of big eyes. These eyes are symbolic of God's all-seeing perspective. There is no nose between the eyes but rather a representation of the number one in the Nepali alphabet, signifying that the single way to enlightenment is through the Buddhist path. Above each pair of eyes is another eye, the third eye, signifying the wisdom of looking within. No ears are shown because it is said the Buddha is not interested in hearing prayers in praise of him.

The area surrounding the stupa is filled with chaityas, temples, painted images of deities and numerous other religious objects.

MONASTERY of IZAMAL, YUCATAN, MEXICO



Some forty miles east of Merida, the capital of Yucatan, is the quiet, old fashioned, colonial town of Izamal. In the centre of town lies the great Monastery of Izamal, which houses one of the most venerated Marian statues in the whole Mexico. To this statue are attributed thousands of miracles of healing. The usual Christian explanation for these miracles is that the prayers of the pilgrims call forth the benevolence and therapeutic powers of Mary. Maybe yes, maybe no. Let us examine Izamal's history more deeply and perhaps another explanation for the miracles will present itself.

During the time of the Spanish conquest of Yucatan (1527-1547), Izamal was one of the largest and most beautiful cities on the

peninsula. A pilgrimage site since as early as 1000 BC, Izamal had become the most important religious centre in northern Yucatan during the Early Classic Period of AD 300-600. The city was considered by the Mayans to be the abode of Kinichkakmo, a manifestation of the sun god and of the god Itzam Na (the name Izamal derives from the god's name). Itzam Na was a deity of healing and resurrection, the creator of arts and writing and the introducer of many important agricultural items. He was also head of the Mayan pantheon, bearing the title of *ahaulil* or 'Lord' and was shown as presiding over a collection of lesser deities.

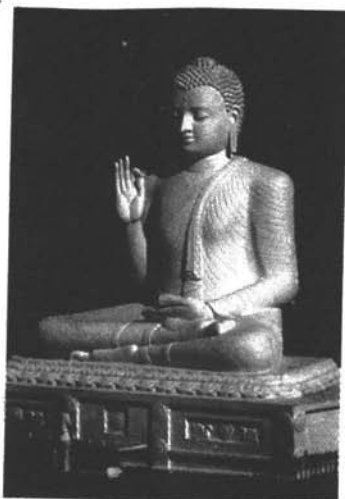
Following the capture of Izamal by the Spanish, the local population was enslaved and forced to dismantle the top of an enormous pyramid in the centre of the city. Upon the now flattened pyramid, at the place where previously had stood the sanctuary of the god Itzam Na, the enslaved Indians were forced, in 1553, to erect a monastery and church. This was done because of the Christian belief that a church would discourage the Indians from their 'devil worship'. Soon after the consecration of the church and the installation of the Marian statue, miracles of healing began to occur. The Christian authorities explained these miracles as resulting from the grace of Mary. Yet, were the miracles really caused by the wooden statue of Mary inside the church or might they be better explained by reference to the Mayan's mythic beliefs about the power of Izamal. The Mayans had built their pilgrimage shrine to Itzam Na, as a god of healing, at this precise location, and, if we have no records of healing miracles in Mayan times (other than those encoded in the myths), it is only because the Christians burned all the Mayan writings and libraries during their conquest of Yucatan.

ADAM'S PEAK, SRI LANKA

Jutting sharply skyward from the lush jungles of southwestern Sri Lanka is the 7362 foot (2243 meter) peak of Sri Pada, the 'Holy Footprint'. Also called Adam's Peak, the mountain has the unique distinction of being sacred to the followers of four of the world's major religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. Long before the development of these religions, however, the mountain was worshipped by the aboriginal inhabitants of Sri Lanka, the Veddas. Their name for the peak was Samanala Kanda; Saman being one of the four guardian deities of the island. For Hindus, the name of the mountain is Sivan Adi Padham, because it was the world-creative dance of the god Shiva that left the giant footprint (5 feet 7 inches by 2 feet 6 inches). According to Buddhist traditions from as early as 300 BC, the real print is actually beneath this larger marking. Imprinted on a huge sapphire, it was left by the Buddha during the third and final of his legendary visits to Sri Lanka. When Portuguese Christians came to the island in the 16th century they claimed the impression to be the footprint of St. Thomas who, according to legend, first brought Christianity to Sri Lanka. And finally, the Arabs record it as being the solitary footprint of Adam where he stood for a thousand years of penance on one foot. An Arab tradition tells that when Adam was expelled from heaven, God put him on the peak to make the shock less terrible - Ceylon being that place on earth closest to and most like heaven.

The mountain is more easily seen from the sea than from land

and also more impressive. Early Arab seafarers fascinated with the pyramidal peak wrote of it as 'the highest mountain in the world' (it is not even the highest in Sri Lanka) and 'visible from three days sail'. The ancient Sinhalese also believed it to be of great height and a native legend tells 'from Seyllan to Paradise is forty miles, and the sound of the fountains of Paradise is heard here'. Visited by many early world travellers, among them the Arab Ibn Batuta (1304-1368) and the Venetian Marco Polo (1254-1324), Adam's Peak attained a legendary status as a mystic pilgrimage destination. Today the pilgrimage season commences in December and continues until the beginning of the monsoon rains in April (from May to October the mountain is obscured by clouds). Certain parts of the path leading up the mountain are extremely steep and the climbing chains secured in these sections are said to have been placed by Alexander the Great (365-323 BC), though there is no evidence that he made it this far south on his Asia travels.

Mihintale Buddha, Sri Lanka

Situated 12 kilometres east of the ruins of the great city of Anuradhapura, the sacred mountain of Mihintale is considered the location where Buddhism was first introduced to the island of Sri Lanka. There are two stories, one historical and one mythological, that explain the arrival of Buddhism at Mihintale. According to historical sources, in the middle of the third century BC the great Indian Emperor Ashoka had sent his son Mahinda to Sri Lanka to spread the teachings of the Buddha. Mahinda and his group of Buddhist monks were camped upon the sides of Mt Mihintale when King Devanampiya Tissa of Anuradhapura encountered them during a royal hunting expedition. Mahinda spoke

to the king of Buddhism and recited the Culahastipadopama and other sutras. The date of this meeting between King Devanampiya Tissa and the Buddhist monk is believed to have been on the full moon of June in the year 247 BC. Soon thereafter the king (and 40,000 inhabitants of Anuradhapura) converted to Buddhism. An alternate story of the arrival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka tells that the Buddha himself journeyed to the island, on the back of the great winged demigod Garuda, but there is no historical evidence that the Buddha himself ever visited the island. Today the peak of Mihintale, approached by a grand stairway of 1840 granite steps, has many temples, lodgings for monks and several splendid statues of the Buddha. Each June on the full moon there is a pilgrimage commemorating the date when Mahinda first preached the Buddhist doctrine in Sri Lanka and many thousands of pilgrims flock from all over Sri Lanka to meditate on the holy peak. The photograph was made with a Nikon F3, a 300mm lens (with two 2x teleconverters resulting in a 1200mm lens) and Fujichrome 50 film. The photograph was made during the brightest part of the day but was underexposed by several f-stops in order to turn the background to dark black and thereby simulate the view of the great Buddha as seen during the night of the full moon pilgrimage.

At the foot of the mountain are the ruins of a hospital, medical bath (or stone canoe in which patients were immersed in medicinal oil) a stone inscription and urns belonging to the ancient period have been unearthed. Between the hospital and the steps leading to the rock are the ruins of a large monastery. On the floors of the square building which is 125 feet on one side, are beautiful carvings and also are stone balustrades and guard stones. As this side is precipitous, the steps are on the eastern side of the slope, spacious and in 4 sections. The stairway has 1840 steps made of granite, leading to the summit.

UXMAL, YUCATAN, MEXICO

Uxmal (OOSH-mahl) means 'built three times' in the Mayan language, and though its name is a mystery, its beauty is not. As a World Heritage site, it is one of the best restored and maintained ruins in the Yucatan and certainly one of the most magnificent. Its architecture, some of the most majestic of the Yucatan ruins, is characterised by low horizontal palaces set around courtyards, decorated with rich sculptural elements and details.

Uxmal was the greatest metropolitan and religious centre in the Puuc hills of Yucatan during the late Classical period, flourishing between the 7th and 10th centuries A.D. Uxmal translates as 'thrice built' and, whatever the actual number, the numerous building phases are reflected in a variety of architectural styles. The city was abandoned in the 10th century after apparently coming under Toltec influence. The currently used names for many of the structures were coined by the conquering Spanish and are neither indigenous nor do they indicate the actual functions of the buildings. An example is the Nunnery so named for its similarity to the convents of the Spaniards. This structure was actually used as a school for the training of healers, astronomers, mathematicians, shamans and priests.

The Pyramid of the Magician, at 100 feet the tallest structure in Uxmal, is more accurately named. According to an ancient legend, of various different tellings, a magician-god named Itzamna was single handedly supposed to have constructed the pyramid in

one night. From archaeological excavation however, we know that the pyramid was constructed in five superimposed phases. The legendary association of the pyramid with a magician may be understood as an indication that the structure, and indeed the entire sacred part of the Uxmal complex, had ancient and ongoing use as a mystery school and ceremonial centre. It is also interesting to note that the entire city is aligned with reference to the position of the planets then known, with Venus predominating, and that the pyramid of the magician is oriented so that its stairway on the west faces the setting sun at the time of summer solstice.

CHICHEN ITZA, YUCATAN, MEXICO

While the earliest archaeological artefacts thus far found at Chichen Itza date from AD 1 to 250, it is probable that the site was settled at a far earlier time. Proto-Mayan tribes had inhabited the flat limestone plateau that makes up much of the Yucatan peninsula for at least 8000 years. These nomadic peoples would certainly have discovered the enormous natural well, called a cenote, next to, which the city of Chichen Itza later grew. As a Maya social centre, Chichen Itza began its rise to prominence with the arrival of a seafaring people in the eighth century. Called the Itza by archaeologists, these merchant warriors first colonized the northern coastal areas of the Yucatan peninsula and then ventured inland. After their conquest of the holy city of Izamal, the Itza settled at the great cenote, then known as Wuk Yabnal, meaning 'Abun-

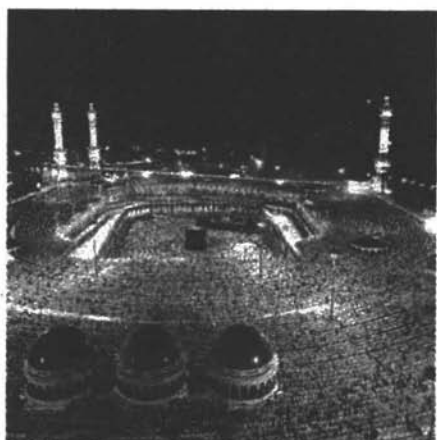
dance Place'. Their city became known as Chichen Itza, which means 'Mouth of the Well of the Itza'. From this site, the Itza Maya rapidly became the rulers of much of the Yucatan peninsula.

Writing of Chichen Itza, Mayan scholars Linda Schele and David Freidel tell us that:

"After over a thousand years of success, most of the kingdoms of the southern lowlands collapsed in the ninth century. In the wake of this upheaval, the Maya of the northern lowlands tried a different style of government. They centred their world around a single capital at Chichen Itza. Not quite ruler of an empire, Chichen Itza became, for a time, first among the many allied cities of the north and the pivot of the lowland Maya world. It also differed from the royal cities before it, for it had a council of many lords rather than one ruler."

The Temple of Kukulcan, the Feathered Serpent God (also known as Quetzalcoatl to the Aztecs) is the largest and most important ceremonial structure at Chichen Itza. This ninety-foot tall pyramid was built during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries directly upon the multiple foundations of previous temples. The architecture of the pyramid encodes precise information regarding the Mayan calendar. Each face of the four-sided structure has a stairway with ninety-one steps, which together with the shared step of the platform at the top, add up to 365, the number of days in a year. These stairways also divide the nine terraces of each side of the pyramid into eighteen segments, representing the eighteen months of the Mayan calendar. The pyramid is also directionally oriented to mark the solstices and equinoxes. The axes that run through the northwest and southwest corners of the pyramid are oriented toward the rising point of the sun at the summer solstice and its setting point at the winter solstice. The northern stairway was the principal sacred path leading to the summit.

MECCA, Saudi Arabia



Mecca (Makkah in Arabic) is the centre of the Islamic world and the birthplace of both the Prophet Muhammad and the religion he founded. Located in the Sirat Mountains of central Saudi Arabia and 45 miles inland from the Red Sea port of Jidda (Jeddah), ancient Mecca was an oasis on the old caravan trade route that linked the Mediterranean world with South Arabia, East Africa and South Asia. By Roman and Byzantine times it had developed into an important trade and religious centre and was known as Macoraba.

Nearly all scholars trace the sanctity of Mecca to the Ka'ba edifice built at God's express command by Abraham and Ishmael. The city of Mecca achieved its major religious significance following the birth and life of the Prophet Muhammad (570-632AD). According to the original words of Muhammad, the Hajj pilgrimage

is the fifth of the fundamental Muslim practices known as the 'Five Pillars of Islam'. The Hajj is an obligation to be performed at least once by all male and female adults whose health and finances permit it. The pilgrimage takes place each year between the 8th and 13th days of Dhu al-Hijjah, the 12th month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Before setting out, a pilgrim should redress all wrongs, pay all debts, and plan to have enough money for their journey and the support of their family while away.

As pilgrims undertake the journey they follow in the footsteps of many millions before them. When the pilgrim is about 10 kilometres from Mecca he enters the state of holiness and purity known as Ihram, and dons special garments consisting of two white seamless sheets that are wrapped around the body. Entering the great Mosque in Mecca, the pilgrim first walks seven times around the Ka'ba shrine in a counterclockwise direction; this ritual is called turning, or tawaf. Next, entering into the shrine, the pilgrim kisses the sacred stone. The stone is mounted on a silver frame in the wall, four feet above the ground, in the southeast corner of the shrine. It is of an oval shape about twelve inches in diameter, composed of seven small stones (possibly basalt) of different sizes and shapes joined together with cement. Legend tells that the stone was originally white but became gradually darkened by the kisses of sinful mortals (some traditions say by the sins of 'offsprings of Adam').

During the next few days the pilgrim walks a ritualised route to other sacred places in the Mecca vicinity (Mina, Muzdalifah, Arafat, the Mount of Mercy and Mt. Namira) and returns to the Ka'ba on the final day (the word Hajj probably derives from an old Semitic root meaning 'to go around, to go in a circle'). Once a believer has made the pilgrimage to Mecca they may add the title al-Hajji to their name. In different Islamic countries returning pilgrims will use a variety of signs to indicate they have made the Hajj; these include painting pictures of the Ka'ba (and the pilgrim's means of transportation to the shrine) upon the walls of their homes, painting the entrance doorway of the house bright green, and wearing hats or scarves of green colour. A so-called Minor Pilgrimage,

known as the Umra, contains some but not all of the rites of the Hajj and may be performed at any time of the year.

The Ka'ba is the largest mosque in the Islamic world.

Forbidden to persons not of the Muslim faith, Mecca came to symbolise for Europeans the secrets and mysteries of the orient and as such became a magnet for explorers and adventurers. To this day, Mecca remains strictly closed for persons not of the Muslim faith. Nowadays about 2,000,000 persons perform the Hajj each year and the pilgrimage serves as a unifying force in Islam by bringing together followers from diverse countries and language groups.

PILGRIMAGE AND SACRED SITES IN SHI'ITE IRAN

The existence of pilgrimage places, other than the holy shrine of the Ka'ba in Mecca, is a controversial subject in Islam. Orthodox Sunni Muslims, following the dictates of Muhammad's revelations in the Koran, will state that there can be no other pilgrimage site than Mecca. When Muhammad died, he was buried in the house of his wife Aisha and it was forbidden to visit his corpse. In accordance with his teachings, no special treatment was given to the burial places of the four rightly guided Caliphs and shrines were not erected over any of their graves. Likewise, Orthodoxy maintains that the belief in and worship of saints is not Koranic. The reality, however, is that saints and pilgrimage places are extremely popular throughout the Islamic world, particularly in Morocco, Tunisia, Pakistan, Iraq and Shi'ite Iran.

To understand the practice of pilgrimage in the country of Iran it is first necessary to know something of the differences between the two major sects of Islam, the Sunni and Shi'ite, in particular why and when those differences historically arose. Prior to his death, Muhammad had not stated with absolute clarity that who should carry on with the leadership of the new religion of Islam. He had no surviving sons and had not even indicated what type of leadership should replace him. Muhammad's death on June 8, 632, therefore thrust the community of believers into a debate

over the criteria of legitimate succession. According to sources compiled two to three centuries after Muhammad's death, two primary solutions to the problem of succession arose. One group maintained that the Prophet had designated his cousin and son-in-law Ali to be his successor. The other group, convinced that Muhammad had given no such indication, choose from among their group the elder disciple, Abu Bakr, who had been the Prophet's first adult male convert and was the father of his wife Aisha. The process of choosing the successor was itself undemocratic for Ali and his supporters were not present at the meeting, being occupied with the burial of Muhammad. Those who supported Abu Bakr were in the majority and formed the nucleus of what later became the 'people of the Sunna and the Assembly', Sunnis for short. The group that supported Ali was called the Shi'a (meaning 'party' or 'supporters' of the house of Ali), later popularly known as the Shi'ite.

The shrine locations of the twelve Shi'ite Imams are:

Ali ibn Abi Talib; in Najaf, Iraq

al-Hasan; in Medina, Saudi Arabia

al-Hussain; in Karbala, Iraq

Ali Zayn al-Abidin; in Medina, Saudi Arabia

Muhammad al-Baqir; location not known

Jafar al-Sadiq; location not known

Musa al-Kazim; in Kazimayn, Iraq

Ali al-Rida (Reza); in Mashhad, Iran

Muhammad al-Jawwad; in Kazimayn, Iraq

Ali al-Hadi; in Samarra, Iraq

Hassan al-Askari; in Samarra, Iraq

Muhammad al-Mahdi; the Hidden Imam

43

Devil's Tower, USA



Brought to international attention by the hugely popular movie, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Devils Tower has been a sacred place of numerous Indian tribes since prehistoric times. Various legends are told about the origin of the tower. One story, common to the Kiowa, Arapaho, Crow, Cheyenne and Sioux tribes, concerns a group of little girls pursued by a giant bear. According to this legend, seven young Indian girls were one day playing in the forest. A great bear came upon them and gave chase. The girls fled swiftly through the trees but the bear slowly gained on them. Recognizing the hopelessness of their situation, the girls jumped upon a low rock and prayed loudly to the Great Spirit to

save them. Immediately the small rock began to grow upwards, lifting the seven girls higher and higher into the sky. The angry bear jumped up against the sides of the growing tower and left deep claw marks, which may be seen to this day upon the rock walls. The tower continued to soar towards the sky until the girls were pushed up into the heavens, where they became the seven stars of the Pleiades. Known to the Indians as Mateo Tepee or Grizzly Bear Lodge, the tower is actually the remnant of a volcanic extrusion that occurred 60-70 million years ago. Rising some 1,200 feet above the nearby Belle Fourche River, the tower was first seen by white explorers during a US. Geological Survey in 1875. The surveyors called the rock Devils Tower after an old Indian name, The Bad God's Tower. It was first climbed, using a long wooden ladder attached to the rock face, on July 4th, 1893. Proclaimed the first US National Park by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906, the tower is today a popular climbing site and over 20,000 ascents have been made. Jutting magnificently out of the relatively flat surrounding terrain, the tower was a greatly honored vision quest site of the Indians. Its use in this regard has continued to the present time, for both Indians and non-Indians, and many visitors have reported seeing strange light phenomena and UFO's flying about the tower's summit.

MASHHAD, IRAN

The capital of Khorasan province in northeast Iran and the second largest city in the country, Mashhad is best known for its beautiful pilgrimage shrine of Imam Reza. The shrine was built on the site of the village of Sanabad, where Imam Reza died in 818 AD (some sources say 817). Imam Reza, the eighth Shi'ite Imam, was born in Medina in 765 AD and was widely known to be a person of both extraordinary scholarship and saintly qualities. At the age of 51 he was surprisingly appointed by the Abbasid Caliph Mamun (a Sunni Muslim) to become his successor as the next caliph. Mamun summoned Imam Reza to Sanabad, publicly proclaimed him his successor, and gave him his daughter in marriage. Mamun's actions, while welcomed by members of the Shi'ite sect, deeply disturbed the rival Sunnis, with the result that several

violent uprisings ensued. After staying for a while in Sanabad, Caliph Mamun and Imam Reza departed for Baghdad (to retake the city from political rivals) but during the journey Reza fell ill and rapidly died. The suddenness of the Imam's death aroused suspicions among Shi'ite believers who believed Mamun had poisoned him in order to quell the political unrest resulting from a Shi'ite Imam being proclaimed caliph-to-be of the vastly more numerous Sunni believers.

The Caliph, however, showed signs of deep mourning and built a mausoleum over the Imam's grave in 818 AD, adjacent to his own father's tomb. Because of the widespread Shi'ite belief that Mamun had murdered Reza, the tomb and the village of Sanabad were given the name of Mashhad ar-Rizawi, meaning 'the place of the martyrdom of Riza'. A tradition (legendarily attributed to Imam Reza's father) told that a pilgrimage to Imam Reza's grave would equal 70,000 pilgrimages to Mecca and the tomb of the Imam became a holy place of pilgrimage to which people thronged from throughout Persia.

The original mausoleum over Imam Reza's tomb was destroyed by Sabuktigin, the Ghaznevid sultan in 993 AD but was rebuilt and extensively enlarged by his son Mahmud of Ghazni in 1009 AD. During this time the shrine was ornamented with tiles, some of which are still visible in the innermost dome chamber. In 1220 AD, the Mongols plundered the city and shrine. A century later the Mongol ruler of Iran, Sultan Muhammad Khudabandeh converted to Shi'ism, and during his reign (1304-1316 AD) again renovated the shrine on a grand scale.

The most glorious phase of Mashhad began during the reign of Shahrukh Mirza, the son of Tamerlane, and reached its zenith during the reign of the Safavid kings who ruled Iran from 1501 to 1786. The Safavid kings beautified the religious complex with golden domes, tiled minarets and spacious courtyards as well as extensive academic buildings.

SHIRAZ, IRAN

After the shrines of Imam Reza in Mashhad and Fatima in Qum, the third most venerated pilgrimage destination in Iran is the shrine of Shah Chirag in the city of Shiraz. Archaeological excavation indicates a settlement on the site of Shiraz in the prehistoric period and cuneiform records from the great ceremonial capital of Persepolis, 57 kilometers to the north, show that it was a significant town in Achaemenian times. As a city however, it was founded in 684 AD, after the Arab armies conquered the Sassanians. The Buyids (945-1055 AD) made Shiraz their capital, building mosques, palaces and a great city wall. The 13th and 14th centuries saw Shiraz as a literary center especially famous for its poets Sa'adi and Hafez, both of whom are buried in the city. There are many splendid Islamic monuments in Shiraz, especially its enormous Safavid mosque, but the most notable religious site is the

shrine of Syed Amir Ahmad (also called Ahmad ibn Musa).

Amir Ahmad and his brother Mir Muhammad, both of whom were brothers of Imam Reza, took refuge in Shiraz following Abbasid persecution of the Shi'ite sect (Amir Ahmad died or was murdered in 835). The brothers' tombs, originally only simple mausoleums, became celebrated pilgrimage destinations in the 14th century when the pious and art-loving Queen Tashi Khatun erected a mosque and theological school by the tombs. Known locally as Shah Chirag or the 'King of Light', the exquisite tomb of Amir Ahmad is a place of truly stunning beauty. The enormous dome above the shrine is inlaid with hundreds of thousands of pieces of finely crafted tile and the interior walls are likewise covered with myriad pieces of dazzling cut glass intermixed with multi-colored tiles. In the same complex is the mausoleum of Mir Muhammad.

Besides the great pilgrimage shrine of Shah Chirag, Shiraz is also famous for its many imamzadihs, these being shrines of descendants or relatives of the twelve Shi'ite Imams. The term imamzadih refers to both the shrine structure and the saint associated with the shrine. Different shrines, or rather the imamzadihs watching over them, are believed to possess different miraculous powers and thus pilgrims in Shiraz may seek assistance with such matters as finding a mate, ease in childbirth and treatment of a variety of physical and psychological ailments.

CHACO CANYON, NEW MEXICO

Deep in the remote deserts of northwestern New Mexico lie the extensive ruins of the greatest architectural achievement of the northern American Indians. Known as the Chaco Canyon complex, the site was the main social and ceremonial centre of the Anasazi culture. We do not actually know what these people called themselves, the term Anasazi is a Navaho word meaning variously 'the ancient ones' or 'the enemies of our ancient fathers.' The early Anasazi (100 BC.) were nomadic hunter-gatherers ranging over great expanses of territory; by AD 700 they had begun to live in settled communities of which Chaco Canyon is the finest example. Intensive construction occurred throughout Chaco Canyon between AD 900 to 1100, resulting in the development of several sophisticated dwelling complexes. Pueblo Bonito (meaning 'pretty village' in Spanish; the original Anasazi name is unknown) had more than six hundred rooms, numerous two- and three-storey buildings, several ceremonial structures called kivas, and a population between 800 and 1200 persons. From tree-ring dating, it is known that a period of great drought came upon the Chaco area in AD 1150, causing the abandonment of the site. Rediscovered in 1849 by U.S. Army soldiers, the site was severely vandalised for seventy years until it was made a national monument in 1907. In 1920, National Geographic Society began a thorough reconstruction of the site.

Radiating out from the Chaco complex is an enigmatic series of straight lines that extend ten to twenty miles into the desert. Con-

ventional archaeological theories explain these lines as roads leading to outlying settlements, but this seems highly unlikely as the lines are arrow straight regardless of terrain. They go over mesas (table-top mountains), up and down vertical cliff faces, and along ways that make them utterly impractical for use by the casual or commercial traveller. Perhaps they had another purpose. Paul Devereux, the British scholar and leading writer in the so called 'Earth Mysteries' field has suggested that these lines (and others he has studied around the world) are better understood as markings that represent the out-of-body spirit travel of ancient native shamans. Archaeological research does indeed indicate that the lines often lead to small shrine-like structures where evidence of religious and shamanistic activity is common. These mysterious lines, often apparently between no particular places, are found in many parts of the Anasazi realm. More than five hundred miles of the lines have so far been charted. Nowadays they are mostly visible only from the air in the early morning or late afternoon, when the sun casts deep shadows. Inspecting these lines at ground level, it is evident that they have been acted upon by many hundreds of years of natural erosion, which has obscured all but scarce remains.

ZOROASTRIAN SACRED SITES



Writing on the founding legends of the six major shrines in the Yazd region, Michael Fischer comments that their “mythical origin is a variant of the Bibi Shahbanu legend, namely, that at the time of the Arab invasion a daughter or son or member of the court of Yazdegird III fled before an Arab army towards Khorassan, came to a point of exhaustion near Yazd, called upon God, and was taken into the mountain, rock, well, or cave before

the bewildered Arab eyes. The second part of the legend concerns a process of rediscovery. That is to say, the location of these sites of ascension to the next world was lost. Then, in relatively recent times, they were rediscovered by a shepherd, child, or other person in need, to whom a spirit or saint (pir) appeared in a vision or a dream. This spirit aids the human protagonist by solving the mystery of lost sheep, lost path, and so on, requesting in return that a shrine be built." This legend, commonly used by devout Zoroastrians in order to sanctify their mountain shrines, is however, known to date from an historical period demonstrably more recent than the shrines themselves. The Zoroastrian mountain shrines of the Yazd region were used as holy places long before the birth of Islam and therefore predate any legends associated with that religion. The six shrines are:

- Pir-e Sabz (Chak-Chak); 72 kilometers from Yazd, near Ardakan; pilgrimage period June 14-18.
- Seti Pir; east of Yazd, pilgrimage period June 14-18, often visited on the way to the shrine of Pir-e Sabz.
- Pir-e Narestuneh (Narestan); Kharuna mountains, six miles east of Yazd; pilgrimage period: later part of June, after Pir-e Sabz.
- Pir-e Banu-Pars; near Sharifabad; pilgrimage period in early July.
- Pir-e Naraki; at the foot of Mt. Nareke, south of Yazd; pilgrimage period in mid-August.
- Pir-e Herisht; near Sharifabad.

The shrine of Shekaft-e Yazdan (the 'Cleft of God') in the Tutgin valley near the village of Zardju is sometimes visited after the pilgrimage to the shrine of Pir-e Banu-Pars. (Another sacred site in the Yazd region is the Muslim shrine of Haji Khezr, in the town of Kuhbanan.)

PIR-E-SABZ SHRINE

For Iranian Zoroastrians, summer begins with the pilgrimage to Pir-e-Sabz. This remote site is the holiest and most visited of the Zoroastrian mountain shrines. Shrine legends tell of a conquering Arab army that had pursued Nikbanoo, the daughter of the Sassanian Emperor Yazdgird III, to this region. Fearing capture, she prayed to Ahura Mazda to protect her from the enemy. In the nick of time the mountain miraculously opened up and gave her protection. This legendary site, where a holy spring issues from the towering cliff, is also called Chak-Chak, which means 'drop-drop' in Persian. Growing beside the source of the holy spring is an immense and ancient tree which legends says used to be Nikbanoo's cane, and the waters of the spring are believed to be tears of grief shed by the mountain for Lady Nikbanoo. The shrine

enclosure, a man-made cave, is floored with marble and its walls are darkened by soot from the fires kept eternally burning in the sanctuary. Each year from June 14 to 18, many thousands of Zoroastrians from Iran, India and other countries flock to the temple of Pir-e Sabz. One of the pilgrim trails to Chak-Chak is a dirt road starting near the village of Elabad, north of Yazd. It is a time-honoured tradition for pilgrims to stop the moment they see the sight of the shrine and continue the rest of their journey by foot. Several roofed pavilions have been constructed on the cliffs below the shrine and throughout the day and night these are tightly packed with pilgrims.

Mt. Ushi-darena (translated as 'Support of Divine Consciousness' or 'Sustainer of Divine Wisdom') is the mountain where Zoroaster attained illumination and received the revealed knowledge of the supreme god, Ahura Mazda. Another Zoroastrian saint mentioned in the Avestan Yasht literature, Asmo-Khanvant, also attained spiritual illumination upon Ushi-Darena. This mountain appears to be situated in the Mt. Alborz range near Azerbaijan, Zarathustra's traditional birthplace. The Bundahishn, however, places it in Seistan (or Sajestan), east of Iran in the region referred to in the Avesta (Vendidad I, 9-10) as Vaekereta, the ancient name of Kabul (or Sajestan). The Greeks called it Dranjiana and in the Pahlavi writings it is known as Hushdastar.

Mt. Asnavant, now known as Mt. Ushenai in the Azerbaijan region near the sacred lake of Chaechasta (also known as Urumiah). Asnavant is another mountain where Zarathustra lived for a number of years practicing solitary meditation. In the Bundahishn, Mt. Asnavant is referred to as the seat of Adar Gushasp, the Sacred Fire.

Avila, Spain

One of the finest remnants of Europe's medieval era, the walled town of Avila was sacred to an ancient Celtiberian culture long before the arrival of the Romans or Christians. The city was captured by the Arab Moors in 714 AD, recaptured by the Christians in 1088, and had its protective walls built in the 12th century. Extending for 2,500 meters (8202 ft.) and encircling the old town, the massive walls are punctuated by ninety, heavily fortified stone towers. Avila is much visited by tourists today, yet in the late medieval ages its visitors were pilgrims coming to the church in the center of the walled city. The current church, begun in 1091 and completed in the 13th century, is where the mystic St. Teresa (1515-1582) had frequent visions and ecstatic experiences. Nearby the

church stands the house where St. Teresa lived.

When asked which sacred sites influenced me most strongly during my long pilgrimage travels, I always include the cathedral of Avila in my response. There is a wonderful presence or energy inside the cathedral, especially focused at two locations, which stimulated in me the most sublime and passionate feelings of spiritual love. It is often my habit, within the various temples, mosques and churches that I visit, to utilize different dowsing techniques in order to locate what I call energy beam points. These places are particular locations within the larger area of a sacred structure where it seems that the energy, spirit or power of the site is most highly charged. In Avila, I located three of these energy beam points, two of which it was possible to stand directly upon. During a four-day exploration of Avila I spent many hours each day sitting or standing at these two places. My experience at them was of a presence that surrounded and infused my being with the most intoxicating compassion. I was frequently so overwhelmed while standing at these sites that I would softly cry with intense joy for minutes on end. The tourists visiting the church found my behavior a bit odd, but the old priests seemed to well understand.

ZARAGOZA, SPAIN

Towards the end of the 1st century BC, the ancient Celtiberian sacred site of Salduba was conquered by the Romans and renamed Caesaraugusta after the Roman Emperor. Called Saraqustah by the Arabs, the modern name of the city, Zaragoza, is a corruption of these earlier names. There are two primary sacred places within the city, the small shrine of Mary Magdalene shown in the foreground of the photograph and the great Catedral Nuestra Señora del Pilar, in the background. This enormous basilica, dedicated to the Virgin of the Pillar, the patron of all Spain, marks the site of the first recorded Marian apparition in Europe. The Christian telling of the foundation legend relates that St. John the Apostle, the brother of St. John the Evangelist, spent years following the crucifixion preaching in Spain. St. John the Apostle arrived in Zaragoza in 40 AD and upon a pagan standing stone saw a vision

of Mary who instructed him to build a church. A chapel was soon constructed and it became a regional centre for the conversion of the pagans. Because of its pre-Christian sanctity, its Marian apparition, and its importance as a commercial and political centre, Zaragoza rapidly grew in size and religious importance. The early chapel was frequently enlarged following wars and fires, and the existing cathedral was erected, at the site of the original pillar, between the 17th and 18th centuries. For all the time to come it will remain a place of great religious curiosity & place of common visitors congregation.

Throughout the centuries mysterious apparitions have frequently been observed around the pillar and large numbers of pilgrims, both Christian and neo-pagan, continue to visit the shrine. Each year on October 12, a small, 15th century statue of the Virgin is taken on a procession around the city. Few visitors to Zaragoza take the time to meditate in the nearby shrine of Mary Magdalene; for this author that is the more powerful (and certainly more quiet) place. Mary Magdalene, whose relics were originally stored at St. Maximin in France and later transferred to Vezelay, also in France, was highly venerated in the medieval ages. There were over 125 shrines dedicated to her worship and at least fifty of these also contained shrines to the Black Virgin. Readers interested in studying the subject of Black Virgins, Dark Goddesses and Mary Magdalene in greater detail will enjoy the books, *The Cult of the Black Virgin*, by Ean Begg; *Shrines of Our Lady*, by Peter Mullen; and *Mary Magdalene: Christianity's Hidden Goddess*, by Lynn Picknett.

TAKHT-E SULEIMAN, IRAN

Located in a mountainous area of northwestern Iran and 42 kilometers north of the village of Takab, Takht-e Suleiman (the 'Throne of Solomon') is one of the most interesting and enigmatic sacred sites in Iran. Its setting and landforms must certainly have inspired the mythic imagination of the archaic mind. Situated in a small valley, at the center of a flat stone hill rising twenty meters above the surrounding lands, is a small lake of mysterious beauty. Brilliantly clear but dark as night due to its depth, the lake's waters are fed by a hidden spring far below the surface. Places like this were known in legendary times as portals to the underworld, as abodes of the earth spirits.

Archaeological studies have shown that human settlements ex-

isted in the immediate region since at least the 1st millennium BC, with the earliest building remains upon the lake-mound from the Achaemenian culture (559-330 BC). During this period the fire temple of Adur Gushasp (Azargoshnasb) was first constructed and it became one of the greatest religious sanctuaries of Zoroastrianism, functioning through three dynasties (Achaemenian, Parthian, Sassanian) for nearly a thousand years. In the early Sassanian period of the 3rd century AD, the entire plateau was fortified with a massive wall and 38 towers. In later Sassanian times, particularly during the reigns of Khosrow-Anushirvan (531-579 AD) and Khosrow II (590-628), extensive temple facilities were erected on the northern side of the lake to accommodate the large numbers of pilgrims coming to the shrine from beyond the borders of Persia. Following the defeat of Khosrow II's army by the Romans in 624 AD, the temple was destroyed and its importance as a pilgrimage destination rapidly declined. During the Mongol period (1220-1380), a series of small buildings were erected, mostly on the southern and western sides of the lake, and these seem to have been used for administrative and political rather than religious functions. The site was abandoned in the 17th century, for unknown reasons, and has been partially excavated by German and Iranian archaeologists in the past 100 years.

Assisi, Italy



Approximately 90 miles north of Rome, in the rolling hills of Umbria, stands the exceptionally well-preserved medieval town of Assisi. Known primarily as the birthplace of St. Francis (1182-1226 AD), the town has been a sacred place since long before the Franciscan era. Little is known regarding the original foundation of the town. One legend tells that the ancient town, called Assisium, came into existence around a holy spring that was later venerated by the Etruscans (9th - 5th centuries BC) and, following them, by the Romans. Another legend tells that the town was begun by Dardanus 865 years before the foundation of Rome (April 21, 753 BC). Sometime in the 1st century BC a temple of Minerva, the Roman goddess of art, handicrafts and the professions, was

constructed at the sacred spring. During the early Christian era the sanctuary of Minerva was destroyed, a series of churches were erected at the site, and the sacred spring stopped flowing. Subject to the dukes of Spoleto in the early Middle Ages, the town of Assisi became an independent commune in the 12th century and was involved in disputes and battles with nearby Perugia before passing to the Papal states. It became part of the Italian kingdom in 1860.

St. Francis was born in Assisi in 1182 (some sources say 1181), the son of a well-to-do cloth merchant. A lively, even riotous youth who dreamed of achieving military glory, Francis abandoned his worldly ambitions at the age of 19 while a prisoner of war in Perugia. He thereafter became a mystic who experienced visions of Christ and Mary, composed the first poems in the Italian language about the beauties of nature, and in 1210 founded the famous order of mendicant friars known as the Franciscans. His repudiation of the worldliness and hypocrisy of the church, his love of nature, and his humble, unassuming character earned him an enormous following throughout Europe, posing an unprecedented challenge to the decadent Papacy. Francis was the first known Christian to receive the stigmata, the spontaneously appearing wounds on the hands, feet and side of the body corresponding to the torments of Christ on the cross. These injuries caused Francis great pain and suffering, but he bore them with his characteristic serenity, keeping the matter secret for many years so as not to draw attention to himself and away from god.

The Basilica of San Francesco, one of Italy's foremost monuments, was built between 1228 and 1253 AD. The short period of its construction, rare for a church of this size, is often explained as a measure of the great love that the people of the time had for St. Francis.

Temple of Hera, Paestum, Italy



Approximately fifty-five miles (ninety kilometres) south of Naples, Italy, stands the ancient city of Paestum. Legends tell of the city's founding by Jason and the Argonauts, but archaeologists, uncomfortable with the stuff of legends, attribute Paestum's birth to 7th century BC Greek colonists. Paestum was long known as Poseidonia, indicating that the site was once a ceremonial centre of Poseidon (the Roman Neptune), the god of the sea. The two primary temples, the 550 BC Basilica and the 450 BC temple of Neptune (shown in the photo), were originally dedicated to the fertility goddess Hera. A third temple on the site was dedicated to Athena, the goddess of wisdom, spiritual consciousness, and

the arts. Poseidonia was conquered and occupied in 400 BC by the Lucans, an Italian people who ruled until 273 BC when the city became a Roman colony. With the fall of the Roman Empire, the spread of malaria from nearby marshes, and Moslem raids in the ninth century, Paestum fell into decline and was deserted for many centuries. Rediscovered only in 1752 by an Italian road-building crew working in the area, Paestum is the finest preserved Greek temple complex in the Mediterranean world.

The initial temple dedications to feminine deities indicate that the site was originally sacred to prehistoric earth-goddess cults before its usurpation by the patriarchal Poseidon priesthood. Hera was a goddess of fertility and creativity, and Athena a goddess of art and spiritual wisdom. Did Hera and Athena actually exist as discreet physical entities, or should these goddesses be understood as mythological encoding of the particular energetic qualities of the site? According to my theories, the gender of the primary deities at the site is an indication of the gender of the earth energies (what might also be called the yin and yang qualities of the site), and the personality characteristics of the deities are a metaphorical indication of how the site will affect human beings. Psychics and dowsers visiting Paestum note that the area of the ruins is conducive to the awakening and amplification of the capacity of artistic creativity. It is fascinating to note that a popular legend resonates with this idea. Childless couples flock to the temple of Hera to copulate beneath the night sky, in the belief that making love within the shrine of the goddess will call forth her fertilising influence and thereby insure pregnancy. At Paestum, Hera is not only a goddess of fertility; she is also a goddess of childbirth. Ultimately these myths speak to us of the power of this place to birth newness in the human spirit.

EINSIEDELN, SWITZERLAND



In the German language the word *einsiedler* means hermit, and Switzerland's greatest pilgrimage shrine, the abbey of Einsiedeln, derives its name from being the 'place of the hermits'. While legends indicate the site was sacred in pre-Christian times, its historical fame began in the early 9th century. In 835, Meinrad, a young nobleman who had been a monk in the monastery of Reichenau, left the monastery to live a hermit's life in the deep woods of northeast Switzerland. For 26 years he lived alone in the woods with two crows as his only companions. In 861, two bandits came upon Meinrad in his hermitage and murdered him. Legends tell that Meinrad's two crows followed the bandits, hov-

ering and shrieking in a strange manner, until the bandits were captured in Zurich, 30 miles away.

When Meinrad had first come to the forest he had brought along one of the mysterious Black Madonna statues, considered by many scholars to be Christianised pagan Dark Goddesses. After Meinrad's death a small Benedictine cloister was built at the site of his hermitage and this cloister, housing the Black Madonna, soon became a pilgrimage site of great importance. The enormous abbey standing today rose over a period of many centuries and only legends are left regarding the sites sacred use in prehistoric times. Inside the church the primary object of pilgrimage visitation is the Chapel of Grace which houses a mid-15th century Black Madonna icon (the earlier icon having been destroyed in a fire). The Chapel of Grace, standing directly upon the site of Meinrad's original hermitage, is believed to have been consecrated by Christ himself when he miraculously appeared on September 14, 948.

The Black Madonna images in European pilgrimage shrines are a matter of some controversy. Throughout Western Europe there are over 200 examples of these black images and, while anathema to the orthodox church, they are widely venerated as having esoteric, magical and wonder-working powers.

Writing in *The Cult of the Black Virgin*, Ean Begg states that "The still popular cult of wonder-working images is not only reactionary and non-scriptural, it also evokes memories of awkward subjects best left in obscurity like the pre-Christian origins of much in Christianity, the history of the Templars, Catharism, and other heresies, and secrets concerning the Merovinginian dynasty. So, blackness in statues of the Virgin tends to be ignored and, where admitted, is attributed to the effects of candle smoke, burial, immersion or fashion's passing whim. The contention, then, of the Catholic Church is that most such statues were not originally intended to be black, and only became so by accident later." "If the presumed polychrome faces and hands of the Virgin and Child have been blackened by the elements however, why has their polychrome clothing not been similarly discoloured?"

EXTERNSTEINE, GERMANY

Encompassing the old towns of Detmold and Horn, the Teutoburg district is historically claimed as the sacred heartland of Germany. Here took place episodes of the German heroic myths and the defeat of the Roman legions by Arminius. The region was also known as a place of pilgrimage in prehistoric, Celtic and early Saxon times. At the geomantic centre of this ancient sacred region stand the Externsteine rocks, a chain of towering sandstone spires dating from the Cretaceous period (about 70 million years ago). Shrouded in mystery, the Externsteine rocks are one of the most ardently debated archaeological sites in all of Central Europe. They were a sanctuary of nomadic reindeer hunters and from earliest times had an important influence on German history. Pagan rituals were performed here until the 8th century AD, when Charles the Great cut down the sacred Irmensul tree, the German tree of life and symbol of the old religion. Atop the tall-

est rock spire are the extremely well preserved remains of an enigmatic prehistoric temple.

Different theories have been suggested concerning the identity of the temple's builders and the use to which it was put. Some have described the shrine as a Mithraeum, or sanctuary for Roman soldiers adhering to the Persian cult of Mithras, while other scholars believe that such deities as the Germanic Teut, the Nordic Wodan, or the Bructerian prophetess Veleda were worshipped in the sanctuary. What is known with certainty however is that the temple was constructed according to astronomical orientations. The round window-like opening shown in the photograph has been demonstrated to have significant celestial alignments, including a view of the moon at its northern extreme and the sun at sunrise on the summer solstice.

The earliest historical mention of Externsteine comes from the 12th century when the site came under the control of a nearby Benedictine monastery. A series of artificial caves, which had been mysteriously carved into the base of the sandstone spires in ancient times, were enlarged and used as dwellings for Christian hermits and monks. People from different corner of the world visit the place frequently.

It is remarkable that the delicate and enchanting temple atop the central spire was not destroyed at this time, like so many other pagan sites presumed to be places of 'devil worship' by the medieval Christians. Similar to numerous other sacred sites in Europe today, Externsteine is much frequented by crowds of noisy tourists; if one is intent on experiencing the magic and holiness of this extraordinary place, the author recommends a surreptitious nocturnal visit.

PETRA, JORDAN

Petra (from the Greek, meaning 'rock') lies in a great rift valley east of Wadi 'Araba' in Jordan about 80 kilometres south of the Dead Sea. It came into prominence in the late first century BCE (BC) through the success of the spice trade. The city was the principal city of ancient Nabataea and was famous above all for two things: its trade and its hydraulic engineering systems. It was locally autonomous until the reign of Trajan, but it flourished under Roman rule. The town grew up around its Colonnaded Street in the first century CE (AD) and by the mid-first century had witnessed rapid urbanisation. Following the flow of the Wadi Musa, the city-centre was laid out on either sides of the Colonnaded Street on an elongated plan between the theatre in the east and the Qasr al-Bint in the west. The quarries were probably opened

in this period, and there followed virtually continuous building through the first and second centuries CE.

According to tradition, in ca. 1200 BCE, the Petra area (but not necessarily the site itself) was populated by Edomites and the area was known as Edom ('red'). Before the Israelite incursions, the Edomites controlled the trade routes from Arabia in the south to Damascus in the north. Little is known about the Edomites at Petra itself, but as a people they were known for their wisdom, their writing, their textile industry, the excellence and fineness of their ceramics and their skilled metal working.

As one of the most spectacular sites in the Middle East, Petra has long attracted travellers and explorers. During the 19th century, the site was visited and documented by several Europeans, after J. L. Burckhardt's initial visit. A synthesis of the site was published by Libbey and Hoskins in 1905, presenting one of the first overviews in print. Archaeological excavations began in earnest at the turn of the century, with the earliest scientific expedition being published in *Arabia Petraea* in 1907, by A. Musil. In the 1920's R. E. Brünnow and A. von Domaszewski surveyed the site and published an ambitious mapping project in their *Die Provincia Arabia*. This survey has since undergone many necessary revisions, the most recent of which was published by Judith McKenzie in 1990.

JEBEL MUSA, JORDAN

Jebel Musa, also called Mount Nebo, lies to the northwest of Madaba, Jordan and is the alleged site of the tomb of Moses. The principal ruins are at a place called Syagha and consist of a church and an adjacent monastery. The first historical mention of the church is in the account of the famous pilgrim, Lady Egeria (Aetheria) who visited the site in 394 AD. She describes a small church containing the tomb of Moses, the place having been miraculously revealed in a vision to a local Shepard. In the late fifth or early sixth century the shrine is mentioned in the biography of Peter the Iberian. The building is now described as a "very large temple, named after the prophet Moses and many monasteries which are build around it", which seems to indicate that an enlargement of the complex since the time of Egeria. Writing of the power of the holy place, Peter the Iberian says,

This temple was built in the name of the great prophet and law-giver, and he proclaims this publicly and to every man, so that no doubt is possible in the signs and wonders and cures, which since that time have occurred at this place without interruption. For it is a place of cure for both the souls and for the bodies, and a place of refuge for all those, who come here from all places and are afflicted in the soul and affected with many kinds of sufferings of the body.

A Portuguese Franciscan monk visited the site in 1564 but by then the buildings on the peak was ruined and abandoned, though a small church at Ayun Musa (Moses' Springs) in a valley to the north, was still in use. Mt. Nebo is again mentioned in a document of the 17th century but the writer does not mention either buildings or ruins at the site. Beginning in 1933, the Franciscan Biblical Institute of Jerusalem has conducted extensive excavations upon the summit of Jebel Musa, revealing the church and monastery described by the early pilgrims. The church is the usual basilica type and corresponds almost exactly with the tomb of Moses that Egeria had described in 394 AD. The floors of the sanctuary were decorated with wonderful mosaics and many inscriptions.

From the terrace to the west of the church it is sometimes possible on clear days to have a view across the Jordan valley all the way to the Mount of Olives. The River Jordan is hidden from view in a deep canyon but the Dead Sea gleams in the sunlight over 3500 feet below. It must have been somewhere in this vicinity that Moses stood and gazed upon the Promised Land.

THE ABBEY OF CONQUES, FRANCE



When one first views the steep, rocky, and thickly wooded mountain side upon which the abbey of Conques is perched, the unsuitability of the location for any sort of building, human habitation, or commercial activity is immediately apparent. Yet in this remote Auvergne valley stands one of medieval France's most visited pilgrimage shrines.

Why did this particular location become such a celebrated shrine? Church authorities explain that Conques gained renown as a major stopping place along one of the four principal routes leading to Santiago de Compostela, because of the 12th century Benedictine abbey that housed the relics of St. Foy. Conques, however, had been venerated as a sacred place long before relic ven-

eration and pilgrimages became popular in the 9th to 15th centuries. Preceding the Benedictines' arrival in 819 AD, a Carolingian church had stood for many years, and prior to that time people dwelling in the local forests considered the site holy. During medieval times, Conques was known to be a particularly miraculous place and the explanation given to the Christian pilgrims was that the relics of St. Foy caused the miracles. A bit of detective work concerning the history of St. Foy reveals, however, that this person certainly did not have enough time to lead the life of a saint. Foy was a small girl child, living in Asia Minor (present day Turkey), who was burnt as a Christian in 303 AD and therefore became classified as a martyr of Christ. There are no stories concerning the child that give any evidence of a saintly life (such as we find with St. Francis) nor any reason that her relics would have spiritual powers. Furthermore the relics of Foy, like so many others in medieval times, are of dubious authenticity.

Writing in *The Traveller's Key to Medieval France*, John James tells an interesting story concerning the monastery's acquisition of the relics. At a gathering of the monks of Conque "the monk Armisdus was chosen to visit Agen, where the bones of Saint Foy lay. On arrival he was asked to join the community. He was in no hurry; it took him ten years to gain their confidence. Patiently and, one hopes, not a little guiltily, he waited until he had been appointed guardian of the church's treasures, including the saint's tomb. His opportunity came one night when he was left alone in the church. He broke into the tomb, stole the bones, and on a horse which had been prepared for the occasion, rushed the relics to Conques. The enraged Agen monks pursued, but the triumphant thief reached home with his treasure, and it was received with great rejoicing."

PETRA, JORDAN

Situated in present-day Jordan and hidden amidst nearly impenetrable mountains to the east of the valley connecting the Gulf of Aqaba and the Dead Sea, lies the ancient city of Petra. One of the world's most visually stunning archaeological sites, Petra (meaning 'the rock' in Greek) is an abandoned necropolis of temples and tombs cut into towering cliffs of red, pink and orange sandstone.

During the 6th-4th centuries BC, the Nabataeans, a nomadic tribe from the northwestern part of Arabia, entered and gradually took over the lands controlled by the Edomites. The first historical mention of the Nabataeans is in a list of the enemies of the King of Assyria in 647 BC, during which time Petra was still occupied by the Edomites. There are several reasons, religious and economic, suggested for the Nabataeans selection of Petra as their capital. The city of Petra is situated at the beginning of Wadi Musa, meaning the Valley of Moses, and this site had long been venerated as one of the traditional sites where Moses struck the ground and the water gushed forth. The region was also revered by the Nabataeans as the sacred precinct of their god Dushara.

In 106 AD, the entire Nabataean kingdom came under the control of the Roman Empire. During the ensuing centuries Petra continued to prosper as the Romans carved many buildings as well as a great theatre capable of holding 3000 spectators. While the political and economic power was completely in the hands of

the Romans, the Nabataeans continued to adhere to the practices of their own religion. With Emperor Constantine's proclamation of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire in 324 AD, Petra and the lands of the Nabataeans came under the sway of the Byzantine Empire for the next three hundred years.

The Christianisation of the Roman Empire signalled the end of the golden era of Nabataean culture and the magnificent city of Petra. Decline slowly set in. With the establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus in 661 the region of Petra fell under the control of Islam and the commercial importance of the city plummeted. Following the establishment of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad in 750, the region of Petra was neglected and thereafter virtually disappears from the historical record. Abandoned to time and the elements, Petra was unknown to the outside world - with the single exception of an insignificant Crusader fortress built in the 12th century - until its 'rediscovery' in 1812.

The splendid ruins of Petra, which were listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985, have for some years been faced with a worrying threat; salt blown in from the Dead Sea is encrusting the relatively delicate sandstone and slowly weakening the buildings.

DURHAM AND YORK CATHEDRALS, ENGLAND



The cities of Durham and York were home to two of northern England's greatest pilgrimage cathedrals during the medieval era. Durham housed the relics of Cuthbert, Aidan, and Oswald. York had those of five 'saints': Paulinus, Wilfred, Chad, John of Beverley, and William. Most of these persons led lives of questionable sanctity and were canonized by the church primarily for political reasons. Cuthbert however, seems to have been a truly saintly individual. Becoming a monk while still a young boy, Cuthbert (635-687) lived in various monasteries and was then transferred to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne. Legends are told of his gentle nature

and his wondrous ability to calm wild birds and animals. It is said that late in the evening, after the other monks had gone to sleep, he would often go on long walks whilst in ecstatic communion with god. Birds would perch upon his shoulders and, as he stood in the sea to pray, all manner of small and large fish gathered at his feet. After twelve years at Lindisfarne, Cuthbert felt drawn to the life of a solitary ascetic and so retired to the small windswept island of Farne where he stayed for nine years. Later recalled to Lindisfarne by the King to become Bishop of the monastery, Cuthbert led his final two years teaching and ministering to the pilgrims who came to receive his blessings. He died in 687 and was buried in Lindisfarne.

For nearly two hundred years the relics of Cuthbert remained on the island until they came to be transferred to Durham by a most interesting series of events. The monks of Lindisfarne, fleeing repeated Viking attacks, had abandoned their holy island in 875, taking with them the relics of St. Oswald and St. Aidan packed into the coffin containing St. Cuthbert's uncorrupted body. For over 100 years the monks wandered, settling here and there, and founding churches dedicated to St. Cuthbert. In 995, fearing another attack from Danish raiders, the monks again fled with their precious relics. According to legend, when the monks approached the town of Durham the saint's coffin began to grow heavy and one of the monks had a dream in which Cuthbert said his body would finally rest at 'Dunholme'. None of the monks knew of such a place but, inquiring of local villagers, overheard two women speaking about a lost cow which was said to have strayed into 'the Dunholme'. Investigated by the monks, this turned out to be a wooded promontory in a loop above the River Wear, which is where Durham cathedral now stands.

Except for a short period when Cuthbert's body was returned to Lindisfarne Island, his sacred relics have remained in Durham to this day.

BAALBEK, LEBANON

Approximately 86 kilometres northeast of the city of Beirut in eastern Lebanon lies the great temple complex of Baalbek. Situated atop a high point in the fertile Bekaa valley, the ruins are one of the most extraordinary and enigmatic holy places of ancient times. Long before the Romans conquered the site and built their enormous temple of Jupiter, long even before the Phoenicians constructed a temple to the god Baal, there stood at Baalbek the largest stone block construction found in the entire world.

The origin of the name Baalbek is not precisely known and there is some difference of opinion among scholars. The word Baalbek may mean 'God of the Bekaa valley' (the local area) or 'God of the Town', depending on different interpretations of the word.

The origin and development of Baalbek may be considered from two quite different paradigms of prehistory, one the conventional

approach that views civilisation as having only begun in early Neolithic times and the alternative approach which suggests that highly developed civilizations existed well before the melting of the last ice in what is archaeologically known as Palaeolithic period.

The golden age of Roman building at Baalbek/Heliopolis began in 15BC when Julius Caesar settled a legion there and began construction of the great Temple of Jupiter. During the next three centuries, as emperors succeeded one another in the imperial capital of Rome, Heliopolis would be filled with the most massive religious buildings ever constructed in the far reaching Roman empire. These monuments functioned as places of worship until Christianity was declared the official religion of the Roman Empire in 313 AD, following which the Byzantine Christian emperors and their rapacious soldiers desecrated thousands of pagan sanctuaries. At the end of the 4th century, Emperor Theodosius destroyed many significant buildings and statues, and constructed a basilica with stones from the Temple of Jupiter. This signalled the end of Roman Heliopolis. The city of the sun declined and lapsed into relative oblivion. In the year 634, Muslim armies entered Syria and besieged Baalbek. A large mosque built within the walls of the temple compound, which was converted into a citadel. Over the next several centuries, the city and region of Baalbek were controlled by various Islamic dynasties including the Umayyad, Abbasids and Fatamids as well as the Seljuk and Ottoman Turks.

The ruins of Baalbek, situated on a large hill (1150 meters) with an expansive view over the adjoining plains, are bordered on two sides by the town of Baalbek and on the other sides by agricultural land belonging to local farmers. Within the sprawling complex are a great profusion of temples and platforms filled with a stunning collection of fallen columns and sculptures.

CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL, EN- GLAND

The most famous of England's pilgrimage shrines during the late medieval ages, Canterbury Cathedral marks a sacred site that has been continuously utilised since long before the Roman's arrival in 43 AD. A Celtic church was established in Canterbury during the Roman occupation but, following the departure of the Roman legions in the 5th century and the reconquest of the region by Jutes and Saxons, Christianity was displaced by the old pagan religions. Sent by Pope Gregory to eradicate this paganism, St. Augustine came to Canterbury in 597 AD and soon thereafter established the cathedral that has remained the primary ecclesiastical administrative centre of England. A succession of cathedrals has stood upon the site of the original Augustine construction. Destroyed by fires and Danish raiders, these cathedrals enshrined an impressive collection of relics, which stimulated Christian pilgrimages from the 7th century onwards.

Canterbury's importance as a major European pilgrimage destination however, really began after the martyrdom of Thomas Becket on December 29, 1170. Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury and the most powerful religious figure in England, had angered Henry II, the King of England. In response to the king's question, "Who will rid me of this turbulent priest", four knights entered Canterbury cathedral and slew Becket with swords. While Becket was certainly no saint (he is known to have been an arro-

gant, greedy and manipulative opportunist), his martyrdom gave rise to England's greatest pilgrimage tradition. The reasons for this may be found in the unjust circumstance of his murder, the coincidental occurrence of some miracles of healing immediately following the murder, the penance done at the shrine by Henry II four years later, and the wide spread medieval belief in the spiritual powers emanating from the relics of saints and martyrs.

For more than three hundred years Canterbury attracted great numbers of pilgrims from throughout England and Europe, and many hundreds of miracles of healing were recorded at the shrine of Thomas Becket. Catering to the needs of these pilgrims became the principal industry of the town, and a fine picture of the pilgrimage era is given in *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer (written 1394-1400). Pilgrimages to Canterbury, and most other English shrines, waned in the mid 16th century after Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries and confiscated their properties. A measure of the immense popularity of the Canterbury pilgrimage is evident from the fact that twenty-six wagons were required to haul away the confiscated gold, jewels and other treasures that had been donated to the shrine. It is said that a forest of crutches left by cripples whom had been miraculously healed also surrounded the shrine.

MT. ARARAT, TURKEY

Mt. Ararat, the traditional resting place of Noah's Ark, is located in eastern Turkey near the Armenian and Iranian borders. The summit of Mt. Ararat is 5,165 meters (16,946 feet) above sea level. Ararat is a dormant volcano and its last eruption was on June 2, 1840. At present the upper third of the mountain is covered with snow and ice throughout the year. The Turkish name for Mt Ararat is Agri Dagi (which means mountain of pain). Adjoining Mt. Ararat, and 4000 feet lower, is the peak known as Little Ararat. Classical writers considered Ararat impossible to scale and the first known ascent was that of Frederic Parrot, a German physician, in 1829. Prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, Armenia was part of the Russian state and border conflicts between the Turkish and Soviet authorities often made it impossible

for climbers to gain access to the mountain. Armenia has now regained its freedom but continuing conflicts with the Turkish government and the Turkey's own conflicts with local Kurdish tribes have continued to limit further exploration of the great peak. If one is able to gain permission to climb, it is best to start from the Turkish town Dogubayazit on the south side of the mountain. The average climber who is experienced in high altitudes can complete the trek in three days, but it is better to allow four or five days so that exploration of the peak can be included.

There are numerous legends and eyewitness reports of Noah's Ark resting high on Mt. Ararat but so far no real evidence has been found. Only the loftiest heights of the frozen peak are capable of preserving the Ark and perhaps explorers will one day find the boat's remains beneath the snow and ice.

The Biblical references to a great flood and Noah's ark have remarkable parallels in many other archaic myths found around the world. Greek mythology, for example, tells of a hauntingly similar cataclysmic event. Collecting and recording oral traditions from a far earlier time, Hesiod in the 8th century BC reports that prior to the present creation there were four earlier ages, each of which had been destroyed by geological cataclysms. In the forth of these previous ages, Deucalion was warned by Prometheus of an impending flood and told to fashion a wooden box in which he and his wife Pyrrha could float above the rising waters. After nine days and nights in the boat, Deucalion came to rest upon sacred Mt. Parnasus in Greece and, with the help of Zeus, recreated human beings. As the Hebrews looked back to Noah, so also the ancient Greeks looked upon Deucalion as the ancestor of their nation and as the founder of many towns and temples.

BATH, ENGLAND

Archaeological excavations have revealed that the human use of the hot mineral springs at Bath began at least 10,000 years ago and have continued to the present times. First frequented by Neolithic hunter-gatherer tribes, the springs were later venerated as sacred by Celtic, Roman and Christian peoples. The Celts, who arrived in England around 700 BC, erected what are believed to be the first shrine structures at the springs. Dedicated to Sulis, a goddess of water, the shrine was a religious centre for much of southwestern England. Soon after the arrival of the Romans in England in 43 AD, the Celtic shrine was taken over and the god-

dess Sulis was identified with the Roman goddess Minerva as a healing deity. Beginning sometime around 65 AD, and continuing for nearly four centuries, the Romans constructed increasingly elaborate bathing and temple complexes at the springs.

The main spring, bubbling out of the ground at a rate of a quarter of a million gallons per day and maintaining a constant temperature of 120 degrees Fahrenheit (49 degrees Centigrade) was however, far more than just a source of hot water to the Romans. It was a sacred place where mortals could communicate with deities of the underworld and seek the assistance of the goddess Sulis-Minerva, and also the god of healing, Asclepius. Archaeological excavations in the bottom of the spring have brought to light a remarkable collection of sacred votive offerings thrown by worshippers into the waters. Also from the spring's bottom, over 12,000 coins - spanning the entire Roman period - have revealed that the behaviour of throwing coins into a spring to the accompaniment of a wish is a universal and ancient human behaviour. The numerous bathing pools were fed with a constant flow of water delivered by lead pipes which still function today and the largest bath was lined with 42 great sheets of lead whose combined weight exceeded 8 and 1/2 tons.

This great healing shrine of *Aquae Sulis* was not to last however. Following the departure of the Roman legions from Britain early in the fifth century AD, the city and its splendid temples and baths swiftly fell into decline. Over time the baths were covered by the relentless silting of the spring and only the fallen temple of Sulis-Minerva marked the ancient sacred site. Yet the town was not abandoned. Rather it continued to grow and by the seventh century the first Christian structure had been established upon the ruins of the Roman temple. For the next twelve hundred years a succession of churches rose and fell upon the hallowed ground with the currently standing abbey having been constructed between 1499 and the mid 17th century.

BORNHOLM, DENMARK

Located 40 kilometres southeast of the southern tip of Sweden but territorially a part of Denmark, the island of Bornholm is one of the oldest visible rocks in the world. Formed through volcanic activity more than 1700 million years ago, the small granite island has an area of approximately 600 square kilometres (230 square miles). Its rolling hills are covered with a patchwork of farms, pastures and beautiful forests, the coasts are graced by sandy beaches and rocky cliffs and its traditional villages are home to some of the friendliest people in Europe.

Archaeological excavation reveals the island to have been settled since at least 3600 BC, when numerous dolmens and Neolithic mounds began to be constructed. A majority of the mounds show evidence of having been used for burials while others, lacking burial

remains, indicate possible astronomical and ceremonial use. Scattered here and there across the island are many boulders and flat, glacier-scoured rock surfaces that are engraved with mysterious symbols and geometric forms, small cup-shaped depressions, and carvings of ships. Conventional archaeological theory, unable to date the engravings or explain their function, attributes them to Bronze Age inhabitants (1800-500 BC). These rock engravings may, however, date from a far earlier age and may have functioned as sea and star maps for ancient mariners. In medieval times, the island was known as Burgunderland or Burgunderholm, from which the present name derives ('holm' is an old Danish word for island). During the transition to Christianity between 1050 and 1150 AD, around 40 runic stones were erected around the island and today most of these are found in the vicinity of churches and old bridges where they have often been reused as building materials.

Clearly the most famous of the ancient constructions of Bornholm Island are its medieval round churches. The current hypothesis among historians is that these structures were not intended solely for religious practices but that they also had a defensive function. Given their assumed construction period in the 12th century, this makes sense as the Baltic region was then subjected to near continuous raids by Slavonic pirates from the island of Rugen, off the German coast. Originally the four churches had flat roofs so that they could be defended from any angle and the cone-shaped roofs were not added until several centuries later. Upon deeper consideration however, the idea that the churches were used for defensive purposes does not make much sense when one considers the extremely limited interior space within the churches. Each of the four round churches, except for Nyker, have three floors but the lower floor has limited space because of the enormous central pillar and the upper two floors are far too small and cramped to accommodate more than a few dozen people.

Black Hills, USA



The Black Hills stretch across western South Dakota, northeast Wyoming and southeast Montana and constitute a sacred landscape for the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne and Omaha. To the Lakota, they are Paha Sapa, 'the heart of everything that is'. The Black Hills were the casualty of one of the most blatant land grabs in U.S. history and continue to be the site of a legal and political confrontation. Rick Two-Dogs, an Oglala Lakota medicine man, explains: 'all of our origin stories go back to this place. We have a spiritual connection to the Black Hills that can't be sold. I don't think I could face the Creator with an open heart if I ever took money for it'.

In the rolling, forested highlands of the Black Hills, four thousand archaeological sites spanning 12,000 years attest to a long

relationship with native people. An oblong ridge circles the Black Hills, separating them from the surrounding prairie grasslands and making them 'one of the most unusual environmental features in the United States', according to anthropologist Peter Nabokov. In the 1700s and 1800s, the Lakota ceremonial season began each spring with the stampede of buffalo from the Black Hills through Buffalo Gap. As the people followed the buffalo, they would go to places like Devils Tower and Bear Butte, their pathway forming the shape of a buffalo's head.

Over the years, the Black Hills have experienced mining, logging and recreational uses, often in violation of Lakota beliefs. Mining for gold, coal and uranium pollutes water. Cyanide heap-leach gold mines, such as Homestake and Gilt Edge, use cyanide to extract gold from crushed ore. The cyanide mixes with other chemicals, producing toxic chemicals that can leach into the groundwater. This sort of mining leaves huge open pits that scar the landscape and frequently the companies are allowed to abandon the mines without cleaning up or restoring the land to its original state.

Two sacred places within the Black Hills, Bear Butte and Devils Tower are on public land and are protected from natural resource extraction. However, both have endured conflicts over recreational use. Bear Butte, known as Mato Paha, has long been a site for ceremonies, vision quests and important tribal meetings, though most Americans see the dramatic little mountain as just one of the many geographically stunning outcroppings in the Black Hills. Bear Butte became a South Dakota state park in 1961, and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. To accommodate different uses of the park, the state created two different trails, one for hikers and one for native religious practitioners, which leads people to a designated ceremonial area. Both trails are open to the public, however non-native users are requested to stay on trail and not disturb prayer bundles or individuals in ceremony.

SARNATH, India

After attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya the Buddha went to Sarnath; and it was here that he preached his first discourse in the deer park to set in motion the 'Wheel of the Dharma'. It is one of the most holy sites as in this place the stream of the Buddha's teaching first flowed.

At this place, the Buddha encountered the five men who had been his companions of earlier austerities. On meeting the enlightened Buddha, all they saw was an ordinary man; they mocked his well-nourished appearance. "Here comes the mendicant Gautama", they said, "who has turned away from asceticism. He is certainly not worth our respect." When they reminded him of his former vows, the Buddha replied, "Austerities only confuse the mind. In the exhaustion and mental stupor to which they lead, one can no

longer understand the ordinary things of life, still less the truth that lies beyond the senses. I have given up extremes of either luxury or asceticism. I have discovered the Middle Way." Hearing this the five ascetics became the Buddha's first disciples.

Gautam Buddha started teaching not to debate but for the advantage of and out of compassion for human beings. He explained the middle way, which avoids extremes, the Four Noble Truths and prescribed the Eight-fold path. The Four Noble Truths are: 1. There is suffering; 2. Suffering has a cause; 3. The cause is removable, and 4. There are ways to remove the causes. So as to remove the causes the Buddha prescribed an Eight-fold Path: Right speech, Right action, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, Right concentration, Right attitude and Right view.

A Monastic tradition flourished for over 1,500 years on the site of the deer park at Sarnath. In the third century BC Ashoka erected a column 15.24 m in height, which had four lions as its capital, which is now treasured in the archaeology museum. The lion symbolises both Ashoka's imperial rule and the kingship of the Buddha. The four-lion capital was adopted as the emblem of the modern Indian republic. The last and largest monastery constructed before the Muslim invasion was Dharma-Chakar-Jina Vihar, erected by Kumardevi, wife of King Govinda Chandra, who ruled over Benares during 1114 to 1154. In 1194 AD, Kutubuddin Aibak, the Muslim conqueror, levelled the city to the ground. Sarnath became a forest of debris below which the historical ruins remained buried. Of the two great stupas which adorned the city only the Dhamekha remained which is of the 6th century. The Dhamekha stupa is considered to be the sacred place where the voice of Buddhism was first heard. Many dignitaries of Buddhist countries visit this place for circumambulation of this sacred stupa and to worship the Buddha.

JAGANNATH TEMPLE

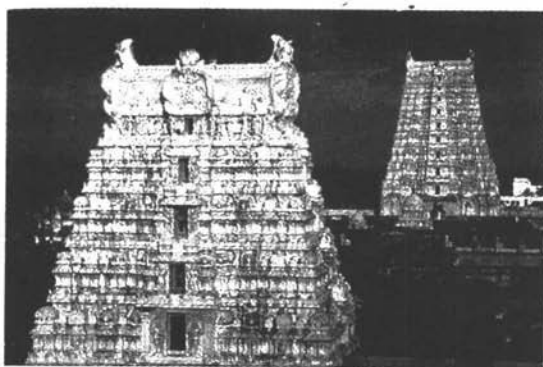


Even before one enters Puri, this 65-metre high temple makes its presence felt. The 12th century temple built by Chodaganga, to commemorate the shifting of his capital from South to Central Orissa, stands in a compound on the Nilgiri Hill, and is surrounded by a 20 foot high wall, within which lie several smaller shrines. A traditional porch, shrine, hall of offerings and a pillared hall of dance, form the rest of this temple. The remarkable thing about this temple, since its early beginnings, is that there has been no discrimination, ever, between castes. To one end of the road, that leads to the temple is Gundicha Mandir, Lord Jagannath's summer temple, within a walled garden at the far end of Grand Road, where the deity is enshrined for a week, on a simple throne. Like

the Lingaraja in Bhubaneswar, Puri's Jagannath is not open for non-Hindus, who must contend themselves, from viewing it from a vantage point, outside its precincts.

The Chandan Yatra celebrating the Hindu New Year. The Snana Yatra, celebrating Lord Jagannath's ritual bath is held on the day of the full moon in June (Jyestha). The original deities are taken out for public viewing. During the Jhulana Yatra, proxy images of the deities are carried out in grand processions for 21 days, to cruise in beautifully decorated boats in the Narmada Tank. And, of course, the prime attraction for tourists all over India and abroad, which is, the Rath Yatra, which falls in the month of June- the ideal time to visit Puri. Lord Jagannath with his sister Subhadra and brother Balabhadra take an annual vacation to the 'Gundicha Ghar', a smaller sanctum, 2 kms from the main temple. This journey constitutes the Rath Yatra Festival. The three deities, in separate raths (wooden chariots), are pulled by devotees to the Gundicha temple. These raths are elaborately dressed in a riot of colours, the colours symbolising the significance of each deity.

The Rath Yatra and Nava Kalebara, are the famous festivals of Puri. Both these events are related to the reigning deity, Lord Jagannath. The Nava Kalebara festival is an immensely significant religious ritual, wherein the idols of the three deities - Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra change their external forms. New idols are carved out of specially sanctified Chandan-Neem trees, within strictly prescribed regulations. The 'daru' (wood) is then transported to the temple in full regalia. At this point the Vishwakarmas (wood sculptors) step in and work for 21 days and nights, in strict secrecy, giving final shape to the idols. The new idols are then enshrined after transferring the 'Brahma' within each idol into their new form. This is again done in strict accordance to the religious norms.

RAMESWARAM

Southeast of Madurai, on an island in the Palk Strait, is the temple town of Rameswaram, a sacred place for Hindus. According to the *Ramayana*, this is the place where Rama worshipped Lord Shiva, to absolve himself of the sin of killing Ravana. Every nook and corner of Rameswaram is steeped in episodes from the *Ramayana*. Rameswaram is the Varanasi of the south and is a major pilgrimage centre for Vaishnavites and Shaivites.

Close to the sea, on the eastern side of the island, is this 17th century Ramanathaswamy Temple, renowned for its magnificent pillar corridor, running to a length of 1200 metres and flanked by ornate pillars. This is the longest corridor in India. Construction of the temple began, in the 12th century AD, and additions were made to the building, over the succeeding centuries by various

rulers and today, its gopuram is 53.6 metres high. There are 22 sacred wells in the temple, the water of each tasting different from the others. 100 metres away from the temple are Agnitheertham, where Rama worshipped Lord Shiva, to cleanse away the sin of killing Ravana. Situated on the highest point in the island, 2 km north of Rameswaram town centre, is the venerable shrine, housing the imprint of Lord Rama's feet placed on a chakra.

Dhanushkodi, at the eastern end of the island, is located 8 kms away from Rameswaram. This is the place where Rama is said to have bathed and the boulders that pepper the sea between here and Srilanka, known as Adam's bridge, were the stepping-stones used by Hanuman to find Rama's wife Sita, after she was abducted by Ravana, the King of Lanka. Dhanushkodi was completely washed away by the sea, in the 1964 cyclone. The only surviving relic of the past is the Kothandaramaswamy temple, which still contains the icons of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Hanuman and Vibhishana. Legend states that Vibhishana, brother of Ravana, surrendered to Rama at this spot.

Ramanathapuram, the district headquarters and an ancient town, is worth visiting for its Ram Vilas Palace. This palace of the Sethupati Rajas, houses oil portraits of the Rajas, of the past centuries. Ceilings and walls are decorated with early eighteenth century murals, depicting subjects such as business meetings with the English, and battles with the Maratha Sarabhoji, as well as scenes from epics. Tirupullani is also known as Dharbasayanam. The Vishnu temple at Tirupullani, is dedicated to Lord Adi Jagannatha Perumal. Uthirakosamangai is famous for the Shiva temple. The annual 'Arudhra' festival in December attracts a large number of tourists. Erwadi is an important site for Muslim pilgrims here; Erwadi houses the tomb of Ibrahim Sahid Aulia. The annual festival in honour of this saint, takes place in December.

SHRINE OF MATA VAISHNO DEVI



The holy shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi which is situated in the folds of might 'Tirkuta Hills' attracts Lakhs of devotees since ages owing to the unflinching faith of the people who throng the Shrine from all parts of India and from abroad. The Vaishno Devi temple, which is also recognised as one of the 'Shakti Peeths' of goddess 'Durga', is situated at a distance of 61 Kms from Jammu, which is the winter capital of J&K state.

The holy cave of goddess Vaishno Devi is situated at an altitude of 5200 ft. Thus by travelling on foot a distance of 13 Kms, a yatri covers a vertical height of about 3500 ft. In the last two decades especially after 1986 when the management of this Shrine was entrusted to an autonomous Board viz. Shri Mata Vaishno Devi

Shrine Board, the influx of yatra has experienced a steady rise. As of date the Shrine Board has created a massive infrastructure including pedestrian track, electrification, accommodation, toilets, blankets stores, cloakrooms etc and many of its vital projects are in the offing. Out of the millions of devotees who throng the place, a large number of yatri are repeaters who visit place every year. The Shrine of goddess 'Vaishno Devi' is reached by an arduous climb. The efforts a pilgrim puts in to traverse this distance kindles in him a sense of mission. The scenic beauty, the landscape around and the constant chanting of 'Jai Mata Di', leaves a mystic effect on the yatries, making complete transformation of one's body and soul. The devotee's mind is freed from all kinds of pride and ego and he is completely lost in a reverie of gratitude to the divine. It is spiritually uplifting experience to witness the faith of the yatries, who are motivated to the heart by three words being chanted since the ages...

Thus Vaishnavi, in the form of a five and a half feet tall rock with three heads or the 'Pindies' on the top is the ultimate destination of a devotee. These Pindies constitute the Sanctum Sanctorum of the holy cave known as the shrine of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Ji, which is revered by one and all. Mata's cave shrine is nestled in the mighty Trikuta Mountain 61 kilometres north of Jammu at a height of 5,200 feet above the sea level in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, India. Appropriate Season: The shrine is visited all through the year, but the path is difficult during the winters due to snowfall.

Ayers Rock, Uluru, England



Ayers Rock is a magnetic mound large - but not unlike Silbury Hill in England. It is located on a major planetary grid point much like the Great Pyramid in Egypt. It is the world's largest monolith rising 318m above the desert floor with a circumference of 8 km. Once it is considered one of the great wonders of the world. It is located in the Kata Tjuta National Park, which is owned and run by the local Aboriginals. The Australian government handed ownership of the land back to the Aboriginals some years ago. The Rock is arkoses, a coarse-grained sandstone rich in feldspar at least 2.5 km thick. Uplifting and folding between 400-300 may turn the sedimentary layers nearly 90 degrees to their present position. The surface has then been eroded.

Depending on the time of day and the atmospheric conditions,

the rock can dramatically change colour, anything from blue to glowing red! Many avid photographers set up for days and record the many changing colours of Uluru. Ayers Rock was named for the Premier of South Australia, Sir Henry Ayers. It extends down over 3 and a half miles beneath the surface. The Aborigines believe that there it is hollow below ground and that there is an energy source that they call 'Tjukurpa' the 'dream time'. The term Tjukurpa is also used to refer to the record of all activities of a particular ancestral being from the very beginning of his or her travels to their end. Anangu know that the area around Ayers Rock (Mount Uluru) is inhabited by dozens of ancestral beings whose activities are recorded at many separate sites. At each site, the events that took place can be recounted, whether those events were of significance or whether the ancestral being just rested at a certain place before going on.

Usually, there is a physical feature of some form at each ancestral site that represents both the activities of the ancestral being at the time of its formation and the living presence of Tjukurpa within that physical feature today. For the Australian Aboriginal people, that physical feature, whatever its form or appearance, animate or inanimate, is the Tjukurpa. It may be a rock, a sand hill, a grove of trees and a cave. For all of these, the creative essence remains forever within the physical form or appearance. Around Ayers Rock (Mount Uluru) there are many examples of ancestral sites. The Anangu explanations of these sites and of the formation of Ayers Rock (Mount Uluru) itself derive from the Tjukurpa. Most of these explanations are in the realm of secret information and are not disclosed to Piranypa, the non-Aborigines.

BASILIQUE DU SACRÉ COEUR, FRANCE



After the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, it was proposed to construct a church to the Sacred Heart on the butte Montmartre. Although originally the fund raising was by public subscription, in 1873, the National Assembly declared its construction to be a state undertaking. Of the 78 entries in the competition for its design, the one chosen was by the architect named Abadie. He was already well known for his restoration of the St-Front Cathedral in Périgueux. The plans for the new basilica called for an edifice of Romano-Byzantine style, and the first stone was laid in 1875. Abadie himself died in 1884 with only the foundation having been completed.

Completed in 1914, it was not consecrated until 1919 after World

War I had ended. The final cost was 40 million francs. Since 1885, there has been perpetual adoration and worship within. The interior of the church contains one of the world's largest mosaics, and depicts Christ with outstretched arms. The nearby bell tower contains the 'Savoyarde'. Cast in Annecy in 1895, it is one of the worlds heaviest at 19 tons.

Montmartre: Revered scene where the first martyrs of Paris met their death, and site of a famous abby of Benedictine nuns, visited by Saint Bernard, Saint Joan of Arc, Saint Ignatius Loyola, Saint Francis Xavier, Berulle (found of the Oratorians) and Olier.

The Basilica of the Sacred Heart: This Basilica, in Romano-Byzantine style, was build, as the mosaic above the choir reminds us, to accomplish a vow made in consequence of the extreme need of France and of the Church in 1870. Despite the obstacles encountered by the builders, work was brought to a successful conclusion thanks to a law passed by the National Assembly and above all to the countless humble offerings sent from all over France. Saint Theresa of the Infant Jesus, Father de Foucauld, the poet Max Jacob, the painter Utrillo, Pius XII, John XXIII often prayed here, as well as the ordinary people, in times of distress: 1914, 1940. John Paul II came in 1980.

Perpetual Adoration: Above the high alter a monstrance containing the bread that has become the body of Christ through the mass, has been solemnly exposed since 1885 for the uninterrupted adoration during the night as during the day. Those who take part in this prayer of adoration are the link between Christ and the people of their social sphere, of their country and of the entire world that the far-reaching view the avis enables them better to recall to mind.

BAPTISTERY of SAN GIOVANNI



The origins of the temple dedicated to St. John the Baptist, later patron saint of the city, are still uncertain. According to tradition, it was founded in Roman times and dedicated to the god Mars. Several sarcophagi have in fact been found in this area, today in the Museum of the Opera del Duomo, as was the famous statue of Mars, which mediaeval chronicles tell us stood at the entrance to Ponte Vecchio. However some scholars think that the building was the Praetorium and the statue that of a barbarian king.

The Church of San Giovanni became an official part of history on March 4th 897, when Amedeo, the Count Palatine and envoy of the Emperor, sat beneath the portico in front of the 'Basilica of

San Giovanni Battista' to administer justice. The church was apparently acting as the cathedral in this period in the place of Santa Reparata. The second historic date came on November 6th 1059 when, immediately after his election, the Florentine Pope Nicholas II deconsecrated the basilica, which was to be the new bishopric. This reconsacration leads us to believe that the temple had in the meantime been radically transformed, or perhaps reconstructed. The eight segments of the cupola had certainly been completed by then as well as the semicircular apse that was added on the west side to contain the altar: the three doors opened on the other three sides. Bishop Ranieri was buried in the church in 1113.

The final result is of great elegance that perfectly incarnates the artistic spirit of the Florentines; it was to become a prototype for Romanesque architecture in the city and used as a model by Leon Battista Alberti when he started work on the completion of the facade of Santa Maria Novella in 1470. The eight corner ribs decorated with strong green and white stripes (originally in grey stone) were instead more typical of the Romanesque style in use at Lucca, Pisa and Pistoia. The windows are also interesting, with their alternate pointed and semicircular tympani: a classical decoration that was used throughout the Renaissance.

By the 14th century plans were already under way for the creation of the new doors which also had to be worthy of the monument: the sculptor Andrea Pisano was commissioned with the first pair, which he carried out between 1330 and 1336, while Lorenzo Ghiberti designed and made two sets of doors, one pair between 1401 and 1424 and the other, known as the 'Doors of Paradise', between 1425 and 1452. The interior contains the splendid monument to the Antipope John XXIII, carried out by Donatello and Michelozzo in 1421-27.

BLUE MOSQUE, ISTANBUL



Istanbul's imperial Mosque of Sultan Ahmet I (Sultan Ahmet Camii) is called the Blue Mosque because of its interior tiles, mostly on the upper level and difficult to see unless you're right up there with them. The place is an extremely significant sacred sight for the muslims all over the world.

Forget the blue tiles! The mosque (built 1603-17) is the masterpiece of Ottoman architect Sedefkâr Mehmet Aga. It's built on the site of the Great Palace of Byzantium, on the south-eastern side of the Hippodrome. With its six minarets and a great cascade of domes, the mosque is a worthy sibling to Ayasofya (Hagia Sophia) just a few minutes' stroll to the north. The Blue Mosque has fascinating secrets. This is one of Istanbul's premier sights, and you're welcome to visit at most times of day, for free (dona-

tions gratefully received). But it's also a working mosque, so it's closed to non-worshippers for a half hour or so during the five daily prayers, and may be closed for a longer time midday on Friday, the Muslim holy day.

The architect of Istanbul's Blue Mosque, Sedefkâr Mehmet Aga, paid tribute to his colleagues Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus, architects of neighbouring Ayasofya (Hagia Sophia), who designed their masterwork a thousand years before Mehmet Aga was born.

As you proceed deep into Ayasofya, the domes seem to billow upward into space, creating their own 'heavens'. In the Blue Mosque, Mehmet Aga has duplicated the effect on the exterior of the building: as you approach from the front and ascend the stairs toward the courtyard, the domes billow upward until, entering the courtyard, the full grandeur of the exterior is revealed.

This massive structure, officially called Sultan Ahmet Cami (Mosque of Sultan Ahmet), is studded with mini- and semi-domes and surrounded by six minarets. Inside, it is decorated with 20,000 shimmering blue Iznik tiles interspersed with 260 stained-glass windows; an airy arabesque pattern is painted on the ceiling. When you enter the mosque, at the side entrance facing Aya Sofya, remove your shoes and leave them at the entrance. Immodest clothing is not allowed, but an attendant will lend you a robe if he feels you are not dressed appropriately. Women should cover their heads. The **Hunkar Kasri** Carpet and Kilim museums are in the stone-vaulted cellars of the Blue Mosque and upstairs at the end of a stone ramp.

Ayasofya (HAGIA SOPHIA)



The Church of the Divine Wisdom (Hagia Sophia in Greek) is one of the most impressive and important buildings ever constructed. Its wide, flat dome was a daring engineering feat in the 6th century, and architects still marvel at the building's many innovations.

Called Hagia Sophia in Greek, Sancta Sophia in Latin, Ayasofya in Turkish, it was built on the site of Byzantium's acropolis by Emperor Justinian (527-65 AD) in 537 AD.

Ayasofya was the greatest church in Christendom until St Peter's Basilica was built in Rome a thousand years later. Ayasofya is awe-inspiring—one of the first things to see when you're in Istanbul. Luckily, it's right next to Topkapi Palace, the Blue Mosque and the Byzantine Hippodrome, and right across the street from Yerebatan, the Sunken Palace Cistern.

The 30 million gold tesserae (tiny mosaic tiles) which cover the church's interior—especially the dome—are now being restored to the brilliance they boasted 1500 years ago. This means the interior is filled with scaffolding, and will be so for years to come. This may spoil photos, but not the church's grandeur. You'll still enjoy your visit here.

Be sure to climb to the mezzanine level to see the splendid Byzantine mosaics.

The magnificent dome of Aya Sofya, more commonly known as Hagia Sophia (Church of the Holy Wisdom), was the world's largest church from its completion in 537 until St. Peter's Basilica was built in Rome 1,000 years later. Perhaps the greatest work of Byzantine architecture; the cathedral was Christendom's most important church for 900 years. It was then converted into a mosque; in 1936, it was made into a museum. In recent years there has been growing pressure for Aya Sofya to be reopened for Muslim worship. Some people often gather to pray at the museum at midday on Friday. As with mosques, it is best not to try to visit then.

SANTA MARIA DELLA SALUTE

Over the centuries, diseases have contributed mightily to great art and architecture.

The church of Santa Maria Della Salute is a case in point. In October of 1630, after nearly a third of Venice's 150,000 citizens had been killed by plague, the Venetian Senate made an offer to God: "Stop the plague, and we'll build a church to honour the Virgin Mary."

God came through, or maybe the onset of cooler weather reduced the population of plague-ridden fleas. Whatever the reason, the

plague was stopped in its tracks. The Venetian authorities honoured their promise by giving the Virgin a prime chunk of real estate near the tip of Dorsoduro, where the Grand Canal merged with St. Mark's Basin.

The resulting church wasn't completed until half a century later, in 1682. In *The Companion Guide to Venice*, Hugh Honour describes Longhena's legacy:

If you come to Venice by sea—and any other approach is like entering a palace through the back door—the most prominent of the myriad architectural marvels that greet you is the church of Santa Maria della Salute. As if riding at anchor at the entrance to the Grand Canal, with its balloon-like dome weighed down by great baroque scrolls, this fabulous building dominates the scene even more than the Palazzo Ducale or San Giorgio Maggiore. It is the supreme masterpiece of the Venetian Baroque—and of its author Baldassare Longhena, one of the few Venetian architects whose personality is strong enough to glimmer through the mists of history. Contemporaries tell us that he was a short dapper man, always dressed in black, of quiet and gentle manners. He had the embarrassing habit of asking everyone he met their opinions of whatever work he then had in hand. But this apparent lack of self-assurance finds no echo in the magnificently extrovert and ebullient buildings he designed, least of all in Santa Maria della Salute.

On November 21 of each year, city workers lay a pontoon bridge over the Grand Canal from the San Marco district to the Salute church. The huge main doors of the basilica are opened, and Venetians walk across the canal to pay their respects to the Virgin Mary or—at the very least—to tradition. Gondoliers bring their oars to be blessed by a priest who recites his incantations from the church steps. Santa Maria della Salute is on the opposite side of the Grand Canal from St. Mark's Square, near the triangular tip of the Dorsoduro quarter. If you're visiting the Academia art gallery or the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Salute is easily to reach on foot from either of those museums.

THE BASILICA OF SANTA MARIA SOPRA MINERVA



Rome's only Gothic church is filled to bursting with art treasures, and with the ghosts of famous personages in Church history.

Who would guess that behind Santa Maria sopra Minerva's massive seventeenth-century façade lies Rome's one and only Gothic church? In fact, once past the basilica's severe classical portal, a visitor encounters a sight completely unique in Rome: soaring pointed vaults, delicate ogival arches, predominant blues and gold, flickering lights from stained-glass rose windows. Is this a Mediterranean mini-Chartres? But wait a moment. The Corinthian columns, marble floors and flattened vaults suggest that even here, the Gothic is not quite 'at home'.

The site of the present basilica originally hosted a temple to Minerva, built by Pompey the Great around 50 B.C. It was amidst

the ruins of that temple that Pope Zacharias (741-752) built the first church, known as St. Mary on Minerva. That structure has disappeared, but the present building owes its existence to the Dominican Friars, who received the property from Pope Alexander IV (1254-1261) and made the church and adjoining monastery their influential headquarters throughout the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Counter-Reformation.

Apparently, two talented Dominican monks, Sisto and Ristoro, who had worked on the beautiful Gothic cathedral of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, began the present structure in 1280, during the pontificate of Nicholas III (1277-1280). Anyone who stands amid the medieval heights and lights of Santa Maria sopra Minerva invariably asks the question: why? Why is this the only example of Gothic architecture in Rome? Michael Brouse, an American who has been studying Roman churches for over twenty years, explains: 'during the peak of Gothic architecture, the papacy was experiencing an all-time low. Internecine battles and empty coffers forced the popes' flight to Avignon in 1308, and in Rome, anti-popes, false popes and rival Roman families fought fiercely among themselves. Roman artists, whose patrons had deserted them, ceased construction. The city became a slum'.

The Vatican Library's medieval specialist, Paolo Vian, gave another reason: 'Rome, a cradle of classical art and architecture, looked at Northern Gothicism with an unappreciative eye. Christian basilicas, on the model of their imperial antecedents, had filled the papal city throughout the early Middle Ages. With the advent of the Renaissance, Roman artists could hardly wait to get back to their pure classical roots'.

Thanks to powerful Dominican patronage, Rome did get one Gothic church. But even Santa Maria sopra Minerva, built upon the ruins of an imperial temple, in the shadow of Rome's most perfect classical structure, the Pantheon, is not a pure example of Gothic style. Its colonnade of marble Corinthian columns proudly parades its classical heritage beneath the slender ribbings of the Gothic vaults.

MT. ATHOS, GREECE

The city of Mount Athos is situated in the entire third, eastern and most beautiful peninsula of Halkidiki, called the peninsula of Athos. It is the only place in Greece that is completely dedicated to prayer and worship of God. For this reason, it is called the Holy Mount. The Holy Mount is about 50 km in length, 8 to 12 km in width and it covers an area of about 350 square kilometres.

The Holy Mount is a self-governed part of the Greek state, subject to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its political aspect and to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople as regards its religious aspect. It has been divided into twenty self-governed territories. Each territory consists of a cardinal monastery and some

other monastic establishments that surround it (cloisters, cells, cottages, seats, hermitages). All the monasteries are communes (of a convent nature), which means that there is common liturgy, prayer, housing, nourishing and work among the monks. The Superior of the monastery, being elected by the monks for life, is responsible for the affairs of the monastery. The Superiors of the monasteries are members of the Holy Assembly and exercise legislative authority.

The most interesting sight and at the same time one of the most beautiful in Greece is the one brought by the combination of the unique wild nature of the peninsula with the various monasteries existing here from many centuries. The scenery suits perfectly the lifestyle and customs of the monks, who live in tranquillity and have removed nearly everything material from their lives, in order to follow an ascetic life. There are 20 monasteries and 13 coenobiums, all important and all bearing priceless religious items, such as books, codes, manuscripts, icons and gold and silver jewels. The architecture is superb, dating back to the Byzantine years and expressing the Greek Orthodox Religion.

If you pass through the wild landscape of Mount Athos you will encounter most peaceful and relaxing spectacles. You can walk on narrow paths, running parallel to the shores or forcing their ways through hills and forests and feel the scents and the harmony of this divine place. Picturesque small bridges and tower houses will carry you to the monasteries where you can live for a few days in a special breathtaking atmosphere.

If you want to visit Mount Athos you must be an adult male and have the special permit that will allow you to travel and stay in the peninsula for 4 to 15 days. If you want to reside in a monastery you must contact the monk in charge and make reservations in advance since only 15 visitors a day are allowed to stay in Mount Athos.

THE SHRINE AT CZESTOCHOWA, POLAND



The foundation of the Monastery and Shrine in Czestochowa began with a small wooden church. Subsequent development led to the construction of the present day basilica and defence wall that surrounds the sacred buildings (1632-48). Under the heroic leadership of the Prior of the Monastery, Father Augustine Kordecki, the Shrine withstood the attacks of the Swedish invasion of 1655. This great victory proved to be a tremendous boost to the morale of the entire Polish nation. As a result, King Jan Casimir, in 1656, made a solemn vow proclaiming the Mother of God to be the 'Queen of the Polish Crown' and the Shrine of Jasna Gora to be

the 'Mount of Victory' and a spiritual capital for Poland.

During the years of Poland's partition (1772-1918) the Shrine of Jasna Gora became a vibrant link for the Polish people with their homeland. The holy painting enshrined at Czestochowa beamed as a lighthouse of hope during the painful years of national hardships and defeats. Following the restoration of national independence in 1918, pilgrimages to the Polish Shrine grew in number and size. As World War II ended, a nation devastated by the scourges of war drew new strength and courage from the Shrine and its purpose to rebuild and recover from the war.

The Black Madonna was painted by St. Luke the Evangelist; and it was while painting the picture, Mary told him about the life of Jesus, which he later incorporated into his gospel. The next time we hear of the painting is in 326 A.D. when St. Helen found it in Jerusalem and gave it to her son and had a shrine built for it in Constantinople. During a battle, the picture was placed on the walls of the city and the enemy army fled. The picture was owned by many other people until 1382 when invading Tartars attacked a Prince Ladislaus' fortress, where the painting was located. A Tartar's arrow lodged into through the throat of the Madonna. The Prince transferred the painting to a church in Czestochowa, Poland.

In 1430, the church was invaded and a looter struck the painting two times with his sword, but before he could strike it another time, he fell to the ground in agony and pain, and died. The sword cuts and the arrow wound are still visible on the painting.

Miraculous events such as spontaneous healings have occurred for centuries on making pilgrimage to the portrait. The painting is known as the Black Madonna because of the soot residue that discolours the painting. Centuries of votive lights and candles burning in front of the painting are the cause of the soot.

LANGALBAND

Langalband, a Hindu holy place, situated on the bank of old Brahmaputra close to Dhaka-Chittagong highway, 20 kilometres to the southeast of Dhaka city. Every year on the 8th day of lunar fortnight in the Bengali month of Chaitra, thousands of Hindu devotees from home and abroad assemble there for Astami snan, a holy bath in the river. They believe that this bath will please Brahma and they will be relieved of their sins and distresses.

Most local people believe that the blessings of all the holy places of the world are pooled in the waters of the Brahmaputra on the auspicious day of Chaitra and by touching the water a believer becomes free of all sins and attains eternal salvation. There is a long story about how Langalband became a holy place. A legend goes that once there lived a great ascetic or mahamuni named Jamadagni. He had a beautiful wife named Renuka, who came from a royal family. Due to some reason the Muni asked one of his son, Parashuram to kill his mother. Parashuram then took an axe and killed his mother with the blow of it. Although he did it by an order of his father, it was a sin and a punishment; the axe got stuck to his hands so firmly that nothing could release it. Jamadagni then asked him to visit different holy places and take bath in their waters to get rid of the curse.

At the same time, Jamadagni started the search for the holy waters for his son. He came to know of the greatness of god Brahmaputra who was then hiding in the Himalayas in the form

of a lake. He moved around the Himalayas for long but could not find Brahmaputra. Finally, he could see it at the bottom of the Himalayas. He became extremely happy and prayed for his sin to be washed in its water. As soon as Parashuram jumped into the lake, the axe separated from his hand. This is how he could atone for his sin of matricide. Parashuram at once decided to bring the holy water of the Brahmaputra to the plains for the good of the common people. He attached his axe to a langal (plough) and dug a canal. He brought the water of 'Lake Brahmaputra' down a long way through the hills and valleys and stopped at Langalband, completely exhausted. There he stopped ploughing the land. Since then the Brahmaputra began flowing along the canal dug by him. And this is how the place was named Langalband and turned into one of the holiest places for the Hindus.

AXUM, ETHIOPIA



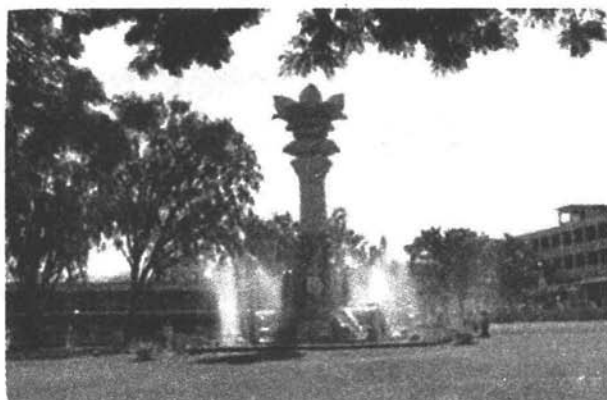
Although its very early history is unknown, the importance of Axum dates back to the tenth century, when it was made the capital of the Queen of Sheba. Located in the northern province of Tigray, Axum is a small town surrounded by dry hills and fields. Under the surface of this town lie centuries of splendour and pageantry of its glorious past. And today, one can still see remnants of the temples, fortresses and elaborate palaces that illustrate the power Axum Obelisks and wealth of the ancient Axumite people. It is generally believed that Axum was first established by immigrants from southern Arabia a few centuries before Christ, and by first century AD, Axum was the capital of the vast and powerful Axumite kingdom, which dominated the crossroads of Africa and Asia for almost a millennium.

The Axumites introduced Ethiopia's first written language, Ge'ez, and gave Ethiopia its first organised religion-Christianity-in the fourth century AD.

The people of Axum also built seven monolithic obelisks, each made out of a single piece of granite, and three of which still remain today. (One of the obelisks is now standing in Rome, Italy, where it was brought from Axum by the fascist dictator Mussolini, in 1937. The Ethiopian people are still patiently awaiting the return of this obelisk to Axum.) The largest of the stelae-measuring over 33 meters and the largest in the world-has fallen and now lies in broken segments next to the only obelisk that remains standing (in Axum). Ironically, what was made by hand many centuries ago is beyond the capabilities of modern technology to repair today.

Perhaps the greatest mystery of this ancient city is that here is the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant-a claim connected in Ethiopian tradition to legends of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, whose son Menelik is said to have brought the Ark to Axum some 3000 years ago and established the Solomonic dynasty of which Haile Selassie was the last reigning emperor. The Ark is housed in a well-guarded sanctuary chapel, which one may approach, but never hope to enter. On Epiphany the people of Axum carry a replica of the Ark in a procession. Axum also has the ruins of the Queen of Sheba's palace (Taakha Maryam), and a huge water reservoir hewn out of solid rock, known as the Queen of Sheba's bath. Finally, outside of the city stands an obelisk, much older than in the Park of the Stelae, which is thought to mark the grave of the Queen of Sheba.

PUTTAPARTHI, India



Puttaparthi, once a sparsely populated village, has shot into national and international fame as the abode of Bhagwan Sri Satya Sai Baba. The original name of Sai Baba is 'Satyanarayana Raju'. He was born on 23rd November 1926 in Puttaparthi.

Sri Sathya Sai Baba, the most colourful and multifaceted prophet, modern India has produced, is believed to be the very avatar (incarnation) of love and the voice of one's own innermost heart speaking to each individual externally. The teachings of the Baba are based on the famous 'five props' of Sathya (truth), Dharma (righteousness) Santhi (peace), Prema (universal love) and Ahimsa (non violence). Prasanthi Nilayam, over the years, has attracted people from all over then world. The Ashram has a code of conduct that every visitor should follow. The Ashram also has museums, stadiums, educational institutions, the Sai Space Theatre etc.

The 23rd November is celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm by the devotees of Baba at the Prasanthi Nilayam. Over a million people gather here on the occasion of the Baba's birthday. The atmosphere around the Ashram is undeniably peaceful, and the growth of such a vibrant community in this once forgotten backward area is not a small miracle.

Located 400-km from Hyderabad by road, the village Chitravati, situated at a distance of about 18 miles from Penukonda, 2 miles from Penukond-Bukkapatnam road has now become a centre of great attraction, Puttaparthi. It is abode of Puttaparthi Sri Satya Sai Baba. An important tourist attraction of Ananthapur district, Puttaparthi is surrounded by the arid and rocky hills bordering Karnataka. A Siva temple in the Puttaparthi village signifies the birthplace of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The temple was opened by Baba in 1979. The real birthplace, not known to most people, is located across the river in a small dilapidated house. On the other side of the street there is a temple for Sathyabhama, a rare one exclusively established for Sathyabhama. Sathyabhama is commonly known as the consort of Lord Krishna and the worse example of such. Perhaps this is the reason why the temple in Puttaparthi is the only temple in the world dedicated to Sathyabhama. Sri Kondama Raju, Bhagavan's grandfather, had a dream where he found Sathyabhama standing in heavy rain and wind, asking for shelter.

The village mosque and the hall opposite was constructed and opened by Baba in 1978. At a certain borderline from Puttaparthi, accidents and diseases would set-in on travellers. Bhagavan asked local people in the area to dig at a certain spot and a plate was discovered, containing various Muslim inscriptions. The plate was moved into the Mandir and all inauspicious events stopped. A mosque was built in Puttaparthi and the plate was taken on yearly processions to the mosque from the Mandir.

DESHNOK - MATA KARNI, INDIA

20 miles south of Bikaner (pronounced Bickn-air), near Nokha in the province of Rajasthan (which itself is in north-west India, bordering Pakistan), is a small desert town called Deshnok or Deshnoke. Deshnok's best-known feature is a small white marble Hindu temple sacred to Karni Mata, a 14th-15th century female mystic and political figure. Karni is also sometimes called Karani Mata or Karniji ('Mata' means 'mother'; 'ji' is an all-purpose honourific signifying respect). She is believed to be an incarnation of the goddess Durgha, 'The Inaccessible' - a striding warrior-woman manifestation of the Divine Mother Devi-Ma. In some stories Durgha is the mother of Ganesh, although this is more

usually attributed to Parvati, another aspect of Devi-Ma. Karni Mata is revered by the local people, the Charans: a tribe who traditionally were pious and peaceful bards, writers, traditional storytellers and genealogists.

The daughter of Meha Ji Kiniya (father) and Dewal (mother), Karni was born on 28th September 1387AD at a village called Suvap, in the Phalodi tehsil [a tehsil is an administrative sub-division of a district] of Jodhpur, and was married to a man named Depa. The foundation of Deshnok was laid by her on Baisakh Sudi Dwitiya Samvat 1476 - that is, on the second lunar day (Dwitiya) of the first fortnight (Sudi) of the lunar month Baisakh (13th or 14th April to mid-May) in the Samvat (year of Vikram Samvat calendar) 1476. The Vikram Samvat calendar is 57 years ahead of the Gregorian one, so this would be 15th or 16th April 1419AD.

Karni was an ascetic who dedicated herself to serving and uplifting the poor and downtrodden of all communities, and made Deshnok a sanctuary where those accused of crimes could seek asylum and absolution. She witnessed the accession of three consecutive generations of royal rulers, Rao Ridmal, Rao Jodha and Rao Bika and was instrumental in enabling them to come to power.

The Garbh Griha or sactum sanctorum of the temple at Deshnok is reported to have been founded by Karni herself. There are temples of Karni in Jodhpur and Bikaner as well, but Deshnok is the centre of her cult: it was her main base of operations when alive and it still is. She is believed to have had divine powers and became a goddess to the Charans and a patron deity to the rulers of Bikaner. It is said that she arranged Rao Bika's marriage with the daughter of Bhati Rao Shekha of Pugal, and since the ceremony required that the girl's father be present, and since he was at that time in prison in Multan, Karni flew to his prison in the form of an eagle and fetched him to his daughter's wedding.

SRI VENKATESWARA Temple, India



The ancient and sacred temple of Sri Venkateswara is located on the seventh peak, Venkatachala (Venkata Hill) of the Tirupati Hill, and lies on the southern banks of Sri Swami Pushkarini. It is by the Lord's presidency over Venkatachala, that He has received the appellation, Venkateswara (Lord of the Venkata Hill). He is also called the Lord of the Seven Hills. The temple of Sri Venkateswara has acquired unique sanctity in Indian religious lore. The Sastras, Puranas, Sthala Mahatyams and Alwar hymns unequivocally declare that, in the Kali Yuga, one can attain mukti, only by worshipping Venkata Nayaka or Sri Venkateswara.

The temple has its origins in Vaishnavism, an ancient sect that advocates the principles of equality and love, and prohibits animal sacrifice. The sanctum sanctorum which houses the awe-inspiring idol of the Lord of the Seven Hills is situated in the main temple complex of Tirumala. It was during the rule of the Vijayanagar dynasty that the contributions to the temple increased. Sri Krishnadevaraya had statues of himself and his consorts installed at the portals of the temple, and these statues can be seen to this day. There is also a statue of Venkatapati Raya in the main temple.

After the decline of the Vijayanagar dynasty, nobles and chieftains from all parts of the country continued to pay their homage and offer gifts to the temple. The Maratha general, Raghoji Bhonsle, visited the temple and set up a permanent endowment for the conduct of worship in the temple. He also presented valuable jewels to the Lord, including a large emerald which is still preserved in a box named after the General. Among the later rulers who have endowed large amounts are the rulers of Mysore and Gadwal. After the fall of the Hindu kingdoms, the Muslim rulers of Karnataka and then the Britishers took over, and many of the temples came under their supervisory and protective control. In 1843 AD, the East India Company divested itself of the direct management of non-Christian places of worship and native religious institutions. The administration of the shrine of Sri Venkateswara and a number of estates were then entrusted to Sri Seva Dossji of the Hatiramji Mutt at Tirumala and the temple remained under the administration of the Mahants for nearly a century, till 1933 AD.

In 1933, the Madras Legislature passed a special act, which empowered the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Committee to control and administer a fixed group of temples in the Tirumala-Tirupati area, through a Commissioner appointed by the Government of Madras. In 1951, the Act of 1933 was replaced by an enactment whereby the administration of TTD was entrusted to a Board of Trustees, and the Government appointed an Executive Officer. Charitable and Religious Endowments Act, 1966, retained the provisions of the Act of 1951.

MATHURA



Brajbhoomi - the land where Shri Krishna was born and spent his youth, has today little towns and hamlets that are still alive with the Krishna legend and still redolent with the music of his flute. Mathura, a little town on the River Yamuna was transformed into a place of faith after Lord Krishna was born here. Vrindavan, a village - once noted for its fragrant groves, is where he spent an eventful youth. There are numerous other little spots in the area that still reverberate with the enchantment of Shri Krishna.

The city of Mathura, in Uttar Pradesh, the nucleus of Brajbhoomi, is located at a distance of 145 km southeast of Delhi and 58 km northwest of Agra. Covering an area of about 3,800 sq. km., today, Brajbhoomi can be divided into two distinct units - the east-

ern part in the trans-Yamuna tract with places like Gokul, Mahavan, Baldeo, Mat and Bajna and the western side of the Yamuna covering the Mathura region that encompasses Vrindavan, Govardhan, Kusum Sarovar, Barsana and Nandgaon. The land of Braj starts from Kotban near Hodel about 95 km from Delhi and ends at Runakuta that is known specially for its association with the poet Surdas, an ardent Krishna devotee. A long line of picturesque ghats - with their steps leading to the water's edge, arched gateways and temple spires extending along the right bank of the River Yamuna, emphasise the sacred character of the town of Mathura. The birthplace of Lord Krishna, Mathura is today an important place of pilgrimage. An ancient city whose origins fade into the mists of history, Mathura's strategic location at the cross roads of various trade routes - that went westwards to West Asia and the Roman Empire; northwards, via Taxila, Pushkalavati and Purushapur to Central Asia and the Silk Route and eastwards to China - ensured its position as a centre of trade and a meeting point for varied cultures.

By the fifth century BC, during the time of Buddha, it was a major metropolis and the capital of the Surasena Kingdom - one of the 16 Mahajanapadas of the period. Mathura saw its 'golden age' during the rule of the Kushanas and the able governance of rulers like Kanishka, when the arts flourished and economic wealth grew. It remained a centre of power during the Mauryan period, through the enlightened rule of Emperor Ashoka (3rd century BC) to the Gupta era (4th century AD). It is believed that this is the place where about 5,000 years ago lord Krishna was born in the prison of King Kansa. While excavating this area, many old statues were found which are now displayed in the museum. At present this place has a beautiful temple of lord Krishna.

Shirdi, India



Shirdi is not only the famous place in Maharashtra but in India and pilgrims come to Shirdi to worship the Sai Baba. The temple is a huge one and is recently renovated in 1998-99. The temple including premises is around 200 Sq.mtrs. Sai Baba lived here till the last minute of his life. Sai Baba took personal interest in looking after the local temples. Sai Baba personally took interest in the construction of Maruti Temple and Shani Temple.

Many people around the period of 1913 knew Sai Baba. Sai Baba laid down his body on Dashera 15th October 1918 here. Samadhi - The place where sacred body of Baba is resting. A beautiful statue of Shri Sai Baba was installed in 1954, replacing a photo-

graph of Shri Sai Baba. This is the main temple of Shri Sai Baba and also known as 'Buttiwada'. The holy place of Shri Sai Baba's Samadhi and a large statue of Shri Sai Baba can be seen in this main temple. The main attraction here is all such things handled by him which are on display here. The main temple is the Samadhi Temple, the Samadhi place of Shri Sai Baba. While visiting here some instructions are to be followed by the devotees.

Some important places to visit here are:

Dwarkamai Temple is the place where Shri Sai Baba used to spend much of his time. All the things from His time are still kept as they were used to. It includes, Dhuni (lighted by Shri Sai Baba), Chul (clay stove), Bathing Stone, Jata (Grinding Stone) and the stone on which Baba used to sit. Lendi Baug is the place where Baba used to stroll daily. Baba used to come here to get some rest and isolation. Baba himself had planted a 'Peepal Tree' at this place. A beautiful 'Datta Temple' is located here. 'Baba's Shiwadi' (a well) is also located in this place. A light named Nandadeep is kept lightened all the time, near the 'Peepal Tree'. The place of Shri Sai Baba's Guru is famous as 'Gurusthan'. Sai Baba at the age of 16 was seen here firstly. The well known 'Neem Tree' can also be seen here. It is believed that, the devotees can get what they pray for if 'Udi' and 'Agarbatti' are lightened at this place, every Thursday and Friday. The place next to Dwarkamai is Chawadi where Baba's used to sleep on alternate nights. The cot and chair, used by Shri Sai Baba are kept here. Some important Temples in Shirdi are Gurusthan Temple, Khandoba Temple, Taty Kote Samadhi, Samadhi of Abdulbaba and Bhau Kumbhar's Samadhi

SABRIMALA, KERALA, INDIA



Kerala is a land of temples perhaps the best known pilgrimage destination in Kerala is Sabarimala, high up in the Sahyadri Mountains. Sabarimala Sri Dharmasastha Temple is the most famous and prominent among all the Sastha Temples. It is believed that 'Parasurama Maharshi' who uplifted Kerala from the sea by throwing his axe, installed the idol of Ayyappa at Sabarimala to worship Lord Ayyappa. The pilgrimage begins in the month of November and ends in January. The temple attracts pilgrims not only from the southern states of India, but also from other parts of the country and abroad.

The unique feature of the Temple is that it opens to people of all faiths and many non-hindus conduct pilgrimages to this temple. The secular aspect of the temple is best exemplified by the existence of the 'Vavar Nada' in honour of a Muslim saint at the close

proximity to the main temple (Ayyappa Swami Temple) at Sabarimala by the side of Holy Pathinettampady. The pilgrims worship in this place also. The pilgrims on their sojourn to Sabarimala worship at Erumeli Sree Dharma Sastha Temple and conduct 'Petta Thullal'. They also worship in the mosque at Erumeli as a part of their pilgrimage. Ayyappa cult gives much importance for the secularism and communal harmony and has turn out to be a model for the whole world. Another significant aspect of the pilgrimage is that all the pilgrims whether rich or poor, learned or illiterate holding position or not master or servant are all equal before LORD AYYAPPA and all address each other as AYYAPPA. The divine qualities like equality, fraternity, tolerance, humanity etc.. are shining well in the pilgrims.

Pathinettapadi (18 divine steps) to the sanctum sanctorium is divine in all aspects. The first three steps depict 'Bhoomi, Agni, Vayoo & Akash', 6 to 9 steps for Karmendriya, 10 to 15 for Jhanandriya, 16th for mind 17th Intelligence and 18th Jeevathma Bhava. Those who crosses all these steps is believed to achieve 'Punyadarshan'.

The divine Pampa place an important roll in the Sabarimala pilgrimage. After passing around 102 steps the pilgrims can reach at the Pampa Maha Ganapathi Temple. Breaking coconuts is the main offering here. Neelimala, Appachimedu, Sabareepedam, Saramkuthi are the other divine places enroute. At Pampa also there are a few pilgrim sheds. There are three hospitals (one Allopathy, one Ayurveda and one Homocopathy) functioning during the festival period. At Appachimedu also one first aid centre. Used to function during the peak days of festival period. One information centre is working at Pampa Anjaneya auditorium.

PALITANA, GUJARAT, INDIA

Palitana is located in the western Indian state of Gujarat, 51 km south west of Bhavnagar. It is a part of the Saurashtra region famed for its spectacular temple sites, cities, beautiful beaches, and wildlife. The town has a good road and rail network that connects it to the other cities of Gujarat, especially Bhavnagar.

The act of ascending a path to reach a place of pilgrimage is a part of the Hindu and Jain consciousness, which is why many of their holiest temples are, located along hills and mountain ranges. The Jains have five separate hill locations for their holiest clusters of temples and Shatrunjaya Hill, Palitana is considered the most important among them. Another group is in Girnar (Junagadh),

not too far away, while others are in Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Palitana houses perhaps the largest cluster of Jain temples anywhere. From the base to the peak of the Shatrunjaya Hill, where the Palitana temples are located, there are in all 863 temples. These temples were built in two phases—the 11th and 12th centuries as a part of the resurgence of temple building all over India, and in the 16th century. Some of the earliest temples built in the 11th century were destroyed by Muslim invaders in the 14th and 15th centuries. The current temples date back to 16th century onwards. Not any one person or group was responsible for the construction of these magnificent temples. It was the effort of the wealthy businessmen who were followers of Jainism that these buildings came into existence.

Sites to visit:

Shatrunjaya (the place of victory) Hill is considered to be one of the holiest pilgrimage sites for the Jains. The temples are dedicated to the Jain Tirthankars and even the priests leave the temples at dusk. The hilltops are bounded by sturdy walls and the temples have been grouped into nine tunks (enclosures)—each having several minor temples clustered around a central temple. Among the most important temples here, is the Chaumukh temple with its four-faced deity of Adinath enshrined on a marble pedestal in a shrine open on all four sides (an aberration in itself). Built in the early 17th century, it is planned as a large square subdivided into smaller squares, each structure topped by a dome. The innermost five dome topped squares form a cross and represent the five hills sacred to the Jains. The Adishwar temple is probably the most profusely decorated in Palitana. Its ornate pillars and roofs are decorated with intricately cut marble in the shape of dragons.

Near the Adishwar temple is the Muslim shrine of Angar Pir. Childless couples make offerings of miniature cradles at this shrine in the hope of being blessed with children.

Other temples worth mention are the Sampreti Raja, Kumarpal and Rampal.

Kaladi



Kaladi is 'a pre-eminent centre for inspiration on the banks of the Purna River that purified every man in thought, word and deed', said the Sankaracharyas in a joint message. He also said, 'A visit to Kaladi increases tranquillity, self-restraint and other eminent virtues of those engaged in the Pursuit of knowledge. It is the duty of every common Man to visit the holy Kaladi, the birthplace of Adi Sankara and more so any aspirant for liberation, the Sanyasi and those that follow the Advaita school of thought'.

Sankara was born in A.D. 788 of a devout, Nambudiri couple-Sivaguru and Aryamba. They were disconsolate because they had no issue. They repaired to the famous Siva (Vadakkunnathan) temple at Tirchur and worshipped the Lord with all their heart. The Lord appeared before them in a dream and wanted to know

their desire. The couple prayed for a son. He asked: "Do you want a short-lived good son or simpleton with a long life?" They chose the former and returned home to live a life of devotion and dedication.

In due course a child was born to them. It was a precocious child. Unfortunately Sivaguru died when the child was only three. Aryamba brought him up with love and care. At the age of five he was invested with the sacred thread and sent to the teacher's house for education. In three years' time the boy mastered all the subjects of study and returned home. He also served his aged mother in all possible ways. Once his mother swooned on her way to the River Periyar (also called Purna) which was some distance away. Sankara nursed her back to health and prayed to the Lord that the river might change its course to enable his mother to take her daily bath in it. The river did change its course.

The study of the scriptures had convinced Sankara, that spiritual enlightenment was the highest goal of life. The crocodile episode may be interpreted as Sankara's horror of a worldly life and his importunities. In any case as per his innate inclination to dedicate his life to spiritual pursuits Sankara set out in search of a preceptor. He met his guru, Govinda, on the banks of the Narmada River. Under him he mastered yoga, Vedanta and other systems and became a knower of the Brahman. The guru was immensely pleased with his disciple and bade him go to Kashi next and write the commentaries for various scriptures and re-establish the Eternal religion. Sankara obeyed his master and on the way worshipped at several temples, teaching scriptures to earnest students. His erudition and exposition attracted many scholars as also disciples.

MOUNT TAISHAN (TAI SHAN), CHINA



There are five famous mountains in China - East Tai Shan, West Hua Shan, South Heng Shan, North Huan Shan and Central Song Shan. They each have their unique attractions. Even-though Mount Taishan is not the highest mountain; it is the most famed of the five and symbolizes the Chinese Spirit. Since the Qin Dynasty (221BC ~ 206 BC), Mount Taishan, as the royal object of cult, was the venue where past emperors used to worship Heaven and Earth. Countless literati have left inscriptions and steles there, giving it the reputation as 'A Natural Museum of History and Art' of modern times.

Located at the central part of Shan Dong Province and lying across

Ji'nan and Tai'an Cities, Mount Taishan is the cradle of Chinese culture and the most magnificent mountain under heaven. With a height of 1,545 meters, its majesty and splendour is incomparable. It is mainly made up of natural sights as well as man-made sights. The intense grandeur from its mountainous bearing and spectacular breath-taking scenery exudes sheer elegance, profundity and immense vastness while touching on serenity merged with an air of mystery and tempestuous danger. There are five scenic areas on Mount Taishan - the Dai Temple, the East and West Routes, the Mid-heaven Gate - junction of the two routes and the Jade Emperor Summit.

Located to the north of Tai'an City, the Dai Temple is the largest and most completed ancient building complex of Mount Taishan. It used to be the venue where emperors of the past dynasties held celebrations to worship heaven and earth and bestowed sacrifices to the God of the mountain. And it was also the first stop for the pilgrims on their way to the holy Mount Taishan. According to historical records, the original temple was first built during the Qin Dynasty (211BC ~ 206BC). Since the Han Dynasty (206BC ~ 220AD), people replicated the imperial palace to construct it. Several dynasties later pavilions, old cypresses and steles to the decoration were added, bringing the modern Dai Temple to what it is today.

Most of the present attractions inside the temple were left over from the Han Dynasty. Seen from a distance, a feel of grandiosity and magnificence appears in your mind. Take a closer view and you will feel astonished by its stateliness. It is the symbol of the Chinese feudality. Another attraction is the Bronze Pavilion. Lying in the northeast corner of the temple, the pavilion is made of bronze castings. Intricate workmanship makes it highly valuable, thus gaining its reputation as one of the famous bronze pavilions in China.

ST. MICHAEL'S MOUNT, CORNWALL, ENGLAND



Situated on either side of the English Channel and precariously perched upon coastal rock outcroppings are the famous medieval pilgrimage shrines of St. Michael's Mount and Mont-St. Michel. At both sites, visions of the archangel were seen during the fifth century and the histories of the two shrines are intimately connected with one another.

Guarding the entrance to the Land's End district of Cornwall, the English Mount was known as a port and trading post (for tin and copper) from as early as 350 BC. Following the defeat of the seafaring merchants who controlled the mount by the Roman Julius Caesar in 56 BC, the small island was abandoned to hermits and mystics. Legends tell of a visit by St. Keyne and a spring that miraculously gushed forth when she set foot upon the rock in 490 AD. The event that most clearly stimulated Christian pil-

grimaces to the mount, however, was an apparition of St. Michael to a fisherman in 495 AD.

In studying St. Michael's Mount two interesting matters come to light. The first regards the legendary accounts of apparitions of the archangel. According to various reckonings, St. Michael was said to have miraculously appeared in over 400 places throughout Britain and Europe during the 4th and 5th centuries. At a large percentage of these sites he was supposed to have slain dragons. This author finds it remarkable that paleontological excavations have brought to light large numbers of dinosaur bones from hundreds of millions of years ago yet not one single dragon bone from only 1500 years ago. This lack of evidence for the existence of dragons, at least in early medieval times, must cause any intelligent person to question the Christian story of St. Michael. Did the archangel really appear and did he really slay dragons, or should the myth be understood as having a metaphorical rather than literal meaning?

A second fascinating matter that presents itself to the student of St. Michael shrines in Britain is the extraordinary linking of those shrines by straight lines running for hundreds of miles across the countryside. One example is the line, which originating at St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall, goes on to pass through the pre-Druid/Druid sacred site of Cheesewring, through the St. Michael's churches at Brentor, upon the Neolithic mound of Burrow bridge Mump, and upon Glastonbury Tor, and thence continues on to the stone rings of Avebury. These places listed here are only the better known sites along this particular line; there are indeed many other earth and stone structures along the line and all of them predate the arrival of Christianity by thousands of years.

CHALMA

Twenty-five kilometres west of Cuernavaca is situated the pre-Columbian sacred site of Chalma. Now a Christian holy place it is the second most visited pilgrimage site in Mexico after Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. While its early history is shrouded in myth it seems that when Augustinian friars first visited the area in the mid 1530's they learned that local Indians were making pilgrimages to a sacred cave with the name of Chalma. The pilgrims would walk for days through the surrounding mountains, wearing flowers in their hair and carrying incense burners, in order to make offerings to a statue of Ozteotl, the Dark Lord of the Cave. This statue was said to be a large, man-sized, black, cylindrical stone reputed to have magical healing powers.

When the friars were taken to the cave to see the stone statue, they found flowers and other gifts, as well as evidence of blood sacrifice. In 1539, Fray Nicolás de Perea gave a sermon to the Indians, preaching the evils of idol worship and blood sacrifice. When the friars returned to the cave three days later, it had been cleaned and whitewashed. The flowers were still there, but the image of Ozteotl was in pieces on the floor. In its place was a life-size image of a dark Christ on the cross. Seeing this, the Indians reportedly fell down in 'a wave of apostolic piety' and thus began the conversion of the natives in this region. According to another version, two friars arriving at the cave soon after the Spanish invasion destroyed the Indians' idol. They returned with a wooden cross to put in its place but miraculously, so the legend goes, there

was already a crucifix with a black Christ and the entrance was full of exquisite flowers. Still other sources say that the Augustinian friars sculpted the archaic stone into the shape of Jesus Christ.

Thousands of Catholic pilgrims flock to the site throughout the year to give thanks for prayers answered or to make wishes. While some other Mexican pilgrimages involve self-flagellation and suffering, with penitents hobbling on bleeding knees, pilgrims to Chalma pray through dancing. Today's pilgrims follow each other along the same narrow paths they have for centuries. They take a route through Cuernavaca, then cut through back roads and continue cross-country to Chalma. Many walk the last leg of their journey at night, the glittering light from their torches and candles snaking a magic trail up and down the deep ravines. Women carry small babies; old men hope for a miraculous cure; and young folk seek an adventure. They wear flowers, just as their ancestors did and many crawl on their knees for the final part of their journey.

ATOTONILCO, MEXICO

In the state of Guanajuato, seven miles northeast of the artist town of San Miguel de Allende, is the small but much venerated pilgrimage church of Atotonilco. In the indigenous language of the region, Atotonilco (pronounced ah-toe-toe-NEAL-co) means 'Place of the Hot Waters' and the site actually began as a hacienda with a spring, from which curative waters still bubble forth. A local priest acquired the land from the hacienda's owner, Don Ignacio Garofa and began construction of the church on May 3, 1740. Padre Alfaro commissioned an anonymous artist, Miguel Antonio Martinez de Pocasangre, to paint the murals for which the church is so famous. Padre Alfaro guided and collaborated with Pocasangre so that it is the priest's own imaginative vision which unfolds in dramatic scenes over the walls and ceilings of the shrine. The life, passion and resurrection of Jesus are the main subjects of the frescoes.

The central nave was dedicated eight years later and work then began on the sculptures and paintings in the Cavalry Chapel. Three years later Padre Alfaro completed the impressive Chapel of The Holy Rosary that is dominated by an ornate altar of carved, gold-encrusted wood embellished with paintings on Venetian mirrors. Additionally the lives of Catholic saints and martyrs and scenes of the Last Judgment are linked by ornate banners and colourful floral decoration. The church is sometimes referred to as the

'Sistine Chapel of the Americas' and almost every square inch of the walls and ceilings inside the Sanctuary is covered with fresco paintings in a riotous outpouring of Mexican folk art. The murals also portray angels, archangels, saints and demons amidst decorations of fanciful flowers and fruits. Some of the murals are among the most gruesome and sombre paintings in the world. The central image is of a horribly bleeding Christ. All around him are other tortured, bleeding, dying and decaying people.

Today the Sanctuary of Atotonilco retains its special place in the religious life of central Mexico. A compound of buildings surrounding the shrine includes dormitories, **dining** rooms and meeting halls for the many religious retreats **held** throughout the year. Thousands of Christians come each year to participate in religious exercises such as sleeping in stone cells on cold rock floors, crawling around the perimeter of the shrine on bare and bloody knees, wearing crowns of thorns and flagellating themselves with whips. This is done for a variety of reasons. Many of the pilgrims feel they must experience some of the pain they imagine Christ felt during his carrying of the cross to hill of Golgatha, and his subsequent hanging on the cross. Local history recounts that from 1880 to the present times as many as 100,000 people a year have made pilgrimages to the shrine.

MONTE ALBAN, MEXICO

Soaring above the valley and city of Oaxaca, the hilltop ruins of Monte Alban are the second largest ceremonial sites in Mesoamerica, only exceeded in size by Teotihuacan near Mexico City. One ancient name of the site was Sahandevui, meaning, 'at the foot of heaven.' The ruins are extremely old. Elaborate yet currently undeciphered hieroglyphs found here are among the most ancient writings in all of Mesoamerica. Equally mysterious are the strange rock carvings known as danzantes, which depict humanoid figures with Negroid facial features. Similar to carvings found at Olmec sites in other parts of Mexico, these decidedly non-Mexican figures and the hieroglyphic writings seem to indicate the possibility of contact and influence by cultures far distant from the western hemisphere.

The first known buildings were constructed between 1000 - 800 BC but most of these are now destroyed or buried beneath later Zapotec structures. The Zapotec occupation of the site dates from 100BC and most of the enormous structures standing today date from the Classic phase of 300-900 AD when Monte Alban had become the principal ceremonial site of the Zapotec empire. The complex contains great plazas, numerous pyramids, a ball game court, underground passageways and over 170 tombs. The site was abandoned as a functioning ceremonial centre during the 10th century though it continued to be used as a burial place by the Mixtecs.

Mound J has been shown to be a highly refined and complex astronomical observatory. A curiously shaped arrowhead structure, situated at an angle of 45 degrees to the main axis of Monte Alban, Mound J was aligned with the point in the western sky where Alnilam, the centre star of Orion's belt, sits. Built sometime between 100 BC and 200 AD, Mound J also has astronomical alignments with the setting positions of the Southern Cross and Alpha and Beta Centauri and the rising position of Capella.

Monte Alban is an enigmatic place. Conventional archaeological theory is at a loss to explain why this particular site was chosen; it is upon a tall, steeply walled plateau, it has no source of water, it was never used as a habitation centre, and there is no evidence of it ever being used for strategic or military purposes. Furthermore, it was extremely difficult to construct; the building rocks were laboriously carried from the valley far below, the builders were small people (averaging only 5 feet tall), they had no metal stone-cutting tools and they had not discovered the transportation capacities of the wheel. Yet, given all this, the site still became the second largest ceremonial centre in Mesoamerica. How are we to explain this immense human endeavour? Archaeologists may respond that the great structures represent a social and religious momentum, an architectural elaboration of the earlier sacred use of the site.

KNOCK SHRINE

On the wet Thursday evening of the 21st August 1879, at about the hour of 8 o'clock, Our Lady, St. Joseph and St. John the Evangelist appeared in a blaze of Heavenly light at the south gable of the Church of St. John the Baptist. Behind them and a little to the left of St. John was a plain altar. On the altar were a cross and a lamb with adoring angels. The Apparition was seen by fifteen people whose ages ranged from six years to seventy-five and included men, women, teenagers and children.

The poor humble witnessed distinctly beheld the Blessed Virgin Mary clothed in white robes with a brilliant crown on her head. Over the forehead where the crown fitted the brow, she wore a beautiful full-bloom golden rose. She was in an attitude of prayer

with her eyes and hands raised towards Heaven. St. Joseph stood on Our Lady's right. He was turned towards her in an attitude of respect. His robes were also white. St. John was on Our Lady's left. He was dressed in white vestments and resembled a bishop, with a small mitre. He appeared to be preaching and he held an open book in his left hand.

The witnesses watched the Apparition in pouring rain for two hours, reciting the Rosary. Although the witnesses standing before the gable were drenched, no rain fell in the direction of the gable. They felt the ground carefully with their hands and it was perfectly dry as was the gable itself. One of the strengths of the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock is that the devotions there have developed along solid doctrinal lines. A pilgrimage to Knock is a journey through the basic elements of our faith. In the first place, there is the very experience of the pilgrimage itself. Pilgrims to Knock will find what pilgrims have always found. There is the chance to pray about what bothers us, and to give thanks for what gives us joy. To be with other praying people at a Shrine is to get a unique chance to stand back from life and let God throw light on its bits and pieces. To journey out from home on pilgrimage throws light on home. Travel broadens the mind, in more senses than one.

Mass is the centre of the devotions at Knock. Sometimes it is celebrated in splendour in the Basilica, often times quietly in one of the chapels. Pilgrims love the Mass at Knock.

About one and a half million pilgrims come to Knock each year and a high proportion of those pilgrims go to Confessions. At a time when the sacrament has fallen on lean times in your average parish, more and more pilgrims are making their way to Knock and making their peace with God.

GURDWARA BANGLA SAHIB Ji, INDIA



A magnificent and spacious bungalow in Delhi owned by Raja Jai Singh, Amber (Jaipur) who commanded great respect and honour in the court of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb now enjoys the status of a holy shrine called Gurdwara Bangla Sahib. The eighth Guru Sri Harkishan had stayed here for a few months as guest of Raja Jai Singh. Since then it has become a place of pilgrimage for both, Hindus and Sikhs. They pay their respect to the memory of Guru Harkrishan, nominated as successor by the seventh Guru, Sri Har Rai. He passed away on October 6, 1661 A.D. When only a little over five years old, he had been tried and tested as a perfect fearless and fully illuminated soul. Baba Ram Rai, his elder brother became much perturbed when he learnt that Har Krishan had been appointed the spiritual head. He tried in vain to influence

the leading Sikhs of Delhi and Punjab. Later he approached Emperor Aurangzeb to help him acquire the Gurugadi. Consequently, Aurangzeb agreed to summon Guru Harkrishan to see whether he was really superior and more spiritual.

Fortunately both Raja Jai Singh and his son Raja Ram Singh were in Delhi at that time. When approached by Sikhs for help, they agreed to assist them in their predicament.

The Rajput chief took over the responsibility of persuading Guru Harkrishan to come to Delhi and also gained assurance from the Emperor that as long as he (the Emperor) was not satisfied about the succession issue, Guru Harkrishan would stay with him in his bungalow as guest. During his stay in Delhi, the Guru spent most of his time in serving the humble, the sick and the destitutes for cholera and smallpox were spreading in an epidemic form. He distributed medicines, food and clothes to the needy. He also directed Diwan Dargah Mal to spend all the daily offerings made by the people to the Guru for the poor. The Guru won more admirers. Soon stories about his healing powers spread throughout the city.

A small tank was constructed by Raja Jai Singh over the well nowadays, the faithful take home this water as amrit to cure their ailments. The Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Management Committee runs a hospital in the basement of the Gurudwara building. Besides, the Khalsa Girls School is located in the adjoining building. A tank 225 x 235 ft with 18 ft wide Parikarma and 12 ft wide varandah along its three sides has been constructed entirely with people's contribution and voluntary labour. The Art Gallery located in the basement of the Gurdwara is also very popular with visitors. They evince keen interest in the paintings depicting historical events connected with Sikh history.

METEORA MONASTERIES



The Meteora monasteries rise at the centre of Greece, where Pinios River emerges from the deep canyons of the Pindus range and surges into the Thessalian plain. These are gigantic rocks etched by time into a variety of shapes; grey stalagmites rising towards the sky, they appear as nature's gift to the pious who, driven by faith, have opted for solitude and a life of worship. The Monasteries, with their wooden galleries and corniced rooftops, crown the summits of these formidable pinnacles. Precariously hanging over the sinister abysses, with the Pindus range at their back and the vast plain, woods, gorges and picturesque villages below, these unworldly hermitages compose one of the most breathtaking sites on earth.

In the late Byzantine period and during Ottoman rule this monastic community became a sanctuary of the persecuted. On these barren and inaccessible rocks a centre of Byzantine art was created. The history of the Meteora monastic community begins in the 11th century. During the 9th century hermits settled in the caves and crevices of the rocks. On Sundays and important holidays they gathered in Doupiani, near Kastraki (where the monastery and church of the Virgin Mary was later built), to read mass. A good paved road makes access to each of the main monasteries easy and interesting. They may be visited in succession on a single trip (21 km from Kalambaka and back). On the left of the road to the monasteries, at the foot of the Meteora, stands Doupiani hermitage and the 12th century chapel of the Virgin. Nearby are the ruined monasteries of Pantocrator and Doupiani. 3 km from Kalambaka and again on our left is the monastery of Agios Nikolaos Anapafsas. Built slightly before 1510 it was decorated in 1527 with beautifully preserved frescoes by the famous hagiographer Theophanes the Cretan.

Close by are the ruins of the monastery of Agia Moni, built around 1315. Following the southern route, which will eventually take us to the monastery of Agios Stephanos, we first come upon the Agia Trias monastery, built between 1458 and 1476 by the monk Dometius. Situated on a particularly beautiful pinnacle, it is reached by a circular flight of stairs (approximately 140 steps). At the end of the road is the nunnery and Museum of Agios Stephanos. A steep gorge separates the pinnacle from the main cliff; the two rocks are connected by a bridge. Referred to as a hermitage at the beginning of the century, in 1333 Agios Stephanos was visited by Emperor Andronicus the III Paleologus. The head of the saint is preserved in the monastery's cathedral Agios Haralambos. In the old church of Agios Stephanos (1350) one can still admire the beautiful gold-leaved wood carvings, wall paintings and old icons.

DELWARA TEMPLES, RAJASTHAN, INDIA



Delwara Temples, the celebrated and world famous Jain temples, are situated at Delwara village about 2½ Km's from the beautiful city of Mt. Abu. The temples are carved in marble, the design and accuracy of workmanship is unbelievable. The temple dates back to 11th and 12th century A.D. Delwara temples are a composite cluster of 5 temples.

Vimal Vasahi Temple was built by Vimal Shah, the minister and commander-in-chief of Bhima Dev I, Solanki ruler of Gujarat. Vimal Shah was remorseful and spent the rest of his life in religious discourse at Chandravati (near Abu road); inspired by Jain Acharaya, to wash-out his sins perpetrated in the battle fields, with the blessings of tutelary deity Ambika, constructed this temple. It took 1500 artisans and 1200 labourers a time span of 14 years to build this brilliant piece of architecture.

The whole shrine covers an area of 140 ft. long and 90 ft. broad. As we enter the temple we get a glimpse of the grandeur of sculp-

tured marble, exquisite carvings of ceilings, domes, pillars and arches of the temple which is beyond anyone's expectations. It has a sanctum, a Gudha Mandap, Navchowki, Rang Mandap and a circumambulatory corridor having 57 cells. In each cell, image of one or the other Jain Tirthankar is installed. In front of every cell, double carved roofs are screened by double arcade of pillars. Cell numbers are marked and the name of the idol installed in it is also written. One of the decedent of Vimal Shah named Prithvipal carried out constructions and repairs in 1147-49 A.D and to commemorate the glory of his family erected a 'Hasti-Shala' in front of this temple. As we walk along the corridor we enter the various cells. Each cell has an image of one or the other Tirthankar installed. All the images are unique in its creation.

Vastupal and Tejpal two brothers, ministers of Solanki Raja Bhandev II of Gujarat built this temple in memory of their late brother Luna. The architect was Shobhandev. This temple is smaller than Vimal Vasahi but the ground plan and architecture is similar. This temple is far more in perfection and refinement. During the recent repairs of the 52 cells in the corridor four were newly built (23 - 26) and (27 - 30) were renovated. In front of every cell the ceiling is divided into two sections with double row of columns and in each cell image of one or the other Jain Tirthankar or Devi is installed.

Mahaveer Swami temple is a small and simple structure constructed in 1582 A.D. and dedicated to 24th Jain Tirthankar, Lord Mahaveer, with nine other images in this temple. There are pictures on the upper walls of the porch painted in 1764 A.D. by the artists of Sirohi.

KONYA, Turkey

'Iconium' of the Roman times, is 263 kms from Ankara. The land appears as a wide plateau, and has been continuously inhabited even since the dates extending back to the 8th millenium BC. Catalhoyuk is an ancient city of that period, which is considered to be one of the first settlement areas in the world, accommodating the earliest human communities. During the 12th and 13th centuries, the city acted as the capital of the Seljuk Turks and advanced rapidly to become a great cultural centre.

The most famous building here is the Green Mausoleum of Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, the great Turkish philosopher and poet. He is the founder of the sect of Whirling Dervishes, the seminary

of which was attached to the mausoleum. It's now converted into a museum housing Mevlana's works, and accoutrements related to his sect. Every year in December, ceremonies are held in Konya for the Commemoration of Mevlana and the Whirling Dervishes. In this Dervish Festival, the 'Sema' dance is performed by men dressed in white robes, whirling and rotating around the floor. This dance, in which the dancer with the great love of God is believed to attain divine unity, is an event well worth seeing.

On Alaeddin Hill in this region, is the same named mosque and palace, which are fine monuments built in the 13th century during the reign of the famous Seljuk Sultan Alaeddin Keykubat. Karatay Medresse, constructed in 1251, stands to the north of this hill, and now is a museum which holds the best examples of Seljuk tiles and ceramics. The Ince Minareli Medresse with its fascinating monumental portal, the Sircali Medresse and the Iplikci Mosque are other Seljuk works in the city. Beysehir, 94 kms west of Konya, is founded on the shores of Lake Beysehir, the third largest in the country. There are the attractive Seljuk monuments of Esrefoglu Mosque and its Medresse, here and also the Kubad-Abad Summer Palace.

Of particular interest is the town of Aksehir with its remains from the 13th century, the Ulu Mosque, the Sahip Ata Mausoleum and the Altinkale Mescid. This land, 130 km northwest of Konya, is the birthplace of the famous Turkish humorist Nasreddin Hoca, whose mausoleum is here. The various museums, comprising rich collections of historical finds, are other interesting sights in Konya. Especially the Archaeological Museum which should be visited for its charming pieces, including the Sidemara Sarcophagus. The Koyunoglu Museum, with the Izzettin Koyunoglu House inside it, constitutes a beautiful complex; the Ethnographical Museum and Ataturk's House are also at the service of history lovers.

GURDWARA RAKABGANJ SAHIB Ji, India



On a fateful day, a sword of executioner Jalauddin of Samana, struck with a thud. The head of Guru Tegh Bahadur was cut off and people cried in utter helplessness. This tragedy took place on November 11, 1675, in Chandni Chowk, Delhi under orders of Emperor Aurangzeb. In the midst of invisibility caused by dust storm, a disciple of the Guru took away the head of the great martyr and ran away to a place for safety. Covering a 500 km journey with courage and fortitude, he managed to reach Anandpur Sahib in Punjab along with the holy head of his spiritual preceptor and placed it before Guru Gobind Singh. This devoted Sikh was none else but Bhai Jaita á Rengreta Sikh. The tenth Guru embraced him and remarked 'Rengreta Guru Ka beta'. So the head of the Guru was cremated at Anandpur Sahib with proper ceremony.

Another act of valour and dedication was performed by Bhai Lakhi Shah Banjara and his son, Bhai Naghaiya. They reached Chandni Chowk after the execution of the Guru with a convoy of ox-driven carts carrying bales of cotton and foodstuffs. They lifted the headless body of the Guru with flash speed and alacrity and placed it in the cart under the cotton bales. Bhai Lakhi Banjara and his sons were successful in their mission of bringing the headless body of the Guru to their village, notwithstanding the search that was instituted immediately after by the imperial police when they found the body of the Guru missing. But the devotees of the Guru had already cremated the holy body by burning their own house. After the cremation of the body the ashes were put in a gagar (urn) and buried on the spot. For general public it was a miracle as Guru's dead body could not be found, out by the police despite serious efforts. Bhai Lakhi Shah Banjara and his sons by putting themselves in such evident danger performed an exemplary act of religious devotion and thereby earned gratitude of the Sikhs for all times to come. According to historical records Emperor Shah Alam II granted two Sanads to Sikhs. One sanad granted permission to S. Bhagel Singh to take possession of the land for construction of a Gurdwara and a garden. By second Sanad the Emperor also gifted 101 bighas and '5 biswas pukhta equal to about 63 acres with 3 wells land, revenue free. Sikh forces agreed to withdraw from Delhi territory peacefully after the construction of their religious shrines in the Mughal capital in lieu of these concessions.

Thus Sikhs were able to build a magnificent Gurdwara to keep up the memory of the great Guru who made supreme sacrifice for the freedom of worship, belief and expression.