

Chapter 8

The Past in the Present: Using Poetics as an Interpretative Strategy at Pasargadae

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Introduction

Complex curatorial challenges are posed by Pasargadae. It is a World Heritage site inside a religious state in which a variety of conceptions of heritage are at work; developing sophisticated interpretation at this site is difficult. After considering some problems implicit in the World Heritage framework, this chapter analyses one of the possibilities of a recent turn in Iran towards the cultural landscape idea. Poetics, with its implication of strong visitor engagement, emerges from cultural landscape philosophy as an illuminating interpretative possibility for this perplexing site. Interpretation at Pasargadae could be fruitfully developed around the idea of poetics with a foregrounding of the senses and imagination in an intense awareness of the present. Conservative Iranian heritage perspectives emphasise visitors' emotions as a way to connect a site to divine contemplation. Cultural landscape philosophy also foregrounds emotion as part of a dynamic process of engagement with a site. This chapter explores the possible role of poetics at Pasargadae.

European Values and the World Heritage System

UNESCO World Heritage values reflect the European origins of the concept of World Heritage. Although World Heritage inscription is intended to have global inspiration and application, European political values and history of thinking about the representation of the past dominate. Despite the best intentions of involving local people and interpreting local meanings, fixed values and certain ways of perceiving a site as a heritage object, are embodied in a World Heritage listing. It is possible, when examined from some non-western cultural points of view, that the function of a World Heritage listing could be understood as providing yet further examples of European cultural and political hegemony, an example of the power of the cultural values of colonisation decades after most imperial acquisitions were formally decolonised. The prodigious dominance of European and other western examples of built heritage on the World Heritage List which disproportionately represents European castles, palaces, battle sites and gardens,

reflects the European roots of the convention and its continued administration by Paris-based UNESCO.

World Heritage sites are interpreted overwhelmingly as separate monuments, their sharply drawn boundaries demanding that we protect the lofty, isolated status of the treasured site. The boundaries have functioned not only to exclude people, but also to convey a sense of a frozen place in which meanings are fixed. The interactions of both local and non-local visitors with a site have been conceptualised as extrinsic to a site's curatorial meanings and even a potentially damaging nuisance to be guarded against. World Heritage sites have appeared as if excised from everyday life and time. Good site protection has been theorised as resting on a site's separate status, but this has had unintended interpretation implications. The separate status has had a flow-on effect in curatorial work resulting in narrow interpretations. Sites appear not only frozen out of everyday life, but as if their histories have stopped at one particular epoch. Such frozen singularity has often served national needs for expressing cohesion, identity and international importance. Problems arise, however, when the cohesion and identity constructed through a site are at odds with wider societal tensions.

In addition to the separate monument status implied by World Heritage, the contemporary western value of diversity can pose challenges in developing non-western sites. Throughout the western world, especially in countries which have now adopted policies of multiculturalism or implicitly live by them (such as Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom), the positive value of diversity is almost unquestioned. Diversity as a positive civic value is taught in schools and celebrated widely. Dissent from this value is often understood to emanate from a disaffected minority with extreme politics. This chapter does not aim to critique the place of diversity in western countries today, but highlights the cultural fact that it is a contemporary western value, neither global nor ahistorical. The central value of diversity in UNESCO's World Heritage activity, however, is presented as transcendent and virtually devoid of historical context. The dissemination of the positive values of western human rights, expressed implicitly through the celebration of human diversity, seems to be a core implication of World Heritage activity. In an introduction to a book on World Heritage and cultural diversity these values are stated strongly by Albert (2010, p. 17) who holds the UNESCO Chair in Heritage Studies.

The common substance of all contributions, either directly or indirectly, refers back to the fundamental ideas of the United Nations and of UNESCO. For the achievement of these objectives, the UN Millennium Declaration, one of its most important and forward looking documents, has served as a conceptual orientation. The Millennium Declaration explicitly reverts to the founding ideas of the UN and transports these objectives by promoting the diversity of world cultures into the twenty-first century.

Albert (2010, p. 19) emphasises the dynamic quality of cultural diversity, despite the strictures of

closed systems. Even when autocratic systems have tried to isolate cultures from the outside world, these cultures would inwardly develop in different ways, progressing and creating new material and immaterial expressions.

When diversity is promoted as a core value of World Heritage, heritage practitioners need to be very conscious of the fact that it might not be a positive value everywhere. It seems evident that the very concept of World Heritage must encompass the value of diversity. After all, the world is a diverse place and if a nation applies for one of its sites to have World Heritage listing it seems a logical inference that it supports diversity. There is, however, a sharp distinction to be made between celebrating diversity on an international scale, and promoting it as an internal national value. Not all countries and people wish to prioritise celebration of internal cultural diversity. For some people, to do so could undermine the idealised values of harmony and cultural unity which, for many, still underpin national unity. Such countries need to negotiate their own internal national values when interpreting their World Heritage sites.

The problematic case of Pasargadae is considered in this chapter. The Iranian state needs to negotiate the care and interpretation of Pasargadae in the context of World Heritage expectations and state parties' obligations. In addition, Islamic Iranian national and religious values need to be protected, or at least not challenged within the fluid framework of evolving Iranian attitudes to heritage. Pasargadae was listed as a World Heritage site as recently as 2004. Since that time, however, Iranian thinking about approaches to heritage sites has shifted more strongly towards the concept of the cultural landscape. The fixed monument approach to interpretation and management, so often seen at World Heritage sites, clashes with cultural landscape ideals of cultural heritage process rather than cultural heritage product (Taylor and Lennon, 2012, p. 2). Cultural landscape concepts include the embrace of local involvement and the rejection of the separate status of the site. Philosophies underpinning the emergence of cultural landscape emphasise the fundamental role of landscape in the creation of identity (Taylor and Lennon 2012, p. 5; O'Keefe 2007, p. 3) and ideology (Taylor and Lennon 2012, p. 5; Taylor, 2012, p. 27; Agnew 2011, p. 37 and Arneson 2011, p. 373). The dynamic quality of cultural landscapes is emphasised in stark contrast to the lifeless quality of the monumental concept of heritage. The significance of these developments in Iranian thinking can be grasped when they are compared to the philosophic importance once enjoyed by the Iranian heritage commentator, Hodjat (1995), who enunciated the importance of heritage as residing in its ideal potential to lead visitors to contemplate the Divine. The unexpected cultural landscape connection to Hodjat's principles is considered later in this chapter.

The European ideals of World Heritage are very clear when examining the criteria for the 2004 inscription of the ruins of Pasargadae. The site was judged

to have World Heritage status because of its evidence of ‘human creative genius; interchange of values; testimony to cultural tradition and significance in human history’ (UNESCO 2009, p. 714). These criteria are the same ones that are used to describe many other places on the World Heritage List although an implication of World Heritage Listing is that a place is unique. Criteria in a bureaucratic and forensic context need to be repeatable and testable, stalwart labels for site evaluation which facilitate dealing with hundreds of sites in a huge variety of political and social contexts. The UNESCO guide colours in the criteria with its brief history notes describing Pasargadae as the first dynastic capital of the Achaemenid Empire that was founded by Cyrus the Great. It has ‘outstanding examples of the first phase of royal Achaemenid art and architecture’ and ‘spanning the eastern Mediterranean and Egypt to the Indus River, it is considered to be the first empire that respected the cultural diversity of its different peoples’ (UNESCO 2009, p. 714). Cultural diversity is not only respected, but indeed celebrated in many western countries at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It may be alien, however, to the guiding political and spiritual principles of the Iranian government although some significant government factions support broad diversity. This situation highlights some of the problems implicit in both the World Heritage List and, of particular interest for this chapter, interpretation of places on that list.

In grappling with the interpretation problems posed by Pasargadae, this chapter builds on the history and description of the site that have been covered by Ali Sami (1971) and many others. I argue that western styles of interpretation, often resulting in subtle provocation at heritage sites, can co-exist respectfully with some apparently contrasting Iranian heritage principles emerging from a teleological approach to history and the privileging of a dominant historical narrative. This chapter now considers some limitations in entrenched western interpretation. It then looks at cultural landscape interpretation and poetics and concludes with consideration of some key problematics implicit in the poetics approach.

Possible Interpretations of the Site

If Pasargadae site curators were guided by the UNESCO World Heritage criteria it is highly likely that their interpretations would give offence to some Iranians, and this could prevent their interpretations being installed. In this book, Mozaffari describes the complicated political and religious contexts and the consequent intractable interpretation problems posed by this site. The two most obvious interpretative approaches that present themselves to a western curator could be unworkable.

The first most likely approach, consistent with many western sites, would be the construction of a linear chronology of the ruins describing the various periods in which the site has been used, its historic and mythic associations with great people such as Cyrus and the Mother of Solomon (albeit imaginary) and its political rise and

fall from greatness. This classical chronology would also cover the site's use as an Islamic site of worship, evident in the remains of the mosque which were removed in the twentieth century by archaeologists aiming to return the excavated site to one dominant, glorious historical period, that of the Achaemenids – a destructive action consistent with the frozen monument approach to heritage (Figure 8.1). Examination of different interpretative approaches that have been foregrounded at Pasargadae reveals changing values that have been ascribed to the site. In the twentieth century, the elevation of the Achaemenid period to the most important period for interpretation undermined the site's diachronic values and the future idea of diversity for which this period is now praised by UNESCO (2009). In this volume, Baldissone describes the problems associated with the 'privileged moment' foregrounded by archaeology and the desire to have a single dominant 'thread' determine the interpreted history, as opposed to 'overlapping fibres' of rich and contradictory histories. If using chronology as the basis for interpretation, it is crucial to note that many pasts, and not only the Islamic past, would be encompassed. The chronology would certainly not be used teleologically, an implicit demand made by some very conservative religious factions in Iranian Islamic cultural politics. The custodian of the site, the Parsa-Pasargadae Research Foundation, suggests a chronological approach (Mozaffari 2012), but it would be likely to offend some Iranians.



Figure 8.1 Excavation of Pasargadae (Iran): mausoleum of Cyrus the Great, from the south, remains of the old mosque were apparent at the time (1905)

Source: The Ernst Herzfeld papers. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

The second likely approach at Pasargadae would be an insistence on curatorial dialogism which would lead to this site being framed by ideals of pluralism and visitor provocation. This approach would insist on the Islamic pasts and indeed the pre-Islamic pasts being interrogated, perhaps abrasively, with politically unpalatable links possibly made to some authorised heritage directions in contemporary Iran. UNESCO's (2009) observation that Pasargadae is associated with early respect for cultural diversity, noted above, would be the launch for a dialogic approach.

Although both of these approaches are entrenched in western heritage practice, they could be difficult to sustain at this site in Iran today. As discussed by Mozaffari (2010, pp. 35-6) in relation to the doctoral thesis of Hodjat (1995), 'heritage was seen as a western discourse alien to people's Islamic identity'. He describes Hodjat's attacks on western heritage: it 'conveys materialistic values and messages rather than spiritual values to which the traditional Islamic society subscribe[s]' (2010, p. 36). By contrast, from this perspective, an Islamic use of heritage concerns 'a hidden truth about immutable Divine traditions ... it has an educational-spiritual function perceived primarily through the emotions' (2010, pp. 55-7).

The possible inadmissibility, in the Iranian Islamic context, of the two approaches outlined above demands a reconsideration of ways to approach the site that would incorporate ideals of various groups of Iranians, including those focussed on the divine and the foregrounding of emotions. Ironically, making sensory perceptions and emotions the foci of interpretation suggests an unexpected and productive link between conservative religious perspectives and the cultural landscape approach to heritage sites.

Cultural Landscape Interpretation

The move away from rigid monumentalism and towards cultural landscapes is of special interest in this chapter because of growing professional heritage emphasis on the dynamic, interactive qualities of a site. Whereas previous protective measures at World Heritage sites started with a tight boundary that excluded on-going everyday life, the more complex cultural landscape approach proposes a looser boundary that permits links between a site and wider life; its boundary is permeable and site curators are open to the implications that emerge. Overwhelmingly, past, and many present, visitor landscape experiences have been framed by the visual – 'most scholars continue to privilege vision over other senses' observes O'Keeffe (2007, p. 6). Focus on the visual has assisted in maintaining the fixed monumental focus in heritage production in not just views, but in the accumulation of facts that are guaranteed 'true' by vision. O'Keeffe (2007, p. 6) links the visual emphasis to the factual, producing a 'visual-factual' orientation that is based on an apparently commonsensical link between what is seen and the facts that privileged vision can comprehend.

The study of landscape and memory often devolves, therefore, into a study of tangible visual *aides de mémoire* within landscapes. This is certainly the case with respect to western capitalist societies where its origin can be traced back to the Renaissance ‘theatre of memory’ and further back into classical times.

Most visitors bring cameras to site visits, thus highlighting the role of the visual. Bunkše (2011, p. 33) describes the limited perception of many tourists in a heritage site: ‘most go in search of visible, known landscapes that can be recorded and taken home as souvenirs’. There is great irony in the tourist industry – travelling with the stated aim of discovery, but effectively seeing only what one expects to see. Bunkše (2011, p. 33) quotes Spirn (1998): ‘Culture can prevent eyes from seeing and ears from hearing’. The visual sense in western landscape use, therefore, has often functioned in a limited, framing way. Cusack (2010, p. 12), however, drawing on Appadurai (1990), pushes apprehension beyond the visual and crucially elaborates the concept of perspective in understanding a person’s relationship to what is viewed.

Appadurai employs the suffix ‘scape’ to denote a ‘perspectival construct’ which implies a reading of something that is inflected by the viewer’s historical and political situation ... [what] is viewed and the meanings attributed to it will depend upon how it is regarded by specific cultural and political groups at certain historical junctures.

Curatorial insistence on perspective, therefore, opens up a site to both diachronic analysis and the views and individual meanings of widely varying groups of people. Using the concept of ‘perspective’ to understand individual people’s relationships to landscape leads analysis away from the rigidity of early World Heritage interpretation. Perspectives, necessarily, come from inside and outside the site. Visitors, therefore, bring world views with them and, in a cultural landscape approach, use their internal lives and the world beyond the boundary in making sense of what is inside. The effect of this curatorial shift leads to interrogation of the ‘product’ nature of the static monument. The interpretative limitations of ‘heritage as product’ are readily apparent, especially in terms of the priority it grants to a fixed aesthetic appreciation of the site often separated from a complex social history and lived experience. In its place, the idea of ‘process’ has emerged as a way to grasp landscape (Taylor and Lennon 2012, p. 2). Almost 30 years ago Cosgrove (1984, p. xiv) insisted on the active nature of landscape: ‘landscape constitutes a discourse through which social groups historically have framed themselves and their relations with the land and other groups’. O’Keeffe (2007, p. 8) describes the radical change in landscape understanding:

An importation into landscape research of culturalism’s insistence that social formations (such as identity) and social institutions (such as ‘the market’) are fluid and contingent, rather than primordial, cross-cultural and transhistorical.

Landscape is theorised as fundamental in the creation of identity (Taylor and Lennon 2012, p. 5; O’Keeffe 2007, p. 3). Taylor (2012, p. 22), quoting Mitchell (1994), suggests ‘we need to change “landscape” from a noun to a verb ... [so] that we think of landscape not as object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which identities are formed’.

One approach to the connection between identity and landscape takes identity as formed by self-reflection in the landscape and in necessary, practical life responses and adaptations to that landscape. Taylor notes, however, that such fundamental descriptions, drawn from simple coping with the landscape, have been dismissed as ‘naïve’ by some writers, such as Duncan and Duncan (1988) who push landscape analysis beyond adaptation, to a new semiotic level: ‘text’. ‘They argue cogently that landscapes can be seen as transformations of social and political ideologies. They base their claim on insights from literary theory applied to the analysis of landscapes and reading them as texts’ (2012, p. 27). Similarly, ideologies cluster around landscape (Taylor and Lennon 2012, p. 5, Taylor 2012, p. 27, Agnew 2011, p. 37, Arneson 2011, p. 373), notably in painting (Cusack 2010) and can become powerful signifiers of nation.

[Landscapes are] ... general and publicly accessible and shareable *aides-mémoire* of a culture’s knowledge and understanding of its past and future. In this sense landscape enters politics ... [landscapes] ... may serve as an important focus for political organization around the issue of territory ... and this has been witnessed many times in the course of history. (Arneson, 2011, p. 373)

It is clear when considering the arbitrary link between landscape and ideology that landscape is not the sum of visually verifiable ‘objective’ data, but emerges from perception. Castiglioni, Rossetto and de Nardi (2011, p. 67) argue that ‘values, meetings and the whole realm of the immaterial are therefore the central parts of the relationship which binds the population itself to the territory’. A heritage site, therefore, cannot be pinned down and fixed. The fixed, monumentalised past can be seductive with its comfortingly repetitious images sought out by tourists, and ‘facts’ which are supported by the act of looking, but the era of ‘landscape as monument’ appears to be over in professional heritage interpretation.

For this chapter, the role of the person in the landscape is very important. ‘The conjunction of the word “cultural” with landscape also infers an inhabited, active being’ says Taylor (2012, p. 23). This active person is an entire feeling human with ‘proprioception’ (Bunkše 2011, p. 28), that is, having the ability of the whole body to be, in a sense, a reaction to the world. This necessarily means that there is vision, hearing, touch, smell, memory and so on involved in a visit to a site and that the visit is insistently affective (Taylor 2012, p. 27). The wonders of sensory perception are usually sublimated to the cerebral in heritage interpretation. Affective responses make little sense in a monumentalised, rigid, heritage production because they are active, responding to the surrounding world and interacting with the site. Nevertheless, the visitor necessarily has affective responses, which

together constitute what Bunkše calls ‘little narratives’ of landscapes places. ‘The experiences are personal, subjective, deep, they are private micro-narratives’ (2011, p. 28). Likewise, Castiglioni, Rossetto and de Nardi (2011, p. 77) describe the power of landscape in ‘eliciting and comparing different feelings, emotions’.

As Iran turns towards the cultural landscape approach in understanding and interpreting its heritage sites, a rich opportunity exists to encourage visitors’ personal emotional responses, particularly in terms of poetics. Western interpretation has usually ignored personal responses. Social science analysis, with its habitual segmentations of a population into various groups, has been very powerful in determining the curatorial reception of visitors at heritage sites. Visitor studies have followed the social science pattern. It is time to move beyond the segmentation of visitors into broad groups and to consider the wealth of individual experiences that a site might elicit. This chapter argues, therefore, that focussing on the poetics of the Pasargadae ruins would enable a form of interpretation that would be rich for any visitor, including those from the west imbued with western ideas of interpretation, while insisting also on respect for official Iranian Islamic ideals of different factions. Although a variety of approaches to heritage exist in Iran, the interest of this chapter is in responding to the reality of the difficulties of implementing interpretation within an official framework while maintaining sufficient openness to enable a valuable visitor experience.

Local villagers who live only 400 metres from the tomb of Cyrus, and the few remaining nomads who move around the site boundary (Figures 8.2), might be interested in being involved in site protection and interpretation based on poetics, in contrast to their almost certain alienation if the interpretation were drawn from knowledge foreign to them, that is, an exclusive scholarly historian’s approach. The poetics of the site embrace the same natural phenomena that surround these local stakeholders: wind, light, shadows, the seasons; these are aspects of a site that are experienced as intense sensory qualities of place and might be rich elements with which to encourage local engagement (Figure 8.3). Pradhananga and Landorf (2008, p. 1) outline the immense difficulties of involving local stakeholders in effective engagement at World Heritage sites:

Research shows that even if local community involvement does take place, various issues such as the level of participation of the community in the decision making process, the capacity of local stakeholders to actively engage and make contributions, power imbalance of stakeholders plus the problems faced in developing countries related to the specific environment such as the political and socio-economic context has caused attempts of local community involvement at heritage sites to be ineffective.

Through interpretation based on poetics, traditional local stakeholders at Pasargadae could possibly be more fully included in the site as potentially powerful stakeholders. Poetics would enable the site to be embraced in the utmost present and encourage perception through emotion and the body.



Figure 8.2 A nomadic tent in the Pasargadae region

Source: Courtesy of the Parsa-Pasargadae Research Organisation

Poetics are not offered as a way to pacify the site, that is, to avoid the political problems raised by a direct historic approach. To the contrary, becoming alive to poetics should energise a site; poetics of place encompasses all of the ways that a site is inhabited, moved through, experienced. It embraces all the elements of a site, both historic and imaginative, and magnifies the spatiality of the past in a place. It can be linked to site aesthetics, but goes beyond aesthetics to embrace the lived quality of the everyday. In contrast to the qualities of immediacy and visitor-centredness that can be achieved by foregrounding site poetics, the poetics of many historic sites are often reduced to a theatrical backdrop on which curator-centred interpretation rests. Such curation refers to a lost past, usually disconnected from the present in all but lessons to be learnt, for example, the laudable respect for cultural diversity shown by the UNESCO inscription for the Achaemenids. This style of curation also implies that the spectator is disconnected from the site. Despite the widespread curatorial appreciation of Tilden's (1957) interpretation principles that demand the centring of the visitor at a heritage site, it is still rare to find a site interpreted around the idea of an active, inquiring visitor who brings knowledge and world experience.



Figure 8.3 Ruins of Palace P

Source: Courtesy of Ali Mozaffari © 2011

An interpretation based on poetics enables a very different perception of the site. It brings the past and the present together insisting that visitors participate by actually inhabiting the site during their visit. Such interpretation depends on the visitor experience of the site and necessary day-by-day changes. Poetics brings together nature and culture, these being the two concepts that are crucially linked by the cultural landscape approach (Plachter and Rössler 1995). Poetics makes powerful links between past and present; as visitors move around the site they inscribe and re-inscribe place, highlighting daily the importance that Pasargadae has for Iran and World Heritage. Sensory aspects of a site have been long neglected in western interpretation in favour of chronology, individual narratives, nationalism/localism and teleology. Although such well known approaches can certainly have an emotional element, they do not foreground the bodily awareness of, and emotional participation in, poetics.

Malleable Pasts

The long fascination by the western world with ruins contains a history of changing ways of looking at the past which indicates the potential malleability of historic places in heritage practice and the practical possibilities of instituting poetics at

sites as a way to centre the visitor and enhance appreciation of the precise qualities of a particular place.

In seventeenth-century Europe, ruins were appreciated for their reassuring aesthetic qualities leading to considerable poetic, imaginative play with specific places in art (Thomas 2008, p. 654). Ruins were regarded as melancholy places that showed how civilisation had improved (Ginsberg 2004, Thomas 2008, p. 67). Hetzler (1982, p. 105) extends this Romantic view in the twentieth century to define a new aesthetics.

We do not have here only natural beauty or only artistic beauty, but we have *a third kind of beauty: a ruin beauty, which is a new category of being ...* In a ruin, so-called natural beauty intersects with human-made beauty in a unique manner ... Together they yield a new kind of beauty, a new immateriality that is neither human nor natural but both [emphasis in original].

By contrast, the nineteenth century, reeling from the shock of the French Revolution and its immense destructive force, took an historical stance towards ruins (Thomas 2008, pp. 65–7), seeing in them a witness to destruction wrought by humans. They were, therefore, places that showed the collapse of the continuity of time, a break in human experience. ‘People experienced an at times apocalyptic sense of things overturned, and of the present as utterly cut off from the past’ (Thomas 2008, p. 63). Such a perception of the past is very much at odds with the contemporary curatorial ideal, if not the reality, of showing the relationship between past and present.

Further to the violent change wrought through revolutionary events and the Napoleonic Wars, was bureaucratic change. Bann (1989, p. 104) argues that the establishment of the Public Record Office in London in 1837 was a decisive moment in determining ways that were officially acceptable in understanding the past. Until that time, artistic methods had been one of the many possible. After 1837, the steady bureaucratisation of ways of accessing ‘truth’ statements about history severely limited ways of knowing the past. The archivally verifiable mode, especially as embodied in paper documents, has become the preferred official mode.

As documentary evidence attained huge testamentary power through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so painting, music, songs, theatre and literature were correspondingly downgraded and disempowered. This is evident today in the rapid expansion of controlling powers of various styles of heritage agencies and their apparent will to produce sameness at sites of great difference. Bunkše says that his highly personalised, poetic, ‘little narratives’ are in

sharp contrast to the meta-narratives that the poet Ginsburg calls mindless, mechanical instructions that come from the industrial Moloch of which the mass media is a part. Indeed tourism and ‘acts of modernization’ may threaten the authenticity of local narratives.

The proliferation of the concept of themes as a bureaucratic management strategy has resulted in some heritage agencies processing sites by listing them according to themes thus limiting understanding of their individual differences. Themes are linked to tourism and branding. The themes-tourism-branding triumvirate operates fatally against the ideal of the singularity of site poetics. Many sites are subsumed into regions which are branded with particular looks and historic emphases producing historic places as little more than part of a wider regional experience. This is one of the reasons why there has been so little work done on the poetics of heritage places; heritage homogenisation is a looming danger. To develop poetics and singularity of site would be to undermine a vast heritage and tourism bureaucracy which is working in the opposite direction and steadily eroding the unique qualities of heritage sites. The grouping of sites according to theme tends to have a flow-on effect in producing repetitious interpretation at a variety of sites, hence complaints about the similarities of sites, notably of heritage houses and ruins. As imaginative play with the past and the visitor's body have been steadily removed from the experience of western heritage places, it has been easy to take for granted the hegemony of a limited historic focus as an appropriate way to interpret the past. The authority of the interpretation at one site seems to underpin the authority of the same type of interpretation at another site; repetition is taken for granted.

A familiar interpretative focus on history usually demands emotional detachment from the visitor. Other than a modicum of empathising with past experiences of people who might have occupied a site, most interpretation assumes that the visitor is aloof, both emotionally and in terms of time. Although many curators have tried to provoke visitors to question interpretations of the past, they have done little to reduce the barrier implied by the 'pastness' of the past, that is, the sensory qualities of the place seem to be sealed-off from the present, frozen as a material archive. Approaching the poetics of Pasargadae, however, one has a wide choice of elements that can prompt the visitor to ask questions about the past while insisting that the interpretation does not represent a sealed-off past; the ethos of the cultural landscape approach is about insisting on highly specific experiences.

The Poetics of Pasargadae

Poetics move beyond representation to insistence on the immediacy of lived experience. Interpretation inspired by poetics would enable Pasargadae to be 'alive' today rather than a place that is reduced by interpretation to bearing only traces of former events. The present qualities – the 'nowness' of the site, plus the auratic quality of the original fabric – would be foregrounded. Experiences perceived through the body could be consistent with various types of Iranian official site appreciation.

Consider the poetics of Pasargadae: the feel and sound of the wind in different seasons and different times of the day; the light falling onto ancient stones (Figure 8.4); reflections; poppies in spring time blooming in the cracks of the sun-warmed blocks; the deep blue-green of the parched, barren hills which frame the ruins (Figure 8.5); the delicacy of the bas-relief of Cyrus the Great carved as a four winged guardian in comparison to the monolithic quality of the heavy construction stones; the angle of the legs of the carved figure and the hoofed animal which follows him; the deep vertical repeated shadows thrown by the pillars of the palace ruins onto the creamy platform and their profile against the deep blue sky (Figure 8.6); the solidity of the Mausoleum of Cyrus and its relatively small size in comparison to the surrounding grandeur; the contrast between the Mausoleum and the broken, barely supported ruins of the *Zendan-i Solaiman* (Solomon's Prison, believed to be the tomb of King Cambyses) and the pathways made by the few nomads who still live around the site (Figure 8.7).

Of crucial importance in poetics at Pasargadae would be all the dynamic processes of the site: smells, fretting stone, dry and damp, which alert us to the life in the ruin and the active force of a ruin as it contains death and life simultaneously. Ginsburg describes life in a ruin:

Vegetation has entered here and there, the blame falling on the fallen roof, but the floor has been transformed into earth ... Though the artefact has been destroyed, the ruin is free to be creative in its own terms. (Ginsburg 2004, p. 56)



Figure 8.4 Detail of the stone fortification of *Tall-i Takht*

Source: Courtesy of Ali Mozaffari © 2011



Figure 8.5 The tomb within the mountainous backdrop

Source: Courtesy of Ali Mozaffari © 2011



Figure 8.6 View of the *Tall-i Takht* from the main road on site

Source: Courtesy of Ali Mozaffari © 2011

Poetics move far beyond the visual, acutely so when ruins are the object of sensory experience, but multiple ways of knowing the past have been habitually and dramatically disallowed because of the exclusive power of the archived document and material historical evidence. Hetzler (1982, p. 106) discusses the senses at ruins:

The senses are deeply involved with the experience of ruins. *Touch* has been called the sense of certitude. In a ruin, touch is a marvelous combination of the human and the natural. In touch one meets the resistant body, an alien. There may be the sensuousness of the smoothness of stone, marble or wood ... Man's perceptions of ruins, like the ruins themselves, are part of the dynamic cosmic process that is somehow united by time [emphasis in original].

The difficulty of aesthetic perception of nature is discussed by Fenner (2006) who argues that it is the quality of flux and dynamic openness that have made aesthetic judgement difficult. 'These reasons may even incorporate the view that evaluation is impossible when the object in question is constantly moving. The difficulty with such a posture, however, is that it relegates environmental aesthetics to an exclusively academic role' (Fenner 2006, p. 10). Drawing on Carlson (1993), Fenner (2006, pp. 10–11) describes the way in which a typical art object is 'distinct from the appreciator'. By contrast, 'the object of nature appreciation is all around the appreciator, encompassing her, forming a living and dynamic context for her appreciation ... a sensory envelope'. This is vital. Grasping that the visitor or appreciator is at the centre of the site, and its meanings and sensory possibilities, is fundamental to understanding why an interpretation based on poetics can push a site to a new level of heritage interpretative sophistication. Earlier in this chapter I noted the way that curator-centred interpretation results in a dominant curator and a detached visitor. Interpretation based on poetics, however, centres the visitor, leading to a dynamic visitor experience and connecting the site to the present.

In addition to the natural aspects of Pasargadae, consider also the power of imagination: visitors can be asked to recreate in their minds the idea of the primal Pasargadae symmetrical garden, the world's first-known walled garden, with its walls that invite you to push away the rest of the world and turn in towards a living space. By contrast, visitors could also be asked to imagine the might of Cyrus' army in this place. These two historic elements of the site could thus be treated in terms of poetics and contrast rather than in terms of a more problematic chronology or even cultural achievement in the current Iranian context. Further, visitors could be asked to imagine the violent removal of the traces of the mosque that had surrounded Cyrus' Mausoleum, then known as the Mausoleum of the Mother of Solomon by Italian archaeologists who wished to return the site to a simple synchrony, to the time of the glory of the Achaemenids. The removal of the mosque in order to have the site reduced to one time only is akin to the bureaucratic will to control sites via the strategy of themes.



Figure 8.7 General view of the ruins of the *Zendan-i Solaiman*, the Palaces and *Tall-i Takht* in the far background

Source: Courtesy of Ali Mozaffari © 2011

Hetzler (1982, p. 108) defined ruins as a ‘disjunctive product of the intrusion of nature without loss of the unity that man produced’, thereby highlighting the imperative for heritage interpretation to move beyond limited historical engagement. For Ginsburg (2004, p. 1), ruins contain even more than this unique combination. He describes them as active and creating an intense relationship with a visitor that results in ‘something substantial’ happening to the visitor. Interpretation based on poetics at Pasargadae taps into this strong force.

The growing attention paid to affect in curatorial work is necessarily producing a more centred heritage visitor and helps to explain further the curatorial achievement of a poetics based on interpretation. Affect is bodily intensity, the kind of intensity that we experience before we intellectually grasp the meanings of the body’s response to an environment – rippling bodily pressures that we later interpret as joy, fear, shame and so on (Tomkins and Izard 1964). Much of the work on affect is derived from the initial theorising of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and their work on the concept of the human becoming-animal. They argue that previous thinkers have understood the idea of the animal part of the human as representative of drives, but ‘they do not see the reality of it becoming-animal, that it is affect in itself, the drive in person, and represents nothing’ (1987, p. 259). Bodily responses to an historic environment in a pre-intellectual way can open up dramatic spaces of individual engagement that are outside curatorial control. Such bodily responses foreground the ‘nowness’ of being at a site and the haecceity or

'thisness' of the 'you' who is there. Deleuze and Guattari turn to poetry to describe haecceity: 'you are longitude and latitude ... a climate, a wind, a fog, a swarm ... a cloud of locusts carried in by the wind ... a werewolf at full moon' (1987, p. 262). Affective interpretation makes possible an empowering position for a visitor who becomes a central element of the site (Harris 2012b). Massumi insists on the exhilarating sense of being alive that a rush of affect gives to the body. It is beyond words, one feels 'one's own vitality, one's sense of aliveness, of changeability' (2002, p. 36). The visitor engages with the site in the here and now and is far removed from what is so often stale, limited, repetitious curatorial interpretation.

Key Issues for Poetics and Heritage Sites

Two fundamental issues arise from the prioritisation of poetics: first, the status of poetics in terms of representation and secondly, the place of history. Are heritage poetics to be considered a form of representation at a site? Intellectually, where might poetics lead the visitor? What happens to history? After all, history is the usual focus at a heritage site. In thinking through answers to these questions one discovers that poetics can assist in dealing with the usual problems posed by history. History is necessarily selective, in choosing what is to be known at a site there is also, of course, a fundamental process of erasure. Related to erasure is the often dominant status of the curator who chooses to erase or not. Related also is the textually subservient position of the visitor who may not detect the erasures and the conceptually slippery gaps. The familiar, powerful curatorial role, fundamentally although unwittingly, relies on the perpetuation of visitor ignorance because interpretation is so often detached from the visitor. This is so despite contemporary heritage ideals of dialogism (Harris 2011).

Bate's work on poetry and biodiversity is useful in thinking through heritage site poetics. He draws on Heidegger who suggests that poetry is not a form of representation or of mapping, but of 'presencing', that is, it causes one to be in the present, a clear outcome of affective experience. Bate (1998, p. 55) describes Heidegger's notion of 'dwelling' in the natural environment, and its significance:

that authentic form of Being which he set against what he took to be the false ontologies of Cartesian dualism and subjective idealism. We achieve Being not when we represent the world ... but when we stand in a site, open to its Being, when we are thrown or called; the site is then gathered into a whole for which we take on an insistent care.

This deep ecology style of relating, or being in a place, opens up immense possibilities for heritage interpretations for all sites, not just those that are tense in contemporary political terms such as Pasargadae.

Derrida identifies the vulnerable quality of the 'poematic' (Clark 2005, p. 141). 'Thus the dream of *learning by heart* arises in you. Of letting your heart

be traversed by the dictated dictation. In a single trait – and that’s the impossible, that’s the poetic experience’ (Derrida 1991, p. 231, quoted in Clark 2005, p. 141). The visitor’s body, therefore, is heavily engaged necessarily in a primarily affective way at a site that foregrounds poetics. McCorkle describes the force of this engagement: ‘the necessity of a poetics of identity: to examine one’s condition, one’s difference; to name and offer a voice to those names or one’s own name; all this is not only a marking of histories but also a re-examination of history and a re-visioning of the self’ (McCorkle 1992, p. 187).

Firuz (2007) offers a moving approach to tackling the relationship between poetry and history. The writer insists on making present the problems of erasure and the need to create an active reader of history by playing with the history of Turkey in World War One. It is necessary to emphasise that Firuz brings the problems into being through a poetic approach by making present the jumble of facts rather than reflecting dispassionately on existing documents. Firuz creates an assemblage of fragments, facts, key dates and received wisdom leading to ‘things that are lost between definitions’ (Firuz 2007, p. 219). The writer tries to express the massive complexity of the birth of modern Turkey in the context of the European war and the rupture of the Armenian genocide.

Because history, I think should move us.

The stuff about poetry is a longstanding thing.

Historians are plagued by arrogance. Like poets. Maybe it’s only me. But I think there exists a certain legitimacy which surrounds history and historians, and it needs to be questioned.

What if a historian’s truth were no more than a poet’s truth? Now wouldn’t that be interesting? (2007, p. 223)

By asking the reader to consider the strange power accrued to contemporary historical writing, Firuz reveals the fragile base of its legitimacy and offers poetic power in its place. McCorkle grapples with the same problems: ‘Had history been different, had it been less certain, had it been reversed ... absence would be overturned. History, in a tragic sense, is the making of absences. If that is the violence of history, then the force of poetry would be the making of presence’ (1992, pp. 178–9). Drawing on the work of Jerome Rothenberg, McCorkle concludes, ‘poetry offers, perhaps, the only access for us to hear the voices of the dead. In this autonomous space of dialogues are offered accounts of what has transpired ... [It is] the poem’s ability to create the space in which we become haunted by others’ (1992, p. 187).

In being haunted by others, we transcend the detached historian’s view of the past. Poetics, therefore, enables us to be present at a site. The apparent binary – history as absence or erasure, poetry as presence – is key to the presentation of Pasargadae as a cultural landscape of poetics. Concurrently, attempts must be made to break a rigid binary. Poetics is not about representation. It is a stand-alone life experience that demands visitor engagement. Imagine how the poppies

at Pasargadae quiver in the warm stony cracks of the great site in a different way each spring day; the clouds, hour by hour, making unique patterns as they pass over the dramatic verticals of the pillars on the great terrace of Palace P (Figure 8.3). There is great force in the immediacy of the poetic engagement, Ginsberg's (2004, p. 1) 'something substantial' happens. Clark (2005, p. 9) tries to pin down the poetic experience:

To read a text solely as itself and on its own terms, in its singularity: no idea might seem simpler – not to make the text an example of some social or cultural point, nor a facet of some theory of poetics, but merely to *affirm it in itself and as it is*. The point is not to interpret the singularity of the text but to move towards a point, never finally attainable, at which the text is being understood only on its own singular terms.

There could be a creative and productive blurring of poetics, history and politics at heritage sites which would transcend binaries. Several writers tackle aspects of another binary: poetics/aesthetics and politics. Eagleton (1988), for example, demonstrates that the political is embedded in aesthetics; Hutcheon (1988, p. 106) describes the porosity of fiction and history; Kumar (1999, pp. 6–7) highlights the 'barrenness of the binary opposition between poetics and politics'; while McCann argues that the debate about politicising or depoliticising art is a displaced debate that is really about the necessity of ethical character. The arguments he says 'are concerned less with realizable ends than with the kinds of people we are, and their underlying demand is that we be the kind of people who care about ends that seem both enormously significant and, at bottom, all but unrealizable' (1999, p. 44). Rethinking Pasargadae in terms of poetics has the power to focus the presence of the site and to push the many significances of the site right onto the visitor's body.

Conclusion

A possible first perception that a turn to poetics is a way of muffling the problems of history or soothing curatorial tensions is very wrong. Foregrounding heritage site poetics is not concerned with calming down the tensions at a site. By stark contrast, it is concerned with moving the naming of historical and political problems away from the curatorial role. Most interpretation relies on the curator alerting the visitor to the chief problematics of the site. Through poetics, the naming of those problematics is placed back on the visitor. The visitor, therefore, names the tensions of the site for her or himself. Interpretation based on Pasargadae as a cultural landscape and prioritising poetics could demand a visitor's implicit engagement with the historical and political difficulties of a site while at the same time respecting Iranian official sensibilities. It could pull past and present together. If heritage interpretation could achieve a visitor experience which insisted on the singular poetics of a site, then the problems of hackneyed interpretation of ruins,

the dull repetition of the World Heritage criteria and anachronistic and Euro-centred admiration for respect for cultural diversities could be greatly reduced.

Note: This paper was developed from an earlier, shorter paper (Harris 2012a).

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