

## **Workshop: Sacred Symbolic Architecture -- Time, Orientation and Meditation**

A. T. Mann, [atmann@atmann.net](mailto:atmann@atmann.net)

Sacred sites are often places where an original creation occurred and as a result such places have myths that describe their generation. Sacred mountains were originally where the gods and goddesses came down to earth from heaven, just as they are also ways in which we ascend. The sacred mountains of every culture therefore evoke original creation, and continued to as they morphed from mountain to mound, to pyramid, to stupa, to cathedral to skyscraper. (This visual genesis represented with images.)

Many ancient sacred sites utilizes symbolism that arises directly from two associated factors: orientation and time. Some sites and monuments are oriented either to the NS axis (Great Pyramid, Buddhist stupas, Forbidden City, Chinese sacred sites ), to the EW axis (Chartres to the solstice and other cathedrals), to the SE/NW (Newgrange in Ireland, megalithic mounds and standing stones) or in the case of Islamic mosques, toward Mecca, whichever direction that lies. Other monuments are oriented toward the rising and setting of particular celestial bodies such as the moon, the sun or certain constellations or even stars (like Sirius) in the sky. The city gates of many early Italian cities were oriented to the twelve zodiac points. What we often do not realize is that these orientations grew out of a relationship with time.

In the case of cathedrals, there is the interesting fact that each one is dedicated to a particular saint and therefore associated with that saint's day in the year. Although all cathedrals and churches are oriented with their naves roughly EW, they are rarely exactly oriented that way and yet the technology available would have allowed this orientation to be determined. What is clear is that the orientation of the rising or setting sun on these saint's days determined the orientation of the cathedral. (We will explore how this works with a visual demonstration.)

How is it that although the Abrahamic religious — Judaism, Christianity and Islam — specifically rejected the ideas of astrology at some stage of their growth, they were clearly integral to their initial structure of belief and symbolism? Indeed certain basic principles remain at the core of their sacred architecture? We must be missing something here. That the connection has been lost can be demonstrated by certain cathedrals designed and built in the last century that completely discarded these ideas about siting, which is almost certainly a mistake.

Geomancy is the art of orientation based on astronomical (and energetic) factors and integrates in Chinese history with their theories of the five elements. Thus buildings such as the Forbidden City as well as the layout of the city of Beijing not only align with the cardinal axes, but incorporate circles and squares as identifiers of this sacred geometry, utilize elemental qualities from the orientation and even resonate with chakra energy centers and internal organs. My current study and practice of Qigong

incorporates exercises at specific times of the year to enable the transition from one calendrical element to the next.

In terms of the form of sacred geometry, such sites, cities and buildings often feature a square integrated with a circle, sometimes even “squaring the circle.” This combination reflects the integration of earth with heaven, below and above, the microcosm and the macrocosm. A series of mandalas that I painted in 1975 show the predominance of these shapes in sacred forms from many different cultures. Tibetan Buddhist mandalas are simultaneously meditation diagrams, cosmoses, iconographic maps of deities, architecture in both plan and elevation. In a north Indian monastery at Sherab Ling high in the Himalayas two years ago I was fortunate to see craftsmen creating three dimensional mandalas of tutelary deities for His Eminence Tai Situ Rinpoche. I realized that while a practicing architect in New York in the 1960s that when I designed large public buildings I carried an image of the building in my mind and that this process reflects deity meditation in Tibetan Buddhist spiritual practice.

We will explore the circle and square in a number of mandalas that show how this archetypal geometry is integral to the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, the Great Pyramid, the Memory Theater created by Palladio, megalithic stone circles and others.

While these generalities are fascinating, it is much more powerful to work with techniques that embody the specifics of sacred geometry for an individual, a couple, an organization or virtually any entity that has a foundation date. These techniques allow for an integration of the personal within the archetypal in profound ways. By combining an astrological Local Space chart with the eightfold Bua Gua of traditional feng shui it becomes possible to orient buildings, rooms and even pieces of furniture in such a way that it resonates with the user.

Ending with a guided meditation to explore personal visions of the future of sacred architecture.

NOTE: Anyone willing to explore the Local Space horoscope diagrams on a 360° wheel can email A. T. Mann at [atmann@atmann.net](mailto:atmann@atmann.net) with date, time and place of your birth and your name and I will send them to you to bring to the forum.