Some of the Evil of my Tale: Lawrence of Arabia

In late 1916, Thomas Edward Lawrence (1888-1935), a British intelligence officer stationed in Cairo, was assigned as a military liaison officer to the forces of Hussein bin Ali al-Hashimi, the Sharif of Mecca, who, with his sons Ali, Abdullah and Faisal had initiated the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Turks in June 1916. Lawrence quickly adapted to the ways of his hosts and gained their trust. Under his leadership, the Arabs took the city of Aqaba in July 1917. This allowed the British to supply both their own army and the Arab rebels as they advanced on Jerusalem and Damascus. Lawrence led the Arabs as they disrupted the Hejaz Railway, and harried the Turkish army. His exploits were recorded on film and widely publicized by the American journalist Lowell Thomas, from whom came the epithet "Lawrence of Arabia." Lawrence published a memoir of his experiences in 1927, *Revolt in the Desert*. A much more complete and introspective book on the Arab Revolt, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, was not formally published until after his death in 1935.

Early Life

Lawrence's father Sir Thomas Chapman (1846-1919) was a gentleman landowner in Ireland, who had married a vindictively religious wife and fathered four daughters. In the late 1870s he hired a young Scotswoman, Sarah Lawrence, as a governess for his daughters. He soon fell in love with Sarah, who became pregnant and gave birth to a son in 1885. After his wife finally found out, Chapman decided to leave his family and moved with Sarah to Wales, where he assumed her surname for the sake of respectability. In 1888, Thomas Edward, was born. Three more sons were born and in 1896 the "family" settled in

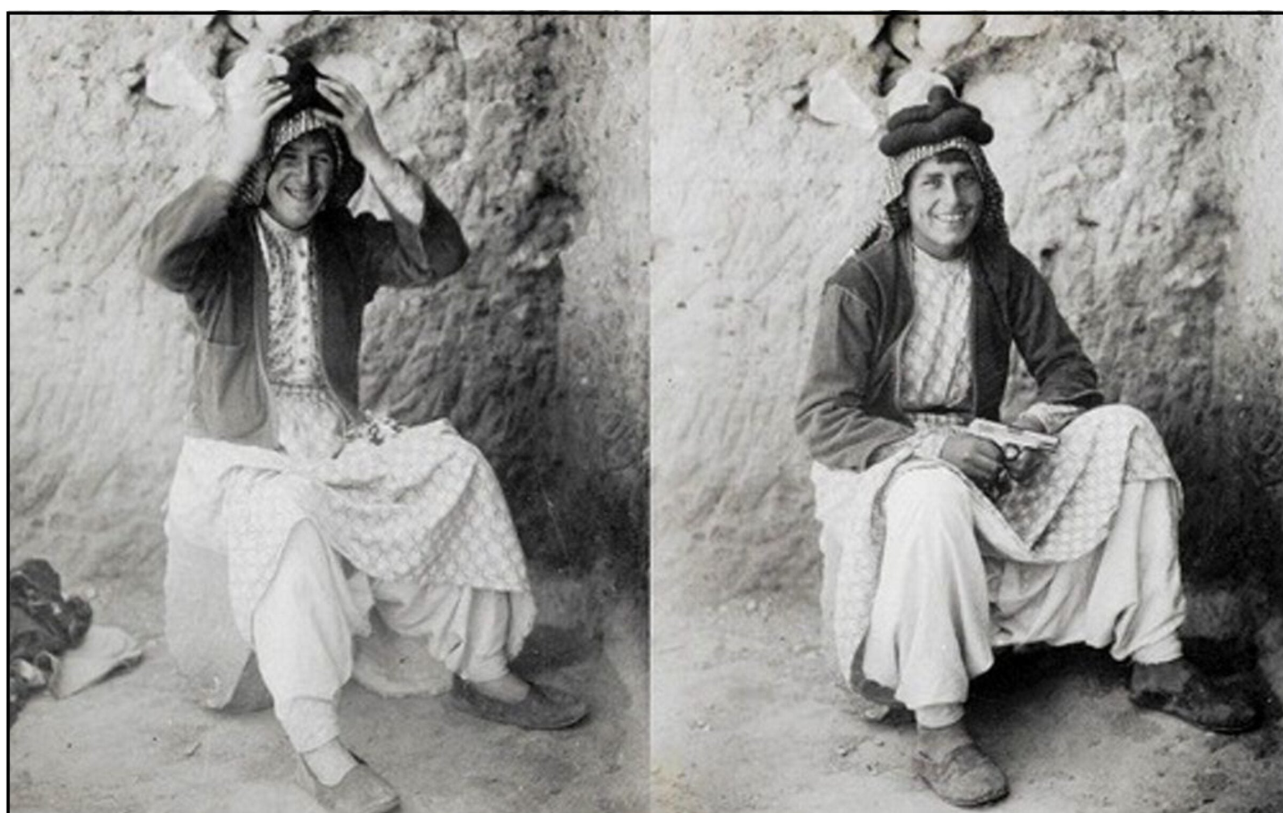
Oxford, where Lawrence and his brothers attended the City of Oxford High School for Boys.

Lawrence read history at Jesus College in Oxford. His honors thesis on the architecture of the Crusader castles (Lawrence, 1910) was based on a 3-month walking tour of Ottoman Syria in the summer of 1909. The main conclusion of the thesis was that Crusader castles followed the principles of European fortifications and did not absorb any influences from local architecture. The illustration below shows Lawrence's pen-and-ink sketch of the south-east corner of Sahyun castle.

Selim Ahmed

After graduating in 1910, Lawrence joined an archeological expedition to Carchemish to investigate the remains of the Hittite civilization (2nd millennium BCE), staying there until the outbreak of the war in 1914. While in Carchemish he took

an intelligent young Arab boy, Selim Ahmed (1896-1918), nicknamed “Dahoum” (dark one), as his apprentice (Sattin, 2014, pp 200-202; Wilson 1989, pp 543-545). Selim nursed him during a severe attack of dysentery in 1911. For the last three years of Lawrence’s time in Syria, the two of them lived together, Lawrence teaching Selim mathematics, English and photography, and Selim helping Lawrence with his Arabic. Their relationship was intense; no one knows whether it remained platonic or became physical. The following paired photographs show Lawrence (left) trying on Selim’s clothes.



In the introductory chapters of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1935, pp 39-40) Lawrence recalled a visit in 1912 with Dahoum to the Qasr of Ibn Wardan, a 6th Century Byzantine castle built by Justinian I near Hama in northern Syria (Sattin, 2024, pp 164-165 provides an earlier version of the story).

> The common base of the Semitic creeds, winners or losers, was the ever present idea of world-worthlessness. Their

profound reaction from matter led them to preach bareness, renunciation, poverty; and the atmosphere of this invention stifled the minds of the desert pitilessly. A first knowledge of their sense of the purity of rarefaction was given me in early years, when we had ridden far out over the rolling plains of North Syria to a ruin of the Roman period which the Arabs believed was made by a prince of the border as a desert-palace for his queen. The clay of its building was said to have been kneaded for greater richness, not with water, but with the precious essential oils of flowers. My guides, sniffing the air like dogs, led me from crumbling room to room, saying, ‘This is jessamine, this violet, this rose’.

But at last Dahoum drew me: ‘Come and smell the very sweetest scent of all’, and we went into the main lodging, to the gaping window sockets of its eastern face, and there drank with open mouths of the effortless, empty, eddyless wind of the desert, throbbing past. That slow breath had been born somewhere beyond the distant Euphrates and had dragged its way across many days and nights of dead grass, to its first obstacle, the man-made walls of our broken palace. About them it seemed to fret and linger, murmuring in baby-speech. ‘This,’ they told me, ‘is the best: it has no taste.’ My Arabs were turning their backs on perfumes and luxuries to choose the things in which mankind had had no share or part.

The Canadian poet, Gwendolyn MacEwen, wrote a set of poems about T. E. Lawrence. In one she recounts the visit to the Qasr of Ibn Wardani. The poem ends

We call
this room the sweetest of them all,

You said.

And I thought: *Because there is nothing here*.

I knew then that you possessed nothing of me, and I
possessed nothing of you, Dahoum.
You were wealthy and stuffed with a wondrous nothing
that filled the room and everything around.

You looked into my eyes, the windows to my soul,
and said that because they were blue
You could see right through them, holes in my skull,
to the quiet powerful sky beyond.

While he was in Carchemish, Lawrence began writing a book entitled *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* about the major cities of the Middle East (Aleppo, Beirut, Cairo, Constantinople, Damascus,

Smyrna, and Medina). The title comes from *Proverb*s 9:1:

> Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars

"Seven" had no specific meaning: it was just considered an auspicious number. Lawrence never completed the book and destroyed the drafts that he had written. He was later to use the title for his memoir of the Arab Revolt.

Soon after the war began, Lawrence enlisted and served in Cairo as an intelligence officer. Dahoum was given a stipend to stay at Carchemish to watch over the archeological site. Their halcyon days in northern Syria came to an end.

Lawrence dedicated *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* to S. A. He never explained who this was but almost everyone now agrees that it was Selim Ahmed (see Knightley & Simpson, 1969, pp 184-188, for reasoning). The book is prefaced with a poem to S. A. that begins

> I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into my hands
> and wrote my will across the sky in stars
> To earn you Freedom, the seven-pillared worthy house
> that your eyes might be shining for me
>
> When we came.

Dahoum died of typhus in 1918 before the Arab and British forces reached Damascus. Lawrence appears to have found this out in one of his trips behind the enemy lines. The epilogue to *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* begins

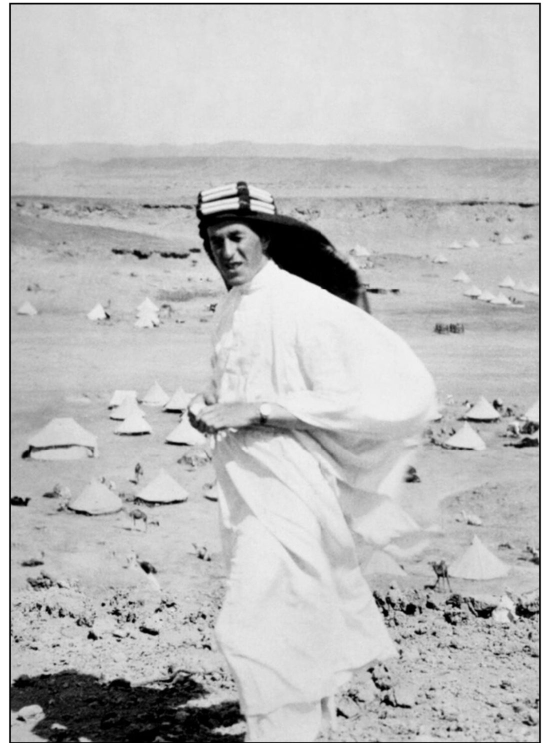
Damascus had not seemed a sheath for my sword, when I landed in Arabia: but its capture disclosed the exhaustion of my main springs of action. The strongest motive throughout had been a personal one, not mentioned here but present to me, I think, every hour of these two years. Active pains and joys might

fling up, like towers, among my days: but refluent as air, this hidden urge re-formed, to be the persisting element of life, till near the end. It was dead, before we reached Damascus.

Selim Ahmad was the private passion driving Lawrence as he led the Arab forces in their search for freedom.

The Beginnings of the Arab Revolt

In June, 2016, Hussein bin Ali al-Hashimi, the Sharif of Mecca, rebelled against Ottoman rule in the Hejaz (the western region of the Arabian Peninsula). By July his forces had captured the holy city of Mecca and the port of Jeddah. However, the Turks repulsed the Arabs when they tried to take Medina. The British hoped that the Arab Revolt would pin down Ottoman troops, and thereby assist the British in their advance into Palestine. In correspondence with Hussein, the British High Commissioner in Cairo, Sir Henry McMahon, made vague assurances of support for a self-governing Arabia from Palestine to the Indian Ocean and from Aleppo to Aden. The British likely thought that Husein’s revolt would not succeed, and that they would therefore not be required to fulfil their promises. Nevertheless, they sent Captain T. E. Lawrence to be a liaison officer with Hussein in October 1917. He identified Hussein’s son, Faisal bin al-Hussein bin Ali al-Hashemi, as the best leader of the Arab forces. Together they gathered together warriors from other tribes, and received supplies from the British in the Red-Sea ports of Yanbu and Weijh.



Faisal suggested that it would be much more comfortable for Lawrence to wear Arab clothes (see photograph on right):

> Suddenly Feisal asked me if I would wear Arab clothes like his own while in the camp. I should find it better for my own part, since it was a comfortable dress in which to live Arab-fashion as we must do. Besides, the tribesmen would then understand how to take me. The only wearers of khaki in their experience had been Turkish officers, before whom they took up an instinctive defence. If I wore Meccan clothes, they would behave to me as though I were really one of the leaders; and I might slip in and out of Feisal's tent without making a sensation which he had to explain away each time to strangers. I agreed at once, very gladly; for army uniform was abominable when camel-riding or when sitting about on the ground; and the Arab things, which I had learned to manage before the war, were cleaner and more decent in the desert. Hejris [Faisal's slave] was pleased, too, and exercised his fancy in fitting me out in splendid white silk and gold-embroidered wedding garments which had been sent to Feisal lately (was it a hint?) by his great-

aunt in Mecca (Lawrence, 1935, p 126).

The following photograph shows the Arab forces at Yanbu with Faisal at the head and Lawrence (in his new white robes) on a camel behind him.

Aqaba

In early 1917, Lawrence convinced Auda Abu Tayeh, known as the “Desert Falcon”, to join the Arab Revolt. Auda was the leader of the Howeitat, a Bedouin tribe in the western part of the Arabian desert. Auda, Sharif Nasr of Syria, Lawrence, and a group of about 50 fighters undertook an arduous journey from Wejh north into the desert. This journey was a clandestine route toward the port of Aqaba. If the Turks noted the Arabian forces, they would likely believe that they were headed further north toward Amman or Damascus. As thy came out of the desert, they attracted many local Arabs to their cause so that their numbers swelled to several hundred. They then turned toward the southwest, crossed the railway and attacked Aqaba.

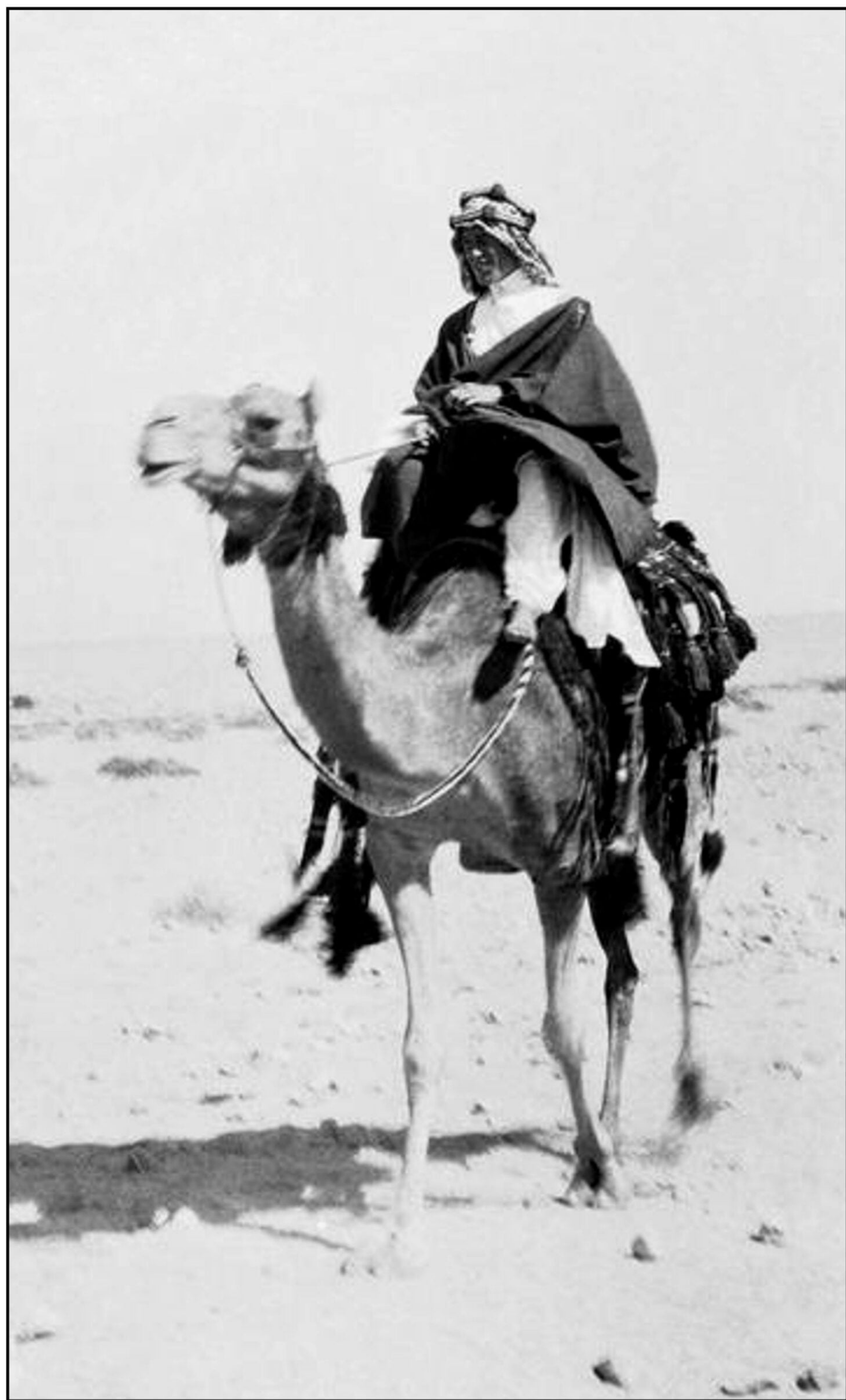
The map below shows the Arab route in purple. The port was impregnable from the sea – the British Royal Navy had unsuccessfully tried to take the city earlier in the war. However, it was not well defended from a land attack. Led by Auda and Lawrence, the Arab forces captured Aqaba in July 2017. The attack on Aqaba was one of the great scenes in David Lean's 1962 film *Lawrence of Arabia*. For the film, the town was recreated on a beach in Spain:

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/aqaba.mp4

After the capture of Aqaba, Lawrence and a few Arab companions rode by camel across the Sinai desert to Suez (dotted purple line on the map). He arranged for the British Navy to send money and supplies to Aqaba and to take the prisoners of war back to Egypt.

The British had not suggested that Lawrence urge the Arabs to capture Aqaba. Lawrence was acting on his own recognizance. The British likely wanted the Arab Revolt to stay confined to the southern regions of the Hejaz. The victory at Aqaba was crucial to the success of the Arab Revolt. Thenceforth, British could supply the Arabs as they moved northward toward Damascus.

The illustrations below show photographs of a flag bearer at the actual battle of Aqaba, and of Lawrence on his camel after the victory.

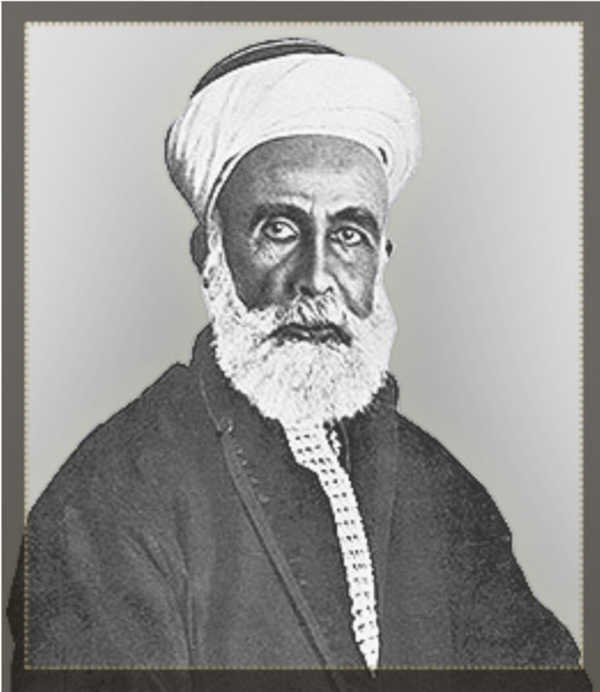


After returning to Aqaba from Egypt, Lawrence spent time in Wadi Rum with Faisal, who had come to join the forces of Auda in Aqaba. Wadi Rum was soon to serve as the base for the armored cars that the British supplied to aid the Arabs. The following photographs show the striking granite and sandstone cliffs around the Wadi and a spring that Lawrence found.

Lawrence (1935, p 355) described the spring:

> From this rock a silver runlet issued into the sunlight. I looked in to the spout, a little thinner than my wrist, jetting out firmly from a fissure in the roof, and falling with that clean sound into a shallow, frothing pool, behind the step which served as entrance. The walls and roof of the crevice dripped with moisture. Thick ferns and grasses of the finest green made it a paradise just five feet square. Upon the water-cleansed and fragrant ledge I undressed my soiled body, and stepped into the little basin, to taste at last a freshness of moving air and water against my tired skin. It was deliciously cool. I lay there quietly, letting the clear, dark red water run over me in a ribbly stream, and rub the travel-dirt away.

In Aqaba the Arab factions consolidated into a formidable fighting force. The main leaders of the Arab Revolt are illustrated below (photos from Arab Revolt website):



Hussein bin Ali al-Hashimi (1854-1931)

Ali bin Hussein bin Ali al-Hashimi (1879-1935)

Faisal bin al-Hussein bin Ali al-Hashemi (1885-1933)

Auda Abu Tayeh (1874-1924)

Asraq

After Aqaba was taken, Lawrence and the Arab forces moved to the north. Beginning in late 1917 Lawrence used the ruins of Qasr al Asraq about 100 km east of Amman as a desert base for attacking the Hejaz Railway and the Turkish troops that tried to keep it open.

The oasis of Asraq had been used since Roman times, though the

present ruins date from 1237 CE when ‘Izz ad-Din Aybak built a fortress there using basalt stone. Lawrence was particularly impressed by the huge stone doors in the gatehouse. Though each door weighed more than a ton they still swung shut:

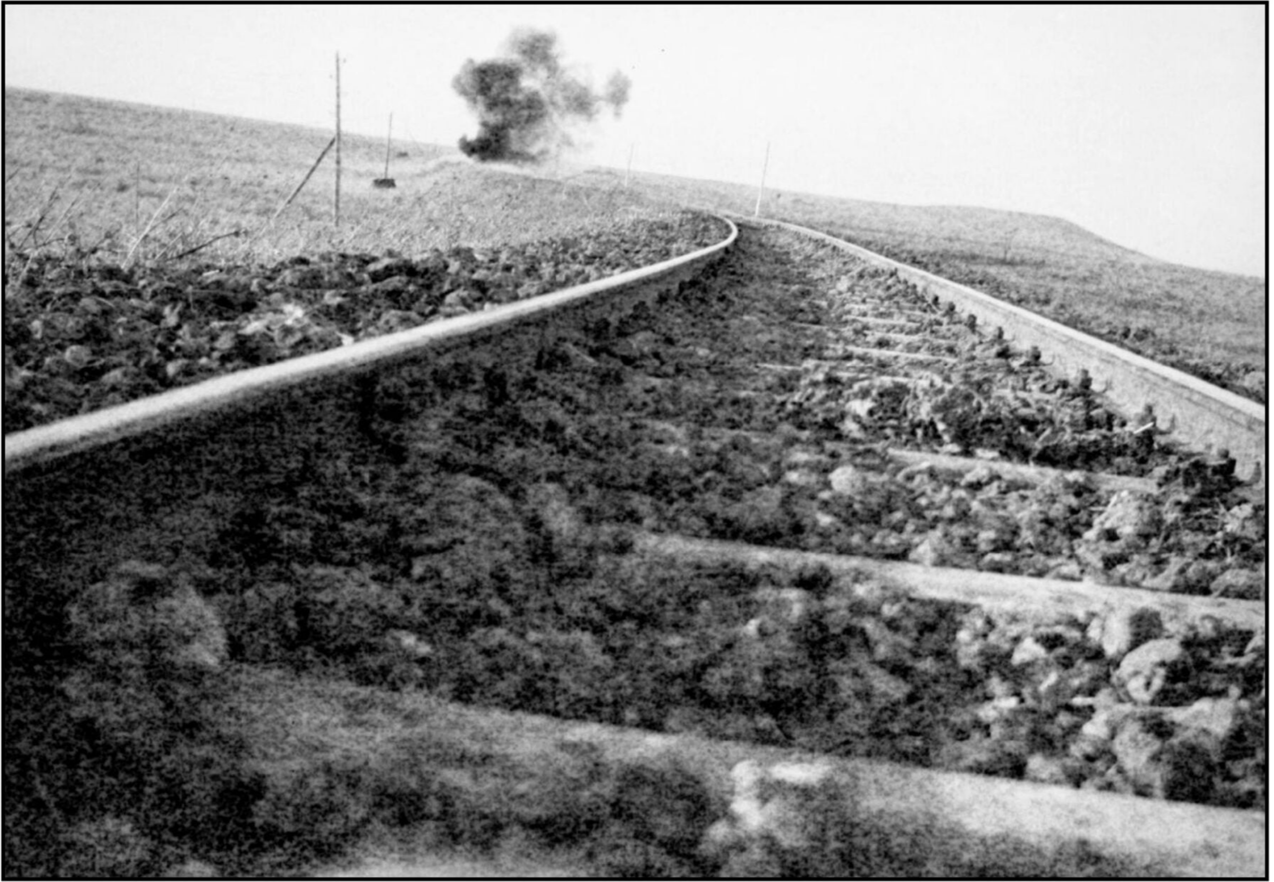
> The door was a poised slab of thick basalt, a foot thick, turning on pivots of itself, socketed into threshold and lintel. It took a great effort to start swinging and at the end went shut with a clang and crash which made tremble the west wall of the old castle (Lawrence, 1935, p 436)

Asraq was an oasis that the northern end of the Wadi Sirhan, the ancient trading route between Syria and Dumat-al Jandal in Arabia. Lawrence was fascinated by the site and its relation to the ancient (5th– and 6th Century CE) Syrian kingdoms of Ghassan and Hira:

> Then the blue fort on its rock above the rustling palms, with the fresh meadows and shining springs of water, broke on our sight. Of Azrak, as of Rumm, one said ‘Numen inest’. Both were magically haunted: but whereas Rumm was vast and echoing and God-like, Azrak’s unfathomable silence was steeped in knowledge of wandering poets, champions, lost kingdoms, all the crime and chivalry and dead magnificence of Hira and Ghassan. Each stone or blade of it was radiant with half-memory of the luminous, silky Eden, which had passed so long ago. (Lawrence, 1935, p 414).

The following illustration shows some recent photographs from the site:

The following are two of Lawrence's own photographs from his time in Asraq: one showing the explosion of a mine on the Hejaz Railway near Deraa and one showing the fort at Asraq:



The Incident in Deraa

The crucial episode in Lawrence's account of the Arab Revolt in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* happened in Deraa in late November, 1917. According to Lawrence (1935, Chapter 80), he went there dressed in Arab clothes together with Faris, an elderly Arab, to reconnoiter the approaches to the railway station. He was arrested by a Turkish soldier (who ignored his companion), and taken to the barracks. There he was cleaned up and, in the evening, presented to the Turkish governor (or 'Bey'), who called him beautiful and fondled him. Lawrence vehemently rejected these advances, and was sent out for a beating to teach him "everything." After a horrific whipping and a beating that apparently progressed to rape, Lawrence was taken back to the governor, who waved him off as "too torn and bloody for his bed." After his wounds were treated, Lawrence was left alone. He escaped and made his painful way back to Asraq. The following passages describing his experience in Deraa are from Chapter 80 of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1935):

> To keep my mind in control I numbered the blows, but after twenty lost count, and could feel only the shapeless weight of pain, not tearing claws, for which I had prepared, but a gradual cracking apart of my whole being by some too-great force whose waves rolled up my spine till they were pent within my brain, to clash terribly together. Somewhere in the place a cheap clock ticked loudly, and it distressed me that their beating was not in its time. I writhed and twisted, but was held so tightly that my struggles were useless. After the corporal ceased, the men took up, very deliberately, giving me so many, and then an interval, during which they would squabble for the next turn, ease themselves, and play unspeakably with me. This was repeated often, for what may have been no more than ten minutes. Always for the first of every new series, my head would be pulled round, to see how a hard white ridge, like a railway, darkening slowly into crimson, leaped over my skin at the

> instant of each stroke, with a bead of blood where two ridges crossed. As the punishment proceeded the whip fell more and more upon existing weals, biting blacker or more wet, till my flesh quivered with accumulated pain, and with terror of the next blow coming. They soon conquered my determination not to cry, but while my will ruled my lips I used only Arabic, and before the end a merciful sickness choked my utterance. …
>
> I remembered the corporal kicking with his nailed boot to get me up; and this was true, for next day my right side was dark and lacerated, and a damaged rib made each breath stab me sharply. I remembered smiling idly at him, for a delicious warmth, probably sexual, was swelling through me: and then that he flung up his arm and hacked with the full length of his whip into my groin. This doubled me half-over, screaming, or, rather, trying impotently to scream, only shuddering through my open mouth. One giggled with amusement. A voice cried, 'Shame, you've killed him'. Another slash followed. A roaring, and my eyes went black: while within me the core of life seemed to heave slowly up through the rending nerves, expelled from its body by this last indescribable pang. By the bruises perhaps they beat me further: but I next knew that I was being dragged about by two men, each disputing over a leg as though to split me apart: while a third man rode me astride. It was momently better than more flogging.

Lawrence concluded the account by stating that

> the citadel of my integrity had been irrevocably lost.

The incident was not mentioned in the early biographies (Thomas, 1924, Graves, 1927) and was omitted from *Revolt in the Desert* (Lawrence, 1927). Lidell Hart (1934) describes the beating but makes no mention of rape.

Richard Meinertzhagen (1959, pp 31-33) reported a conversation

with Lawrence in 1922:

> He went on to describe the indecency and degradation he suffered at the hands of the homosexual Turks. He did not intend to publish the true account of this incident as it was too degrading, 'had penetrated his innermost nature' and he lived in constant fear that the true facts would be known. He had been seized, stripped and bound; then sodomized by the governor of Deraa, followed by similar treatment by the Governor's servants. After this revolting behaviour he had been flogged.

Meinertzhagen reported seeing scars on Lawence's back: Lawrence attributed these wounds to being dragged across barbed wire in a camel accident. Unfortunately, the veracity of Meinertzhagen's report of his encounter with Lawrence has been questioned (Lockman, 1995).

When putting together the first version of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* in 1922, Lawrence wrote to his publisher Edward Garnett

> If that Deraa incident whose treatment you call severe and serene (the second sounds like a quaint failure to get my impressions across, but I know what you feel) had happened to yourself you would not have recorded it. I have a face of brass perhaps, but I put it into print very reluctantly, last of all the pages I sent to the press. For weeks I wanted to burn it in the manuscript: because I could not tell the story face to face with anyone, and I think I'll feel sorry, when I next meet you, that you know it. The sort of man I have always mixed with doesn't so give himself away. (Lawrence, 1938, p 358)

In a later letter to Charlotte Shaw in March 1924, Lawrence wrote

> About that night. I shouldn't tell you. because decent men don't talk about such things. I wanted to put it plain in the book, and wrestled for days with my self-respect … which

> wouldn’t. hasn’t, let me. For fear of being hurt, or rather to earn five minutes respite from a pain which drove me mad, I gave away the only possession we are born into the world with – our bodily integrity. Its an unforgivable matter, an irrecoverable position: and it’s that which has made me forswear decent living, and the exercise of my not-contemptible wits and talents. (Lawrence, 2000, p 70).

What actually happened in Deraa is not known. In the play *Ross* by Terence Rattigan (1960), the Turkish governor recognizes Lawrence. He instigates the beating in order to break the spirit of the man, something he considers preferable to making him a martyr. Though this is an intriguing speculation, it remains just that.

David Lean’s 1962 movie followed Lawrence’s account but showed only the beating. Jeremy Wilson’s careful and exhaustive biography (1989) accepts that what Lawrence reported actually happened. Other episodes in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* accord reasonably well with the historical record despite occasional exaggerations. For example, the camel ride from Aqaba to Suez was an impressive feat but it actually took longer than Lawrence described.

Lawrence’s recounting of the event in Deraa is overwrought. Some things could not have happened the way they were described. Lawrence could not have seen the effects of the whip on his back. The Bey in Deraa at that time was not known to be a homosexual: according to Lawrence James (1990. p 213), he appears to have been more of a womanizer. Some biographers (Barr, 2008) have therefore speculated that the episode was imagined. Desmond Stewart (1977, p 244) suggested that Lawrence’s report was a “transubstantiation” of a sadomasochistic relationship with Sharif Ali ibn al Hussein, but there is no evidence for this. Aldington (1955) accused Lawrence of exaggerating his military exploits, but still chose to accept that he was tortured and raped at Deraa (see Crawford, 1998, for how Aldington’s book was denigrated by

supporters of Lawrence). Korda's biography *Hero* (2010) quotes from *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and comments on the beating and the rape (p 349):

> There seems no good reason why Lawrence would have invented the incident – on the contrary, it seems like the kind of thing that he would have suppressed, had he not been determined to tell the whole truth even when it was distasteful and damaging to him. For he does not strain himself to come out of it with credit; it is not just his body but his spirit that was broken, and much of what happened in 1918 and what became of Lawrence later, after the war, would be incomprehensible except for Deraa.

Later in his life, Lawrence submitted himself to ritual beatings as a form of penance (Knightley & Simpson, 1969, pp 219-254; Simpson, 2008, p 286-299). However, we do not know if this type of activity predated Deraa, or occurred as a result of his experience there. My personal opinion is that Deraa was the beginning of Lawrence's masochism.

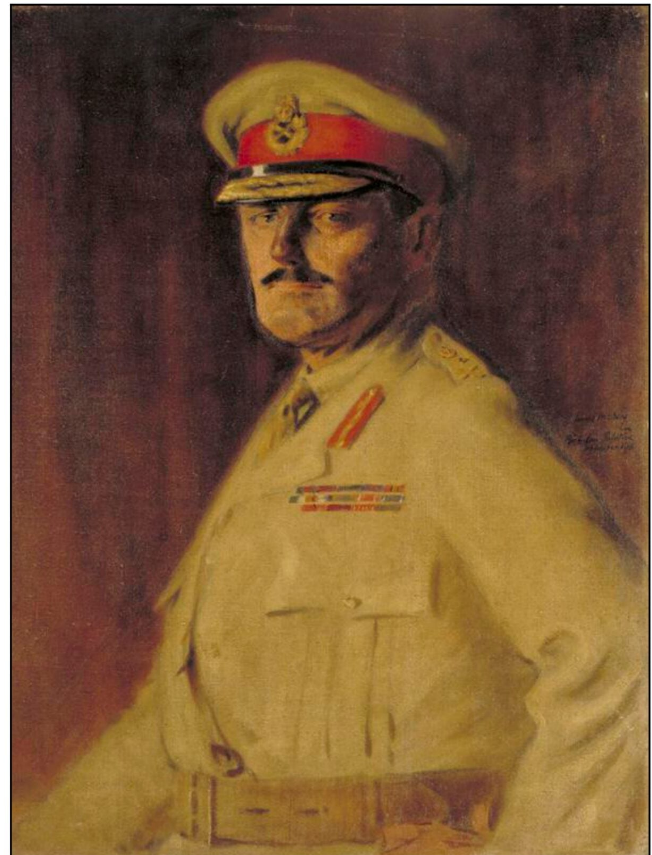
The Deraa episode is so striking that it requires interpretation. That he was tortured and raped during his captivity there makes sense with the strange and broken life that Lawrence was to lead after the war. This was likely why he included it in his book – as explanation and exculpation.

The Road to Damascus

While the Arab forces were harrying the Turks in the inland desert, General Edmund Allenby led British and Commonwealth forces across Sinai and into Palestine. The campaign was a marvel of logistics since the forces had to be constantly supplied with water, food and ammunition through a desert region with no railways. After several major battles with Turkish and German troops, Allenby prevailed and Jerusalem surrendered on December 9, 2017. Two days later, Allenby

entered the city through the Jaffa Gate. He came on foot to show appropriate reverence for the holy city. This was the first time that Jerusalem had not been under Muslim rule since 1247.

The following illustration shows a photograph of Allenby’s entry into Jerusalem and a 1918 portrait of the general by James McBey.



In February of 1918 Lowell Thomas, an American journalist met Lawrence in Jerusalem. The two men intrigued each other. On Lawrence’s invitation, Thomas came to Aqaba, bringing with him the camera man Henry Chase. Over the next several months Thomas and Chase reported Lawrence’s exploits in the desert. The film clips and slides later formed the basis for a multimedia show “With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia” that toured America and England in the years following the war. The name and the legend of “Lawrence of Arabia” derives mainly from Thomas. Lawrence was ambivalent about his

relationship to Thomas (Crawford & Berton, 1996). On the one hand he was fascinated by fame; on the other he wanted anonymity. Lawrence did not mention Thomas in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. The illustration below (from Thomas, 1924) shows a photograph of the two of them in Aqaba in March 1918, and Lowell's portrait of Lawrence in London in 1919.

As the Arab forces grew in strength and experience, they became able to face the Turks in fixed battles as well as guerilla attacks. Their first main encounter was at Tafileh just south of the Dead Sea in January 1918. After multiple attacks, retreats and counter-attacks, the Arabs prevailed. The surviving Turks were pursued toward the railway:

> As we turned back it began to snow; and only very late, and by a last effort did we get our hurt men in. The Turkish wounded lay out, and were dead next day. It was indefensible, as was the whole theory of war: but no special reproach lay on us for it. We risked our lives in the blizzard (the chill of victory bowing us down) to save our own fellows; and if our rule was not to lose Arabs to kill even many Turks, still less might we lose them to save Turks. (Lawrence, 1935, p 482)

In September 1918, the Arabs and Turks met at Tafas just north of Deraa. The Turkish troops had just massacred all the inhabitants of the village – men, women and children – as they retreated from Deraa. Tallal, one of the Arabs fighting with Lawrence, was from the village.

> Tallal had seen what we had seen. He gave one moan like a hurt animal; then rode to the upper ground and sat there a while on his mare, shivering and looking fixedly after the Turks. I moved near to speak to him, but Auda caught my rein and stayed me. Very slowly Tallal drew his head-cloth about his face; and then he seemed suddenly to take hold of himself, for he dashed his stirrups into the mare's flanks and galloped headlong, bending low and swaying in the saddle, right at the main body of the enemy.
>
> It was a long ride down a gentle slope and across a hollow. We sat there like stone while he rushed forward, the drumming of his hoofs unnaturally loud in our ears, for we had stopped shooting, and the Turks had stopped. Both armies waited for him; and he rocked on in the hushed evening till only a few lengths from the enemy. Then he sat up in the saddle and cried his war-cry, 'Tallal, Tallal', twice in a tremendous shout. Instantly their rifles and machine-guns crashed out, and he and his mare, riddled through and through with bullets, fell dead among the lance points.
>
> Auda looked very cold and grim. 'God give him mercy; we will take his price.' He shook his rein and moved slowly after the enemy. We called up the peasants, now drunk with fear and blood, and sent them from this side and that against the retreating column. (Lawrence, 1935, pp 631-632)

On Lawrence's orders, the Arabs took no prisoners that day. Lawrence had become an instrument of bloody war, and all compassion was lost in the frenzy of revenge.

Damascus finally surrendered on October 1, 2018, The British

and Commonwealth troops allowed the Arab forces to enter the city first. The war was won but the politics had only just begun:

> We passed to work. Our aim was an Arab Government, with foundations large and native enough to employ the enthusiasm and self-sacrifice of the rebellion, translated into terms of peace. We had to save some of the old prophetic personality upon a substructure to carry that ninety per cent of the population who had been too solid to rebel, and on whose solidity the new State must rest.
>
> Rebels, especially successful rebels, were of necessity bad subjects and worse governors. Feisal's sorry duty would be to rid himself of his war-friends, and replace them by those elements which had been most useful to the Turkish government. (Lawrence, 1935, p 649)

Faisal arrived a few days after the surrender of Damascus and met with General Allenby:

> They were a strange contrast: Feisal, large-eyed, colourless and worn, like a fine dagger; Allenby, gigantic and red and merry, fit representative of the Power which had thrown a girdle of humour and strong dealing round the world. (Lawrence, 1935, p 660)

Lawrence was exhausted. The following photograph shows him in Damascus. Once Feisal had arrived to take over the politics of government, Lawrence asked Allenby for leave to return to London.

Aftermath

With peace came politics. Fromkin's 1989 book on the creation of the modern Middle East takes as its title, *A Peace to End All Peace*, a quotation from Lord Wavell who had served under Allenby, and was present at the Paris Peace Talks (1919-20):

> After 'the War to end War' they seem to have been pretty successful in Paris at making a 'Peace to end Peace.'

In the Middle East, the politics of power soon came into conflict with the ideals of freedom and justice. In the correspondence between McMahon and Hussein in 1916, the Arabs had been promised an independent state that stretched across the whole of the Arabian Peninsula. However, the British had not thought that the Arab Revolt would be successful. They had therefore arranged with France, in an agreement negotiated by the diplomats Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot in 1916, to divide up the Ottoman Empire between them. And in 1917,

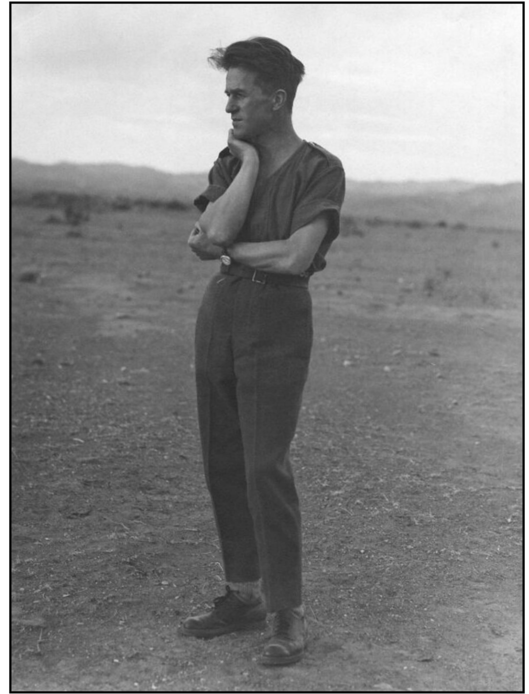
Britain’s Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, had also promised the Jews that they could find a “national home” in Palestine. And so, at the Paris Peace Conference (1920), Britain was given a mandate over Palestine, Jordan and Iraq, and France was given a similar mandate over Lebanon and Syria.

Arab leaders were granted titular kingships: Faisal bin Al-Hussein in Syria, and Abdullah bin Al-Hussein in Jordan. After Faisal rejected the French claim for a mandate in Syria in 1920, French forces invaded and Faisal was exiled. In 1921, the British arranged for Faisal to become king of Iraq. He remained king until his death in 1933. Abdullah was king of Jordan until his assassination in 1951. The Hashemites continue to this day as the royal family of Jordan. Hussein bin Ali al-Hashimi was recognized as the king of Hejaz. His eldest son, Ali bin Al-Hussein, remained in Hejaz as his heir. However, the Hashemites were soon challenged by Ibn Saud (1875-1953), who in 1932 unified most of the Arabian Peninsula into Saudi Arabia.

In the first few years after the war, Lawrence was celebrated as a hero. He and Faisal had their portraits painted by Augustus John in 1919:

Initially, Lawrence enjoyed his new fame. He began to write his memoir of the Arab Revolt, worked in the Foreign Office, served as an adviser to Secretary of State Winston Churchill, and attended the Peace Conferences in Paris. However, he soon became deeply depressed by the ongoing politics. He believed that he had betrayed his Arab friends. He felt guilty and longed for penance and anonymity.

In August, 1922, he enlisted in the Royal Air Force as a simple aircraftman under the name John Hume Ross. He wrote about the grueling and demeaning period of basic training in *The Mint* (posthumously published in 1955). The title likened the experience of raw recruits being converted into useful soldiers to the stamping out of coins from blank metal.



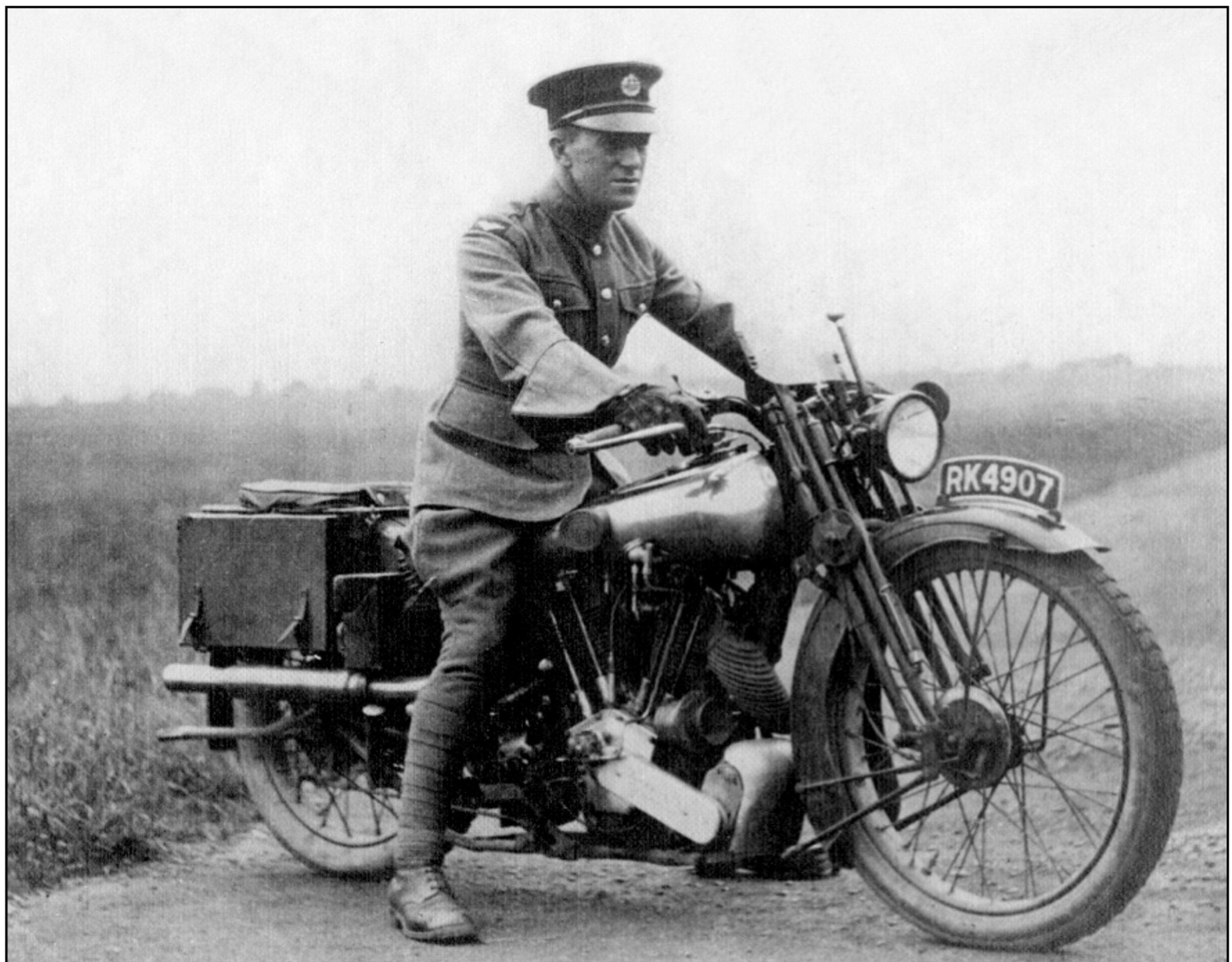
After his identity was disclosed, Lawrence changed his alias to T. E. Shaw (likely from his friendship with Bernard and Charlotte Shaw) and enlisted in the Royal Tank Corps in 1923. He transferred back to the Royal Air Force in 1925 and served until 1935 in various locations. The photograph at the right shows him in 1928 at an air force base in Miranshah in what is now Pakistan, a lonely man in a desolate landscape

In 1923, he had purchased a forester’s cottage (Clouds Hill) in Dorset near the Bovington Camp, where he served in the Tank Corps. Furnished with books and music, the cottage became his refuge. He returned to live there after leaving the Royal Air Force in 1935.

Lawrence continued to write through all these years of anonymity. He put together a limited publication (only 8 copies) of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* in 1922. Writing the memoir caused much anxiety and grief. An early version of the book was lost while changing trains at Reading station in 1919, and much of it had to be completely rewritten (Meyers, 1973). The

book was not formally published until after his death in 1935. However, Lawrence issued an abbreviated version of the book, *Revolt in the Desert,* in 1927. He also wrote a new translation of Homer's *Odyssey* in 1932. An anthology of the poems he had enjoyed, *Minorities* (1971), and *The Mint* (1955) were published posthumously.

The Death of a Hero



Lawrence loved the experience of speed. He bought his first Brough SS100, the fastest production motorcycle in the world, in 1922, and over the years before his death owned six more models of the motorcycle, which he called *Boanerges* ("son of thunder,' the name that Christ gave to his disciples, the brothers James and John). The fifth of these motorcycles

(1927) is illustrated above. In Chapter 16 of *The Mint* (written in 1929 but not published until after his death), he describes racing on his motorcycle with an airplane:

> Another bend: and I have the honour of one of England' straightest and fastest roads. The burble of my exhaust unwound like a long cord behind me. Soon my speed snapped it, and I heard only the cry of the wind which my battering head split and fended aside. The cry rose with my speed to a shriek: while the air's coldness streamed like two jets of iced water into my dissolving eyes. I screwed them to slits, and focused my sight two hundred yards ahead of me on the empty mosaic of the tar's gravelled undulations.
>
> Like arrows the tiny flies pricked my cheeks: and sometimes a heavier body, some house-fly or beetle, would crash into face or lips like a spent bullet. A glance at the speedometer: seventy-eight. Boanerges is warming up. I pull the throttle right open, on the top of the slope, and we swoop flying across the dip, and up-down up-down the switchback beyond: the weighty machine launching itself like a projectile with a whirr of wheels into the air at the take-off of each rise, to land lurchingly with such a snatch of the driving chain as jerks my spine like a rictus.
>
> Once we so fled across the evening light, with the yellow sun on my left, when a huge shadow roared just overhead. A Bristol Fighter, from Whitewash Villas, our neighbour aerodrome, was banking sharply round. I checked speed an instant to wave: and the slip-stream of my impetus snapped my arm and elbow astern, like a raised flail. The pilot pointed down the road towards Lincoln. I sat hard in the saddle, folded back my ears and went away after him, like a dog after a hare. Quickly we drew abreast, as the impulse of his dive to my level exhausted itself.
>
> The next mile of road was rough. I braced my feet into the rests, thrust with my arms, and clenched my knees on the

> tank till its rubber grips goggled under my thighs. Over the first pot-hole Boanerges screamed in surprise, its mud-guard bottoming with a yawp upon the tyre. Through the plunges of the next ten seconds I clung on, wedging my gloved hand in the throttle lever so that no bump should close it and spoil our speed. Then the bicycle wrenched sideways into three long ruts: it swayed dizzily, wagging its tail for thirty awful yards. Out came the clutch, the engine raced freely: Boa checked and straightened his head with a shake, as a Brough should.

On May 13, 1935, Lawrence had a fatal accident while riding his motorcycle from Bovington Camp to his cottage Clouds Hill. He was not driving at great speed: the inquest found that his motorcycle was in second gear when it crashed, a gear with a top speed of 38 mph. However, Lawrence had suddenly came upon two boys cycling on the narrow road: he braked, skidded, and lost control. He was thrown over the handlebars and his head struck the road. Comatose, he was taken to the hospital at Bovington Camp. Lawence never regained consciousness and died on May 19. Hugh Cairns, a young Australian neurosurgeon from Oxford, came to consult on his case. Later in his life, Cairns investigated the epidemiology of concussion and promoted the use of crash helmets for motorcyclists (Hughes, 2001)

The Seven Pillars of Wisdom

Lawrence was deeply impressed by the power of the desert. In his introductory chapters to *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, he discussed how the desert had been the source for three of the world's great religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He remarked on the Semitic people (p 39):

> Their largest manufacture was of creeds: almost they were monopolists of revealed religions. Three of these efforts had endured among them: two of the three had also borne

> export (in modified forms) to non-Semitic peoples. Christianity, translated into the diverse spirits of Greek and Latin and Teutonic tongues, had conquered Europe and America. Islam in various transformations was subjecting Africa and parts of Asia. These were Semitic successes. Their failures they kept to themselves. The fringes of their deserts were strewn with broken faiths.
>
> It was significant that this wrack of fallen religions lay about the meeting of the desert and the sown. It pointed to the generation of all these creeds. They were assertions, not arguments; so they required a prophet to set them forth. The Arabs said there had been forty thousand prophets: we had record of at least some hundreds. None of them had been of the wilderness; but their lives were after a pattern. Their birth set them in crowded places. An unintelligible passionate yearning drove them out into the desert. There they lived a greater or lesser time in meditation and physical abandonment; and thence they returned with their imagined message articulate, to preach it to their old, and now doubting, associates. The founders of the three great creeds fulfilled this cycle: their possible coincidence was proved a law by the parallel life-histories of the myriad others, the unfortunate who failed, whom we might judge of no less true profession, but for whom time and disillusion had not heaped up dry souls ready to be set on fire. To the thinkers of the town the impulse into Nitria [one of the earliest Christian monastic communities, located in the Egyptian desert] had ever been irresistible, not probably that they found God dwelling there, but that in its solitude they heard more certainly the living word they brought with them.

The desert provided the context to what happened to Lawrence in Arabia. The faith he sought, fought for, and ultimately lost was freedom. Swedenborg (1789, pp 59-60) had described freedom as the second of the great laws that man lives by:

> The first law, that man from sense and perception shall have no other knowledge than that he is endowed with life, but shall still acknowledge that the goods and truths originating in love and faith, which he thinks, wills, speaks, and does, are not from himself but from the Lord, presupposes the second, that man has freedom, and that it is also to appear as his own.

The opening paragraphs of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* provide the essence of Lawrence's story:

> Some of the evil of my tale may have been inherent in our circumstances. For years we lived anyhow with one another in the naked desert, under the indifferent heaven. By day the hot sun fermented us; and we were dizzied by the beating wind. At night we were stained by dew, and shamed into pettiness by the innumerable silences of stars. We were a self-centred army without parade or gesture, devoted to freedom, the second of man's creeds, a purpose so ravenous that it devoured all our strength, a hope so transcendent that our earlier ambitions faded in its glare.
>
> As time went by our need to fight for the ideal increased to an unquestioning possession, riding with spur and rein over our doubts. Willy-nilly it became a faith. We had sold ourselves into its slavery, manacled ourselves together in its chain-gang, bowed ourselves to serve its holiness with all our good and ill content. The mentality of ordinary human slaves is terrible – they have lost the world – and we had surrendered, not body alone, but soul to the overmastering greed of victory. By our own act we were drained of morality, of volition, of responsibility, like dead leaves in the wind.

Jim Norton provides a reading of these words:

https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/seven-pillars-jim-norton.mp3

Jeffrey Myers (2016, pp 114-115) summarizes the life of Lawrence and the importance of the events described in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

> *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926) is the story of Lawrence's growth in personal and political awareness. The meaning of the book is determined by the juxtaposition of his psychological needs and the pattern of historical events, by the conflict between the man who acts and the conditions of his action. Lawrence's role in the Arab Revolt combined self-discipline with freedom and power, and his devotion to the higher cause of a 'holy war' enabled him to define his identity. But for Lawrence this self-discovery was destructive rather than enlightening. He gradually realized that he had been transformed from a man who had once valued each human life and had given himself in the service of freedom, to one who had been caught up in a repellent and fascinating slaughter and had lost his idealism. When he was tortured and raped at Deraa, this insight deepened into the horrible realization that he had achieved sexual pleasure from physical pain.
>
> The Deraa experience completely destroyed his elaborately constructed network of defences and exposed his all-too-human vulnerability, broke his spirit and extinguished the possibilities of creative freedom. This crucial moment – what Erik Erikson calls 'The Event', or culmination and turning point of a man's experience – dramatizes the central opposition of body and will, and forms the core of *Seven Pillars* as well as of Lawrence's life.
>
> Lawrence's post-war career – his political activities, the composition of *Seven Pillars,* the enlistment in the ranks, the flagellations and even the suicidal motorcycle rides – followed inevitably from the events described in the book.

As a visual summary of his life, we can consider two portrait sketches of Lawrence by Augustus John, one at the height of

his fame in 1919 and one from the period of anonymity in 1929

References

Aldington, R. (1955). *Lawrence of Arabia: a biographical enquiry*. Collins.

Barr, J. (2006). *Setting the desert on fire: T.E. Lawrence and Britain's secret war in Arabia, 1916-18*. Bloomsbury.

Crawford, F. D. (1998). *Richard Aldington and Lawrence of Arabia: a cautionary tale*. Southern Illinois University Press.

Crawford, F. D., & Berton, J. A. (1996). How well did Lowell Thomas know Lawrence of Arabia? *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, *39*(3), 298-318.

Erikson, E. H. (1964). *Insight and responsibility*. W. W. Norton

Fromkin, D. (1989). *A peace to end all peace: creating the modern Middle East, 1914-1922*. André Deutsch.

Graves, R. (1927). *Lawrence and the Arabs.* Jonathan Cape.

Hughes, J. T. (2001). Lawrence of Arabia and Hugh Cairns: crash helmets for motorcyclists. *Journal of Medical Biography*, *9*(4), 236–240.

James, L. (1990). *The golden warrior: the life and legend of Lawrence of Arabia*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Knightley, P., & Simpson, C. (1969). *The secret lives of Lawrence of Arabia.* Nelson.

Korda, M. (2010). *Hero: the life and legend of Lawrence of Arabia*. Harper.

Lawrence, T. E. (1910, publicly printed 1936). *Crusader castles*. Golden Cockerel Press (also reprinted by Folio Society, 2010).

Lawrence, T. E. (1922, edited by Wilson, J., & Wilson, N., 2003). *Seven pillars of wisdom: a triumph: the complete 1922 text*. Castle Hill.

Lawrence, T. E. (1927). *Revolt in the desert*. Garden City Publishing (Doubleday, Doran).

Lawrence, T. E. (1932). *The Odyssey of Homer*. Oxford University Press.

Lawrence, T. E. (1935). *Seven pillars of wisdom, a triumph*. Garden City Publishing (Doubleday, Doran).

Lawrence, T. E. (edited by D, Garnett, 1938). *The letters of T. E. Lawrence*. Jonathan Cape.

Lawrence, T. E. (1955). *The mint: a day-book of the R.A.F. depot between August and December 1922, with later notes by 352087 A/c Ross*. Jonathan Cape.

Lawrence, T. E. (1971). *Minorities*: *Good poems by small poets and small poems by good poets.* Jonathan Cape.

Lawrence, T. E. (edited by J. Wilson & N. Wilson, 2000). *T. E. Lawrence: correspondence with Bernard and Charlotte Shaw*. Castle Hill Press.

Lean, D. (dir., 1962, DVD 2003). *Lawrence of Arabia*. Columbia Pictures.

Liddell Hart, B. H. (1934). *T. E. Lawrence: in Arabia and after*. Jonathan Cape.

Lockman, J. N. (1995). *Meinertzhagen's diary ruse, false entries on T. E. Lawrence*. Cornerstone Publications.

MacEwen, G. (1982). *The T.E. Lawrence poems*. Mosaic Press/Valley Editions.

Meinertzhagen, R. (1959). *Middle East diary, 1917-1956.* Thomas Yoseloff

Meyers, J. (1973). The revisions of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, *88*(5), 1066–1082.

Meyers, J. (2016). Chapter VIII. T. E. Lawrence: *Seven Pillars of Wisdom.* In *Homosexuality and literature: 1890-1930*. (pp 114-130). Bloomsbury.

Rattigan, T. (1960). *Ross*. Hamish Hamilton.

Sattin, A. (2015). *The young T. E. Lawrence*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Simpson, A. R. B. (2008). *Another life: Lawrence after Arabia*. Spellmount.

Stewart, D. (1977). *T. E. Lawrence*. Hamish Hamilton.

Swedenborg, E. (1760, posthumously published, 1789, anonymously translated, 1867). *The Athanasian Creed*. New Jerusalem.

Thomas, L. (1924). *With Lawrence in Arabia*. Century Co.

Wilson, J. (1989). *Lawrence of Arabia: the authorised biography of T.E. Lawrence*. Heinemann.

Stonehenge

Over five thousand years ago the Neolithic people of Britain began to erect a monumental stone structure known as "Stonehenge" on the Salisbury Plain. The name likely means "hanging" or "suspended" stones. The structure underwent several changes over the years of its construction, reaching its final form around 2000 BCE.

The stones are of two kinds. The largest are the sarsens, which have their origin in the hills about 40 km north of Stonehenge. The word "sarsen," first used at the time of the Crusades, comes from "Saracen" and essentially means "pagan."

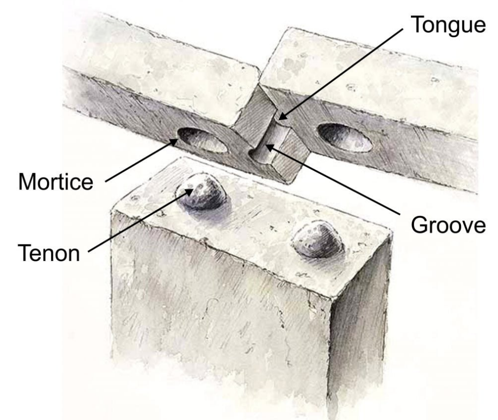
The smaller bluestones come from the Preseli Mountains in Southwest Wales 240 km away. Most archaeologists currently believe that these were transported across the Bristol Channel and then overland to Stonehenge. The bluestones may have been used in several ways during the different periods of construction. In the final form of the monument they are arranged within the outer circle of sarsens and within the inner horseshoe of larger sarsens.

The monument has long been a symbol of ancient Britain. Over the years, however, our understanding of it has changed radically. This posting considers how Stonehenge has interacted with the British imagination. Because of its striking appearance, images are given as much space as words.

Past and Present Structure

The following figure shows a photograph of the monument taken from the Southwest by Diego Delso in 2014. A larger version of the photograph is available from Wikipedia.

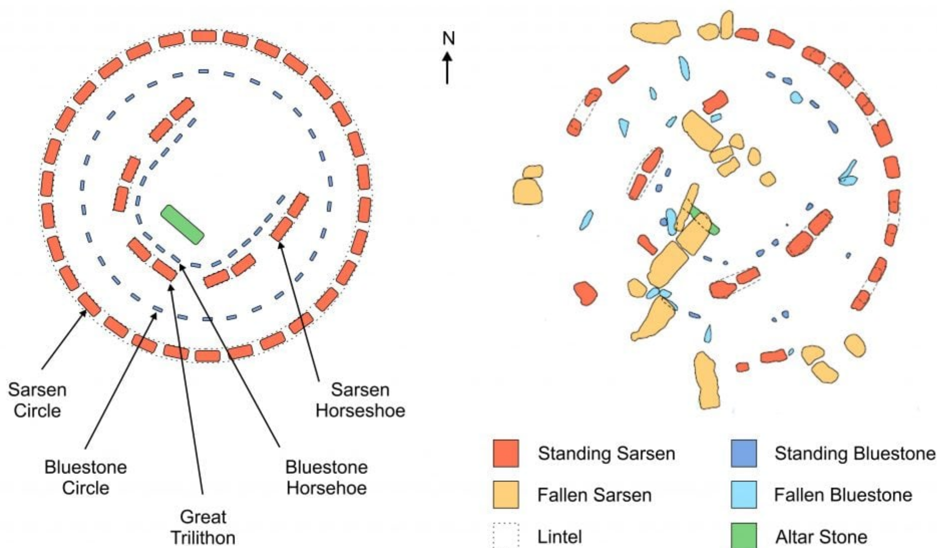
In the center of the figure is a large standing stone – the only stone still upright from the great trilithon ("three stones" – two erect stones with a superimposed lintel). At its top is a small peak representing the tenon of a mortice-and-tenon joint that served to maintain the lintel on top of the two uprights.



Behind and to the right of this central stone can be seen the surviving arches of the outer sarsen circle. The lintels on this circle are held in position using tongue-in-groove as well as mortice-and-tenon joints. These techniques are similar to those used in woodworking (Chippindale, 2012, p 12; Johnson, 2008, pp 142-148). The figure on the right (modified from the English Heritage site) illustrates these procedures.

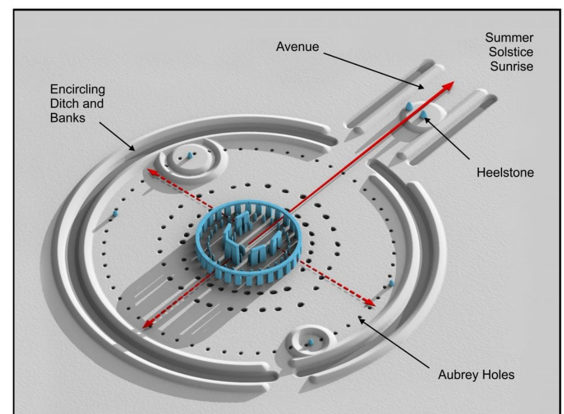
Many of the original stones have collapsed. Some fallen stones were probably long ago broken up and used for other buildings.

Others lie on the ground; others are buried. Most of the sarsens on the south and west of the outer circle fell and vanished long ago. The following figure shows on the left a diagram of how the monument might have been in 2000 BCE (based on Johnson, 2008, p. 166). and on the right a plan of the present site (modified from the English Heritage Webpage).



The outer ring of sarsens with the superimposed lintels rose almost 5 m above the ground. The trilithons of the inner sarsen horseshoe varied in height: those at the open end of the horseshoe were about 6 m high, the adjacent trilithons a little higher and the great trilithon at the center of the horseshoe almost 7.5 m. The bluestones are much smaller and quite variable in size and shape. The illustration below shows a digital model by Hypnagogia of how the completed monument might have appeared as viewed from the Northeast at sunrise.

The great trilithon collapsed long ago. The eastern upright broke in two over the altar stone. The western upright fell only halfway and was for many years held up at an angle by the inner bluestone. It was re-erected and stabilized in 1901. The first set of stones whose fall is historically recorded is the southwestern trilithon which collapsed in 1797. It was re-erected in 1958.



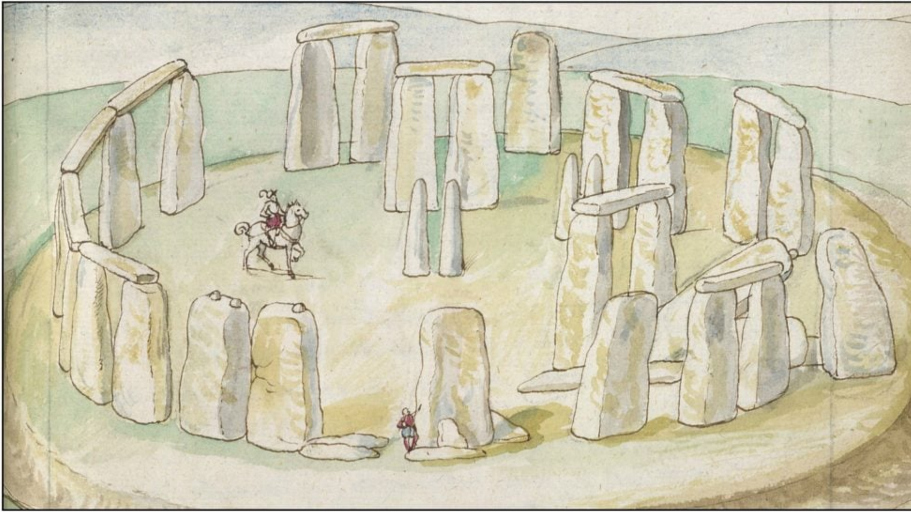
As shown on the right, the standing stones are at the center of a larger circle marked by a ditch and by the Aubrey Holes. These are the oldest part of the monument, predating the sarsens by several hundred years. Parker Pearson (2012, pp 181-186) has suggested that the Aubrey Holes may have been the

original location of the bluestones, which were later removed and placed within the sarsen monument.

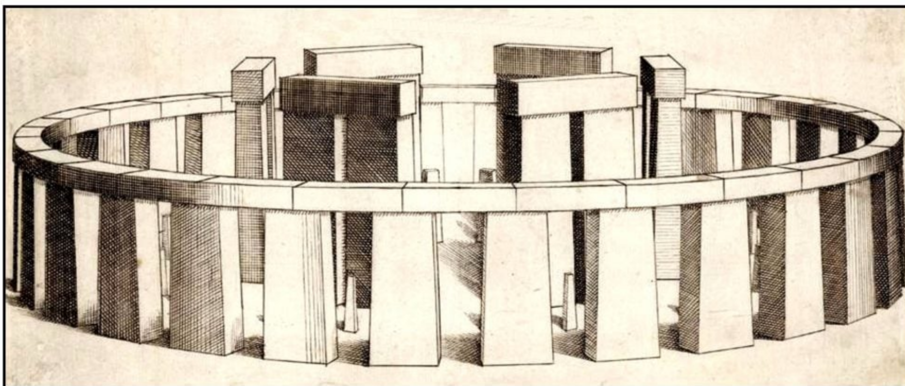
Early Views of Stonehenge

One of the earliest accounts of Stonehenge occurs in Geoffrey of Monmouths's *History of the Kings of Britain* (1136). Chapters 10 to 12 of Book 8 provide a fanciful tale of the stones being erected by giants under the supervision of Merlin, the sage of the Arthurian legends. The Egerton 3028 manuscript in the British Library contains an illustration of this story.

The first "realistic" depiction of Stonehenge was a 1575 watercolour by Lucas De Heere, a Flemish refugee in England. The painting shows the general size and arrangement of the stones as viewed from the Northwest but is woefully incorrect in its detail (Chippindale, 2012, pp 33-35). The most glaring error is that the monolith of the great trilithon is depicted as leaning outwards rather than inwards.



The great English architect Inigo Jones studied the monument in the 17th Century. John Webb collected Jones' notes and published them posthumously in 1655 in a book entitled *The Most Notable Antiquity of Great Britain, Vulgarly called Stone-Heng on Salisbury Plain*. Jones thought that the stones were erected as a temple by the Romans during their occupation of Britain. He considered the ancient Britons too savage to have built a monument of such perfectly classical proportions.



This idea was disputed by John Aubrey, the author of the famous *Brief Lives*, who published his *Monumenta Britannica* in 1665. He made a careful study of the Stonehenge site and noted the circle of chalk pits around the stone monument, which are still called Aubrey Holes (Johnson, 2008, p. 57). He pointed out that the Britain and Ireland contained multiple Neolithic monuments and stone circles, and that many of these were in areas where the Romans had never penetrated. He therefore suggested that they were erected by the Britons as "Temples of the Druids" (Hill,

2008, p 33).

Aubrey’s proposal was promoted by William Stukeley, a friend of Isaac Newton. He published *Stonehenge, A Temple Restor’d to the British Druids* in 1740. Initially he had made some accurate observations of Stonehenge: he was the first to notice the “avenue” leading to Stonehenge from the Northeast (Chapter 8), and he noted that the monument and the avenue were oriented along a line pointing to the sunrise at the summer solstice (Chippindale, 2012, p. 75).

Imaginative Interpretations of Stonehenge

However, Stukeley soon let his imagination take over, and he concocted a narrative of how the Jewish patriarchs had visited England in ancient times with the Phoenicians (Chippindale, 2012, Chapter 8; Lewis Williams & Pearce, 2005, pp 169-172; Hill, 2008, pp. 39-49). This was all part of a grand universal history of humanity, with the pure original religion being initially subverted by idolatry and then restored by Jesus. He considered Stonehenge as a temple of this primordial religion, where divine observances were conducted by the Celtic Druids. Stukeley was so enthusiastic about these ideas that he took to calling himself Chyndonax, Prince of the Druids. His work has exerted a tremendous influence on the popular views of Stonehenge. Modern dating methods have shown that Stonehenge was built by Neolithic Britons more than a thousand years before the Iron-Age Celts (who only became evident in Britain by after 1000 BCE). Nevertheless, to this day druids still conduct services at Stonehenge on the days of the summer solstice.

Some of Stukeley’s ideas are present in William Blake’s poem *Jerusalem*:

> And did those feet in ancient time,
> Walk upon England’s mountains green:
> And was the holy Lamb of God,

On England’s pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England’s green & pleasant Land

Hubert Parry’s 1916 musical setting of this poem has become an extremely popular anthem, traditionally sung with great fervor and flag-waving on the last night of the Proms.

Blake’s poem is contained in the preface to his illuminated book *Milton a Poem* (1811). The poem deals with the need for the creative imagination to liberate mankind from slavery to established morality. Some illustrations of megaliths (e. g. part of page 4 shown on the right) are included in this long poem, and at times Blake seems to suggest these as evidence of religion’s Satanic power over the people. Some interpreters have even considered the “Satanic Mills” of the second verse of the prefatory poem mean the established churches rather than the cotton mills of the industrial revolution.

However, Blake’s view of Stonehenge was ambiguous. The last page of a later illuminated book *Jerusalem: The emanation of*

the giant Albion. (1821) contains a striking image:

The central male figure is Los, the personification of imaginative energy, with the hammer and tongs he uses to create. On the left is his spectre carrying the sun. On the right is his emanation, Enitharmon, the female personification of spiritual beauty. She holds what appears to be a spindle, from which descend the threads of life. Below them is a serpentine line of trilithons with a central circle similar to the Stonehenge. The meaning of this final image is not clear. In his notes to the facsimile edition of the book, Paley suggests that these structures may represent the creation of Jerusalem in England. However, the words of a prophet can be difficult to understand.

Romanticism

J. M. W. Turner visited Stonehenge in 1799. He made several drawings of the ruins. The following small sketch represents a view from the West.

In 1827 he created a watercolor based on his earlier sketches. The final painting depicts Stonehenge during a storm. Lightning strikes the ground in the middle of the ruin, killing many sheep and the shepherd who lies in the right foreground. The shepherd's dog howls disconsolately. An 1829 engraving of this image became very popular, appealing to the public's new romantic fascination with the unrestrained power of nature:

John Constable's 1835 watercolor of Stonehenge also sets the monument in a scene of great natural power. The view is from the South. In the North are dark storm clouds, onto which the sun has cast a double rainbow. At the time of this painting, Constable was grieving for his recently deceased wife. The

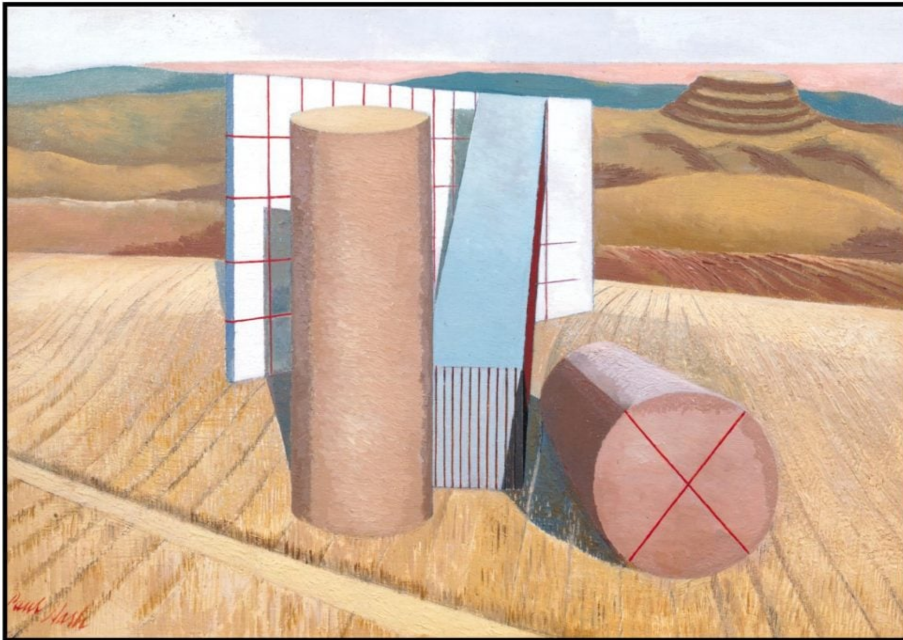
painting is imbued with sadness; the rainbows are drained of color.

Constable (quoted in Chippindale, 2012, p 105) provided a caption when his painting was first exhibited:

> The mysterious monument of Stonehenge, standing remote on a bare and boundless heath, as much unconnected with the events of past ages as it is with the uses of the present, carries you back beyond all historical recall into the obscurity of a totally unknown period.

Modernism and Stonehenge

The Romantic approach to Stonehenge does not do justice to its austere beauty. However, Modernism also fails to capture the essence of the site. The following is a 1935 painting by Paul Nash entitled *Equivalents for the Megaliths*. Large geometric shapes are set down in a stylized English landscape. The painting does not convey the power of Stonehenge or the other megalithic monuments, though it does suggest their incomprehensibility.

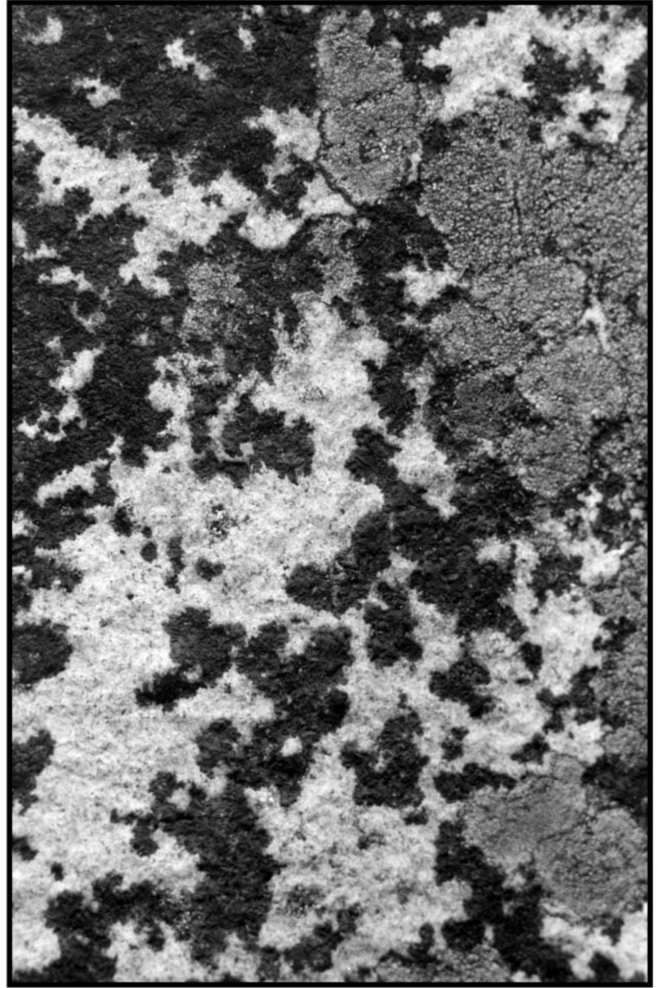


John Piper’s ink-and-wash painting from 1981 is more successful. This considers Stonehenge form the point of view of a Romantic Modernist.

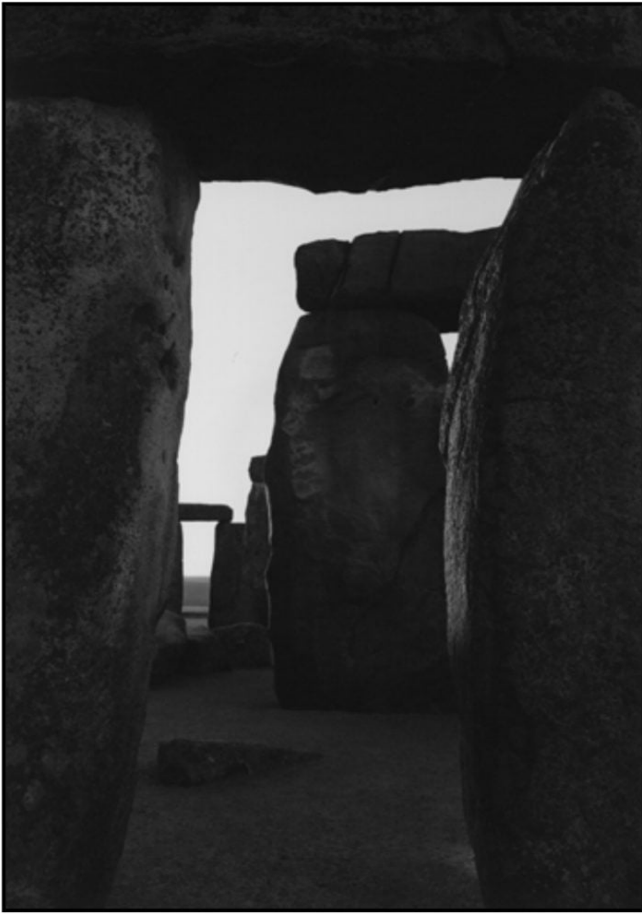
Photographs of Stonehenge

Photographs provide a realistic view of Stonehenge. The following is the first known photograph, a calotype by William Russell Sedgfield in 1853 (copied from Chippindale, p.149). The view is from the west. A carriage stands by the leaning upright of the great trilithon.

Photographs also provide a record of the reconstruction. The following photograph by John Piper shows the upright resurrected. This photograph was taken before the 1958 reconstruction of the southwestern trilithon (which can be seen in the 2014 photograph at the beginning of this posting).



John Piper in another undated photograph in the Tate Britain collection focuses on the surface of one of the stones. In so doing he captures their very tactile impression. Unlike other megaliths, the stones at Stonehenge were dressed using stone axes so that their inner surfaces were smooth. Over the years lichen have painted upon them in an abstract expressionist style.

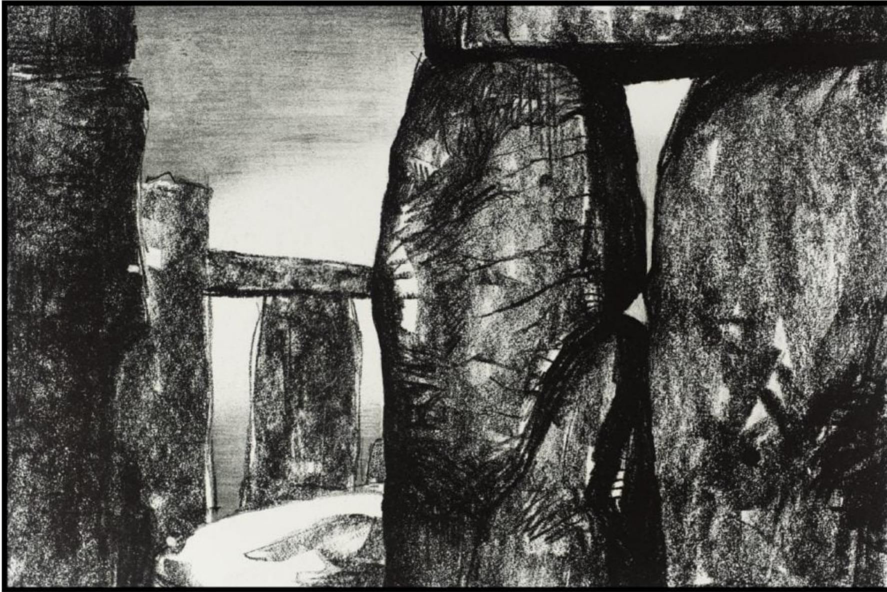


Photographs can give a sense of the place as well as providing a simple record. The photograph to the left by Paul Caponigro is entitled *Inner Trilithon through Circle Stones, Stonehenge* (1970). Caponigro published a large book of photographs of the Neolithic monuments in Britain, Ireland and France in 1986. The outer reaches of Europe contain numerous stone structures dating back to several thousand years BCE (Mohen, 1999)

Prints of the Stones

Print-makers have been very successful in capturing the form and feeling of Stonehenge. Perhaps they are more comfortable with stones, since they work closely with them in lithography. Their prints concentrate on how the light plays on the monument. They tend to consider the monument in part rather than in whole. On the right is a 1961 aquatint print by Julian Trevelyan.

Henry Moore made a series of lithographs of Stonehenge in 1973. All are available at the Tate Britain website. Below is *Stonehenge IV*:



On the right is a 1974 intaglio by Norman Stevens. Stonehenge at night has a brooding majesty.

Nature of Stonehenge

What purpose did Stonehenge serve? Many fanciful explanations have been proposed with little support other than the imagination (Hutton, 2013). Any ideas that the site served as a place for living are completely dispelled by the lack of any archeological evidence for everyday life. The people who built Stonehenge lived nearby but not at the site of the monument. They stayed close to the River Avon in a place called Durrington Walls, where archeologists have found signs of ancient wooden buildings, and the refuse of everyday life (Parker Pearson, 2012). Some of the wooden buildings, such as Woodhenge, were circular. The people then used the techniques of the wooden buildings when constructing Stonehenge.

Why then did they build their great megalithic monument? Was it a place for meetings or a site for religious observances? One would have thought that the objects used in such meetings or rites might have remained, but the site is largely empty of anything unrelated to the stones or to the burials. Was Stonehenge a shrine where the sick went for healing under the benign influence of the stones? The human remains do not show evidence of obvious illness. Was Stonehenge a celestial observatory to help predict the seasons and eclipses (Hawkins & White, 1965)? When one stands at the base of the great trilithon at the summer solstice, one can see the sun rise over the Heel Stone. Although the monument is laid out along the line of the solstices, most archeologists now feel that this was more of gesture to the heavens rather than a way to measure them (Brown, 1976; Ruggles & Hoskin, 1999; Hutton, 2013)

Because of the cremated human remains found in the Aubrey Holes, Parker Pearson (2012) has suggested that the site was built as a monument to the dead, perhaps as a place to honor noble ancestors. He tells an intriguing story of how he was told by Ramilisonina, an archeologist from Madagascar, that people in his country spent their lives in wood structures, but gave their dead stone houses to last them for eternity. Other great stone monuments such as the Egyptian pyramids were certainly built as places for the dead, as were the British barrows and dolmens that predated Stonehenge.

Words

Thomas Hardy set the penultimate scene of his 1891 novel *Tess of the d'Urbevilles* at Stonehenge. Tess has killed Alec, her seducer and tormentor. Tess and Angel Clare are now fleeing at night across the Salisbury Plain. When they reach Stonehenge, Tess is too tired to go on, and she lies down on one of the recumbent stones. She asks Angel if he believes that they might meet again after they are dead.

> Like a greater than himself, to the critical question at the critical time he did not answer; and they were again silent. In a minute or two her breathing became more regular, her clasp of his hand relaxed, and she fell asleep. The band of silver paleness along the east horizon made even the distant parts of the Great Plain appear dark and near; and the whole enormous landscape bore that impress of reserve, taciturnity, and hesitation which is usual just before day. The eastward pillars and their architraves stood up blackly against the light, and the great flame-shaped Sun-stone beyond them; and the Stone of Sacrifice midway. Presently the night wind died out, and the quivering little pools in the cup-like hollows of the stones lay still.

The great stones are silent about what happens after death. They persist through the centuries. They evoke memories of those who built them so that they might, themselves, remember

and honor their ancestors. Yet the world has moved on and all those ancient people are no more.

References

Blake, W. (1810, facsimile with annotations by Paley, M. D. 1991). *Jerusalem: The emanation of the giant Albion*. Princeton, N.J: William Blake Trust/Princeton University Press.

Brown, P. L. (1976). *Megaliths, myths, and men: An introduction to astro-archaeology*. Poole, Dorset, UK: Blandford Press.

Caponigro, P. (1986). *Megaliths*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Chippindale, C. (2012). *Stonehenge complete*. *4th Ed.* New York: Thames & Hudson.

Hawkins, G. S., & White, G. B. (1965). *Stonehenge decoded*. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday.

Hill, R. (2008). *Stonehenge*. London: Profile Books.

Hutton, R. (2013). *Pagan Britain.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Johnson, A. (2008). *Solving Stonehenge: The new key to an ancient enigma*. New York: Thames & Hudson.

Lewis-Williams, J. D., & Pearce, D. G. (2005). *Inside the Neolithic mind: Consciousness, cosmos, and the realm of the gods*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Mohen, J.-P. (1999). *Megaliths*: *Stones of memory*. New York: Abrams.

Parker Pearson, M. & Stonehenge Riverside Project (2012). *Stonehenge: Exploring the greatest Stone Age mystery*. London: Simon & Schuster

Ruggles, C. & Hoskin, M. (1999) Astronomy before history. In M. Hoskin (Ed.) *The Cambridge Concise History of Astronomy*. (pp. 1–17). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.