HEAVEN ON EARTH: TEMPLES, RITUAL, AND COSMIC SYMBOLISM IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

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On Friday, March 2 and Saturday, March 3, 2012, the eighth annual University of Chicago Oriental Institute Post-doctoral Seminar, titled "Heaven on Earth: Temples, Ritual, and Cosmic Symbolism in the Ancient World," was held in Breasted Hall. Over the course of the two days, eighteen speakers, from both the U.S. and abroad, examined the interconnections between temples, ritual, and cosmology from a variety of regional specializations and theoretical perspectives. By bringing together archaeologists, art historians, and philologists specializing not only in the ancient Near East, but also Mesoamerica, Greece, South Asia, and China, we hoped to re-evaluate this topic all across the ancient world. Our goal was to share ideas and introduce new perspectives in order to equip scholars with new questions or theoretical and methodological tools.

The meeting focused on three intertwining themes: sacred architecture and topography, ritual practice, and cosmic symbolism. The idea that sacred architecture held cosmic sym-

Pictured, from top left to right: (row 1) John Baines, Davíd Carrasco, Susanne Görke; (row 2) Matthew Canepa, Uri Gabbay, Gary Beckman, Elizabeth Frood, Claus Ambos; (row 3) Yorke M. Rowan, Ömür Harmanşah, Betsey A. Robinson, Michael W. Meister, Tracy Miller, Karl Taube, Clemente Marconi; (row 4) Deena Ragavan. Not pictured: Julia A. B. Hegewald, Richard Neer

bolism has a long history in the study of the ancient Near East. From the excavations of the mid-nineteenth century to the pan-Babylonianist scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we see repeated the notion that the Mesopotamian ziggurat reflected the form of the cosmos. Strongly influenced by these scholars, and linking Near Eastern and Indian traditions, Mircea Eliade developed the concept at the heart of this conference: *imago mundi*, the idea that architectural forms at any scale can be images, replicas of the greater cosmos. Although Eliade's theories have since been criticized extensively, they nevertheless linger on in the academic consciousness. Thus, in part, the conference aimed to demonstrate that the idea of the temple as microcosm continues to be relevant for interpretations of sacred architecture. We sought to address the interaction of architecture and cosmology through the third thematic element: ritual and how it may provide context, purpose, or meaning to architectural forms and spaces. Through comparative study and interdisciplinary analysis, we hoped to further illuminate our own research into this topic.

The two-day seminar was divided into two halves, each half comprising three sessions and culminating in a response to the preceding papers. The three sessions of the first half took place on Friday, while the second half was split, with one session on Friday and the final two on Saturday. Each session focused on the different ways the three main themes of the seminar could interact. The program was organized thematically to encourage scholars of different regional or methodological specializations to communicate and compare their work. Contributions to the seminar included both broad critiques of particular regional traditions as well as specific historical cases.

The conference opened with a preamble by Gil Stein, Director of the Oriental Institute, before my own introduction to the topic. Regrettably, our first speaker, Julia Hegewald (Universität Bonn), had to cancel due to illness, so the first session, "Architecture and Cosmology," chaired by Theo van den Hout, began with a contribution from Tracy Miller (Vanderbilt University). Miller's paper provided an excellent starting point, with her discussion of the translation of South Asian Buddhist architectural forms into a Chinese context, by focusing on a monument known as the Yicihui Pillar. Miller demonstrated how traditional South Asian methods for investing temples with cosmological significance could be adapted for Chinese architectural forms granting deeper meaning to the pillar. The last paper of this session, from Susanne Görke (Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz), took a very different approach, examining Hittite ritual texts in order to question the relationship between Hittite temple topography and the organization of their cosmos. She raised the possibility that older Hattian-Anatolian traditions reflected a more open, publicly accessible topography, while younger traditions, influenced by Hurrian and Mesopotamian cultures, necessitated restricted sacred spaces. She suggested that these limitations, or the lack thereof, were matched by their conception of the universe, one in which movement between cosmic realms was respectively freely permitted or equally restricted.

After an excellent discussion and short break, we returned to the second session, "Built Space and Natural Forms," chaired by Andrea Seri. Karl Taube (University of California, Riverside) began with a presentation on the classic Maya temple. Taube's beautifully illustrated talk showed us how the Maya's complex sculptural program imbued these monumental structures with a variety of symbolic meaning, from the Mayan paradise of Flower Mountain to zoomorphic caves. He focused on the temple's embodiment of the cosmos through the representation of the four cardinal points by means of a range of sculptural forms positioned at the corners of the building. The subsequent paper by Michael W. Meister (University of

Pennsylvania) reiterated the relationship between the temple and the natural world, tracing the evolution of Indian temple architecture through two key images, the seed and the mountain, showing how they materialized South Asian cosmogony and cosmology. Meister's paper proved an elegant illustration of how architectural forms could develop over centuries yet retain the symbolism of the past. This session was completed by Gary Beckman (University of Michigan), whose paper dealt again with the numinous properties inherent in the mountains, but also the springs, this time of the Hittite world. Beckman showed how natural features of the landscape were deliberately adapted to further actualize the immanent forces of the cosmos.

The third session, "Myth and Movement," chaired by Christopher Faraone, began after lunch with my own paper, in which I argued that gates appeared as symbols of cosmic boundaries in Sumerian myths of divine journeys and that this meaning correlated with their usage in ritual practice. Betsey A. Robinson (Vanderbilt University) then gave her presentation on the mountains Helikon and Parnassos in ancient Greece as both mythic settings of divine activity and locations for religious festivals. Comparing the actual sites to their representations in Greek and Roman reliefs and poetry, Robinson revealed the persistent inspirational value of these mountains.

This half of the conference was concluded by our first respondent, Davíd Carrasco (Harvard University), who observed several recurring themes throughout the preceding papers, from the dynamic exchange of ideas emerging from cultures in contact to the question of social hierarchy and the role of kingship in shaping representations of the cosmos.

The last session of the day, chaired by Walter Farber, was on "Sacred Space and Ritual Practice." The first speaker, Uri Gabbay (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), provided a detailed description of the sacred topography delineated by Mesopotamian literary lamentations, which were performed as part of a procession in and around the cultic landscape. His paper served to ground the ritual performance of these prayers in their wider theological and cosmological context. He was followed by Yorke M. Rowan (University of Chicago), who supplied an archaeological perspective on the subject, looking at a diverse range of ritual spaces from late prehistory to the Early Bronze Age in the southern Levant. Identifying ritual sites from material remains and topographical features, Rowan noted the evidence for both continuity and change in ritual praxis. Claus Ambos (Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg) was our final speaker of the day. By examining the detailed Mesopotamian ritual texts, Ambos analyzed the topography of the space described within. He focused specifically on the temporary ritual structures and, establishing their cosmological significance, demonstrated their liminal status. Friday's proceedings were concluded by a very welcome reception in the Yelda Khorsabad Court of the Oriental Institute Museum, and then an enjoyable dinner in Chinatown for the participants.

We reconvened the next day for the fifth session, "Architecture, Power, and the State," chaired by Bruce Lincoln. Ömür Harmanşah (Brown University) started us bright and early with a glimpse into the literary conceptualization of the ancient Mesopotamian city. Harmanşah argued that this presentation of urban space retained a nostalgia for its rural past and the idea of the king as shepherd, through the use of pastoral imagery, both textual and visual. Afterward, Matthew Canepa (University of Minnesota) provided a historical perspective on the development of ancient Iranian sacred architecture and traditions in the context of royal ritual. He illustrated in detail both the continuity of certain spatial forms, such as the open-air sanctuary, while observing the introduction of new forms and the transformation of

old over several centuries. The session was brought to a close by Elizabeth Frood (University of Oxford), who, in contrast to the previous speakers' emphasis on the dominant power structures, directed our attention instead toward the question of personal religion and its role in the shaping of sacred space. Frood showed how graffiti inscribed in Egyptian temple complexes could be used to reconfigure these spaces and adapt them to different social needs.

After a short break we resumed with the final session, "Images of Ritual," chaired by Janet Johnson. We first welcomed Clemente Marconi (New York University) to speak about representations of ritual activities as part of the sculptural program of Greek temples. Taking an anthropological perspective of the role of ritual as an intermediary between the human and the numinous, Marconi revealed the function of these images representing and reflecting the cult practices taking place alongside them. Finally, John Baines (University of Oxford) took a different approach to ritual images, focusing on the development of iconographic practices around the beginning of the dynastic period in ancient Egypt and the increasing depiction of the king as the central ritual performer.

Our closing speaker was Richard Neer (University of Chicago), who concluded the meeting by giving an insightful response to the latter half of the conference, leaving us all to reevaluate many of the assumptions with which we had begun. Neer observed issues generated by the papers not only on how sacred space was produced, by architecture or by ritual, but also how our conceptions of space are constrained by the limits of our fields and our modes of research.

The topic generated considerable interest and enthusiasm in the academic community, both at the Oriental Institute and more broadly across the University of Chicago, as well as among members of the general public. As such, the conference was very well attended, affording an ideal atmosphere for insightful questions from the audience and the ensuing discussion which occurred at several points throughout.

The papers presented raised many questions and successfully achieved the goal of the conference. The free exchange of ideas and, more importantly, the wide range of perspectives offered, left each of us with potential avenues of research and new ideas, as well as a fresh outlook on our old ones. The proceedings of the seminar will be published as part of the Oriental Institute Seminars (OIS) series during the coming academic year (2012–13).

My sincerest thanks go to the Oriental Institute and its Director, Gil Stein, for the opportunity to organize this seminar. I would also like to express my gratitude to all those who have contributed so much of their time and energy to ensuring this conference came together. In particular, I'd like to thank Mariana Perlinac, without whom the organization of this conference would have been impossible; John Sanders, for all his work with the website and the presentations; Leslie Schramer and Tom Urban in the Publications Office for the beautiful poster and program; Meghan Winston, the Oriental Institute's special events coordinator, for the catering; and Chris Woods, for his guidance and advice.