

Exploring the Roots of Religion

Professor John R. Hale



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Archaeology has been the focus of Professor Hale's career, from his undergraduate studies at Yale University to his research at the University of Cambridge, where he received his Ph.D. The subject of his dissertation was the Bronze Age ancestry of the Viking longship, a study that involved field surveys of ship designs in prehistoric rock art in southern Norway and Sweden. During more than 30 years of archaeological work, Professor Hale has excavated at a Romano-British town in Lincolnshire, England, as well as at a Roman villa in Portugal; has carried out interdisciplinary studies of ancient oracle sites in Greece and Turkey, including the famed Delphic oracle; and has participated in an undersea search in Greek waters for lost fleets from the Greek and Persian wars. In addition, Professor Hale is a member of a scientific team developing and refining a method for dating mortar, concrete, and plaster from ancient buildings—a method that employs radiocarbon analysis with an accelerator mass spectrometer.

Professor Hale published *Lords of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the Birth of Democracy* in 2009. In addition, he has published his work in *Antiquity*, *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, *The Classical Bulletin*, and *Scientific American*. Most of Professor Hale's work is interdisciplinary and involves collaborations with geologists, chemists, nuclear physicists, historians, zoologists, botanists, physical anthropologists, geographers, and art historians.

Professor Hale has received numerous awards for his distinguished teaching, including the Panhellenic Teacher of the Year Award and the Delphi Center Award. He has toured the United States and Canada as a lecturer for the Archaeological Institute of America and has presented lecture series at museums and universities in Finland, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.

Professor Hale is the instructor of two other Teaching Company courses: *The Greek and Persian Wars* and *Classical Archaeology of Ancient Greece and Rome*.

Table of Contents

Exploring the Roots of Religion

Professor Biography	i
Course Scope	1
Theme One: In the Beginning	
Lecture One The Roots of Religious Experience	3
Lecture Two Neanderthal Burials at Shanidar	5
Lecture Three Hunting Magic in Sacred Caves	7
Lecture Four Myths of the Shaman	9
Lecture Five Realm of the Mother Goddess	11
Lecture Six Mysteries of the Megaliths	13
Theme Two: Quest for the Afterlife	
Lecture Seven Towers and Tombs of Sumeria	15
Lecture Eight Tomb of the First Emperor of China	17
Lecture Nine Feasting with the Dead at Petra	19
Lecture Ten Druid Sacrifice at Lindow Moss?	21
Lecture Eleven Honoring Ancestors in Ancient Ohio	23
Lecture Twelve A Viking Queen Sails to Eternity	25
Theme Three: Reconstructing Ancient Rituals	
Lecture Thirteen Dancing with Bulls at Knossos	27
Lecture Fourteen Oracle Bones in Ancient China	29
Lecture Fifteen Sun and Sexuality in Early Scandinavia	31
Lecture Sixteen Apollo Speaks at Klaros	33
Lecture Seventeen Chalice of Blood in Ancient Peru	35
Lecture Eighteen Decoding Rituals at Palenque	37
Theme Four: Lost Gods and Fallen Temples	
Lecture Nineteen Temple of the Goddess on Malta	39
Lecture Twenty The Aten—Monotheism in Egypt	41
Lecture Twenty-One Deities of the Acropolis	43
Lecture Twenty-Two Gods and Pyramids at Teotihuacan	45
Lecture Twenty-Three Sacred City on the Mississippi	47
Lecture Twenty-Four Sun and Shadow at Machu Picchu	49
Theme Five: Sacred Landscapes	
Lecture Twenty-Five Celestial Gateway at Giza	51
Lecture Twenty-Six Cosmic Hub at Stonehenge	53
Lecture Twenty-Seven Desert Lines at Nazca	55
Lecture Twenty-Eight Skywatchers at Chaco Canyon	57
Lecture Twenty-Nine Mountain of the Gods at Angkor	59
Lecture Thirty The Stone Heads of Easter Island	61

Table of Contents

Exploring the Roots of Religion

	Theme Six: Communities of the Spirit	
Lecture Thirty-One	Tending Zoroaster's Sacred Fire in Iran.....	63
Lecture Thirty-Two	Writing the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran.....	65
Lecture Thirty-Three	Taking Religions Underground at Rome.....	67
Lecture Thirty-Four	Forging Iron at Jenne-jeno on the Niger.....	69
Lecture Thirty-Five	Carving Monasteries at Ajanta in India.....	71
Lecture Thirty-Six	Faiths Lost and Found	73
Timeline		75
Glossary		77
Bibliography		80

Exploring the Roots of Religion

Scope:

The most important record of religious history resides not in books and sacred texts but buried in the earth. Ancient graves, statues, temples, standing stones, sacrificial offerings, and places of initiation all bear witness to the universal human quest for spiritual power and understanding. Since the beginnings of scientific archaeology in the 18th century, excavators have been discovering and interpreting evidence ranging from tiny goddess figurines carved from mammoth ivory to entire sacred landscapes, such as at the Giza plateau in Egypt. The millennia of human experience that preceded the invention of writing about 5,000 years ago is only accessible to us through archaeology. And even for more recent religions and cults, the “testimony of the spade” provides an essential perspective that enhances our understanding of the literary tradition.

Archaeology provides evidence that is very different in nature from historical writings. With aerial reconnaissance and remote sensing technology, archaeologists relocate lost temples and other cult sites. With trowels and brushes, they gently remove the dust of ages from buried sites and artifacts. And with space-age laboratory techniques, they analyze the residues left by royal funeral feasts as well as the last meals of sacrificial victims.

Some 30,000 years before scribes made the first religious writings, Ice Age peoples of Europe and the Near East were creating shrines in caves, modeling images of divinities and shamans, and using art and music in ceremonies. Even earlier, in the time of the Neanderthals, some of the tribe’s deceased were laid in their graves with flowers, possibly symbolizing resurrection after death. The first theme of our course, “In the Beginning,” explores these earliest religious rites and the beliefs that inspired them, right down to the time of the first farmers and the construction of the first megalithic monuments.

Next we devote six of our lectures to the ritual activity that seems to lie at the very core of religion worldwide—namely, burial of the dead, under the theme “Quest for the Afterlife.” Beginning with the simple pit tombs of ordinary villagers in predynastic Egypt, whose bodies were naturally mummified in the dry sand of the Sahara, we move forward in time to the extraordinary graves of wealthy monarchs like the Viking queen Åsa, whose elaborate, treasure-filled tomb shows that at least some of our ancestors believed that you can take it with you. We also examine ambitious funeral architecture from Petra in Jordan to Easter Island in the Pacific and include a visit to the enigmatic burial mounds of prehistoric North America.

Another universal element in religion is ritual: the performance of traditional actions that range from dances to foretelling the future. Although such activities may seem ephemeral, they often leave clear traces in the archaeological record. Our third theme, “Reconstructing Ancient Rituals,” starts with a survey of the fertility cults of warriors and farmers in Bronze Age Scandinavia. Then we move on to Minoan bull dancing, Chinese and Greek divination, and Mayan ball games and human sacrifices. We conclude by examining a tour de force of scientific archaeology that has reconstructed, hour by hour, the last day in the life of a Celtic prince, possibly a Druid, who was sacrificed and buried in a bog at the time of the Roman conquest of Britain.

This grisly ritual leads us into our fourth theme, “Lost Gods and Fallen Temples,” where human sacrifice becomes almost routine as part of the nearly superhuman efforts to glorify divine monarchs through monumental architecture, impressive ceremony, and above all spectacular funeral rites. The kings and queens of Ur in Mesopotamia (hometown of the biblical Abraham), the pharaohs of Egypt, the emperors of China and Rome, and the royalty of the ancient Americas have all left indelible marks of their status as gods, rather than as mere mortals.

The penultimate theme of the course, “Sacred Landscapes,” offers a tour of some of earth’s most famous ancient sites: Stonehenge, Angkor Wat, Machu Picchu, and others. These great achievements of ancient engineers in fact functioned as ceremonial centers, and it is our mission to understand the full range of remains at each site and to reconstruct the religious beliefs and worldviews that impelled ancient peoples in every corner of the globe to invest such vast expenditures of time, wealth, human power, and technical ingenuity to create stages for their religious rites and earthly images of the sacred cosmos. We also explore lesser-known ceremonial centers such as Chaco Canyon in the American Southwest and the Ajanta Caves of India.

In our final group of six lectures, under the theme “Communities of the Spirit,” we consider a number of extinct religions in their totality. The best known of these is unquestionably the early monotheistic cult of the heretic Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten, who closed the temples of Ra and the other traditional gods and tried to impose the worship of a single god, Aten, throughout his kingdom. Similar grandeur attends the discoveries of the center for Aztec religious life at the Templo Mayor in Mexico City (formerly the Aztec city of Tenochtitlán), where recent excavations have brought to light a series of pyramids, offerings, and artworks that span the entire period of Aztec domination in Mesoamerica. The search for the ancient Persian cult of Mithras takes us deep underground to the buried chapels of his worshippers throughout the Roman Empire, while the city of Jenne-jeno in Africa yields evidence of a cult in which craftworkers, specifically ironsmiths, were regarded as diviners and religious leaders. Finally, viewing earth from space, we close with the mystery of the Nazca Desert in Peru, where gigantic images of animals and other designs laid out over great distances still defy the efforts of archaeologists to unlock their secrets.

Although this course focuses primarily on religions that belong to the ancient world, we will often pause to consider how archaeological finds shed unexpected light on the origins and rituals of such modern religions as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Even today, most people's religious experience is shaped not by theological creeds but by enduring traditions rooted in the remote past.

Lecture One

The Roots of Religious Experience

Scope: Archaeology is the science of studying the past through its material remains. Religions may seem to center around theology, abstract beliefs, and codes of behavior, but the spiritual will inevitably be reflected in the physical world. The ways in which a people bury their dead, represent supernatural powers, ensure divine favor through offerings, and construct spaces for worship provide essential clues to their religious beliefs. To understand humanity, we must understand religion. Religious monuments often form the dominant element of a culture's remains. Archaeology provides the only surviving data about beliefs and rituals that developed during the ages preceding the invention of writing. Even for the historical period, excavations shed new light on aspects of religion that could never be known from written records. In this course we visit some of the most important sites around the globe in an exploration of the origins and development of religion.

Outline

- I. This course will explore the roots of modern world religions but will also study some of the earliest religious expressions of faiths long dead, which we can only learn about through their archaeological remains.
- II. Let's start by explaining what archaeologists do and how our work differs from that of other historians.
 - A. Archaeology is the science of studying the human past through its material remains: artifacts, buildings, sites, human remains, botanical and zoological remains, and alterations to the natural landscape.
 - B. Archaeologists collaborate with researchers in many fields to gain an interdisciplinary perspective on past cultures and civilizations, from the pollen in the air they breathed to the significance of the art they produced.
 - C. For the entire span of human existence before the invention of writing, archaeology provides our only evidence for human history and culture, including the development and spread of religions.
- III. Let me introduce myself and tell you about my archaeological training and the various experiences and discoveries that have made the study of ancient religions a major part of my career as a fieldworker and scholar.
 - A. I grew up at the Falls of the Ohio River in New Albany, Indiana, on a hill where prehistoric hunters camped to watch for migrating bison herds preparing to ford the river. Ancient artifacts often turned up during construction projects or even just gardening in our neighborhood, and I became obsessed with the vestiges of the past worlds that lay hidden beneath our feet.
 - B. These early experiences grew into training at Yale and Cambridge and a career as an archaeologist. I have had opportunities to survey and explore prehistoric mounds in the Ohio River Valley; Celtic rituals in England; sacred rock art in Scandinavia; pagan and Christian religious structures at a Roman villa in Portugal; and oracle sites in Greece, Turkey, and Albania.
 - C. Reconstructing ancient religious rituals from their archaeological remains has become a central part of my life's work. Some of the sites we visit during this course were chosen because of my desire to share with you my personal experience.
- IV. What are our goals? I have three; you may have additional goals of your own.
 - A. First, we will approach our subject experientially, through visits to more than 30 important archaeological sites. Archaeology is visceral experience; I would like you to share in an encounter with the past that is as much physical as it is cerebral.
 - B. Second, you should expect to acquire a mass of knowledge about ancient religions and religious sites—to become "literate" in the subject. Both modern archaeological research projects and the mass of evidence from the sites themselves will be given due attention.
 - C. Finally, I hope you will come to the end of the course with a new view of religion and its role in human history: how it evolved, what its universal elements are, what aspects unify various religions throughout the world, and what aspects divide them—sometimes violently. It will be our mission to understand the spiritual force that drove people to these heroic achievements.

Suggested Reading:

Fagan, *From Black Land to Fifth Sun*.

Renfrew, *Before Civilization*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Would you expect the material remains of religion (sacred objects, places of worship, burials, and so on) to reflect the religious beliefs of its adherents directly?
2. Among contemporary religions, can you think of an example where material remains might seriously confuse archaeologists of the future?

Lecture Two

Neanderthal Burials at Shanidar

Scope: When Ralph Solecki of Columbia University and his wife Rose began to excavate at Shanidar Cave in 1951, the scholarly image of Neanderthals conformed to a caveman stereotype of brutish behavior and subhuman mental capacity. In levels that dated back to the Middle Paleolithic (more than 35,000 years ago), however, the Soleckis discovered that the Neanderthals had deliberately buried their dead in pits, curling the body into a fetal position and sometimes placing a stone slab over the grave. This revolutionary discovery remains the earliest incontrovertible religious site in the world. Much more controversial has been the Soleckis' conclusion, based on pollen analysis, that Neanderthals placed their dead on soft beds of pine branches and filled the tombs with flowers. Evidence for Neanderthal cave shrines, skull cults, and worship of animal deities also remains hotly disputed.

Outline

- I. First, let's look at the roadmap for the course so you understand where these lectures are going and how they fit together.
 - A. The course is divided into six groups of six lectures each.
 - B. The first set is called "In the Beginning." It includes the introduction and the exploration of a series of sites that carry us back into the Stone Age.
 - C. In this set of lectures, we will discuss what kind of religious impulses come to us out of the period known as the Paleolithic.
- II. Neanderthals were both very much like us and different from us.
 - A. We know about Neanderthals because of a series of discoveries of complete Neanderthal skeletons.
 - B. Neanderthals would have been shorter than we are, but their brains would have been the same size as ours, though arranged differently.
 - C. We know Neanderthals were much stronger than we are from the density of their bones, the mass of their long bones, and the large attachments for their muscles.
 - D. They also were extremely agile and swift on rough terrain, based on the massive strength that their skeletons reveal.
- III. The shambling, dull-witted Neanderthal stereotype was promoted in the early 20th century.
 - A. Neanderthals were discovered in 1848 by British soldiers, working in the caves of Gibraltar.
 - B. In the 1850s, workers in the Neander Valley of Germany uncovered an old rock shelter where they found some unusual-looking humanoid bones.
 - C. In the early 1900s, an archaeologist working at a rock shelter in France found a skeleton of a Neanderthal on a bed of flint flakes with a hand resting near a beautiful axe.
 1. The skeleton was arranged in the form of what is called a flexed burial, which looks like the fetal position.
 2. The Neanderthals may have felt that this position was appropriate to someone going back into the womb of the earth.
 3. The discovery caused a sensation because up until the early 20th century, no one believed such human forebears had religion.
 - D. Even as these discoveries were being made, Marcellin Boule took a very complete adult male Neanderthal skeleton from a rock shelter in the Dordogne Valley and clothed it in flesh, skin, and animal skins, creating the stereotype of the caveman.
- IV. Decades later, along came a husband and wife team, Ralph and Rose Solecki.
 - A. In the 1950s, prehistorians were beginning to bring analytical techniques and scientific methods of the hard sciences to their study of early humans. Ralph was one of those pioneering archaeologists.
 - B. Between 1951 and 1960, the Soleckis carried out a number of field seasons in Shanidar Cave in northern Iraq. They discovered not only the remains of thousands of tools but the skeletons of nine Neanderthal individuals.
 - C. Ralph found the Shanidar 1 burial and worked out a very interesting scenario for the burial.
 1. He was amazed when the bones were studied later and it turned out that this individual had many congenital disabilities.
 2. From the obvious care taken with his burial, Ralph concluded that these were people of compassion.
 - D. In the Shanidar 4 burial, a palynologist found pockets of pollen that belonged to seven different early-summer-flowering plants that may have been bouquets woven into garlands around pine branches for the tomb.

- E. Based on findings from Shanidar 4, Solecki felt that everything he had thought about Neanderthals had been turned on its head.
 - 1. They were people who buried their dead not only with honor but with flowers, symbols of resurrection.
 - 2. Interestingly, a number of those plants are medicinal.
- V. Shanidar entered the world of popular culture in Jean Auel's novel *Clan of the Cave Bear*.
 - A. The novel shows a group of people very different from us physically, somewhat different from us culturally, and yet united to us and maybe even anterior to us, preceding us in the area of religious ritual, religious belief, and symbolic religious behavior.
 - B. A part of the "cultural DNA" of the Shanidar burials has been handed down to us: a belief in something that transcends this earthly existence.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. What were your preconceptions about Neanderthals or prehistoric humans in general?
- 2. Would you agree that religious ideas about death and the afterlife form a logical "first step" in the development of religion?

Lecture Three

Hunting Magic in Sacred Caves

Scope: In 1940, a dog named Robot disappeared into a rocky cleft in south-central France, leading four young boys to the discovery of a lifetime: a previously unknown cave that was filled with extraordinary paintings of animals and various symbols created by Ice Age hunters. Among the images in the heart of the cave was a human figure wearing a bird-like mask, standing near a wounded bison. Archaeological study of the paintings and the cave deposits showed that the art was 15,000 years old. This cave, called Lascaux, is only the most elaborate of a constellation of painted caves in France and northern Spain. These rank among the world's oldest religious shrines, although prehistorians continue to debate the meaning of the art and the nature of the ceremonies held by torchlight in these deep caverns. Hunting magic and the spiritual initiation of young hunters may have been the purpose behind the art.

Outline

- I. The origins of the human religious impulse, which consists of desiring to bury our dead and to pay them honor and reverence even after they have passed away, will be one of the strands that binds this course together.
 - A. In this lecture, we're going to look at two more strands and their origins in the Paleolithic: the idea of sacred space and the emergence of a god or deity.
 - B. Both of those quests for origins take us back to northern Spain and southwestern France.
 - C. We have moved forward thousands of years, and the Neanderthals have vanished. We are with our own modern human ancestors and the world they left behind in what we call the Upper Paleolithic.
- II. In 1878, a Spanish nobleman named Sautuola went to see a Paris exposition that featured cave art.
 - A. He was very excited by the exhibits and decided to explore a cave on his own estate in a hill called Altamira. The cave had been discovered by a huntsman seeking his lost dog.
 - B. During the exploration, Sautuola's daughter, Maria, found that the cave's ceiling was covered with paintings of extinct bison.
 - C. We know now that those remarkable paintings are about 15,000–16,000 years old.
 - D. French prehistorians dismissed the discovery at first, and it was years before they came around.
- III. In France in 1940, four boys were out rabbit hunting near a place called Lascaux. In a strange repeat of what had happened at Altamira, one boy's dog disappeared.
 - A. When they followed the sound of the dog's barking, they found something even more spectacular than Altamira.
 - B. The first impression that the Lascaux paintings made was that this place was all about hunting magic, or sympathetic magic.
 - C. It seemed possible that these caves were chambers of initiation for rites of passage involving young hunters.
 - D. André Leroi-Gourhan, on the other hand, suggests that the symbolism in these paintings is about an opposition, or perhaps a conjunction, between male and female.
- IV. In the years between the discovery of Altamira and that great exhibition in Paris in 1878, a new class of small art had begun to appear.
 - A. There was a group of figurines or statuettes called Venus figurines, revealing an element of femininity that was lacking from early discoveries.
 - B. In France, outside a cave at Laussel, a slab of stone was discovered on which there was a woman, a mother-goddess figure.
- V. There is a lot of evidence about how cave art was created.
 - A. We found little lamps, sometimes filled with animal fat, used to light the work while it was going on.
 - B. A study of the pigments shows the few colors that were basic to this art form and the ingredients from which they were made.
 - C. Not only were the lines sometimes incised, but the color was sometimes blown on through a little blow gun.
 - D. We also know that these wonderful rituals could be accompanied by music.
 - E. Some paintings seem to have been placed in areas of the caves specifically for their resonance.

Suggested Reading:

Bahn and Vertut, *Images of the Ice Age*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Some scholars regard Paleolithic cave art as simply “art for art’s sake.” Does this seem reasonable to you?
2. Animals play a central role in cave art. What role do they play in the iconography of contemporary religions?

Lecture Four

Myths of the Shaman

Scope: Early European visitors to South Africa encountered paintings, some of them apparently of great antiquity, on rock faces in the Kalahari. Their discovery predated the first finds of painted Stone Age caves in Europe, and the art of the San peoples was consequently classed as decorative art or, more dismissively, “prehistoric wallpaper.” Anthropologists and archaeologists in recent decades have been able to demonstrate that the rock art is in fact religious. Specific images and scenes can be linked to the religious mythology of the San, and in some cases to specific rituals. As in the much older painted caves of France and Spain, San rock art often seems concerned with hunting magic. Animals, such as the eland, are prominent in San myths and also in San art; some large beasts are also depicted surrounded by humans in rainmaking ceremonies.

Outline

- I. This entire world of ideas, of actions, of things left behind, introduces us to the idea of cognitive archaeology, which tries to go beyond a mere record of what was left and a reconstruction of what the technology was that created it, all the way into the cognitive processes that led religious specialists to create.
- II. We can see the first of these religious specialists in Lascaux Cave.
 - A. We call such a person a shaman, a term that came into scholarly thought and parlance from stories of Siberian tribes who had religious specialists.
 - B. In Lascaux, modern investigators found a scene involving a confrontation among several figures: a wounded bison being hunted, a human it seems to be charging, and a bird that mimics the shape of the man’s head.
 - C. One of the elements of shamanism involved dealing with animal spirits and sometimes assuming the spirit of an animal to pass into the spirit world. Perhaps the third figure represents such a shaman.
 - D. Confirmation that shamans dressed up as animals can be found in the French cave of Trois Frères, where two cave paintings show parts of animals worn by humans.
- III. This introduces us to this world of the shaman.
 - A. Shamans were found wherever there were groups of people living together as bands or tribes who felt some sort kinship.
 - B. Tribal and band societies and our earliest ancestors typically did not specialize. The shaman was an exception.
 - C. The previous shaman trained the new shaman.
 - D. Often the most important religious things are shrouded by a veil of secrecy; so it was with shamanism.
 - E. In the 19th century, two Native American shamans felt they had come to the end of their tradition and told their stories.
- IV. Shamans are found all over the world. However, we will focus on shamans of the Kalahari Desert.
 - A. Here groups lived by hunting and gathering well into the 20th century.
 - B. In *The Hunters*, John Marshall followed four hunters, including one shaman, around the Kalahari Desert. The shaman’s task was to be in touch with the spirits of the animals and to lead the hunters to those animals.
- V. Our record for the shamanistic tradition in South Africa is rock art.
 - A. Brian Fagan uses this rock art as an example of putting shamanism into visible form.
 - B. The people of that area interviewed in the 19th and 20th centuries explained that their shamans had different functions, including rainmaking and hunting, linking them with the earliest times.
 - C. What do we see in some of these panels of rock art?
 1. Like the Paleolithic caves in France and Spain, they often show us animals.
 2. They sometimes show scenes between humans and animals that seem imagined rather than real—scenes of religious ritual.
 - D. Individual shamans are shown with peck marks and little dots all over their bodies. It has been suggested that these show us that boiling feeling inside when one is slipping into the trance.
 - E. Shamans in the Kalahari Desert used whirling, music, chanting, intense concentration, or breath control to slip into that place from which they could access the spirit world.

- F. Another very familiar body of this rock art is in Australia.
 - 1. The landscape is marked by the petroglyphs of the Aborigines and shows their vision of things that happened in what was called the dream time.
 - 2. The dream time was that shadowy period before our current, everyday world, when spirits walked the land. Every rock, every watering hole, every plain has a story attached to it from the dream time.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. In most societies where shamans play an important religious role, people count on them for healing. What do you consider to be the spiritual aspects of the healing process?
- 2. The rock art of the Kalahari Desert, the Australian bush, and other regions confronts us with the question: Why does art seem to accompany the religious impulse in so many societies?

Lecture Five

Realm of the Mother Goddess

Scope: What happened after the Ice Age? Did the religion expressed in the painted caves disappear from the earth? Many archaeologists believed so, until James Mellaart excavated the extraordinary Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük in southern Turkey. More than 9,000 years ago, early farmers formed a pueblo-like community in which rooms were decorated like Paleolithic caves with scenes of wild animals, hunters, and a powerful female figure, seemingly a Mother Goddess, who appeared to be the direct descendant of the Venus figures known from Ice Age Europe and Siberia. The excavation of Çatalhöyük, now supervised by Ian Hodder, shows that as humans settled down in permanent communities and began to domesticate plants and animals, communal religion seems to have intensified in expression and the complexity of its rituals and beliefs. Central to Neolithic religion was an elaborate cult of the dead, whose bones were often preserved directly below the house floors.

Outline

- I. We now embark on a new period in the history of humanity that will bring us right up to our own modern world.
 - A. Our focus site for the Neolithic, the period beginning about 10,000 or 12,000 years ago, is called Çatalhöyük.
 - B. The Ice Age came to an end in about 10,000 B.C., ending the world of the Paleolithic hunters. Humans began an extraordinary new experiment: reforming the world to meet their own needs.
 - C. We call this period the Neolithic Revolution. It consisted of a cluster of changes.
 1. Plants and animals were domesticated.
 2. A new pottery industry began.
 3. People experimented with using fire to alter natural substances.
 4. Dwellings became more modular.
 5. There were also huge changes in religion.
- II. In the 1950s, James Mellaart was doing a surface survey of the Konya Plain in Turkey.
 - A. He saw a mound and was told it was Çatalhöyük. *Höyük* means “mound” or “tell” (a layer cake of cities made of mud brick).
 - B. He walked up the mound. At the bottom, he saw earth walls; above that, little flakes of obsidian, ash, and signs of burning. Near the top, there was some pottery.
 - C. The 32-acre tell was entirely Neolithic.
- III. There are several significant Neolithic sites in the Near East.
 - A. In a cave at Wadi, Dorothy Garrod discovered a settled culture that she called Natufian. They lived in the prepottery Neolithic, or PPN, from around 9000 to 6000 B.C.
 - B. Kathleen Kenyon had found a PPN fortified town with small dwellings and a religious cult of the dead at the bottom of the tell at Jericho.
 - C. The PPN world is now known to have extended north and west into Turkey, thanks to Mellaart’s discovery.
- IV. What did Mellaart find at Çatalhöyük?
 - A. He found a pueblo-like community, with square and rectangular rooms but no streets in between them and exits in the ceiling.
 - B. The roofs were suspended on logs that spanned the dwelling area of the room, and smaller sticks were laid across them, where more earth was spread out.
 - C. A lot of living took place on top of the roof. The interiors were for wintertime sleeping.
- V. Most of the rooms Mellaart found were places we can only think of as made for religious worship.
 - A. Walls were plastered, and in many rooms pigments of charcoal, ochre, and other substances were used to paint extraordinary scenes on the walls.
 - B. Wild bulls are painted there, an emblem of a fearsome force of nature that must be tamed.
 - C. There is now a sense of opposition between human and nature that did not exist in the Paleolithic world of animism.
 - D. Çatalhöyük introduces the horned altar as a focal point.
 - E. Also, the Venus or Earth Mother figure reappears, sometimes as a goddess of grain.

- VI.** Ian Hodder succeeded Mellaart at the site in 1993. His multidisciplinary team started working at the north side of the mound to see if the shrines Mellaart had located were typical.
- A.** They wanted to know if Çatalhöyük was a ceremonial site, but it was not.
 - B.** They did find bodies, laid in baskets and wrapped in cloth, under the floors and molded benches.
 - C.** These early farmers honored their ancestors by planting them under the floor and living with them.
 - D.** There are very few sites in the world where everyday existence was so completely permeated with religious belief and action as Çatalhöyük.

Suggested Reading:

Balter, *The Goddess and the Bull*.

Mellaart, *Çatal Hüyük*.

Questions to Consider:

- 1.** The archaeological conception of a “Mother Goddess” is almost entirely built on discoveries of images, rather than preserved religious texts. Does the evidence support the conclusion presented in this course, or would you consider a different interpretation of these early figurines to be more likely?
- 2.** How would you expect religious beliefs and observances to change when a hunting and gathering existence is replaced by sedentary life in towns?

Lecture Six

Mysteries of the Megaliths

Scope: Megaliths, or “big stones,” were the world’s first religious stone monuments. The earliest megaliths were raised almost 7,000 years ago on the Atlantic coast of Europe, in Portugal, and most spectacularly in Brittany, France. Natural or rough-hewn slabs, some weighing many tons, were dragged to a site and were tilted or hoisted into place to form standing stones, chambers with capstones, and immense covered galleries and passages. Archaeologists agree that their prime purpose was commemoration of the dead; many megalithic structures still preserve skeletons and grave offerings. But ethnographic parallels from recent cultures in Madagascar, Indonesia, and New Guinea show that megaliths could also be raised to commemorate famous warriors, great feasts held to honor ancestors, peace accords between hostile tribes, or even the adoption of a child. They testify to a widespread religion of agriculturalists that supplanted the shamanistic rites of older, hunting cultures.

Outline

- I. Farmers are dynamic in a way that hunters and gatherers are not.
 - A. Farming helps population grow, and we are going to witness the world’s first population explosion.
 - B. We will also see two important religious innovations: the raising of enormous stone monuments and a fascination with the movements of the heavens.
 - C. The people who did that for the first time are the descendants of those who lived at Çatalhöyük.
 - D. In the Neolithic, population grew at a rate heretofore never imaginable, and these people had nowhere to go but out from the center.
- II. We follow the people who moved west from the Near East.
 - A. They got through the watery barrier between that Anatolian plateau and the land in the Zagros Mountains into Europe.
 - B. They initially brought with them the tradition of building with mud brick, but as they went further into Europe, they began to build with wood.
 - C. Ever westward they went, pushed by population pressure.
 - D. The process took a long time, and the great movement ceased when they reached the Atlantic seaboard in about 4500 B.C.
 - E. Their religious impulses were channeled in a new direction, called the megalithic movement.
- III. The megalithic movement introduces some new elements to our history of human religion.
 - A. In the earliest days of radiocarbon dating, it was thought that Atlantic European megaliths were an example of diffusion, an idea radiating from a civilized center, and were relatively young.
 - B. We found, however, that in almost every case, these were the first examples of big stone architecture in history.
 - C. It was then realized that megaliths had been independently invented in other parts of the world as well.
 - D. Through ethnographic parallels, we can get some insight into the makers’ possible motives.
- IV. Let’s begin our discussion by distinguishing the different kinds of megalithic monuments.
 - A. The simplest is a gigantic, elongated block of stone, called a menhir in Brittany.
 - B. If you put menhirs in rows, you have yet another kind of megalithic monument, as at Carnac in Brittany.
 - C. A dolmen, which means “table,” would be the base of a structure such as a passage grave or a gallery grave.
 - D. Finally, a circle of menhirs, called a cromlech, had a funerary purpose.
- V. Based on ethnographic parallels with places like Borneo, Madagascar, and New Guinea, the European menhirs were most likely raised in honor of specific people.
 - A. Dragging the stones a long distance seems to be part of the power or the magic.
 - B. The standing stones are not always strictly funerary, but the other structures were meant as mausoleums.
 - C. Everyday things that the interred had used in life were laid in the tombs with them, and this tells us something very important.
 1. In Çatalhöyük, the dead were living in the house under the floor with the living.
 2. With the megaliths, families lived apart from that sacred center, but life may still rotate around it. These people had a sense of land ownership.

VI. These sites hint at two other elements of Neolithic religion.

- A.** In the south side of Brittany, at Gavr'inis, there is a very large tomb with a huge, dolmen-like chamber and a passage to the outside, decorated with spirals and strange symbolic shapes.
- B.** At Newgrange, Ireland, we have almost the same building.
- C.** The new element is that these spots were probably not just places to put the ancestors to rest but places of ritual.
- D.** We can also see the beginnings at Newgrange and at Gavr'inis of a way of harnessing the sun.
- E.** We see here the beginnings of gigantic architecture, sacred landscapes, and what we call cultural or archaeoastronomy.

Suggested Reading:

Burl, *Megalithic Brittany*.

O'Kelly, *Newgrange*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Through most of history, the largest monuments have been religious. Taking a global perspective, do you think the same priority exists today?
2. Megalithic monuments represent an extraordinary investment in planning and effort. What benefits might accrue to a society that adopted the practice of constructing such monuments on a large scale?

Lecture Seven

Towers and Tombs of Sumeria

Scope: The decipherment of cuneiform script in the 19th century led to the discovery of a hitherto unknown people in southern Mesopotamia: the Sumerians. One of the first of their cities to be explored was Ur, hometown of Abraham, according to Genesis. In the 1920s, archaeologist Leonard Woolley discovered royal tombs of the 3rd millennium B.C. with fine mausoleums for the bodies and treasures of Ur's kings and queens, as well as outer zones filled with dozens of human sacrifices, apparently willing members of the court. At nearby Eridu, the "first city" of Sumerian myth, archaeologists excavated an even older urban cemetery of more than 1,000 graves. Some men, women, and children were accompanied to the next world by their dogs, and one dog had even been supplied with a bone for food in the afterlife. The poignancy of these tombs echoes the anguish over death expressed in the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh.

Outline

- I. This part of our course is devoted to the religion that surrounds death and burial. We are also making a transition to Mesopotamia and to the city, Ur, where we will find many documents written in cuneiform.
 - A. These cuneiform tablets include a list of the kings of Mesopotamia and the record of a great flood.
 - B. Cuneiform records have revealed to us the traditions of Sumeria, Mesopotamia, and Ur itself.
 - C. We also owe to cuneiform the preservation of the Epic of Gilgamesh.
 - D. The Third Dynasty of Ur dominated the period we will study, about 2650–2500 B.C.
- II. The kings of the Third Dynasty created a royal cemetery at Ur, which was excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley.
 - A. Ur had been inhabited for thousands of years before its abandonment in about 500 B.C., so Woolley had a lot of layers to work through.
 - B. What really appealed to him was the idea of the biblical connections to the stories of Abraham and the Great Flood.
 - C. The tablets revealed a world of named gods that mirrored the earthly royalty.
 - D. Woolley found a very complicated stratigraphy, yet he was able to find the sort of ceremonial center of the community around the ziggurat.
 - E. The ziggurat proved to be part of a much larger ceremonial area.
- III. The grave that changed Woolley's life, archaeology, and our view of early religion was the grave of a woman we now call Queen Pu-abu.
 - A. The grave tested the abilities of archaeologists to excavate fragile materials in the field in an unprecedented way.
 - B. What was remarkable was that Pu-abu had not gone to the next world alone. At least 60 other people went with the queen as her attendants.
 - C. These sacrifices included the bodies of many young women; lyre players; oxen and their grooms; and five contorted skeletons of soldiers.
 - D. It seems the soldiers had systematically killed everybody else down in that tomb, then were sacrificed as well.
 - E. A recent study contends that the women were struck with a sharp object in the temple, then incinerated, dressed, and carried down into the pit. However it was arranged, we don't have any evidence of a struggle.
 - F. What happened at Ur is not unique; it was a practice that we will encounter in other civilizations on other continents.
 - G. The cemeteries of the city dwellers of Ur were also within the tell, and Woolley excavated 1,850 tombs of ordinary people and found their belongings with them as well.
 - H. In many of the tombs Woolley excavated, he found belongings of the deceased buried with them. At a nearby site, Eridu, the dead were buried with their dogs.
- IV. The Epic of Gilgamesh describes a precedent for what Woolley found at Ur.
 - A. When Gilgamesh dies, an immense funeral is held for him, and his wife, members of his family, and members of his court, willingly go down into his tomb and lie down so that they can accompany this great king to the next world.
 - B. On closer study, some of the answers to the questions of Sumerian religion and belief were enshrined in that epic text.

- V. Woolley also found two more things.
 - A. Woolley found that Abraham did indeed come from a city of idols and human sacrifice, but these are rejected by all three of the religions that claim descent from Abraham.
 - B. At the very bottom of Ur, Woolley found a thick layer of flood deposits with more human remains underneath, thereby satisfying those who were looking for evidence of events of the book of Genesis.

Questions to Consider:

1. Mesopotamian peoples visualized the gods as residing “in heaven.” Is this a natural concept, or is it socially conditioned by the way these early farmers and city dwellers lived?
2. In the death pits at Ur, religious conviction seems to have dominated over the primal will to live. Over what other primal instincts and urges can religious beliefs prevail? Do religions in fact tend to encourage a denial of basic physical urges?

Lecture Eight

Tomb of the First Emperor of China

Scope: The terracotta army of Qin Shihuangdi, first unifier and emperor of China, has surpassed Peking Man as the best-known Chinese archaeological discovery. The emperor died in 210 B.C., but his extraordinary tomb complex with its thousands of statues of soldiers, horses, and chariots had been in preparation for years. Most recognize the artistry of the life-size figures; few reflect on the religious beliefs that inspired them: an attempt to achieve immortality through an extension of traditional Chinese ancestor worship. The warriors took the place of human sacrifices and would have provided the emperor with a powerful escort when he entered the next world. The actual tomb, which has yet to be excavated, was a model of the cosmos. Ideas of divine kingship that took generations to evolve in Egypt had emerged in China within the lifespan of a single ruler.

Outline

- I. For the second of our case studies of burials, we visit the first emperor of China's tomb.
 - A. In March 1974, farmers near Mount Li sank some wells and found a lost army of life-size terracotta warriors.
 - B. The spot, near the mountain and the river must have been laid out by geomancers.
 - C. As the Chinese archaeologists dug down, they discovered that the pit was one of four.
 - D. Each of the many statues of horses and men was unique.
 - E. The statues give us a very clear idea of this first emperor's military units.
 - F. In the West, we think of the terracotta warriors as the tomb of the emperor, but they're not the same.
- II. We will examine the tomb, then talk about the emperor of China.
 - A. Emperor Qin Shihuangdi started working on his tomb as soon as he came to the throne at the age of 13.
 - B. In the middle of the tomb complex, there was an artificial hill, and under that hill was a palace.
 - C. Outside was a temple for worship of the emperor; he was trying to turn himself into a god.
 - D. If we think about what he achieved, maybe his touch of megalomania is understandable: he conquered and united all of China.
 - E. He was obsessed with the idea of his own immortality.
 - F. The emperor's death was concealed for nine months after his son ascended to the throne. It was this son who commanded that all the concubines who had not produced children be put in the tomb.
- III. Based on the evidence of the terracotta army, the emperor had developed the idea of scapegoats.
 - A. However ferocious he may have been, he has taken a humane step in allowing images of people rather than the human sacrifices themselves. This also happened in Egypt.
 - B. This explains why it was important to make the faces realistic. These are supposed to be real soldiers.
- IV. Neither the tomb nor the dynasty endured untouched.
 - A. As the Han came in and as the Qin were defeated, many of the people began to loathe this first emperor. A peasant army formed and ransacked the tomb.
 - B. Many of the terracotta warriors were knocked aside, and some were broken; their bronze weapons were taken.
 - C. The passage of time, meanwhile, took away the pigments.
- V. This tomb brings into play a couple of elements that will resound in some of our future lectures.
 - A. Like the Egyptian pharaohs, the first emperor had added a temple to his tomb for his own worship—the first known example in China of ancestor worship at a structure built near the tomb.
 - B. The idea that somebody who looked like a human being was, in fact, a god will lead to the extraordinary religious element of kings who become god-kings.

Suggested Reading:

Cotterell, *The First Emperor of China*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Qin Shihuangdi attempted to achieve immortality through the preparations for his extraordinary tomb. How do modern people seek to become immortal?
2. Should we expect to see a close link between kingship or political leadership and a dominant religious role?

Lecture Nine

Feasting with the Dead at Petra

Scope: The “rose-red city” of Petra was dug out of the rock by a trading people called the Nabateans between about 300 B.C. and 106 A.D., when the Romans incorporated the rich caravan center into their empire. Although mystified later visitors called the enigmatic rock-cut edifices temples or treasuries, most were in fact tombs. And most were furnished with benches where the living could hold feasts in the presence of the dead. Funeral meals are a universal element in world religions, but the cult at Petra was particularly elaborate. Special high benches called *triclinia* were hewn out of the native sandstone around three sides of a burial chamber. Here the family members of the deceased would gather to consume ceremonial meals in which the dead were also believed to partake. Similar *triclinia* and *biclinia* in Nabatean temples show a fusion of concepts about departed ancestors and actual deities.

Outline

- I. Now we turn to the site of the rock-cut city of Petra in Jordan, where the people had, for several centuries, a tradition of feasting with the dead.
 - A. The idea of linking a funeral feast with the burial of the dead is a very old one and is found worldwide.
 - B. In these cases, the food is either being presented to the deceased or is eaten by the loved ones.
 - C. The Nabateans at Petra bring these activities together by creating dining chambers adjacent to tombs for regular feasts with the dead.
- II. Petra is where the Nabateans settled around the 6th century B.C.
 - A. They prospered there and became a great, cosmopolitan, multicultural society and civilization. The fruit of their wealth was Petra.
 - B. The most spectacular carving in Petra is the facade of a building originally described as the treasury, which we now know is a royal tomb.
 - C. In Petra we find many tombs, along with very grand temples to Dushara, Allat, and other gods.
- III. Archaeologists have been guided by Roman and Greek records about the Nabateans. They basically did not write about themselves.
 - A. Some visiting Greek noted that the way they performed sacrifice was to burn incense on sacred betyl stones and then pour the blood of sacrificial animals over those stones.
 - B. The Roman geographer Strabo described the Nabateans for Emperor Augustus.
 1. They loved material things, but they were very open and tolerant.
 2. They were the least litigious people he knew of; they never brought lawsuits against each other.
 3. Women were very visible in Nabatean society, and women and girls sang the funeral feasts.
 4. They loved to drink, but drinking to excess was almost unknown.
 5. Through the 40 years of the reign of King Aretas IV, warfare was unknown in Petra and in the affairs of the Nabateans.
- IV. Now we are going to look at how these Nabateans treated their dead.
 - A. The actual act of burial in Petra could take almost any form, including cremation.
 - B. The common link was what families would do after burial, creating a space nearby for regular commemorative feasts.
 - C. These people were not imagining the dead going on a long journey: Grave goods were almost nonexistent, and the dead were believed to join in the feasts.
- V. What were the feasts like?
 - A. The feasting chambers were laid out like dining rooms familiar to us from the Greek and Roman tradition, with benches carved out of the rock.
 - B. The eating and drinking was likely accompanied by women and girls singing.
 - C. In a niche in the wall was an obelisk, the emblem of the dead.
 - D. There were typically little holes and drains that may have functioned to cleanse the site, but more likely were for libations to be poured for the underworld gods and the dead.

VI. There are gigantic versions of these dining rooms in the temples.

- A.** If the dining room has two benches, it is a *biclinium*; if three, a *triclinium*.
- B.** In some of the temples there are gigantic *biclinia* and *triclinia*. We can imagine dozens of diners feasting there at once.
- C.** In this way, a beautiful cult was created based on ritual feasting—the idea that food and the sharing of the meal links the living to the dead and that the dead are not only with the gods but have somehow become at one with those gods.
- D.** However, there are no *biclinia* or *triclinia* in the royal tombs because kings were worshipped on mountaintops instead.

Suggested Reading:

Bourdon, *Petra*.

Questions to Consider:

- 1.** Petra's rock-cut facades are familiar and exotic images. Did you have prior ideas about their religious meaning or purpose?
- 2.** Are there modern analogies to the widespread ancient custom of feasting with the dead?

Lecture Ten

Druid Sacrifice at Lindow Moss?

Scope: The bog of Lindow Moss near Manchester, England, periodically yields bodies preserved by the tannic acid in the peat moss. The skin, hair, and soft tissues are often in perfect condition, even though most of the bodies date back two millennia to the Celtic Iron Age. At that time, Druids seem to have overseen the ritual sacrifice of community members in the bogs. In 1984, modern peat processors discovered the burial of a man of high rank, buried naked except for an armband of fox fur. Lindow Man was in his late 20s when he was ritually executed by beating and strangling before immersion in his watery grave. Remains of his last meal—a charred cake of baked grains and some mistletoe pollen—were found by forensic scientists in his stomach. Clearly this burial was intended as an offering to the gods, perhaps at a time of communal crisis.

Outline

- I. In this lecture, we turn to the Lindow Moss peat bog in England, where we will encounter a human sacrifice.
 - A. The tannins and acids in peat will tan human skin and preserve human hair, fingernails, and internal organs, but the acids will eat away at the bones.
 - B. Bog bodies are some of the most important ancient human remains because they preserve the complete record of the soft tissues.
 - C. In 1983, peat cutters found the remains of a Celtic woman that were 1,800 years old.
 - D. In 1984, they found Lindow II, or Lindow Man, the remains of a young man.
 1. He was about 25 years old, weighed about 130 pounds, and stood between five foot six and five foot eight inches tall.
 2. He was naked except for a fox fur band around one arm.
 3. He appeared to be in extraordinarily good physical condition.
 4. He had led a life completely free of hard labor.
- II. Radiocarbon analysis dated his remains to the 1st century A.D.
 - A. This was when either the Romans were preparing to seize Britain or when Britain had already become a province of the Roman Empire.
 - B. The resistance to the Romans was organized by a religious group called the Druids, the religious specialists of the Celts.
 - C. To anthropologists, archaeologists, and scientists looking at Lindow Man, the likeliest designation for him was a Druid.
 - D. We know that the Druids practiced human sacrifice, which outraged the Romans and gave them a pretext for invasion.
- III. Lindow Man's life may have been easy, but his death was hard.
 - A. We know that he died near the bog because traces of the sphagnum moss from bog water were in his gut.
 - B. We also know he'd had a funeral meal: a scorched oak cake, which is connected to other Celtic human sacrifice rituals.
 - C. What really indicates he was a sacrifice was the manner of his death.
 - D. Lindow Man's remains show signs of multiple deaths.
 1. Somebody hit him on the side of the head with what looks like the blunt end of an axe.
 2. He was then punched in the back with some sharper instrument so hard that a rib broke.
 3. A garrote was wrapped around his neck and snapped it.
 4. Finally, he was placed in the bog, and that drowning may have counted as an additional mode of death, although certainly by that time he was already dead.
 - E. This looked like a Celtic religious practice because there were ideas of doing things in triples in the Celtic world.
 - F. Another clue was that inside his gut was pollen of mistletoe, a plant sacred to the Druids.
 - G. This is the proposed scenario for Lindow Man's death.
 1. The Druids have decided a man must die.
 2. They take a group to the edge of the bog, where a man picks the cake with the black spot and is singled out.
 3. Someone standing behind him strikes a blow on his temple.
 4. He is then struck in the back.

5. He is garroted and strangled; the neck perhaps breaks.
6. He is carried into the bog and deposited in a pool of water.

IV. What was the reason behind this sacrifice?

- A. Tacitus tells us that in the north, bodies would be placed in lakes or in bogs for one of two reasons: as a method of execution or to honor a fertility goddess. The manner of Lindow Man's death matches the second reason.
- B. Another idea has been proposed by Sir James Frazier, that this was the sacrifice of a sacred king for the benefit of the community, corresponding to a myth known worldwide.
- C. Both scenarios seem possible.

Suggested Reading:

Ross and Robins, *The Life and Death of a Druid Prince*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Your professor accepts the scenario of a Druid prince's ritual sacrifice as the most plausible interpretation of the bog body known as Lindow Man. What other interpretations might be advanced to account for the evidence?
2. Are there any survivals of or analogies to Druidic religion in our contemporary world?

Lecture Eleven

Honoring Ancestors in Ancient Ohio

Scope: The early Hopewell mound builders of the Ohio River Valley (c. 500 B.C.–400 A.D.) left behind a landscape dotted with earthworks: geometric enclosures, gigantic effigies of serpents, and the famous burial mounds. Although the European settlers had little interest in these mounds, Edwin Davis and Ephraim Squier famously recorded thousands of these mounds and earthworks around Ohio and part of the Mississippi drainage. Through their research, especially at Mound City at Chillicothe, Ohio, we learn that the egalitarian Hopewell maintained walled ceremonial centers that enclosed burial mounds, mortuary houses, and work stations for producing dazzling grave offerings of obsidian, copper, shell, pipestone, and mica. The Hopewell proved to generation after generation, for some 500 years, that their ancestors had been great and that they, their descendants, remembered them with pride.

Outline

- I. In the 1st century A.D. along the Scioto River in the central part of Ohio, you would have witnessed a kind of funerary ritual very different from the Petra feasts.
 - A. On the riverbank was an earthen wall, enclosing a great ceremonial area.
 - B. This was one of the largest centers of the Hopewell cult.
- II. Edwin Davis devoted his spare time to the archaeology of Ohio.
 - A. When he met Ephraim Squier, they decided to travel around Ohio and the Mississippi drainage and try to document every mound and earthwork.
 - B. They documented 16 mounds at a place called Mound City on the outskirts of Chillicothe, Ohio.
- III. I want to explain how important their research was.
 - A. The Smithsonian Institute published their research in 1848 under the title “Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley.”
 - B. The publication made Squier and Davis famous as the first people to take a serious scientific interest in these prehistoric sites.
- IV. Louisville, Kentucky, had been a great center for mounds.
 - A. They had been entirely obliterated before 1820.
 - B. The Smithsonian Institution owns a crate of relics from this site that included effigies in the form of tubular pipes.
 - C. On one of the more interesting pipes, there is a figure with copper spools for ears who seems to be dancing. He may represent a shaman.
- V. Let’s go back to our site.
 - A. When it was in use, the mound was likely covered with river pebbles, which gave it a hard and easy to keep clean surface that was white and shining. It was probably six to eight feet high.
 - B. Today there is an earthen wall about three to four feet high and covered with grass.
 - C. Around some earthworks, borrow pits form a moat.
 - D. Although many mounds were at first believed to be forts, they were actually devoted to religion and veneration of the dead.
- VI. Let’s go into the mound.
 - A. The mounds are a number of different shapes, but under each one is an ancient wooden building that had that same shape as its ground plan.
 - B. These sacred houses were individual, small subcommunities.
 - C. Inside, elaborate rites were performed for the burial of the dead. Bodies were usually cremated or excarnated.
 - D. This Hopewell cult ritual was found among many different societies and begins to approximate what we call a religion.
- VII. No ordinary living activities went on in the mounds.
 - A. There were ritual activities and the making of objects of a specific religious purpose in different houses.
 - B. The Hopewell acquired copper from Lake Superior, mica from the Great Smoky Mountains, seashells from the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Coast, and obsidian from Yellowstone to make these artifacts.

- C. After years of use, a given house would be dismantled or burned and a mound of earth laid over it in memorial.
- D. We thus see in Hopewell a way of honoring the ancestors where a daily affair is shifted over into eternity.

Suggested Reading:

Milner, *The Moundbuilders*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Most modern Americans are unaware of their own country's prehistoric sites and monuments. Why should this be so?
2. The Hopewell mounds commemorated the ancestral remains and the ritual houses that were buried beneath them. Does this practice link them to other religious traditions that we have studied or that you have known?

Lecture Twelve

A Viking Queen Sails to Eternity

Scope: Many religious traditions have viewed existence after death as a journey to another world, but none in such spectacular fashion as the Vikings of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Ordinary families buried their dead in small boats or in graves surrounded by a boat-shaped stone curb, but royalty were interred in big ships of oak or pine for their supernatural voyage. The best-preserved ensemble of ship, skeletal remains, and grave offerings comes from the Oseberg Mound near Oslo, where the burials of a Viking queen and her female attendant were unearthed in the early 20th century. The ship itself, along with the queen's sledges, wooden bed, and other furniture, were elaborately decorated with monsters and supernatural beasts of Norse mythology. A fragment of woven and embroidered wool tapestry survived for 1,200 years and shows a scene of sacrificial victims hanging from trees in a sacred grove.

Outline

- I. In this lecture we focus on the Vikings' idea of eternity: It lies on the other side of the water, so they send the dead there in a boat.
 - A. We look at the discovery of the burial of a ruling lady of the Norwegian Vikings.
 - B. Her burial is paralleled by records of Danish and Swedish Vikings interring the dead in boats.
- II. In 1903, a farmer discovered a mound on his property and reported it to Gabriel Gustafson, the conservator of the Museum of the University of Oslo.
 - A. In Norway, mounds like this are likely royal burial places.
 - B. Gustafson was very excited because of the name of the place: "Oseberg" means "Åsa's hill," and Åsa was the name of a queen in the Ynglingatal saga.
 - C. Gustafson tackled the mound in 1904 and found that the ship beneath had been well preserved by blue clay that had formed a dense layer all over the central part of the mound.
 - D. The Ynglingatal saga was fairly specific about when Åsa had lived, about 800–850 A.D., so they hoped to find artifacts of that period.
 - E. Somebody had been there before, but although there was almost no real treasure, what the robbers left behind was even more valuable.
 1. There was everything you needed to set up housekeeping for a royal household in the land of the dead.
 2. They found the bones of two women: one was 60–70 years old; the other was in her 20s and was from the area of the Black Sea, or possibly Iran.
 3. The older woman was likely the primary death, and the young woman was likely an accompaniment.
 4. There were animal sacrifices too: more than a dozen horses, some dogs, and an ox.
 - F. Carvings on the ship were in the 9th-century style, and there was the feeling that only Åsa could have been treated to such an amazing array of treasures.
 - G. The ship was not in great shape, but they managed to get it out.
- III. Vikings had very conflicting ideas about the next world.
 - A. The goddess Hel presided over the place of nothingness.
 - B. If you died well, however, Valkyries would swoop down and take you to either Odin or to the fertility goddess, Freya.
 - C. There was also fear that the dead could come out and walk.
 - D. Although the Oseberg ship was meant for a voyage, it was moored to a gigantic stone inside the mound and was filled with rocks that seemed to be holding it down—or holding the ghosts in.
- IV. What was the date of the ship?
 - A. Through the early 20th century, its official date fluctuated.
 - B. Tree-ring dating later revealed that some of the wood in the ship had been cut in the autumn of 834 A.D.
 - C. It seems very likely that the older woman is indeed Queen Åsa, and that the young woman was a captive brought up on one of the Viking raids.

- V. The Oseberg ship, as a vessel, is something that we also want to know more about.
 - A. A replica of the ship was made. When it was taken out on Oslo Fjord for some sea trials, it sank.
 - B. The makers found it should have had one more plank along each side.
- VI. In the 940s, a group of Swedish Vikings crossed to the Volga River and presented themselves as merchants wanting to trade.
 - A. An Arab traveler, Ibn Fahdlan, had been sent by the caliph at Baghdad to study them.
 - B. He witnessed the burial of their chief.
 - 1. The body was put in the ground to keep it preserved.
 - 2. The ship was put on a huge pyre, and treasure was heaped inside.
 - 3. A slave woman agreed to be sacrificed.
 - 4. There was feasting, preparation of elaborate clothing, and preparations for sacrifices of animals and the slave woman.
 - 5. On the day of the ceremony, the body was placed on the ship and then set on fire.
- VII. Let's end with a different image.
 - A. There was a hero named Beowulf, probably from Sweden, who went down to Denmark and helped the king there.
 - B. In his saga is the description of the funeral of a Danish king who was not burned or sent with human sacrifices but only with treasures and the thoughts of those who loved him.

Suggested Reading:

Graham-Campbell, *The Viking World*.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. When archaeologists attempt to interpret royal Viking ship graves, they are hampered by having only a small sample of sites to consider. In what ways would it be possible to misinterpret such a burial?
- 2. Considering our contemporary burial practices, do you see a close analogy between religious belief about the afterlife and the way we bury our dead?

Lecture Thirteen

Dancing with Bulls at Knossos

Scope: Greek myths tell of the rich and powerful Cretan king Minos, who kept a monster called the Minotaur in the Labyrinth at Knossos. In 1900, Sir Arthur Evans began his three decades of excavation at Knossos, in which he revealed a Bronze Age palace filled not only with royal reception chambers and storerooms but also with shrines, ceremonial pools, and a vast array of religious artifacts. The myth of the Minotaur now seems linked to an ancient bull cult, a descendant of the one at Çatalhöyük in nearby Turkey. Figures of women dominated Minoan art, including statuettes of the Mother Goddess or priestesses with snakes coiled around their outstretched arms. The snakes suggest a chthonic, or earth, cult, while crowns of poppy seed pods suggest the use of hallucinogens for religious trances. In the surrounding mountains were peak sanctuaries, where gods were worshiped far from the centers of Minoan population.

Outline

- I. In this section of the course, we consider how archaeologists reconstruct ancient religious rituals.
 - A. Burials are rituals in themselves, but all religions have other kinds of rituals.
 - B. A ritual is a prescribed sequence of actions performed in a certain place at a certain time and involving specific personnel and equipment, all aimed at a certain end result.
 - C. Our first example of ritual is from the palace of King Minos at Knossos on the island of Crete, discovered and excavated by Sir Arthur Evans.
- II. The myth of the Minotaur and the Labyrinth was famous to ancient Greeks of the 5th century B.C.
 - A. During the golden age of Athens, writers looked back to myths to find patterns of history that led up to their present.
 - B. Athens was a great sea power, and Thucydides preceded his account of the Peloponnesian War with a chronicle of sea power, beginning with the kings of Crete.
 - C. There is an etiological (origin) myth to account for how Crete came to have this power.
 - D. Crete became the great power in the Mediterranean, according to Greek myth, because its kings were the descendants of the god Zeus and Europa, a princess of Tyre in Phoenicia.
 - E. Myths say that the Cretan king Minos's wife, Pasiphaë, fell in love with a bull, and from that union came a beast with the upper body of a bull and the lower body of a man: the Minotaur.
 - F. Minos used this beast as an instrument of his oppression of Athens and the other cities in his realm.
 - G. The bondage of Athens was broken when a young Athenian hero, Theseus, went to Crete and killed the Minotaur, ending Minos's oppression.
- III. Evans bought land at Knossos and began an immense project.
 - A. His land was a tell, and though there were many layers of Knossos, he was only interested in the one around 1250 B.C., around the time of the Trojan War.
 - B. Evans found the throne room in his first trench: a throne with a low seat and high back with curling sides, flanked by benches. Above these are frescoes of griffins.
 - C. This throne does not seem to be the central focus of the palace itself; in fact, Evans found little evidence that Crete was actually controlled by a single hereditary monarch in the manner of the Mycenaeans.
- IV. Let's look at the site as a whole.
 - A. Knossos was arranged around a sort of rectangular-shaped ceremonial plaza.
 - B. Around it were 18 chambers storing jars filled with tributes.
 - C. He also found lots of images, especially bulls and women.
 - D. He found seals that seemed to show a goddess—surprising in a place he thought was firmly controlled by a male monarch.
 - E. In one of the rooms, there was a fresco that showed a bull and three humans in a ritual dance.
 - F. He found many other scenes that showed people interacting with the bulls. It seems to have been a central ceremony.
 - G. One of the points of the gigantic, rectangular plaza was a ceremonial space for that bull dancing ritual.

- V. Regarding the myth, Evans decided that the classical Greeks misinterpreted this ritual.
- A. The Greeks had thought that the young people were sacrificed, and the bull was a monster that lived on, but Evans suggests the opposite.
 - B. Their myth was created to explain an archaeological site that they could not explain in any other way.

Suggested Reading:

Farnoux, *Knossos*.

Questions to Consider:

1. As at several previous sites, Knossos presents us with a link between a Mother Goddess and a bull cult. What do you make of this seemingly unlikely combination?
2. Why should risky ordeals such as dancing with bulls be incorporated into religious practices and ceremonies?

Lecture Fourteen

Oracle Bones in Ancient China

Scope: The most ancient recorded dynasty of Chinese rulers, the Shang, were believed to be mythical until 20th-century excavations revealed their capital city at Anyang in northern China. Despite their alleged supernatural powers and incredible life spans, the Shang proved to be Bronze Age kings of the 2nd millennium B.C., contemporaries of similar dynasties in Egypt and the Near East. At Anyang archaeologists discovered thousands of bones—mainly the scapulae of oxen or sheep and the carapaces of turtles—bearing inscriptions in the oldest known form of Chinese characters. These showed that an important duty of Shang kings was religious. These oracle bones recorded questions put to the deities by the king on behalf of himself or his people. When touched with a red-hot poker, the bone fractured in a way that provided a yes or no answer. These artifacts not only illuminate ancient Chinese religion for us but also record the deeds of Shang queen Fu Hao, commander of the royal armies.

Outline

- I. In this lecture, our site is Anyang, China.
 - A. Anyang was the capital of a dynasty of rulers that were believed to belong to myth: the Shang.
 - B. Chroniclers said that around 1700–1600 B.C., the Shang dynasty was being established by Shang Tang.
 - C. A golden age lasted through 10 of the 30 Shang monarchs, but then the decay set in, making way for the Zhou dynasty by about 1050 B.C.
- II. Archaeologists and historians did not believe that the Shang existed.
 - A. In a Zhou tomb, bronze vessels were found that proclaimed they had been taken from the Shang. Still, there were no specific documents to prove that the Shang kings existed.
 - B. The use of “dragon bones” in traditional Chinese medicine led to two more remarkable archaeological discoveries.
 1. The bones from Chicken Bone Hill at Choukoutien led to the discovery of the *Homo erectus*, also known as Peking Man.
 2. Healers discovered a set of bones with writing on them. They took the bones to a scholar, who identified the writing as some of the oldest Chinese characters known at that time.
 - C. These bones were oracle bones, part of a divination process, and the startling thing was that they seemed to belong to the Shang: The names of Shang kings and queens, particularly Wu-ting, were written on them.
- III. At Anyang, massive archaeological projects started in the 1920s and continue up to the present day.
 - A. Anyang was the capital of the latter part of the Shang, and here was this royal archive of shoulder blades and tortoise shells, all of them inscribed.
 - B. Anyang was an extraordinarily large place for a Bronze Age city, surrounded by walls of beaten earth four miles around.
 - C. Within the royal quarter, in the center, there were 53 beaten earth mounds, each surmounted by what would have been a wooden structure with a thatch roof.
 - D. Inside those buildings, the gods were worshiped, the administration of the kingdom was carried on, the military necessities were attended to, and the king and all of his court lived and practiced the rituals that lay at the heart of their duty to their people.
 - E. The king and his court acted as the intermediaries between the world of the living and the land of the dead and of the gods, especially the god Shang Ti.
 - F. We know from the *Book of Rites* that life at the Shang court was completely circumscribed by the expectations of ritual.
- IV. Consulting oracle bones is a ritual that we can reconstruct in some detail.
 - A. Divination goes on in the palace and involves the king and some divination specialists.
 - B. Royal musicians are brought in and start performing.
 - C. Then our specialists come in with the bone or the piece of turtle shell, and a piece of metal is heated until it is red hot.
 - D. At that point the question is written on the shell or bone.
 - E. The diviner then touches the bone with the hot metal, or the king does himself, and it cracks from the heat.
 - F. The cracks run across the bone and through the characters in such a way that it can now be interpreted by the king.

- G. That interpretation is written on the bone.
- H. That bone or tortoise shell will be taken and threaded to form part of the palace archives.
- V. The questions asked on these oracle bones covered a broad range of subjects.
 - A. Wu-ting asked on over 170 different oracle bones about his consort Fu Hao and her role as leader of his armies.
 - B. These oracle bones give us a window into the preoccupations of a dynasty that was once believed mythical and show them as all too human.

Questions to Consider:

1. We have described some of the topics that, judging from the questions on the oracle bones, obsessed the rulers of Shang China. What topics inspire the “oracles” of our own time to attempt to predict the future?
2. Why do you think the Shang kings kept an archive of all the oracle bone questions and responses?

Lecture Fifteen

Sun and Sexuality in Early Scandinavia

Scope: In the worldwide search for clues about ceremonies of lost religions, the rock art, or petroglyphs, of Tanum parish in western Sweden shine unexpected light on the religious rituals practiced in northern Europe during the Bronze Age. Artists from farming and seafaring communities carved thousands of images into smooth granite rock faces, most of which originally bordered the sea. Ships, funerals, sacred sexual couplings, dancers, acrobats, warriors, plowmen, and processions help us reconstruct a vibrant religious experience. Certain scenes and figures suggest that the myths and beliefs of the 2nd and 1st millennia B.C. endured into the age of the later Viking and Celtic peoples.

Outline

- I. In this lecture we reconstruct the rituals of an ordinary set of farming communities in southwestern Sweden and surrounding areas.
 - A. My doctoral dissertation was about the evolution of the Viking longship.
 - B. What drew me to this area of Sweden were the ships in the rock art, carved around and after 1200 B.C. I wanted to see what similarities there might be to the later Viking ships.
 - C. The ships in the rock art seemed to be of a ritual nature.
 1. Some ships were definitely on land.
 2. Some art showed acrobats leaping and somersaulting over the ships.
 3. Some showed a man with his hands raised in worship while looking at horses drawing the ship across the land as part of a procession.
 4. There were scenes of men and women in sexual union on board the ships, of gods on the ships, and of musicians on the ships playing great curved horns.
 5. There were people wearing horned helmets; they were likely shamans.
 6. On some ships, corpses were being laid out for burial.
 - D. I began to study this rock art; it was farmers' art, but it seemed to express religious ideas of great depth and complexity.
- II. The three-age classification system—Stone, Bronze, and Iron—was invented in this part of the world.
 - A. In the early 19th century, people were archaeology mad, particularly for Greek, Roman, and biblical artifacts.
 - B. The Scandinavians were instead interested in their own past.
 - C. The artifacts they discovered could be dated by the materials of which they were made.
 1. The oldest pieces were made of the chipped stone of the Paleolithic and Mesolithic; then came the polished stone of the Neolithic, and then a transition to bronze.
 2. Bronze came before iron because copper and tin for bronze melt at a lower temperature than iron ore does.
- III. In southern Scandinavia, bronze weapons that were used by the Vikings were found.
 - A. Studying the weapons, we don't find lots of battering on the edges; they seem almost ceremonial, reinforcing the idea that northern Europe was set apart from the conflicts of the south.
 - B. Scandinavia was getting rich because it provided goods that the peoples of the Mediterranean coveted, especially amber, eiderdown, walrus ivory, and furs.
 - C. The Mediterranean people sent bronze back to Scandinavia, which was then cast into beautiful weapons, ornaments, and ceremonial objects.
 - D. Viking communities were mainly farming communities.
- IV. We focus on southwest Sweden because that is where most of the rock art lies.
 - A. When studies began to be published in the 19th century, what shocked scholars was the amount of raw sexual activity in this rock art between men and women—and sometimes between men and beasts.
 - B. The rock art provides in this lively cartoon style a record that at first might be taken for scenes from everyday life; however, there seemed to be evidence of religious activity.
 - C. A plowing figure appears to be a farmer, but we know from Frasier's *Golden Bough* that one of the duties of the sacred king was to plow the first three ceremonial furrows in spring.
 - D. Scenes of what seemed like combat were contests or ceremonial fights between well-matched warriors because this sort of ritualized fight pleased the gods.

- E. Similarly there were processions of people carrying ritual objects, spears, or axes aloft; of animal sacrifices being prepared for the gods or ancestors; and of a maypole.
 - F. Ritual included dressing up in special costumes and masks.
 - G. The art depicts lur players, so music accompanied the rituals.
 - H. There were also scenes of individual worshipers confronting an object of worship and scenes of offering.
- V. Although never presented here, the Mother Goddess's force is still felt.
- A. The images of proto-Odin and proto-Thor are still subordinate to a fertility cult much more closely related to Freya.
 - B. This religion expresses itself mainly in spring at plowing time when the fertility of the gods and the goddess herself is invoked by these intense rituals.
- VI. Let's return to the ships.
- A. When Christianity moved into Scandinavia, the pagan tradition they found hardest to eradicate was that of drawing ships out of the sea and over the fields in the spring.
 - B. The Scandinavians believed that the gods of vegetation and the spirits of fertility came from the sea itself.

Suggested Reading:

Gelling and Davidson, *The Chariot of the Sun*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Does it seem logical either to include or exclude the sexual act from religious rites?
2. Given the needs and concerns of any agricultural community, what religious beliefs and rituals might you expect to develop after the transition from hunting and gathering to farming?

Lecture Sixteen

Apollo Speaks at Klaros

Scope: For centuries, pilgrims from all over the Hellenistic and Roman world flocked to Klaros in western Turkey to seek prophetic guidance from Apollo. Descending into labyrinthine passageways beneath the temple, the visitors would wend their way to a vaulted chamber, into which the voice of the unseen oracle penetrated through a narrow passage. Through the passage was a crypt in which a sacred spring bubbled to the surface. Grateful recipients of the divine word established a tradition of carving their names and the messages they received on the stones of the sanctuary; thus Klaros provides a better guide to the concerns of ancient believers than any other oracle site. Excavations in the 19th and 20th centuries revealed a neighboring temple of Apollo's twin, Artemis, and suggest that an original cult site devoted to the sister and brother gods was eventually reoriented toward the oracular cult of Apollo alone.

Outline

- I. In this lecture our site is Klaros, an oracle site that was sacred to the Greek god Apollo.
 - A. In addition to ritual, we look at this site through the elements from the previous three lectures: creating a ceremonial place of great grandeur; devising oracular procedures; and that ritual is of and by and for the people.
 - B. Klaros was popular starting around the 3rd century B.C. and through the first two centuries A.D.
- II. Let's begin by considering Greek oracles.
 - A. Apollo's province was inspiration and enthusiasm.
 - B. Apollo's oracular procedure required the use of a medium.
 - C. At Delphi, there was a cleft in the earth, where there was a spring and *pneuma* (vapor). The priestess sat on a tripod over that cleft and breathed in the *pneuma*, which triggered her trance and allowed Apollo to speak through her.
 - D. The ancient Greek description of the site is verifiable, geological fact.
 - E. Extending to other oracles, it seems there was a link between religious belief and the geological phenomenon of *pneuma*.
- III. No matter how sincere the religious conviction behind a ritual, there are instances where the people in charge of the ritual have stage-managed the whole effect.
 - A. By constructing the ritual space, they control how you are guided through that space.
 - B. Sometimes you may be subject to illusions about where you are and what is going on.
 - C. Delphi is an example of this, where the cave creates the illusion of entering Mother Earth's heart.
 - D. In Turkey, at a series of Greek temples, there is a similar stage management.
- IV. At Klaros was a temple of Apollo that suddenly sprang to international fame and fortune after two successful predictions about high-ranking Romans.
 - A. Myths developed around Klaros.
 1. They say the founder, Manto, was a servant of Apollo and the daughter of Tiresus.
 2. She married on the advice of the Delphic oracle and then created a temple and a cult at Klaros in honor of Apollo.
 - B. Tacitus wrote an account of what happened in the temple.
 1. The petitioner goes down into a cave and confronts the prophet, but does not ask a question.
 2. The prophet drinks water from the holy spring and gives the petitioner an answer, despite not knowing the question.
 - C. From other sources, we know that these consultations happened at night; there were preliminary rituals, and people entered the cave in batches.
 - D. Iamblichus, in the 4th century A.D., wrote that that crypt at Klaros was in the temple itself, not simply nearby, which was more common.
- V. In the 1950s, Louis Robert found two temples at Klaros, despite the water table having risen and drowned the site.
 - A. There was a temple to Apollo, and to the north was a smaller, archaic temple.
 - B. The archaic temple was from 6th century B.C., and inscriptions showed it was sacred to Artemis, an emblem of fertility on Asiatic soil.

C. All over the marble and the stone of the sanctuary were carved the names of everybody who came there.

VI. Returning to Delphi, let's address music and religious performances.

A. The oldest music in the world is a hymn to the sun god Helios.

B. It was engraved on the walls of the Athenian treasury at Delphi.

VII. Were there the same kind of intoxicating gasses at Klaros as at Delphi?

A. Samples of the water were found to have high quantities of ethylene and some of the other gasses found at Delphi.

B. Klaros seems like a true extension of the Delphic procedure.

VIII. Let's experience what it would have been like for someone who consulted the Klaros oracle.

A. First, we envision the entire oracular setting.

1. We accept Iamblichus's story of the crypt and its spring lying under the temple.

2. In that sacred crypt, the *adyton*, was the emblem of Apollo, reminding the priest of the presence of the prophet god himself.

B. Let's join our questioners.

1. They come from all over the Roman Empire, and sometimes beyond.

2. We pass through the propylaea (gates) and find ourselves in the *temenos* (sanctuary), which is surrounded by a wall.

3. On the way to the temple, we see names, which are like testimonials.

4. It is night, and after a purification process, we go down a staircase and make our way into a vaulted chamber.

5. When it is your turn you face a mysterious dark opening in the far wall; out of that opening comes the voice of the prophet.

C. Think about how carefully it was all arranged, from the names at the beginning to the voice from the inner cave coming to you from an unseen prophet.

Questions to Consider:

1. What roles do stage management and theatricality play in creating a religious experience for ordinary people?
2. What are some of the attributes of Apollo that make him an appropriate patron god of ancient Greek oracles?

Lecture Seventeen

Chalice of Blood in Ancient Peru

Scope: Centuries before Inca rulers conquered an Andean empire centered in Peru, lords of the Moche River Valley north of Lima created a rich realm, based—like Mesopotamian kingdoms—on irrigation technology. As archaeologists took over from treasure hunters in the late 20th century, Christopher Donnan of UCLA recognized figures in rich Moche tombs whom he could identify as specific participants in a Moche ritual of ceremonial bloodletting. Based on repeated representations of the scene by artists, Donnan had earlier called the figures A, B, C, and D and believed them to be purely mythical. However, his figure C, a priestess, appeared unexpectedly in a tomb dating to about 700 A.D. The lordly warrior priest A emerged from a rich burial in a mud-brick pyramid at Sipán. Nearby, Donnan and Peruvian archaeologist Walter Alva unearthed a timber-lined chamber that may be the very room where the ritual was enacted.

Outline

- I. In this lecture, our site is in northern Peru, and we see how archaeologists reconstructed an ancient ritual from the Moche.
 - A. They used iconography—“picture writing”—to interpret the past.
 - B. A couple of archaeologists, in particular Christopher Donnan, used their knowledge of iconography to untangle clues around the art that appears on the pottery of the Moche.
- II. The Moche were a pre-Inca people who lived from about 100 A.D. to about 800 A.D.
 - A. They became known to the modern world through their artifacts, which were buried in great earth pyramids.
 - B. Each of the Moche’s six valley communities had a pyramid as its ceremonial center and as a burial place for monarchs and high-ranking individuals.
 - C. From those ceremonial centers, a group of elite people, led by someone who looked very much like a king but who played intense ritual roles, governed the valleys.
- III. Our heroes in this archaeological story are Walter Alva and Christopher Donnan.
 - A. Alva moved with his family into the Moche River Valley and was tutored by a scholar called Diaz, who had devoted his life to studying these Moche people.
 - B. The Moche had left no records behind, so they were not well known to the outside world. They were known only from their artifacts, which in many cases had been made of gold.
 - C. The Moche are known for their pottery.
 1. Almost every pot represents scenes that could be mythical, historical, or generic, showing hunting or daily activities.
 2. The Moche were also very interested in depicting sex.
 - D. Donnan was intrigued by the Moche and created the world’s largest archive of photos of Moche pots.
 - E. There was one pottery scene that appeared repeatedly that contained four particular figures.
 1. They were continually in the same position relative to each other, arrayed iconographically in the same kinds of paraphernalia and regalia, holding the same objects.
 2. He began to think they must be from a myth.
 - F. Let’s describe those four figures.
 1. Figure A is a male. He is taller than the others and is commonly called the lord.
 2. Figures B and C are approaching him, each with one stemmed drinking vessel. B is male and birdlike; C is female and a priestess.
 3. Behind B and C is another lord, D, and behind D is a war mace.
 - G. In the mid 1970s, Donnan published his findings about the scene.
 1. He called it the presentation theme; others call it the sacrifice ceremony.
 2. In most representations, there were some other figures of naked men and people reaching forward to put knives into their necks to draw blood.
 3. Donnan thought it was a sacrifice theme: In the goblets offered by B and C was human blood for A to drink.

- IV. An extraordinary series of discoveries in these Moche mounds were carried out by Alva and Donnan.
- A. They excavated sites like Sipán and found bodies that seemed to belong to the characters of that famous scene.
 - B. A woman like C was found first, then the man called the Lord of Sipán, buried with enormous complexity and fantastic grave goods and sharing several attributes with A.
 - C. A man like B was also found, and finally, in the tomb of the man called the Old Lord of Sipán, was a body who seemed to match Donnan's D.
 - D. A supreme moment was when they found the chambers where these sacrifices had been carried out.
 - E. It seems the sacrifice ceremony was a repeated ritual. Each generation of Moche nobility would take on those roles and carry out that essential core ceremony of Moche religion.
- V. Donnan felt that this basic ceremony of drinking the blood was tied to Moche warfare.
- A. There were many scenes of warriors accoutered like A and D having duels with other warriors. It seemed to be a ritualized combat.
 - B. When a warrior was defeated, he was immediately stripped naked, roughed up, tied up, and paraded to the pyramids.
 - C. Then blood was taken from the necks of the victims and ulluchu juice was added to prevent coagulation.
 - D. B and C would present chalices of that blood to the warrior who had led the expedition, and he would drink it.
 - 1. Through accepting this offering of blood, he assured the ancestors and gods that the people were pious and reverent.
 - 2. He also assured the gods that they carried out the ceremonies and rituals appropriate to their worship and guaranteed that Moche life would continue.

Suggested Reading:

Kirkpatrick, *Lords of Sipán*.

Von Hagen and Morris, *The Cities of the Ancient Andes*.

Zettler and Horne, eds., *Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur*.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. The Moche sacrifice ceremony centered around human blood. In what contemporary religions does the concept or reality of blood play an important role?
- 2. It appears that four appointed priestly figures, three males and a female, repeatedly practiced a sacrificial ritual over many generations in Moche ceremonial centers. What are the enduring rituals and participants in contemporary religions?

Lecture Eighteen

Decoding Rituals at Palenque

Scope: Old World archaeology began with a Spanish army engineer exploring Herculaneum in 1738. New World archaeology began when a Spanish army officer cleared, excavated, and reported on the ruined Mayan city of Palenque in 1787. Palenque's importance to archaeology increased in the 20th century when its inscriptions provided clues that cracked the code of Mayan hieroglyphs. Art and inscriptions record a vast range of Mayan rituals: the sacred ball game; the ceremonies marking turning points in a king's reign; the ceremonial torture and sacrifice of prisoners taken in war; a Mayan's private vision quest in which the tongue was pierced with a stingray spine. Even cigar smoking proved to have ritual connotations. The ball game was a miniature cult in itself, with a stone court representing the cosmos, a ball representing a celestial body, two teams competing to knock the ball through a stone hoop, and a human sacrifice at the end.

Outline

- I. We conclude this section of the course with the Mayan ceremonial center of Palenque.
 - A. Palenque's greatest time of achievement was between about 250 and 799 A.D. It was a site of kings and priests and a place devoted to rituals of all kinds.
 - B. Today Palenque is almost a square mile of palaces, stepped pyramids, and ball courts. In what is now unexplored forest or open area may have been a large urban complex of houses.
 - C. After about 900 A.D., the elite culture of the Maya collapsed and the great centers were abandoned.
 - D. In this lecture, we bring to life a Mayan ceremonial center and visualize their rituals.
- II. This ceremonial site at Palenque brings together different kinds of rituals we've seen in our survey so far.
 - A. So where we had the bull dance at Knossos, we will find an echo of that in the Mayan ball game.
 - B. We have the blood-letting ceremonies of the Moche, and we have divination; we will see these elements combined in Mayan ritual.
 - C. The shamans, animism, and study of the heavens also make an appearance.
 - D. The Maya erected a towering edifice of supreme beings, of people who serve the gods in temples, and of a calendrical cycle of feasts, offerings, observations, and prayers.
- III. Once the Mayan script was deciphered starting in the 1970s, it was possible to get a new view of the Maya.
 - A. The Maya lived a very bloody life where war was carried on in a ritual way to supply the gods with blood.
 - B. One Mayan site demonstrates the sacrifice of a child to the gods.
- IV. Palenque is one of the most important Mayan sites.
 - A. In the 18th century when the area was under Spanish control, the king of Spain learned about ruins near Palenque village and entrusted them to the army to excavate and record.
 - B. From that excavation came the realization that the area had once supported a complex, glorious civilization.
 - C. Serious archaeological work began in the 20th century, when Alberto Ruz tackled the stepped pyramid called the Temple of the Inscriptions.
 - D. Burrowing down into the temple, Ruz discovered a stone sarcophagus, and inside that was the body of an adult male with a jade mask and fantastic grave offerings.
 - E. This was the single most important ruler in Palenque's history; his name was Pakal, which means "the shield."
 - F. There is a beautiful image called the Oval Cartouche that depicts his coronation.
 1. He's shown seated crossed-legged on a throne of jaguars.
 2. He's leaning over and speaking to his mother, and she is handing to him the war leader's headdress.
 - G. The Temple of the Inscriptions is one gigantic inscription in three panels, with more than 600 hieroglyphic symbols on it.
 1. It dates from the time of Pakal's son.
 2. It interweaves the religious history and the rituals of the last few reigns with the political history.
 3. It emphasizes the importance of the king celebrating events with due ritual.

- V. Mayan rituals were carried out with the king as the supreme intermediary between the world of the living and the world of the dead.
 - A. Sometimes the king dressed himself as a god.
 - B. In the top parts of the temples, the great lords and the king himself would let themselves bleed, and in that faint state they would seek communication with the gods—“calling the serpents of vision.”
 - C. There were stone chambers within the temples for purifying sweat baths.
 - D. The most spectacular of all the ceremonies were the ball games, which concluded with human sacrifice.

Suggested Reading:

Stuart and Stuart, *Palenque*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why do you think the Maya introduced sweat baths into their wide repertoire of religious structures and practices?
2. Are there analogies in other cultures to the sacred Mayan ball game, in which we see religious impulse and ritual linked to competitive sport?

Lecture Nineteen

Temple of the Goddess on Malta

Scope: In 1915, Malta's first professional archaeologist, Sir Themistocles Zammit, began excavating a field at Tarxien where a farmer had plowed up ancient potsherds. He brought to light the stone walls of a temple complex that the islanders had built in about 3500 B.C. Five lobe-shaped chambers opened from a central space. A monumental sculpture of an immensely obese, skirted figure indicated a cult of the Mother Goddess. A miniature figurine found in a votive pit in the hypogeum a few miles away showed the goddess sleeping on a curved bed or pallet. At Tarxien, the remains of bones showed that she had received sacrificial offerings of sheep and cattle; reliefs cut on the stones of the temple also show pigs. Abstract designs of spirals found at Tarxien reappear at megalithic sites in western Europe, suggesting the possibility of a goddess cult with a well-developed symbolic vocabulary of abstract symbols.

Outline

- I. In this section of our course, we use archaeology as a tool to unlock the secrets of ancient gods and temples.
 - A. We begin with the Mother Goddess.
 - B. Our site is on the island of Malta, where we look at the first great temples in the world that were built of stone.
- II. Malta is in a central location in the Mediterranean.
 - A. Its first inhabitants were part of that Neolithic, pioneering spread of farming families that crossed from Sicily in about 5000 B.C.
 - B. Although the island was protected by the sea, it wasn't the ideal place for Neolithic farmers to settle down; however, it did have an underlying bedrock, called coralline limestone, useful for construction.
 - C. After about 1,200 years, these farming families began to develop an extraordinary ritual existence.
 - D. This ritual life was first brought to the world's attention in 1913 when excavators broke through into a vast complex of artificial caves—the hypogeum.
 - E. In this series of chambers, there were human burials and human remains of more than 7,000 individuals. It was also found to have fantastic architecture.
 - F. Most wondrous of all was a statue of a sleeping Mother Goddess, similar to the Neolithic Venus figurines.
- III. Sir Themistocles Zammit was in charge of the local museum of archaeology and prehistory.
 - A. In 1914, farmers working in a small plot began to hit great big stones.
 1. Zammit cleared off some of the area and found himself in the middle of a temple.
 2. The temple dates to about 3200 B.C., and it is the world's first gigantic stone temple.
 - B. Zammit found that the temple was part of a sophisticated complex of four temples.
 - C. The central temple was the most remarkable because it had multiple apses (curved bays).
 - D. As you entered this temple, on your right would be the remains of a monumental statue of the Mother Goddess.
- IV. What went on in this temple?
 - A. Farmers came here and offered sacrifices to the Mother Goddess.
 - B. Double holes through stone slabs were used to tether oxen, sheep, or goats for sacrifice.
 - C. There were altars inside this temple; however, at Tarxien the offerings were not burned as one might expect.
 1. This altar has a chamber inside it where Zammit found a flint knife for butchering meat and the bones of animals; the tools were clean and not burned.
 2. This suggests that the sacrifice was viewed as a feast for the goddess.
 3. All this seems very appropriate for a deity of the earth.
 - D. The temple is decorated with images of animals, of the goddess, and of spirals.
 - E. The spirals were the way to date the temple.
 1. Sir Arthur Evans suggested a Minoan connection and a date some time around 1500 B.C.
 2. The initial radiocarbon dates put it around 2500 B.C.
 3. New analyses in the 1970s put it at 3200 B.C.

- V. The temples at Malta and giant megalithic tombs in Brittany and Ireland gained a sense of primacy over other famous monuments because they were supposed to have been the results of religious diffusion.
 - A. Building these temples was tremendously difficult but something that the Maltese were proud of.
 - B. Neolithic models of these temples have been found elsewhere and were perhaps souvenirs brought home by pilgrims, a treasured memory of a place where they had gone to worship.

Questions to Consider:

1. Malta is isolated by the sea but at the same time open to voyagers from many cultures. What role do you see isolation and multicultural contacts playing in the development of religious traditions?
2. This course presents the Mother Goddess as the first identifiable deity in the archaeological record. If this conclusion is correct, how would you explain the goddess's early appearance in religious history?

Lecture Twenty

The Aten—Monotheism in Egypt

Scope: The lonely tell of el-Amarna in the Egyptian desert was only identified as a religious center in the 1840s when Karl Lepsius translated inscriptions naming it the city of Akhenaten, meaning “horizon of the sun disk.” The lost city was inhabited for only about two decades in the mid-14th century B.C. Its builder was the heretical pharaoh Akhenaten, who closed the temples of Egypt’s traditional gods and substituted the cult of the Aten, or sun disk, an early monotheistic religion unreported by later writers but clearly vouched for by archaeological evidence. Akhenaten and his wife Nefertiti presided over a revolution, but their reforms were swiftly repudiated after Akhenaten’s death. The gigantic temple to the Aten constructed at Thebes, 240 miles south of el-Amarna, was so thoroughly destroyed by successors of Akhenaten that it has taken archaeologists and computer programmers decades to reassemble its fragments.

Outline

- I. In this lecture, we see a god whose rise and fall can be traced over the reigns of a few pharaohs.
 - A. The god’s name is Aten, referring to the disk of the sun.
 - B. With Aten, we see a deliberate attempt to stage a religious revolution to establish a god and a great temple for that god, all in a very short span of time.
- II. In the 14th century B.C., Egypt’s 18th dynasty was in power, which was the rule of the heretic pharaoh Akhenaten.
 - A. The early deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphics used the Rosetta Stone, which allowed Western scholars to get beyond the Egyptian king lists written in Greek.
 - B. Then, an archaeologist found the name of a previously unknown pharaoh: Akhenaten, who was born Amenhotep IV.
 - C. Nothing had been recorded of him in the king lists because he had been a heretic.
- III. Akhenaten recorded every detail of the new faith and the role that he would play in bringing it into the world.
 - A. Amenhotep III, Akhenaten’s father, had his historians research the 3rd and 4th dynasties and discovered a ritual that identified Egypt’s king as a god.
 - B. Amenhotep III tied his own identity to Amen, god of Thebes, linking him to the sun god Rah and bringing him to the center of Egyptian worship.
 - C. Other religious reforms introduced the worship of the Aten, the sun disk, as creator of all, shepherd of the people, and light of the world.
 - D. The Aten was also the place to which pharaohs would rise and join the gods in the afterlife.
- IV. When Amenhotep IV came to the throne, he allowed other gods to be worshiped in Egypt but declared Aten his only god.
 - A. In the fifth year of his reign, renaming himself Akhenaten, he moved his capital to el-Amarna and closed the temples of all the other gods.
 - B. He started work on a temple to Aten within the temple complex at Luxor, but it was never completed.
 - C. The temple at el-Amarna was completed, and the worship of the god went on there for about three decades.
 - D. Akhenaten proclaimed a total change in Egyptian life.
 1. By closing the temples, he had deprived a priestly caste of their employment.
 2. The farmers, the ordinary craftspeople, and laborers had been deprived of all of their traditions and festivals.
 - E. Additionally, up until this time, every Egyptian had pictured that he or she could become immortal; Akhenaten proclaimed that he alone, as a divine force, would worship the Aten, and that he and his family would make that journey to immortality on behalf of everyone else.
- V. The art at Tell el-Amarna was completely different from the familiar hieratic.
 - A. The family of the pharaoh are seated together, and every daily humdrum feature is emphasized.
 1. The father is not a heroic figure.
 2. Across from him is his beautiful wife, Nefertiti.
 3. His daughters are playfully held on the lap and dangled upon the knee.
 4. Over the whole scene is the Aten reaching down to this family.
 - B. With this new style, Akhenaten seems to have been insisting that he was not a perfect physical specimen.

- VI.** Akhenaten worshiped the Aten on behalf of the kingdom, so he eliminated anyone else's role in worship.
- A.** He created a monotheistic state and a state almost without gods because the supreme god was cut off from the people.
 - B.** The diplomatic archive of his reign was preserved in the tell, including letters from Near Eastern kings that make it clear he is losing ground with them.
- VII.** King Tut succeeded Akhenaten.
- A.** He was born Tutankaten, under the aegis of this new supreme god.
 - B.** By the time he died, he had been renamed Tutankhamen—the “-aten” was gone.
 - C.** The revolution had been reversed: Amen returned as presiding deity, the old worship was restored, and the scribes did their best to erase the memory of Akhenaten.

Questions to Consider:

- 1.** Why do you think the sun played such a dominant role in Egyptian religion?
- 2.** Would you consider monotheism to be the most revolutionary aspect of Akhenaten's religious reforms?

Lecture Twenty-One

Deities of the Acropolis

Scope: The Acropolis, or “high city,” in the heart of Athens has been the focus of cults at least since the Bronze Age, when a Mycenaean palace stood on the summit. The ancient Greeks associated various features in their landscape with mythical actions of the gods; the Acropolis boasted an ancient olive tree said to be the world’s first, a gift of Athena herself. Nearby, the bedrock was marked with the triple points of the trident that belonged to Poseidon, sea god and earth shaker. The Parthenon—the temple that housed an immense gold-and-ivory statue of Athena—is world famous, but archaeologists have uncovered structures that were dedicated to a host of other deities and demigods, ranging from Mother Earth to Imperial Roma. The consecrated ground continued to attract worshipers thanks to a Christian church and an Islamic mosque—the latter built within the shell of the Parthenon itself.

Outline

- I. In this lecture, we look at the Parthenon at Athens, and our focus will be the tight link between religion and statehood.
 - A. The Parthenon was a place that housed a gigantic statue of Athena, the patron goddess of the city of Athens.
 - B. The city is dominated by the Parthenon, and its iconic image and the knowledge that it was Athena’s temple has given the impression of ancient Athens as a one-god, one-temple city.
 1. This is an illusion; the Acropolis was devoted to many gods, goddesses, and heroes.
 2. Also, Athena was shared by many other cities.
- II. We can divide the history of the cults and the religious life on the Acropolis into different periods. The first is the Bronze Age, or the Mycenaean period.
 - A. The Acropolis is full of caves, and one of the caverns contains a spring, so it was a highly defensible site.
 - B. The Mycenaean-period palaces are now gone.
 - C. Athens’s Bronze Age kings were remembered by name, and they became mythical heroes to later Athenians in the Classical period.
 - D. The Bronze Age ended in a mysterious way. Despite some unknown cataclysm befalling the city, Athens was the one Bronze Age kingdom not to fall.
 - E. Thus began the Iron Age, and in place of the kings was a new authority structure based on noble clans who were war leaders.
 1. Each clan had a great hall.
 2. Each clan attracted followers who would fight as soldiers of fortune beside them.
 3. The clans divided their ancient religion among them.
- III. We know some of the gods of the ancient religion.
 - A. There was Athena herself, a warrior goddess; but in her earliest days, she was a universal goddess.
 - B. There was Poseidon, god of the sea, horses, and earthquakes.
 - C. There was a myth that Athena and Poseidon had a competition to see who would be lord over Attica. Athena won and gave the people the olive tree, the basis of their wealth and economy.
 - D. The other gods worshiped on the Acropolis include Zeus, Artemis, Pan, Dionysus, Aesculapius, and Demeter.
 - E. The noble families each claimed a god, goddess, or hero as their own, and the Acropolis was divided into lots where each family would build sanctuaries, structures, and altars.
 - F. They each had a priest or priestess who was the son or daughter of the noble family.
 - G. The image of the family’s god was typically inside the structure, along with an altar.
 - H. Although Athens became a great democracy and the ruler of a great empire, the cults of the city were still in the hands of specific noble families.
- IV. Let’s get back to the temples that we can still see today.
 - A. The middle of the Acropolis is bare rock; the original temple to Athena was burned by the Persians in 480 B.C. and was never rebuilt, as a reminder to future generations.
 - B. Instead the Athenians raised new, glorious structures, the first of which was the Parthenon.
 - C. The Parthenon is not really a temple: It has no altar, hereditary priestesses, or clan who claimed to worship Athena there. It is a war monument and a bank.
 - D. The real temple of Athena sits to the side of the Parthenon on what was considered the true sacred ground.

- V. In our own day, the Acropolis has become the shrine of the religion of nationality.
 - A. During the 19th century, Athens was chosen to be the capital of a united Greece.
 - B. When the Germans took Athens on April 27, 1941, a Greek soldier's act of defiance and sacrifice was felt to have resanctified the Acropolis.
 - C. We see in the Acropolis—not just in ancient times, but right down into our own age—a place dedicated to different gods and different concepts but always embodying the idea of the holy.

Suggested Reading:

Vandenburg, *Mysteries of the Oracles*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Classical Athens both inherited old myths and invented new ones. Do modern communities and nations do the same?
2. In Athens, the highest priority of the state was the maintenance of the religious cults. Where does one find such a situation in the contemporary world?

Lecture Twenty-Two

Gods and Pyramids at Teotihuacan

Scope: Thirty-three miles northeast of Mexico City stands a huge prehistoric city, a ghost town ever since its sacred structures (including at least 100 temples) were put to the torch more than a thousand years ago. A contemporary of imperial Rome, the abandoned city was later dubbed Teotihuacan, or “city of the gods,” by the Aztecs, and its two great pyramids were named for the sun and the moon. Years of salvage starting in the late 19th century saved some valuable frescoes showing religious and mythical scenes. Archaeologists have intensively investigated the ceremonial center and the residential neighborhoods, which show that the half a million inhabitants were drawn from various parts of Mexico. An unexpected discovery was a volcanic cave lying below the Pyramid of the Sun—a link to traditional Mesoamerican myths of a cavern of creation.

Outline

- I. In this lecture, our site is the city of Teotihuacan in Mexico.
 - A. Teotihuacan has no written records of its own, and its people vanished after the ceremonial center was burned.
 - B. No direct evidence of what gods were worshiped there survives except monuments and art. Our task is to piece together the clues.
- II. The Aztecs thought they knew what had gone on at Teotihuacan.
 - A. Teotihuacan belonged to the Mesoamerican period.
 1. In about 100 B.C., communities in the valley of Mexico began to grow and expand.
 2. Teotihuacan went under between 700 and 750 A.D., and its demise seems to have triggered catastrophes of abandonment and destruction at all the other sites.
 3. After this period came the Toltec and the Aztec.
 - B. The Aztec knew the site as an abandoned place with gigantic monuments. They gave it the name Teotihuacan, meaning “birthplace of the gods.”
 - C. In a codex that survived the Inquisition, the *Florentine Codex*, there was an Aztec account of what had happened at Teotihuacan when the gods were born.
- III. In the *Florentine Codex*, we hear the story, based on the Aztec cyclical concept of time, recounting the most recent creation, when all the gods came together at Teotihuacan.
 - A. The gods had a council about who was willing to sacrifice himself to restart the world’s cycle, and a warrior god and a humble god came forward.
 - B. The gods built a great fire.
 1. The warrior god could not bring himself to throw himself into those flames.
 2. The humble god ran toward the fire and was turned to ashes. He rose as the sun.
 3. The warrior god then leapt into the flames, and he became the moon.
 - C. The gods realized that all their deaths were needed, so they immolated themselves.
 - D. The god of wind blew through the heavens and set the sun and moon in motion.
- IV. Let’s see what archaeology has to say.
 - A. Intensive work at Teotihuacan began in 1960.
 1. Teotihuacan’s streets are laid out in a grid, and although the north-south orientation is a bit toward the east, within the city the gridding is perfect.
 2. Temples and great ceremonial plazas are carefully arranged throughout the grid.
 - B. Since the 1970s, cultural astronomers have been trying to relate astronomy to surviving ancient monuments.
 1. At Teotihuacan, the kind of solar-lunar axis and orientations that we expected to find are missing.
 2. There seems to be an interest in stars, constellations, and planets, especially the planet Venus.
 - C. Venus was very important to the Aztecs, for whom it was a war deity and to whom it, as an evening and morning star, had two different roles.
 - D. Another clue about the Teotihuacan people is at the pyramid of the feathered serpent, or the pyramid of Quetzalcoatl.
 1. It is a stepped pyramid like that of the sun and the moon, but with many more stages.
 2. It got its name because of the ornament on these platforms: the heads of rattlesnakes wearing quetzal feathers.

- E. Quetzalcoatl was both a god and a person.
 - 1. He was the historical ruler who was said to have left the valley of Mexico after teaching everyone the art of civilization.
 - 2. He told the people that he would return one day during a conjunction of cycles.
 - 3. In a year that the cycles converged, the Aztecs looked for the second coming of Quetzalcoatl and found the Spanish under Hernando Cortez. In their confusion, they were conquered.
- F. The fact that we have a feathered serpent on a Teotihuacan pyramid shows a continuity of iconography.
- G. The pyramids looked very different in antiquity.
 - 1. They had all been plastered over.
 - 2. The valley of Mexico was deforested in order to create the plaster.
 - 3. Part of the demise of Teotihuacan may have been the result of deforestation and an ecological catastrophe.
- V. As archaeologists looked at the pyramids, the frescoes, and the remains of paintings, they began to see some consistent figures.
 - A. There was a god who looked very much like the Aztec rain god; his iconography dominates around the sun pyramid.
 - B. There was also a Mother Goddess: a figure with feather headdresses, outstretched hands, and a spider mouth.
 - C. According to Aztec creation myth, humans were created in a cave and were let to the surface by a pair of hero twins, and in 1971, construction workers discovered a cavern under the great pyramid.
 - D. It may be that under this great pyramid of the storm god lay an image of that original cave, so that people could see that their ancestors had emerged into the light of day in Teotihuacan.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. Why should pyramidal structures feature in the religions of so many ancient peoples?
- 2. What sort of symbolism might be seen in the presence of a cave beneath a pyramid?

Lecture Twenty-Three

Sacred City on the Mississippi

Scope: Few Americans are aware that a great prehistoric city was built on the banks of the Mississippi River more than a thousand years ago. Cahokia, Illinois, was the site of the largest prehistoric urban complex north of Mexico, and at its height it had a population of some 20,000 people who supported themselves on maize agriculture and hunting. The social ties that held Cahokian society together seem to have been mainly religious. The leader of the community was identified with the sun, and an immense flat-topped pyramid was constructed of earth so that worshipers could ascend to the heights to worship the deity. Obsession with the solar disk triggered the building of “woodhenges,” large circles of posts that helped track the movement of the heavenly bodies. Eagles and other birds were important symbols, and men danced wearing the masks and wings of eagles. When a leader died, human sacrifices and treasures were placed in his burial mound, in ceremonies that recall the death pits of the royal cemetery at Ur in Sumeria.

Outline

- I. On the banks of the Mississippi River in western Illinois stands the largest earthen structure in the entire New World, called Monks Mound, in an area called Cahokia.
 - A. A thousand years ago, this mound was the center of the largest ancient urban complex ever to exist within what is now the United States.
 - B. At first thought to be a monarch’s tomb, we now know the mound was a temple mound.
 - C. In this lecture, we ask who was worshiped in this temple and what the religion was like.
- II. Cahokia was a great city, punctuated by mounds, oriented to true north and south, with a 40-acre ceremonial plaza.
 - A. Around the mounds and the plazas were communities.
 1. There were workshops manufacturing sacred objects from exotic materials and semiprecious stones.
 2. The Cahokians made and exported beautiful pottery, cloth, circular hoes, and arrowheads.
 3. They had a lively economy centered, to some extent, around ceremony and ritual.
 - B. Excavations give us some idea of the scale of consumption involved in Cahokian ritual.
 1. A trench more than 100 feet long and 10 feet deep was found. It had been periodically filled up with the remains of great ceremonial feasts.
 2. One layer contained the bones of 3,900 deer, 7,900 shattered pots, the remains of soups and gruels, and a million burned tobacco seeds.
 3. The scale suggests that 20,000 people is a very reasonable estimate for Cahokia’s population.
 - C. We feel the site was religious because of the tobacco seeds, pieces of ritual objects, and burned remains of ceremonial buildings.
 - D. We get the impression that a huge group of people could be mobilized for enormous work projects.
 1. Monks Mound is made of about 22 million cubic feet of earth.
 2. It probably took more than a century to erect.
 3. Lakes were created from the borrow pits’ soil.
 - E. Excavation into some of the mounds show that they grew in stages.
 1. Each stage may have been marked by a feast, a sacrifice, or the building of a sacred structure.
 2. Sacred structures were erected of wood and then burned or torn down. It was the act of building that was the great religious moment.
- III. We see an ethnographic parallel to Cahokian culture in the Natchez people.
 - A. The Natchez maintained the tradition of mound building into the 18th century.
 - B. Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz wrote a detailed account of his interactions with the Natchez.
 1. He became a good friend of the chief, Great Sun, and the chief’s brother, Tattooed Serpent.
 2. When Tattooed Serpent died, du Pratz witnessed the funeral ceremony where human sacrifice was voluntary and Tattooed Serpent’s house was burned.
 - C. Many elements of Natchez culture remind us of what we saw in Cahokia, such as calling the supreme leader Great Sun.

IV. What are some other links in the archaeological record between Cahokia and Natchez life?

- A.** One of the smaller mounds at Cahokia was a king's burial mound containing elements similar to Tattooed Serpent's, including human sacrifice and grave treasures.
- B.** If this king was the Great Sun, he must have been the one presiding over the ceremonies in that temple on top of the mound.
- C.** An archaeologist discovered a woodhenge at Cahokia that could be used as a solar observatory: The posts were aligned with where the sun rises over the mound at certain times of year, another sign of sun worship.

V. What else can we conclude about Cahokia religion?

- A.** They had an extraordinarily rich ceremonial life involving the whole community.
- B.** Even after Cahokia was abandoned, their beliefs spread to other centers and remote tribes, which carried the memory of Native America's first great solar faith.

Suggested Reading:

Chappell, *Cahokia*.

Milner, *The Moundbuilders*.

Pauketat, *Cahokia*.

Questions to Consider:

- 1.** Although mainstream America shows little awareness of Cahokia, the site has been put on the World Heritage register by UNESCO. Why do you think this international recognition was bestowed upon Cahokia?
- 2.** Ancient Cahokians expended far more time and effort on their religious monuments than on their own homes. Are there modern parallels to this practice?

Lecture Twenty-Four

Sun and Shadow at Machu Picchu

Scope: When local farmers led Yale explorer Hiram Bingham up the terraced slopes of Machu Picchu in 1911, Bingham dreamed that he was discovering a hidden city of refuge where a cloistered sisterhood once worshiped the sun. A century of archaeological investigations at Machu Picchu have unearthed evidence that suggests Machu Picchu was in fact a royal retreat built by the ninth Inca ruler, Pachacuti, in about 1450 A.D. Modern excavators call Machu Picchu an Incan Camp David. Bingham's "female skeletons" turned out on analysis to be the remains of the workers, both men and women, who maintained the site. Nevertheless it is true that many of the intricately built masonry structures at Machu Picchu were devoted to religious purposes. Here Pachacuti worshiped his divine father the sun, observed the solstices at a special rock-cut shrine, and measured the sun's shadow with special lines and plumb bobs.

Outline

- I. In 1911, Hiram Bingham was working his way up the Urubamba River in Peru, looking for a legendary place of refuge called Vilcabamba.
 - A. It was supposed to have been the Inca capital after the last claimant to the throne fled from the original capital at Cuzco.
 - B. A farmer took Bingham up a path where he saw a stone wall made of distinctive polygonal Inca masonry. The farmer said this place was called Machu Picchu.
 - C. It was a mountain top covered with buildings that suggested a ceremonial site, as well as farming terraces and water channels.
 - D. Bingham uncovered buildings, tombs, artifacts that suggested ritual purpose, and altars hewn out of the bedrock.
- II. The river valley isolates Machu Picchu and its center.
 - A. The sun casts shadows that would have enhanced the sacred atmosphere.
 - B. Excavators found also plumb bobs that builders may have used to measure precise vertical lines, or they may have been used to measure the shadows on the sacred rocks.
- III. A physical anthropologist said that the skeletons at the site were mostly women; Bingham believed they were Vilcabamba's Virgins of the Sun.
 - A. Machu Picchu became a famous archaeological site for this romantic idea and as a result became an area of intense study.
 - B. Archaeologists soon disputed the idea that the place had been a refuge for the last Virgins of the Sun.
 1. There was a normal population distribution among men, women, and children.
 2. They seemed to be the workers who maintained the place.
 - C. The name of Picchu appeared in some Spanish colonial documents as one of a royal network of sites.
 - D. Archaeologists also disputed the idea that everything at the site was of a ritual purpose.
 - E. They associated the site with a 15th-century Inca ruler named Pachacuti.
- IV. If you read between the lines of recent reports and go back to Bingham's account, the feeling is of a ritual and ceremonial center within a farming community that comes to life periodically when the Inca ruler arrives.
 - A. Pachacuti worshiped Inti, the Sun God, whom he believed was his true father and whose worship he spread throughout the Incan realm.
 - B. Pachacuti was himself a sacred person, an intermediary between the people and the gods, and he took this role very seriously.
 - C. If we map Incan sacred sites in the region around Cuzco, we see that there are many *huacas*, places of spiritual power.
 1. Machu Picchu is one of these *huacas*, and it was likely chosen for its mystical qualities.
 2. Here they shaped natural stone, which had inherent spiritual force, into peaked altars.
 3. One of these altars is called Intihuatana, which means "hitching post of the sun."

- V. An Incan origin myth may tie into what Bingham found at Machu Picchu.
- A. According to oral tradition, in 1200 A.D., Manco Capac led the people, who were dwelling in three caves, to Cuzco, where they established a base for their highly organized empire.
 - B. The people always remembered that place of the three caves, which are reminiscent of the three windows found at Machu Picchu.
 - C. Machu Picchu seems to have been a symbolic representation of the Incan origin place—a holy, sacred site indeed.
- VI. Let's try to recapture what it would have been like to go to Machu Picchu between 1450 A.D. and its decline.
- A. Pachacuti arrives in a procession from Cuzco.
 - B. Machu Picchu is a scene of intense activity.
 - C. On a stated day there is a procession to Intihuatana, where Pachacuti steps forward with a plumb bob to measure the shadow cast by the stone.
 - D. The stone mirrors the shape of one of the mountains on the horizon.
- VII. We feel sure that Machu Picchu was a place where Pachacuti would come to worship the sun, who was not merely a god but the father of them all.

Suggested Reading:

Tierney, *The Highest Altar*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Machu Picchu is yet another presumed site of solar worship, like Cahokia and Tell el-Amarna. Can you think of other deities or religious symbols that are as pervasive as the sun?
2. Many modern scholars would brand Bingham's interest in the Virgins of the Sun as "romantic." Is such a view justified by the evidence?

Lecture Twenty-Five

Celestial Gateway at Giza

Scope: The most famous archaeological monuments on earth, the Great Pyramid and the Great Sphinx, are in reality components of an immense religious complex laid out on the Giza plateau between the west bank of the Nile River and the Sahara Desert. Developed by pharaohs of the Old Kingdom in the 3rd millennium B.C., the site included processional ways, temples, entire ships buried in rock-cut pits, a city of workmen, and the tombs of hundreds of people attached to the pharaoh as family members or members of the court. The complex was so vast that it became, like Carnac, a place of sacred geography, where an entire landscape seemed to create a mystical place where the human and divine worlds could meet and interact. Details of the beliefs concerning the journeys made by the pharaohs and other Egyptians after death can be reconstructed from surviving copies of the Book of the Dead.

Outline

- I. In the fifth section of our course, we tackle the subject of sacred landscapes.
 - A. We begin on the west bank of the Nile River in Egypt.
 - B. Between the paws of the 4,500-year-old Great Sphinx lies a stone stele, which bears a record of an extraordinary encounter between a pharaoh and a god.
 - C. As a prince, Tutmosis III had practiced his chariot skills at the Giza plateau and dreamed that the Sphinx talked to him.
 1. It identified itself as a god, Horus, son of Isis and Osiris.
 2. Horus said that he was buried, and if Tutmosis would bring him back to the light of day, he would reward the prince by making him king.
 - D. Tutmosis was wrong about the identity of the Sphinx; he was looking at the face of the second pyramid builder, Khafre.
 - E. In the Sphinx we see a sacred landscape because the Sphinx is more than a gigantic sculpture; it is a natural land form.
 1. The builders took a lion-shaped mass of stone and sculpted it into a long body and rising headpiece.
 2. The forepart was sculpted to form the face of Khafre; the forepaws, back paws, and tail were added with masonry.
 - F. The Giza Plateau is the most famous pyramid site in the world.
 1. It was not the first pyramid site; the first pharaohs built theirs at Saqqara.
 2. Khufu decided to build his in Giza, and his son and grandson added the other two pyramids to the plateau.
 - G. In considering this gigantic gateway they created, we enter the world of sacred landscapes.
- II. To understand the pyramids, we need to ask what the Egyptians believed would happen after death.
 - A. Egyptians looked on this life as a very short period that led to an eternity of existence on the other side.
 1. They felt that within their own bodies were multiple souls that must be attended to in different ways to survive the journey to the underground world, the Duat.
 2. Pharaohs had to go through that too if they were to successfully join the god Ra in his sun boat.
 - B. Because the afterlife is a journey, it seemed natural to create a gateway where that journey could begin: Giza.
- III. Khufu decided to create a pyramid that would dominate all of the views from the river.
 - A. His pyramid was the center of a gigantic complex.
 - B. There were temples to the dead pharaoh, small pyramids for the pharaoh's wives, tombs for court officers and nobility, the priests' dwellings, and storehouses for offerings.
 - C. Around the perimeter of the pyramid were enormous riverboats the pharaoh had used in life that would now carry him through the underworld to join Ra on his solar boat.
 - D. An important smaller pyramid here was the pyramid of the pharaoh's ka.
 1. The ka is the part of the spirit that stays with the body after death.
 2. The ka must be nourished and will keep the dead person alive as long as the living are performing the correct rituals.
 - E. When Khafre, Khufu's son, built his pyramid, it was placed on high ground, so that the two structures appear to be a pair of matched triangles against the horizon.

- F. The sphinx, a traditional gate guardian in Egyptian iconography, stands guard by the causeway between the two pyramids.
 - G. A third pyramid completes the landscape.
- IV. The complexity of the thought of the pyramid builders even went beyond this.
- A. The Great Pyramid of Khufu is pierced by two angled shafts: one from the north face, the other from the south.
 - B. Cultural astronomers have studied those shafts.
 - 1. Through the north-facing shaft, you can see the pole star.
 - 2. Through the south-facing shaft, you can see Orion, or Osiris to the Egyptians, at its highest point.
 - 3. Menkaure's pyramid may have been placed to complete the site's resemblance to the line of three bright stars in the belt of Osiris, so the ground mirrors the sky.
 - C. Egypt's chief archaeologist, Zahi Hawass, has sent robots up other shafts inside the pyramid to see what lies at their ends.
 - 1. One of the blind shafts had so many turns that the robot had to be called back.
 - 2. The other one came to a door and behind it found another stone door.
 - 3. What lies behind the second door is a mystery, reminding us that we are only at the beginning of our investigations.

Suggested Reading:

Lehner, *The Complete Pyramids*.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. What do you consider to be the greatest mystery concerning the pyramids at Giza?
- 2. Are such sacred landscapes still being created in the world today?

Lecture Twenty-Six

Cosmic Hub at Stonehenge

Scope: Stonehenge in southern England ranks with its contemporary monuments at Giza as among the most famous archaeological sites on earth. Both were constructed by Bronze Age civilizations in the mid-3rd millennium B.C. The ring of “hanging stones” on Salisbury Plain, however, is far more enigmatic than the pyramids or the Great Sphinx. The only ancient testimony to its purpose comes from ancient Greek geographers, who referred to it as a temple to the sun. This claim was ignored by early British antiquarians, who saw in Stonehenge a work of the Celtic Druids. In 1965, Gerald Hawkins used a computer to “decode” Stonehenge as an astronomical observatory so sophisticated that it could predict eclipses. Archaeology has shown that no single theory can explain Stonehenge. The monument evolved over more than a thousand years and was the center of a vast sacred landscape of earthworks, burials, and trackways spread widely across the plain.

Outline

- I. In this lecture, we travel to Britain to visit Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain.
 - A. Because there are no written records by its makers, Stonehenge presents even more of a puzzle than usual.
 - B. Stonehenge is somewhat tied into the megalithic movement, but it is different.
 1. Many of the blocks are not megalithic.
 2. They are fitted together with mortise and tenon joints.
 3. There is no precedent for the circle of slabs united by capstones and lintels into a smooth circle.
 4. Stonehenge is not about burials.
 - C. Let us look at the plain around Stonehenge, which is our second example of a sacred landscape, to put Stonehenge into the context of the religious monuments that once surrounded it and see if we can reconstruct the religious ideas that propelled its makers.
- II. Stonehenge, as a site, spans about 1,500 years of creation.
 - A. In about 3200 B.C., people living on Salisbury Plain created a circular trench and then piled up the soil to form a great ring-shaped wall larger than the later stone circle.
 - B. For about 700 years, people added things, mainly earth mounds at various places within that circle and giant wooden posts set into the mound.
 - C. Around 2500 B.C. and for the 200 years following, Stonehenge became a building site.
 1. The nearer source of the stones is at the Marlboro Downs; these are called sarsen stones.
 2. The other stones are from 250 miles away in southwest Wales; these are called bluestones.
 3. Getting these stones to this site was an extraordinary effort, and we have to assume that there was extraordinary religious fervor behind it.
 - D. The bluestones went up first, and they created a circle, or maybe a pair of concentric circles.
 - E. Perhaps the site’s ultimate meaning was in the building of it. People may have come together at certain times of the year and pour all of their effort into moving these stones.
- III. What would we have seen at this site around 2300 B.C.?
 - A. If you approached Stonehenge from the Avon, you would see a gate, the entrance into the stone circle.
 - B. Up close, the upright sarsen stones were roughly oblong but still showed a lot of natural contours, which was not true of the lintel stones on top.
 - C. Although the ground was not level, the lintel stones are.
 - D. You would have seen bumps and a few carvings on top of the lintel directly above you, marking it as the entrance.
 - E. Within the ring was a horseshoe of five trilithons, like monumental gateways.
 - F. Beyond the ring of stones was an expanse of flat earth with circles of offering pits, dug with picks made from antlers.

IV. Many have tried to understand the meaning of Stonehenge.

- A.** The Greek writer Diodorus Siculus calls Stonehenge a temple to Apollo, indicating a connection to sun worship.
- B.** Medieval chronicler Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote that Stonehenge in his day was a place of healing.
 - 1.** People came and poured water over the bluestones, washed themselves, and were cured.
 - 2.** It was also believed in the Middle Ages and later that Druids built Stonehenge; they did not, though they did use it for sacrifices and rituals.
- C.** In 1963, Gerald Hawkins claimed that Stonehenge was a gigantic astronomical observatory. We no longer think this, though Stonehenge has an element of orientation to the sun.
- D.** A new theory goes back to Geoffrey of Monmouth's idea, that it is a place of healing.
 - 1.** British archaeologists studied the quarry site in the Preseli Mountains of Wales and studied the bluestones there.
 - 2.** They found that there were rings of bluestones from antiquity, like mini-Stonehenges.
 - 3.** People may have brought the bluestones to Salisbury as if transporting their sacredness.
 - 4.** Dammed up pools at Salisbury suggest that it might have been in itself a place of healing.
 - 5.** Archaeologists found the body of an ill individual from central Europe buried nearby, which fits this new theory.

V. Stonehenge reminds us that any of these gigantic sacred landscapes might have multiple meanings and that, however far we go with archaeology, some of the core of the religious belief around them is likely to remain just out of reach.

Suggested Reading:

Chippindale, *Stonehenge Complete*.

Hawkins and Allen, *Stonehenge*.

Questions to Consider:

- 1.** Stonehenge has been called unique. In your view, what features of the monument justify such a claim?
- 2.** What rituals and forms of worship can you picture being celebrated at Stonehenge?

Lecture Twenty-Seven

Desert Lines at Nazca

Scope: The first antiquities from Nazca to reach 19th-century Europe were colorful molded and decorated pottery, now known to date from 500 B.C. to 500 A.D. But the unique element of Nazca culture was not fully appreciated till the 20th century, when pilots flying over the remote and bone-dry coastal desert west of Cuzco, Peru saw gigantic line drawings on the bare earth below them—over 100 spiders, hummingbirds, monkeys, and other figures both realistic and abstract. A German mathematician named Maria Reiche devoted her life to recording the fragile lines and protecting them from destruction by curious motorists. The straight lines through the desert may be processional ways such as those still used by nearby highland communities in their ancestor worship. The extraordinary images of animals and plants, however, continue to defy interpretation, although many theories have been published. At 200 square miles, the Nazca desert ranks as the largest sacred landscape ever created.

Outline

- I. In this lecture, our site is the Nazca Lines of the Peruvian coastal desert.
 - A. In the 1930s, pilots first noted the enormous etchings on the surface of this landscape.
 - B. Our task is to understand the religious purpose of these images, how they were made, who made them, and what they symbolized to this civilization.
- II. The Nazca civilization arose in about 100 B.C. and lasted until about 750 A.D.
 - A. It had a big ceremonial center with about 40 pyramids and temples, called Cahuachi, home to seasonal and special events.
 - B. Cahuachi was surrounded by a foot and a half tall wall that defines the sacred space.
- III. The pilots who discovered the site saw two types of features.
 - A. There are more than 1,000 miles of lines, nodes, and geometric shapes. Each line is usually a few miles in length.
 - B. In the southern zone are 30 figures that mostly represent birds.
 1. The figures are outlined, so you can walk all the way around perimeter and never retrace your steps.
 2. This outlining technique gives the Nazca Lines their recognizable artistic and aesthetic profile.
 - C. The Nazca Lines were made with the simplest technology ever applied to such stupendous results.
 1. The surface is made of volcanic stone, beneath which is whitish-pink subsoil.
 2. To create a line, you just needed to lift off the rocks to the desired width.
 - D. Similar images appear on Nazca pottery, which allows us to link the desert images to the first three quarters of the 1st millennium A.D.
 - E. The Nazca lifestyle, although much grander and more populous at the time the lines were being built, has not changed significantly up to our time.
 1. They farm cotton, various tuber crops, and field crops for sustenance.
 2. They rely on occasional rains and underground seeps.
 - F. Maria Reiche, a German mathematician, spent 50 years as a caretaker and advocate of the lines, promoting their protection and study.
- IV. To understand these lines, we have to use the clues embedded in the lines themselves and know how these people related to their environment.
 - A. Early on, people thought of astronomical links.
 1. The zanier end included theories about aliens.
 2. The more valid idea was that people were looking at the stars and trying to represent them in the desert.
 3. Reiche championed the idea that these lines represent constellations.
 - B. Gerald Hawkins ran a map of the Nazca Desert through a computer to try to find patterns in the risings and settings of stars and constellations at various times of the year.
 1. He deduced that there were no consistent patterns.
 2. On the strength of his reputation, people began to dismiss the astronomical link.
 3. Hawkins has been criticized for overlooking that within the tropics there are days when the sun stands directly overhead.

- C. Anthony Aveni and his team did some of the first serious work on the ground.
 - 1. The nodes from which the lines radiate are on little hills, so that when you climbed to the top of one, you had sight lines to the horizon.
 - 2. They also found that the lines formed a network of continuous interlacing that spanned the pampa between the two populated and farmed river valleys.
 - 3. You begin to get the sense of a system: The dry land between the two populated areas is a spiritual zone crossed by lines radiating from fixed, important points.
- D. Aveni also used a computer and a map of the desert to draw some conclusions.
 - 1. They erased anything that was not a straight line.
 - 2. They found a cluster that pointed at the place on the horizon where the sun would come up around November 1, when the sun is in zenith.
 - 3. November 1 is also the beginning of the rainy season for Nazca farmers.
- V. We do not know what the Nazca might have believed.
 - A. Whether the animal figures were constellations, as Reiche believed, is still open to question.
 - B. Aveni certainly created a very strong case for the idea that water and solar magic were put together to fuel the resurrection of the new year.
 - C. Aveni was also interested in those trapezoidal and triangular figures.
 - 1. They seemed to be charting underground water sources passing through the desert.
 - 2. They are like a sacred or symbolic grid.
- VI. You can walk the lines in the same way that modern people at a religious site walk a labyrinth.
 - A. Nearby modern Andean tribes make walking tours, pilgrimages, and sacred hikes part of their religious experience.
 - B. Indeed, it may be that at Nazca, the art was truly meant to be experienced by walking through it.
 - C. The Nazca may have believed that their sacred actions of walking through these lines on that arid earth would help to bring back that sunrise that heralded the return of the rain.

Suggested Reading:

Aveni, *People and the Sky*.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. More than any other sacred landscape that we have considered, the Nazca Lines seem a miracle of simple technology creating gigantic works and effects. What might this say about Nazca culture in general?
- 2. Without the superhuman scale, do you find the Nazca art evocative of religious or spiritual concerns?

Lecture Twenty-Eight

Skywatchers at Chaco Canyon

Scope: When American archaeologists started to excavate the immense ruined Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon, they focused on a remarkable prehistoric city that had endured for about four centuries (c. 750–1150 A.D.). The ceremonial nature of the site was revealed in the 37 circular kivas built into the pueblo, each with a central *sipapu* through which ancestral spirits emerged from the underworld. But Pueblo Bonito proved to be only 1 of 19 population centers that the vanished Anasazi built in Chaco Canyon. Radiating from these centers were straight roads or ceremonial pathways that formed a network covering hundreds of square miles. Researchers in the new field of archaeoastronomy have been able to demonstrate that many elements of Chacoan architecture and site planning were linked to celestial phenomena, such as the summer solstice marked by an elaborately contrived “sun dagger.” Anasazi ritual seems to have intensified with climate change and environmental deterioration.

Outline

- I. In about 700 or 750 A.D., the descendants of the Anasazi moved into Chaco Canyon in New Mexico and created a ceremonial center and landscape that we turn to in this lecture.
 - A. Chaco Canyon runs east to west and is surrounded by mesas.
 - B. Chacoans had a tradition of making pit houses, which gained new meaning through time.
 1. Pit houses became circular kivas, ceremonial rooms.
 2. They were either below ground level or submerged within large building complexes.
 - C. Chaco Canyon originally had great stands of timber, and Chacoans depended on big pine trees for their architecture.
 1. They were used as posts to hold up the kivas’ roofs.
 2. Each new level of a ceremonial house was supported by wooden beams.
 3. The forests fell victim to the creation of these monumental buildings.
- II. The nine Great Houses emerged in about 1000–1150 A.D.
 - A. They are towering structures of sandstone, comprising 100–800 rooms, containing storerooms, corridors, and kivas.
 - B. Pueblo Bonito is the largest Great House.
 1. It is divided by a central wall, and on either side were great kivas.
 2. There are smaller kivas all around and hundreds of smaller storerooms.
 - C. The first archaeologists assumed this was a city, but it lacked evidence of a large population; thus it must have been a ceremonial center.
- III. Let’s try to reconstruct the religion that went on inside these monuments.
 - A. In the storerooms were treasures: bones of scarlet macaws, copper bells, marine shells, and turquoise.
 1. This gave the initial impression of widespread trading networks, but they were traded up from Mexico.
 2. As part of a ritual system, they ended up as offerings or as ritual paraphernalia.
 - B. The pottery found in the small kivas, which came from all over the ancestral Pueblo domain, suggests each clan had its own place of worship and ceremony within the larger site.
 - C. Meetings took place first in the small kivas and ended in two large kivas, echoing the division into moieties—halves—of many Native American communities.
 - D. The overall structure reminds us of an ancient Greek theater.
 1. The area where the kivas are is entirely or partially below ground.
 2. Rising ranks of storerooms frame the kiva and created a ritual space for display to the assembled groups.
 3. It is a perfect setting acoustically, in terms of site lines, and in overall impressiveness.
 - E. We have very little elaborate art from Chaco, but life and ceremony were complex, colorful, and intricate.
 - F. Pottery was very important since it played a central role in the ceremonies and communal feasts.
- IV. Let’s go down into a kiva.
 - A. People are seated to watch what was happening in the middle of the big circular space, and the gigantic wooden posts rise in the very center.

- B. In the hole in the ground is the central place of Chacoan religious belief.
 - 1. That hole is a *sipapu*, through which the ancestors emerged from the dark underworld, led by a locust playing a pipe.
 - 2. They came from the third world into the light of the fourth world.
 - 3. This belief ties into a cyclical view of human history and a cavelike underworld.
- C. The moment when the ancestors, called katchinas, emerged from the *sipapu* was reenacted.
- D. This is not a religion with a great cult of gods.
 - 1. Instead, katchinas emerge from their *sipapu* to join the living in ceremonies and rituals where the katchinas receive gifts and offerings.
 - 2. When they go back down, they act as intermediaries with the gods on behalf of the living.
- V. The nine Great Houses of Chaco Canyon are set within a sacred landscape.
 - A. In the 1970s, pilots saw roads, straight ceremonial ways, which linked the Great Houses to each other and to outliers.
 - B. These spirit roads create the sacred landscape of these Chacoans.
 - 1. They tend to be places where the landscape was simply smoothed.
 - 2. Sometimes they are narrow, but at other times they split into four branches.
 - 3. The tradition that the ancestors migrated through the land and divided into four groups is one of the things that have helped identify these as spirit paths.
 - C. Where paths met canyon walls or mesas, the builders made ramps or rock-cut steps.
 - D. This was a religion where movement through the landscape is itself a religious act.
 - 1. Among modern Pueblo people, foot races between representatives of clan and community are very popular.
 - 2. These roads may have also served as ceremonial racetracks.
 - E. If we imagine Chaco as it was 1,000 years ago, we can see it brimming with life.
 - 1. There was action in those central Great Houses with their kivas.
 - 2. Additionally, there were people on these ceremonial ways, racing, walking, and praying.
 - 3. Above all, the people honored their ancestors in a landscape that their ancestors themselves were the first to mark.

Suggested Reading:

Plog, *Ancient Peoples of the American Southwest*.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. In what ways does the reconstructed religion of Chaco Canyon resemble the religions of Mesoamerica at Teotihuacan and Mayan sites?
- 2. How might environment and climate help shape religious beliefs?

Lecture Twenty-Nine

Mountain of the Gods at Angkor

Scope: Angkor Wat, the largest religious building in the world, was the funerary temple of the early 12th-century Khmer emperor Suryavarman II but was also a model of the Hindu cosmos. Just as pharaohs represented gods of the Egyptian pantheon, so Khmer rulers identified themselves with the creator god Shiva and established a phallic cult in his honor. Khmer temples imitated the towering form of Mount Meru in the center of the cosmos. Angkor Wat covered a full square mile in five nested rectangular enclosures. Its builder broke with tradition and dedicated it to the god Vishnu. Pilgrims traversed a processional way that was decorated with scenes from Hindu mythology and towers shaped like lotus buds. Angkor Wat also served as an observatory for celestial events such as solstices. Within a century, the Hinduism enshrined at Angkor Wat was supplanted by the Buddhist faith. Later abandoned to the forest, the temple began to yield its secrets to archaeologists only in the mid-19th century.

Outline

- I. In this lecture, our site is in Angkor, Cambodia.
 - A. In 802 A.D., a Khmer prince named Jaya proclaimed the independence of his people and his territory from Java.
 1. Jaya had a vision of the Hindu creator god, Shiva.
 2. Shiva gave the prince a stone called the lingam as a testament to the future.
 - B. The Khmer empire lasted from 802 until 1431 A.D.
 - C. Jaya took the name Jayavarman, meaning Jaya the Shield.
 - D. Jayavarman started the Khmer on their road to glory.
 1. The various successive kings of the Khmer each created a temple that would reestablish the covenant with Shiva.
 2. The temple would hold the lingam in which resided the potency of the king himself.
 - E. Angkor became a vast landscape, and in the midst of the urban complex are mountainlike temples.
 1. The earliest were simple temples on platforms, but they got more elaborate as time went on.
 2. They were dedicated both to Shiva and to their ancestors.
- II. From about 1100 to 1113 A.D., Suryavarman II instigated a religious revolution; he built Angkor Wat between 1113 and 1150.
 - A. Suryavarman came to the throne by fighting a civil war.
 - B. He chose to emblemize the Hindu god Vishnu instead of Shiva.
 - C. He created a new temple to serve three functions.
 1. It would be sacred to Vishnu and his worship.
 2. It would hold the lingam.
 3. It would be his own mausoleum.
 - D. At some point the Khmer monarchs began to call themselves god-kings, *devaraja*.
 1. As god-king, Suryavarman built a temple decorated with art that showed battles recounted in the Hindu epics.
 2. The battle scene is religious but also reminds everyone of his own career as a great conquering hero.
 - E. Architects were ordered to lay out a temple that borrowed ideas and forms from earlier Khmer temples to Shiva but raised them all to a level never before imagined.
 1. A great precinct was laid out in Angkor and walled off.
 2. Within the wall was a moat surrounding a central shrine.
 3. An additional wall was arranged around the island, with four gate pavilions that each mimicked the shape of the towering temple in the center.
 - F. We enter into that stage-managed world.
 1. The impressive sandstone gatehouse has towers with parapets and lotus bud-like tops.
 2. Once past that gatehouse, we arrive at the base of an artificial mountain that consisted of three terraces.
 3. From the third terrace sprang a quincunx pattern of towers.
 - G. The kings of the Khmer loved pageantry.
 1. One writing describes the king coming into the city preceded by the army, dancers, concubines, and all of the ministers and princes.
 2. The king himself entered standing on an elephant, covered in gold, and holding a great sword in his hand.

3. In Angkor Wat, similar dramas were acted out and excitement was generated, but this would be in the cause of the religious fervor.

III. Some of the symbolism of Angkor is laid out in its artwork.

- A. On its stone walls is the record of the religious ideas behind the Hindu faith.
- B. The most important panel is one that shows a creation scene from the *Mahabharata*, called “the churning of the milky ocean,” in which Vishnu helps save the world.
- C. Vishnu is recognizable by his four arms holding four symbols: a lotus, a discus, a conch shell, and a ceremonial mace.
- D. Vishnu is a great warrior, diplomat, and trickster, which are all things that a king needs to be, which is why he was a model for Suryavarman.
- E. Angkor Wat itself is an image of the dwelling of the gods, Mount Meru, the five-peaked mountain where the axis of the world passed.
 1. The axis is represented by the straight lines and the causeways that divided the rectangle of holy ground.
 2. The five peaks were the five towers.
 3. The Sea of Milk is our moat.
 4. Overall, it mirrors a mythological cosmos brought to earth in the service of the worship of Vishnu and this king.

IV. For his mortuary monument, Suryavarman changed the normal temple scheme.

- A. All previous temples at Angkor had faced east, but his faces the west.
 1. The west is where the souls of the dead go in primeval Khmer mythology.
 2. The panels at Angkor Wat are meant to be read in the opposite of the usual direction.
- B. Through all these things, Suryavarman II thought he had achieved immortality.
 1. He was convinced that this sacred precinct would continue to be a place of worship for all time
 2. However, his temple was ultimately taken over for the Buddhist faith.
 3. Suryavarman did achieve immortality, but it was not the immortality that he dreamed of.

Suggested Reading:

Jacques, *Angkor*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why might Suryavarman II have switched his religious allegiance from the Hindu god Shiva (revered by his predecessors) to Vishnu?
2. At Angkor Wat we see Hinduism supplanted by Buddhism. What other sacred structures have been adapted to the needs of successive religions?

Lecture Thirty

The Stone Heads of Easter Island

Scope: Starting in about 400 A.D., the people of Easter Island in the South Pacific began to create one of the world's most remarkable sacred landscapes. Around the coast of their island, they constructed long, rectangular platforms of stone, called ahu. Atop each ahu stood a row of towering stone figures whose heads faced inland. The statues weighed up to six tons each and were carved of soft, volcanic stone from a quarry in the crater of Rano Raraku. Archaeologists discovered burials inside the ahu, strongly suggesting that each monument marked the territory of a clan and that the stone heads represented honored ancestors. The sacred landscape thus also reflected the geographical territories claimed by the different tribal divisions. In about 1500 A.D., a new cult that worshiped birds and eggs appeared on the island. The convoluted cultural and religious history of Easter Island has been investigated by such explorers as Thor Heyerdahl, but many fundamental questions remain unanswered.

Outline

- I. In this lecture, our site is Easter Island.
 - A. The people of this island developed a unique religious cult with forms and elements never seen off the island itself.
 - B. The great stone heads are the symbol of Easter Island.
- II. The original homeland of Easter Island's people is the subject of controversy.
 - A. Thor Heyerdahl was a diffusionist and believed Egypt's pyramids began the tradition of monumental, religious stone buildings worldwide.
 - B. The other school of thought has always been that Easter Island's people are Polynesian.
 - C. The question of the islanders' original homeland bears a great deal on the religion of Easter Island.
- III. Heyerdahl felt that the likeliest parallels to the stone heads were the monumental heads and carved stone figures of Peru.
 - A. He measured, drew, and photographed many of the 745 Easter Island heads.
 - B. He traced the statues' path from the volcanic crater Rano Raraku, where they were made, down to the sea, finding statues that had been left in position all along the way.
 - C. He found stone platforms, called ahu, that seemed to be the same kind of ceremonial platform found on other Pacific Islands and felt that the heads were meant to sit on them.
 - D. He excavated some of the heads, called moai, and discovered that they have bodies, though they lack legs.
 - E. Heyerdahl also discovered about 100 bright orange topknots that were meant to go on the heads of these statues.
 - F. Some of the statues had eyes made of a white stone that were inserted into carved sockets.
 - G. The islanders told him about another rock-carving cult called Rano Kao, which featured birdmen and whose rituals were still conducted.
- IV. Jo Anne Van Tilburg developed a different model for Easter Island's history and religion.
 - A. Her model is based on the evidence that the people came from Polynesia around 300 A.D.
 - B. They would have had a supreme chief or a cluster of chiefs, each of whom claimed descent from a god, and the people were probably divided into clans.
 - C. They would have shared beliefs with other peoples of Polynesia.
 1. Mana is a spiritual force that resides in certain places, things, and people.
 2. *Tapu* (taboo) is the idea that certain things are set apart for ritual, ceremonial, or religious purposes and must not be touched or used in an ordinary way.
 3. Tiki is the god of carvers found throughout Polynesia.
 4. Ancestor worship is also practiced.
 - D. Heyerdahl granted the presence of some Polynesian elements, but he believed that there had been another group, the Long Ears, from South America.
- V. Van Tilburg finally showed that everybody on Easter Island derived from Polynesia and described their practices thus.
 - A. The process of creating, moving, and erecting the heads was in itself something sacred.
 - B. They were repeatedly moved and sometimes deliberately broken, thus ensuring continual activity.
 - C. Some of the rituals probably took place on the ahus, such as dancing and sacrifices.

- D. The dead were wrapped up and placed on ahus to decompose, so that their bones could be gathered; thus each statue represented an ancestor.
- E. The religious life of Easter Island must have been like this from about the time when the first head was created, around 700, until 1500.

VI. The island was a sacred landscape.

- A. There were perhaps 19 or 20 different clans on the island that each created an ahu, from which you could look back at the lands that belonged to that clan.
- B. Honored ancestors would be carved in volcanic stone, which required tremendous effort to be carved and dragged across the island and erected on ahus.
- C. Ongoing veneration and worship occurred through the offerings, the dance, and the introduction of each new dead member of the clan into the protective aura of those ancestors, now transformed into enduring images of stone.

Suggested Reading:

Heyerdahl, *Aku-Aku*.

Van Tilburg, *Easter Island*.

Questions to Consider:

1. To what extent has archaeology been able to “make the stone heads speak”?
2. Why might the Easter Islanders have destroyed or overturned the moai in the 18th century?

Lecture Thirty-One

Tending Zoroaster's Sacred Fire in Iran

Scope: In our modern world, “revealed” religions predominate: religions first preached by a divine figure, prophet, or reformer and then actively spread. The oldest such faith today may be Zoroastrianism, dating back beyond 600 B.C. to the revelations of Zarathustra (called Zoroaster by the Greeks). Zoroaster taught about cosmic dualities: Light versus Darkness, Truth versus Lie, and Good versus Evil. Converts to his religion revered fire as a divine symbol. The spiritual hearth of the religion lay at the isolated city of Takht-i Sulaiman near the Caspian Sea, where Iranian kings and magi tended the sacred flame. Rediscovered in 1819, the identity of the ruined city remained unknown until 1959, when archaeologists unearthed texts on clay tablets. In the days when Persian kings ruled a great empire, Zoroastrianism appeared destined to become a great world religion. Today, the Parsees of India are its main surviving community.

Outline

- I. In our final section, we change our focus to the religions that dominate the world today.
 - A. They are mostly “revealed” religions that can be traced back to specific founder figures.
 1. Zoroastrianism was revealed through Zoroaster.
 2. Judaism was revealed through Abraham and Moses.
 3. Buddhism was revealed through the Buddha.
 4. Christianity was revealed through Jesus.
 5. Islam was revealed through Mohammad.
 - B. In each case, religion became a creed, a set of beliefs.
 1. Creeds discuss the nature of the gods.
 2. They talk about observances of certain rituals, prayers, sacrifices, and religious days.
 3. They may discuss matters of ritual purity.
 - C. Ethics are very important to all of these faiths.
- II. Zoroastrianism makes the dualities of right and wrong clearest.
 - A. Zoroaster founded his faith no later than about 600 B.C.
 - B. The Achaemenid kings of Persia are the first people showing signs of being adherents, calling themselves gardeners and their supreme god Ahura-Mazda; they also venerated fire.
 - C. From Greek historians, we know the kings went to war accompanied by magi, who carried altars on which sacred fires were burning and who watched the stars.
 - D. We learn about Zoroaster himself through about 15 Gathas, or hymns. In one of them, Zoroaster hints at something that is made explicit in the Avesta, the Zoroastrian sacred text.
 1. He had a vision of Ahura-Mazda, who instructed him in three dualities: Light versus Darkness, Truth versus Lie, and Good versus Evil.
 2. Ahura-Mazda's great enemy was Ahrima, who is the Lie, Darkness, and Evil.
 3. Each of us must decide whose side we are on.
 - E. Certain elements of older Indo-European faith were rejected, such as the gods of war, Indra and Mitra.
 - F. Zoroaster also instituted a regimen of reciting the Gathas at five specific times of day in the presence of light or fire.
- III. How do we see Zoroastrianism through archaeology?
 - A. We find it in the symbolism surrounding the Achaemenid kings of Persia.
 - B. Zoroastrianism then went underground for a while, although the activities of the magi were still well known.
 - C. There was a great resurgence in Zoroastrianism during the Parthian dynasty.
 - D. The faith survived many vicissitudes; as part of the holy wars, the pacifism of Zoroaster was forgotten.
 - E. The Sassanid dynasty made spreading the Zoroastrian faith a prime element in their campaign, and fire became an important element of their state religion.

- IV. Takht-i Sulaiman, the “Throne of Solomon,” is a hilltop with a circular lake fed by thermal springs, surrounded by a circular city, surrounded by a circular wall.
- A. The site was well known as a Mongol stronghold. There was also an older Sassanid city with a palace and a temple and, even earlier, an Achaemenid village.
 - B. German archaeologists discovered clay tablets that showed this was the site of the Sassanid sacred fire of kings and warriors: Gushnasp.
 - C. On the north side of the lake, they found a great hole in a floor where the fire altar may have been taken out and a room where ashes may have been gathered for distribution to pilgrims.
 - D. They found the ceremonial way where each Sassanian king would walk barefoot up the slope of the hill, following the example of King Khosrau, the site’s founder.
 - E. Our community of the spirit in this case was the Sassanian king and the pilgrims who visited the site.
 - F. The site was used from Sassanian times up through the Mongol invasions, but worshipers ultimately left because of persecution and became the people now known as Parsees.
- V. The site is geologically interesting.
- A. It looks like Mount Olympus, in Turkey, where fire spouted naturally from the mountainside and travertine flowed from thermal springs.
 - B. These features are repeated at Takht-i Sulaiman, carrying us back to some of our earliest thoughts about the earth itself being the source of religion.

Questions to Consider:

1. Which aspects of Zoroastrianism seem to anticipate innovative features of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam?
2. Why should fire have been chosen as the symbol of the god Ahura-Mazda?

Lecture Thirty-Two

Writing the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran

Scope: In the beginning, religions were an aspect of a people's overall identity, along with their laws, social system, and territorial boundaries. Later, religions were matters of choice and conversion. They allowed individuals to identify themselves with a group that either transcended or resisted traditional political and social identities. A prime example is the Jewish sect that created the Dead Sea Scrolls, that unique library of parchment scrolls discovered in Palestinian caves shortly after the end of World War II. Converts to this sect retreated to a desert commune now called Qumran to lead a life entirely ordered by the rules of their teachers. In addition to a scriptorium, where scrolls were copied, archaeologists have unearthed a unique set of mikvah'ot, or ritual baths, as well as a cemetery. Possibly identical with the Essenes, the Qumran community opposed not only the Roman and Idumaeen rulers of Judea but also the official Jewish temple hierarchy in Jerusalem.

Outline

- I. The people of Qumran withdrew from the mainstream to maintain their faith.
 - A. The Romans and Greeks had laid siege to the Citadel of Jerusalem, and the result was divisions among the Jews about how to interact with this new dominant culture.
 - B. The Sadducees wanted to accommodate this new way and yet maintained the forms and the presence of the Jewish tradition at the temple in Jerusalem.
 - C. The Pharisees, on the other hand, wanted the Jewish people to return to their roots and community-centered worship.
 - D. A third group, the Essenes, left the mainstream altogether.
- II. In 1949, scholars came to the area northwest of the Dead Sea, where two years earlier a Bedouin boy had found a cave containing jars full of ancient scrolls.
 - A. Hundreds of scrolls in thousands of fragments were collected and became the subject of intense study for half a century.
 - B. The texts were sorted, transcribed, and either identified with known writings or determined to be previously unknown texts that tied in with the Essenes.
 1. The Essenes were a breakaway group of reform-minded Jews (predominantly men).
 2. Some of them had decided to retreat from the world into the Judean desert near the Dead Sea.
 3. From their retreat, they kept up a movement that rejected Greek and Roman culture and maintained a connection to Essene communities all over Judea.
 - C. Inside one of the caves were some ruins that proved to have been a community abandoned around 68 A.D.
- III. Roland de Vaux determined that the settlement was no more than 200 years old when it was abandoned.
 - A. He came to believe this was the Essene center the Greeks and Romans had written about.
 1. The site seemed to be the communal dwelling of several dozen people, with large rooms for communal meals and many ritual baths.
 2. There was a place for pottery making and a scriptorium.
 3. There was a cemetery of predominantly adult male bodies and no children.
 - B. He also believed the Dead Sea Scrolls were made by the people of this community.
 1. The scrolls must have been taken to the caves just before the start of the Jewish Revolt.
 2. The community left some of their library down in the caves hoping to someday reclaim them.
- IV. Let us look at the scrolls and their contents to see how well they fit with the community at Qumran.
 - A. There were hundreds of scrolls, and many of them were familiar books from the Torah.
 - B. There were several groups of scrolls that included the complete Hebrew Bible, except for the book of Esther. In some cases, these are the oldest versions that we have of those biblical texts.
 - C. There was also another set of books that read like biblical texts but were completely different: the Essenes' eschatological texts.
 - D. An even more valuable and interesting find was the rules of the community.
 1. The Essenes were a big movement, but we know that only a few of them gathered at Qumran.
 2. There they created a sort of spiritual power center for Essenes all over Judea.
 - E. The rules seemed to conform to what we see at Qumran in terms of the simplicity of the life and the quest for purity.
 - F. Jodi Magness showed that the Qumran pottery was all made there and confirmed the link to the jars that held the scrolls.

- V. We end with a more recent discovery of a potsherd, or ostrakon, from the site of Qumran.
 - A. On it is part of a contract in which a man promises his house, olive tree, and fig orchard to the community.
 - B. He uses the word “Yahad,” which means “those who live together.” In the scrolls related to the community, “Yahad” appeared repeatedly as the community’s name.

Suggested Reading:

Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Which aspects of the sect who wrote or assembled the Dead Sea Scrolls seem to anticipate the later religions of Christianity and Islam?
2. Why should the sect have established a base in such an inhospitable desert?

Lecture Thirty-Three

Taking Religions Underground at Rome

Scope: The oppressive central government of the Roman Empire, coupled with the multicultural traditions of its subjects, fostered a new crop of religious cults that challenged the official state religion and worship of the emperors. In and below the streets of Rome, archaeologists have uncovered evidence for widespread worship of the Egyptian gods Serapis and Isis, as well as the Persian god Mithras and demonic forces controlled through the supposed arts of the Zoroastrian magi. The catacombs of ancient Rome also show early stages in the rise of Christianity, a religion forced underground by imperial edict. The iconography of early Christian tombs reveal a community that expressed its faith through images of lighthouses and anchors and celebrated its creed of agape (Greek for “an open welcome to all”) through egalitarian feasts. The veneration of the honored dead, so important to early religions, was adopted by early Christians to commemorate the graves of martyrs, thus creating cults within the larger religion.

Outline

- I. We look at Rome both above and below ground to see what kinds of religious movements were fostered by the empire.
 - A. Rome was a gigantic economic engine for moving commodities and precious goods, and it became a melting pot of people from many parts of the world.
 - B. There was no religious bigotry; it was assumed people would follow the traditional religion of their region.
- II. Above ground in Rome was the official Roman religion; below ground were movements that show a seething mass of ideas about new faiths in a process of syncretism.
 - A. The Romans inherited Greek-style temples but modified them to Roman taste.
 - B. Romans would not tolerate people who refused to join in the state cult of emperor worship, which was rather chilly, uninvolved, and depersonalized.
 - C. The new religions that were springing up everywhere were offering a sense of involvement and salvation after life.
 - D. Personal involvement can often take people into the world of the occult.
- III. If we go a little deeper, we come to places of water in the Roman underground.
 - A. Nymphs, spirits of pure flowing water, were worshiped at underground springs, where Romans constructed shrines called nymphaea.
 - B. The very ancient mother goddess of Asia, Cybele, was also honored with a grotto and an artificial cave down by the side of the Tiber River.
- IV. If we go deeper still, we find between 60 and 100 miles of tunnels, called the catacombs, under the city of Rome.
 - A. The catacombs served two purposes: It was a quarry for building the city and storage space for Rome’s citizens.
 - B. Many members of the traditional Roman faith used the tunnels as burial plots.
 - C. Some Roman pagan traditions were picked up by Christians, who also interred their dead in the catacombs.
- V. Two great religions that grew beneath Rome were Christianity and Mithraism.
 - A. One of the old Indo-European gods that Zoroaster rejected, Mithras, took over from Ahura-Mazda and was worshiped in underground chapels or caves called Mithraeums.
 - B. Mithraeums hosted ceremonies of extraordinary intensity.
 1. There were seven grades of initiation, ordeals you had to pass on your way to becoming a soldier for Mithras.
 2. There was also an elaborate, bloody baptism.
 - C. Although it seemed that Mithraism was going to be the next great religion, Christianity prevailed.
 1. Christianity was persecuted at times because Christians would not acknowledge the Roman emperor as a god.
 2. Christian martyrs were interred in the catacombs.
 - D. Like the Romans, Christians were convinced that the souls of their dead needed sustenance.
 1. There was a sacred meal, the *refrigerium*, that allowed people to join their dead loved ones in this supper.
 2. The supper was celebrated again on the anniversary of the person’s death.
 - E. One set of catacombs was found directly under St. Peter’s Basilica.
 1. Christian tradition said Saints Peter and Paul died on the same date.
 2. Their feasts were celebrated on the same day, and in inscriptions found in the catacombs, both were described as mediators between the living and Jesus Christ.
 3. The graffiti and inscriptions on the tombs of those early Christians are the oldest Christian texts.

Suggested Reading:

Clauss, *The Roman Cult of Mithras*.

Portella, *Subterranean Rome*.

Questions to Consider:

1. Rome was a multicultural city of many faiths. Was such an environment hostile or conducive to the development of new religious movements?
2. How do you account for the ultimate failure of the Mithraic religion?

Lecture Thirty-Four

Forging Iron at Jenne-jeno on the Niger

Scope: The West African city of Jenne, linked by the Niger River to Timbuktu, is famous for its monumental, multitowered mud brick mosque, dating to the area's conversion to Islam. An older city and an older, indigenous religion were discovered by American archaeologists Roderick and Susan McIntosh after 1975, when they identified a lost nearby city of tells through study of aerial photographs. Years of excavation brought to light Jenne-jeno, or Old Jenne, a vast urban conglomeration of neighborhoods founded in the 3rd century B.C. Archaeological discoveries combined with local oral traditions indicated that many authority figures in this ancient city were not hereditary chiefs but craftsmen belonging to a guild of ironworkers. Their secret techniques for transforming rocky ore to gleaming weapons and tools seemed to indicate supernatural knowledge. Thus the blacksmiths became priestly leaders of the community at large, as well as a sect with hidden rites of its own.

Outline

- I. In this lecture we look at a collision between Islam and the practitioners of indigenous religious faiths in West Africa.
 - A. Islam was founded by, or revealed to, the historical person Mohammad, who lived in Arabia in the late 6th century A.D.
 - B. He was brought up among people of many different faiths, including Christianity, Judaism, and indigenous beliefs.
 - C. His revelation was a vision of the right path for humans to follow, but also of all of religious history. He wrote down his revelation as the Koran, the sacred book of Islam.
 1. The Koran included many aspects of the Jewish and Christian faiths.
 2. It also included the sense of being part of a great battle and a regimented sequence of daily prayers from Zoroastrianism.
 - D. Islam spread within Mohammad's own lifetime. Within a generation of his death, different sects of Islam had appeared.
- II. Sufi Islam spread westward across the Sahara and in the 1200s came into the area of Mali.
 - A. The North African desert and the Mediterranean coast of Africa were converted to Islam quickly because of the old Roman trading routes.
 - B. In equatorial Africa, the king at Jenne converted his kingdom to Islam and built an extraordinary mosque using the adobe architecture of traditional sub-Saharan Africa.
 - C. In West Africa, Sufi Islam was successful in a way that some other branches of Islam would not have been because it was more accommodating of local traditions and practices.
 - D. Jenne flourished under the Islamic dynasties.
 1. It became a bastion of Islam far away from the centers.
 2. Scholars long attributed technological innovations, such as iron use, to the people who arrived with Islam.
 3. It was believed that most of the marks of a highly developed, civilized city went back to that time.
 4. Jenne's participation in a lively trading system was also assumed to begin with the arrival of Islamic peoples.
- III. Roderick and Susan McIntosh excavated the lost city of Old Jenne, or Jenne-jeno, and shattered the old ideas about when ironworking began in West Africa, when this community became a player in international trade, and when complex urban life began in this part of Africa.
 - A. They were studying aerial photographs of a series of 40-foot-high mounds a few kilometers away from Jenne.
 - B. They excavated the mounds and, in the bottom 15 feet or so, found the remains of the crops that the first West African farmers had planted as they moved into the region.
 - C. They were able to show that, in a short time, the area had become in its own right a great urban center.
 - D. They were most interested in the evidence for ironworking and found some workshops.
 1. The ore was smelted in workshops around the periphery of the urban zone.
 2. The pure iron was then brought into the city, ready to be forged.
 3. At first, ornaments, tools, and weapons were believed to be the ironworkers' stock in trade.

- IV. An iron workshop high up in the mound, dating to 800 A.D., particularly attracted their attention.
- A. It seemed normal, until they found a stone structure, a sort of platform.
 - 1. It was made entirely of flat little slabs of sandstone built up in layers.
 - 2. They found terracotta statuettes of human and animal forms that had been deliberately shattered and the fragments placed within the crevices of this platform.
 - 3. Bits and pieces of iron and slag were also strategically deposited throughout the platform.
 - 4. This was a ritual; the workshop was a religious place.
 - B. Many crafts have their own religions and superstitions.
 - C. The blacksmiths were diviners.
 - 1. They provided oracular services, performed rituals like circumcision, and acted as healers.
 - 2. This particular platform was a rainmaking platform, so the ironsmiths of Jenne-jeno were also rainmakers.
 - 3. The platform was where sacrifices were made and rituals were carried out.
 - D. Although there were Marabouts, or monks, among the Sufi Islamic community, the ironworkers lived on because they came from a more indigenous source.
 - 1. The rituals bound the sacred community of ironworkers together.
 - 2. The ironworkers made pilgrimages in their youth from forge to forge to learn the skills.
 - 3. They married into the families of other ironworkers.
 - 4. They brought forward some of their ancestors' indigenous traditions.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. Do any modern crafts or industries seem to have developed any cult practices analogous to those of blacksmiths in Africa's Niger River communities?
- 2. What might you deduce about a society that ascribed religious and magical powers to ironworkers?

Lecture Thirty-Five

Carving Monasteries at Ajanta in India

Scope: Like Christianity and Islam, Buddhism encouraged the creation of monastic communities, where men and women could withdraw from the corrupt outside world and live according to religious rather than secular laws. During a tiger hunt in 1819, British soldiers stumbled on a long-lost Buddhist monastery complex cut into the basalt cliffs at Ajanta in central India. The five temple caves and two dozen monastery caves were all artificial, cut into sheer rock above a horseshoe river bend between 200 B.C. and 500 A.D. The monks' cells, courtyards, and places of worship were decorated with statuary and a unique collection of painted murals—a sort of Buddhist Lascaux. The setting and the artworks were unusual, but the monasteries at Ajanta were in fact part of a constellation of monasteries that attest to the powerful attraction such habitations held for thousands of believers during Buddhism's golden age.

Outline

- I. In April 1819, John Smith rediscovered India's Ajanta Caves.
 - A. They had once housed a Buddhist monastery and had last been active almost 1,400 years earlier.
 - B. Archaeologists have been trying to understand how they were built and to decipher the inscriptions and iconography.
 - C. There are two phases in this remarkable monument, so we will look at the first phase of cave building, talk about Buddhism, and then look at the second building phase.
- II. The caves are monuments to the Buddhist religion.
 - A. They were built during Buddhism's ascendancy in central India but were abandoned altogether in the 7th century when India's Hindu ruling class banned Buddhism.
 - B. Buddhism's origins can be traced to about 485 B.C. with the birth of a prince, Siddhartha Gautama.
 - C. At Siddhartha's birth, a sage predicted that if he was kept from the world, he would become a great king, but if he was exposed to the world, he would turn to the religious life.
 - D. Siddhartha fulfilled the sage's prediction, abandoning his family and his inheritance to seek a more just and righteous way of life.
 - E. He initially plunged into asceticism but then decided to practice "awareness of breath"; he would sit, meditate, and think about the act of being alive.
 - F. Sitting under a Bodhi tree, Siddhartha experienced a transformation.
 1. He was assaulted by a great demon, Mara, who tried to turn him from his path, but he endured.
 2. He achieved awakening.
 3. "Buddha" means "the awakened one," or "the enlightened one," and this became his designation.
 4. He became a monk, founded an order, and devoted himself to bringing others to awareness.
 - G. The Buddha is viewed as the first to preach this path; he was followed by bodhisattvas, ones who had achieved enlightenment and now helped others to do the same.
 1. The bodhisattvas show up in great numbers in later Buddhist art.
 2. There was an initial prohibition against depicting the Buddha, because he did not want to be treated as a god.
- III. The Buddhist faith was founded on some basic ideas.
 - A. The first set of ideas is called the three jewels.
 1. The first is the idea of the Buddha, the awakened one.
 2. The second is the dharma, the Buddha's teachings.
 3. The third is the community centered on these teachings.
 - B. The second set is the four basic points about human life.
 1. Life leads to suffering.
 2. Suffering is caused by the desire for things.
 3. The way to escape from suffering is to stop wanting.
 4. The Buddha has shown the way to do this.
- IV. The Ajanta Caves show two different forms of Buddhism: one from about 100 B.C. and the other from 5th century A.D.
 - A. The original six caves were created for a monastic group.
 - B. They were built using stone chisels, hammers, and mallets.
 1. Workers were lowered on ropes from the top of the cliffs to carve out the chambers and details.

2. They also made depressions in the floor for water so that sunlight would hit the water and be reflected onto the ceilings and walls for the mural painters.
 - C. The mural painters were armed with twig and animal hair brushes and only six colors; they painted stories about the lives of the Buddha, called Jatakas, and Buddhist symbols.
 1. The stories sometimes took place at the courts of kings and gave the artists a chance to depict court life, which becomes important in the second phase of the building.
 2. The first set of images was painted around 100 B.C.
 - D. In 460–480 A.D., King Harisena of the Vakataka dynasty took a new interest in the long-deserted caves and brought back Buddhism in a new form, in which the Buddha is a god and is depicted in the art.
 - E. Great halls of worship were created.
 1. The biggest hall is cave number 10, and it has a stupa.
 2. A stupa is a mound containing some bones or the remains of the Buddha and other holy treasures.
 - F. We can see a transformation of Buddhism, elements flowing into the faith from sources that Siddhartha could not have anticipated and that do not fit well with his ideas.
 - G. Some of the writings from the walls of the later caves indicate how people balanced desire for a Buddhist spiritual experience with desire for material wealth.
- V. Today, the caves are endangered by monsoons, as well as visitors. But the religious impulse that created the caves endures.

Suggested Reading:

Behl, *The Ajanta Caves*.

Questions to Consider:

1. A number of religious traditions have developed patterns of monastic life. What common features unite these monasteries, regardless of creed?
2. What social conditions would you deduce from the prominent role played by wealthy secular patrons in creating the monastery in the Ajanta Caves?

Lecture Thirty-Six

Faiths Lost and Found

Scope: What do archaeological discoveries reveal about religion? Looking back over our selection of sites, we are struck by the universality of religious practices and the central place they occupy in most cultures and civilizations. Not only does religious belief seem to be hardwired into human consciousness, but very specific manifestations seem to appear in widely separated times and places: mystical meaning assigned to caves; erection of mounds, megaliths, and pyramids; cremation; ritual human sacrifice; divine honors paid to rulers; temples housing images of gods; religious specialists, whether shamans or priests; and creation of artificial sacred enclosures and landscapes keyed to the heavens. Ancient traditions outlive the religions from which they originated and are woven into the fabric of later religious experience, art, and ritual. Above all, archaeology shows how religion lies at the core of every society's perception of its own identity.

Outline

- I. In our final lecture, we explore some themes that have run through the course and recur in widely scattered times and places.
 - A. We talk about some enduring elements of human religion.
 - B. We close with a reflection on the place that religion occupies in culture, history, and life.
- II. First we look at three symbols that seem to be part of the religious idea, starting with the cave.
 - A. More than 40,000 years ago at Shanidar cave, Neanderthals interred the bodies of their beloved dead, creating a sacred space and a dwelling for the spirits.
 - B. Caves then became sacred spaces where the living could receive enlightenment, as at Lascaux and Altamira.
 - C. The cave is an important element in many religious cults.
 1. In Mayan ceremonial centers, nearby caves were filled with offerings—obviously places of cult worship.
 2. At the Acropolis, the cave was a great symbol of religious enlightenment and experience.
- III. Our second symbol is the sun.
 - A. This symbol begins to dominate when people shift from hunting and gathering to agriculture.
 - B. In many cultures, including the Natchez, Cahokian, Egyptian, and Incan, leaders were identified with the sun.
 - C. The sun dominates in religions that were held by just a small community of people as well as in great world religions.
 - D. The sun is a symbol of enlightenment—the change from the darkness to the light that is an essential part of the duality that lies at the heart of so many religions.
- IV. Our third symbol is animals.
 - A. We first encountered the bull in Altamira in 15,000 B.C. and saw it again in Çatalhöyük, Knossos, and Rome. It is important in many other religions in many parts of the world.
 - B. The same symbol having the same importance in cultures half a world apart has convinced historians of the diffusionist theory of human history.
 - C. Sir Walter Raleigh expressed an antidiffusionist idea: The human mind has the ability to look at an array of means and materials that exist worldwide and choose the same things and craft the same objects and practices from them.
- V. What are some of the enduring elements of religion?
 - A. Concerns about the afterlife are variations on a theme: Ritual is how you deal with grief.
 - B. Another element is creating sacred space and time.
 1. The importance of place depended on certain geological features, enhanced with buildings, symbolic and religious art, and the paraphernalia of human ceremony.
 2. A sacred place will often be held sacred by a succession of religions.
 3. Time itself becomes religious because it is reckoned carefully, especially by agricultural communities.
 4. Many religions have made a huge effort to understand the sky in order to understand time.
 - C. There is sacrifice, of either one's possessions or one's life.
 - D. Finally, there is the idea of gods.
 1. Religions often develop the idea of grand, superhuman, identifiable deities.
 2. There can also be a supreme god who is not so easily envisioned.
 3. Having created gods, our earliest ancestors strove to get to know them, and that became part of the religious quest for visions.

VI. What is the place of religion in human culture and in individual human lives?

- A. In any anthropology textbook and most archaeology textbooks, religion is the last or almost last chapter; it is considered the result of kinship, social, and economic systems that are the real engines of the society.
- B. The counterargument is that religion occupies a primary place in human affairs.
 - 1. We have seen numerous cases where monuments are entirely devoted to religious purposes.
 - 2. The ingenuity of engineers and scientists has been devoted to religion while the expenditure of time, knowledge, and wealth was not applied to everyday life.
- C. Religion began on a very personal level, but then came the idea of intermediaries.
 - 1. Religion first emerged in the family, at the burials of dead loved ones.
 - 2. It moved to the community through rituals of initiation and enlightenment.
 - 3. Individuals have always desired to make sacrifices, to be part of the mysteries, and to break through the veil.

Questions to Consider:

- 1. What can we learn by studying the material remains of lost religions that can provide insight into the faiths that dominate the contemporary world?
- 2. In what ways do the religious experiences of ordinary people differ from those of the elite or the leaders of the state? Based on our analysis of material remains of religious sites, would you say that your own religious experience differs from that of your ancestors?

Timeline

Ancient Eras and the Creation of Sacred Sites

Note that most dates are approximate.

B.C.

45,000	Neanderthal groups inhabit Shanidar Cave in northern Iraq and bury their dead in pits. Shanidar is the earliest positively identified site of ancient religious ritual.
25,000	Hunting groups in South Africa, ancestors of the modern San, create their rock art.
16,000	Cro-Magnon hunters of the Upper Paleolithic era create religious paintings and small Venus figurines in Lascaux cave in France.
9000	At Gobekli Tepe in southeast Turkey, a hunting community begins to erect stone temples like those later found on Malta.
7500	A Neolithic society of hunters, herders, and horticulturalists creates a pueblo-type community at Çatalhöyük in south central Turkey (Anatolia). By 6500 B.C. the inhabitants were creating masterpieces of religious art and interring their dead beneath the floors of their houses.
4500	The tradition of raising megalithic monuments begins in Atlantic Europe.
3800–2500	Neolithic seafarers and farmers create stone temples to the Mother Goddess on the island of Malta.
2550	The Great Pyramid is completed at Giza, Egypt.
2500	Pu-abu is buried at Ur, Sumeria (southern Iraq).
2500–2300	At Stonehenge, a circle of stones are added to a complex of circular ditches and post holes that had already been the target of ritual activity for about 700 years.
2000	A Bronze Age society erects the first palace or ceremonial center at Knossos. The original palace burned in about 1700 B.C. The grand New Palace flourished until about 1350 B.C. The site was abandoned after 1200 B.C.
1350	Amenhotep IV takes the name Akhenaten and converts Egypt to the monotheistic worship of Aten. This faith dominates Egypt for a single generation.
1300–1050	The Shang dynasty is established and rules an extensive territory from their capital at Anyang, China.
1000	In Bronze Age Scandinavia, a society of farmers and warriors records their elaborate religious rituals in petroglyphs.
432	The Parthenon is built on the Acropolis in Athens, which had already seen a millennium of royal and ceremonial use. Its importance as a religious site would continue down to modern times.
300	The oracular shrine of the Greek god Apollo at Klaros, Asia Minor, begins its slow rise to fame and fortune; the Nabateans, who built the city of Petra, begin a lucrative four-century rule over the caravan routes between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean; Jenne-jeno (Old Jenne), where the ironworkers formed a religious elite, is established along the Niger River in Mali.
221	China is unified under Qin Shihuangdi, now known as the First Emperor.
100	The Hopewell cult appears in the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys of North America, creating numerous ceremonial sites over the next 500 years.

A.D.

68	With Roman legions about to crush the Jewish Revolt, the sectarian group that had inhabited Qumran for over a century (perhaps the Essenes) hid their sacred scrolls in the surrounding caves and abandoned the site.
100	At Lindow Moss, England, a healthy and high-ranking Celtic male aged about 25, possibly a Druid, submitted to a sacrificial death and burial in bog.
200	Rome has become a multicultural city where many different faiths and cults are practiced, including Mithraism, Christianity, Judaism, the cult of Isis, and occult rites of magic and sorcery.
300–900	Teotihuacan, northeast of modern Mexico City, dominates Mesoamerica.
400	At Ajanta in central India, quarrymen and sculptors enlarged an earlier set of Buddhist monastic dwellings to create the Ajanta Caves. The site was used for about a century.
450	Zoroastrian magi establish a holy city at Takht-i Sulaiman in northern Iran.
500	On the north coast of Peru, the “Lord of Sipán” is buried with finely wrought gold ornaments and eight human sacrifices.
600	The Nazca of Peru’s coastal desert come to the climax of some 500 years of creating large-scale images and gigantic line drawings in the desert.
675	At Palenque in eastern Mexico, a ruler named Pacal or Pakal (“Shield”) begins work on the stepped stone pyramid that would later hold his sarcophagus.
700–1130	Period of the Anasazi settlement at Chaco Canyon in modern New Mexico.
700–1500	Period of erecting large stone heads, known as moai, on Easter Island.
834	At Oseberg, near Oslo in Norway, a Viking queen and a female attendant are given a rich and elaborate burial in a big sea-going ship.
900	Mississippian people establish a great center at Cahokia, across the river from modern St. Louis. The site reached its climax between 1100 and 1200 A.D.
1000	The Anasazi begin to create ceremonial centers on a large scale at sites such as Pueblo Bonito and Chetro Ketl.
1113–1150	Khmer king Suryavarman II builds the gigantic Hindu temple of Angkor Wat in Cambodia.
1450	The Inca ruler Pachacuti builds Machu Picchu, partly as a royal estate and retreat, partly as a ceremonial center, or <i>huaca</i> .

Glossary

ahu: The term used by Easter Islanders to designate one of the rectangular stone platforms erected around their coasts as a marker of a clan's territory, a center for religious rites, and a storage place for sacred images. The famous stone heads, or moai, originally stood in rows on the ahus, as if on a stage, but most had been overturned by the time Europeans reached Easter Island.

animism: From the Latin *anima*, "spirit" or "breath," the belief that every aspect of the natural world—animal, plant, rock, water, wind, or celestial body—has its own spirit. Animism is often found among hunting and gathering societies, whose religious specialists, or shamans, grapple with the spirits on behalf of their people.

caryatid: In classical architecture, a column in the form of a human or divine being. The most famous caryatids are the stone sculptures of Athenian priestesses who uphold the roof of the porch on the Erechtheum temple.

cromlech: The term used in Brittany for a megalithic monument in the form of a circle of standing stones. The cromlech is thus ancestral to the great circle of sarsen stones at Stonehenge in England.

cuneiform: From the Latin *cuneus*, "wedge," the form of writing originating in Mesopotamia and later used throughout the Near East in which clusters of wedge-shaped strokes were imprinted on clay or carved on stone. Cuneiform characters could be words, ideograms, or phonetic symbols. The script, which was used to express a number of different languages, remained undeciphered until the 19th century.

devaraja: From the Sanskrit for "god-king," the term used by the Khmer people of Cambodia to designate the imperial rulers who had their capital at Angkor.

dolmen: In the Celtic language of Brittany, a stone table. The term is now used for those megalithic tombs that consist of three or four upright slabs supporting a large capstone.

henge monument: In British archaeology, technically an earthwork consisting of a circular ditch and a ringlike wall made from the excavated soil, chalk, or substratum. Confusingly, the term comes from the traditional name Stonehenge, where the "henge" refers to the hanging stone lintels that are unique to that site, not to the surrounding ditch and ring of earth. In more general parlance, a woodhenge would be a circle of upright timber posts, such as was erected at ancient Cahokia in Illinois.

hieroglyphic: Literally "sacred inscription," the term is now used for the type of elaborate, stylized, pictographic script that was developed by such ancient peoples as the Egyptians and the Maya.

huaca: In Inca cosmography, a point or location of special spiritual power in the natural landscape. Lines of *huacas* radiated out across the countryside from the Inca capital at Cuzco.

hypogeum: Literally "below the earth," an artificially constructed cave below ground level. The most famous hypogeum is in Malta, where it served as a communal mausoleum for thousands of individuals in the Neolithic era.

initiation: In the religious sense, a rite of passage or a ceremony in which an individual begins a new spiritual life with a new social identity. During such rites, the initiates are customarily separated from the main group and are admitted to sacred places, where sacred symbols are revealed and the mysteries of life and death are explained.

ka: In the Egyptian religion, the aspect of the human soul that represents the spirit or life force. When the ka leaves the body, death occurs. The ka can be kept alive by offerings of food and drink at the tomb, though only the spiritual essence of these material offerings is consumed by the ka.

kiva: To archaeologists, one of the circular rooms, usually subterranean or partially subterranean, that served for religious and ceremonial purposes in such Anasazi complexes as Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon. The term has been adopted from the modern Hopi word for a ceremonial house.

lingam: In Hindu iconography, the phallic emblem of the god Shiva, an emblem of life force, fertility, and regeneration. In each of the early Khmer temples at Angkor, the king (as the incarnation of Shiva) would erect a lingam as a focal point of worship and spiritual power.

lur: A musical instrument of Bronze Age Scandinavia consisting of a long, curved tube of bronze with a mouthpiece at one end and a decorated flaring bell at the other. Pictures of lur players in the petroglyphs of southern Sweden show that they were played in ensembles of two or three. Replicas produce notes that are deep and resounding, well suited to accompany the sacred rites in which they are depicted.

mana: In the religions of the South Pacific, spiritual force. It may be inherent in a person, an artifact, a natural object, or a place. The presence of mana accords with the idea of the sacred in English.

menhir: In the megalithic terminology of western Europe, a single standing stone. Menhirs erected in modern times in such places as Madagascar and New Guinea were often raised to honor great men or commemorate important events.

moai: Name given by Easter Islanders to the great stone heads that were carved in the quarries of volcanic stone in the crater at Rano Raraku and then dragged to the coast to be set up on ahus. The heads are believed to represent honored ancestors.

mystery cult: From the Greek *mystai*, “initiates,” Greek mystery cults inducted initiates into a new spiritual awareness through special, secret ceremonies in dark halls, caves, or isolated spots, where officiants revealed the true meaning behind life and death. Mystery cults were very personal, as opposed to the typical sacrificial cults of the state religion in ancient Greece and Rome. The Eleusinian mysteries, celebrated near Athens, were the most famous and later influenced both Christianity and Mithraism.

omphalos: From the Greek for “navel,” a stone that indicated to pilgrims that they had reached the center of the world at Delphi, an oracular shrine originally sacred to the earth mother Ge. In time, the omphalos stone became associated with the prophet god Apollo, so that its presence at Apollo temples such as the one at Klaros in Asia Minor was enough to indicate the presence of the god.

oracle: A prophetic message, the individual who speaks the message on behalf of a supernatural force, and/or the site where the divination ceremonies or consultations are held. Oracles are encountered in many religious traditions.

peplos: In ancient Greece, the single piece of cloth that was worn as a garment by women, usually woven of wool or linen. In Athenian state religion, the peplos was the special embroidered garment that was draped over the sacred image of the goddess. The peplos in the Erechtheum on the Acropolis (where the holy image of Athena was kept) was used for a year, then replaced with a newly created robe at the time of the midsummer Panathenaic festival.

petroglyph: From the Greek for “rock” and “inscribe,” a specimen of rock art. In archaeological terms, petroglyphs may be either carved or painted on natural rock surfaces. They play an important role in depicting religious images and rites among the San of South Africa, the aborigines of Australia, and the Bronze Age Scandinavians of southern Sweden. The tradition is found worldwide.

rongo-rongo: On Easter Island, the script developed as a series of pictograms used for ceremonial purposes. Tablets inscribed with rongo-rongo writing were found in various ahus around the island, but the script has not yet been deciphered.

sarsen: The enormous upright stones in the main circle at Stonehenge, which were dragged more than 20 miles across Salisbury Plain from their point of origin on the Marlborough Downs. Sarsens are slabs that have been roughed out of hard, dense sandstone, and some are still found in their original geological positions. The origin of the name is unknown.

scapulimancy: Literally “prophesying with shoulder blades,” the type of divination practiced by Chinese kings of the Shang dynasty at their court at Anyang. Both scapula (usually sheep or ox) and tortoise shells were used in this oracular procedure, in which a hot poker was pressed against the bone or shell. The resulting cracks were interpreted as the answer to a question that had been spoken, and afterward scribes wrote the question (and sometimes the answer also) directly onto the object. These bones make up the earliest large corpus of Chinese writing.

shaman: From Siberian, this term is now applied to all spiritual specialists who act as medicine men or medicine women on behalf of their clans or tribes. Shamans typically master a great deal of botanical, historical, and other traditional lore, but when actually in action they often go into a trance state in which they encounter and overcome the spirits that are harming or endangering their people. Shamanism is typically a component of an animistic religious tradition, although in Maya centers shamans still served the common people at a time when the ceremonial centers were dominated by kings, gods, priests, and temples.

sipapu: In the traditions of the modern Pueblo tribes such as the Hopi, a mythical hole through which the ancestral humans emerged into this world from the dark underworld, led by a figure named Locust who was playing a flute. The souls of the dead now pass to the Third World or underworld through this primal *sipapu*, but the figure named Coyote has placed a stone over the hole so that only kachinas spiritus can reemerge from it. The term *sipapu* also applied to the symbolic holes that were placed at the centers of kivas, and such *sipapus* could also take the form of water holes or other features in the natural landscape.

tapu: In the religious traditions of the South Pacific, the term applied to persons, objects, or places that have been declared supremely sacred by the religious authorities and must be left strictly alone and untouched—hence our modern Western word “taboo.”

tell: From Arabic, an artificial hill composed of layer upon layer of ancient cities. Tells form in areas where mud brick was used for buildings, and the decay of the architecture through time seals in the old living floors and streets and allows for new construction on top. Troy was a tell with at least nine superimposed settlements; other famous tells are Jericho and Ur.

triclinia: Pieces of built-in furniture consisting of benches around three sides of a room. Greeks and Romans used *triclinia* in their dining rooms, and the Nabataeans of Petra adopted the design for their tomb chambers, where feasting with the dead was an important ritual for families of the deceased.

ziggurat: From the Akkadian for “building on a raised area,” now used to designate the stepped pyramids in the ancient cities of Mesopotamia and surrounding areas. Each ziggurat had a shrine or small temple at its summit, accessible only to priests (and possibly kings). Ziggurats, often built of mud brick with an external sheathing of fired brick or bitumen, were the chief features of religious complexes that included courtyards, places of sacrifice, places of purification, storerooms, and living quarters for priests. The ziggurat of Babylon is the original of the biblical Tower of Babel.

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