

SEMINAR PAPER:

The Common Heritage of Near Eastern Temples

Temples and Texts
Anthropology 678 R
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The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the numerous parallels that are found within the actual physical structure (divisions in, courts of, sacred and holy space) of ancient temples in the Near East (which must account in some measure for the uniformity and purpose in their use) and with those parallels demonstrate a common "parentage" or thread among them. It is not my purpose to discuss the reasons for these similarities or even what influences were determining factors, which is another subject worthy of study. The orientation of the temple will also be considered (where it can be shown) since it plays such an integral part in the temple structure.

It should be noted that it is not a requirement that a temple be an edifice or structure¹ as we shall see in examples of sacred space such as Mount Sinai. If this observation is acceptable, then we can proceed freely without obstruction, in comparing temples or sacred space, whether they be built of human hands or fashioned without hands. David Freedman has given his opinion that "the only true temple of God - made not by human but by divine hands - is and can only be located on top of the mountain sacred to the God who dwells in that temple."² His statement supports the notion that a temple need not be an edifice or structure, while other scholars also feel that temples can include structures built by human hands. This study will consider both kinds.

1 Kristensen, The Meaning of Religion, p. 358-59

2 Freedman, Temple Without Hands, p. 21

In my opinion there are strong evidences and parallels to justify the comparison of the various temples of the Near East and to ultimately conclude that some kind of continuity and common thread, however slight,³ becomes a binding link among the multitude of temples.

The approach that will be used in examining the various temples will be to divide the study into two major divisions: (1) Location (the Holy Mountain motif) and (2) structure, orientation and utility.

LOCATION

Sacred time, sacred space, sacred location. There is present in the sacred texts of the Judeo-Christian world the notion of a connection between temples and mountains (and by extension lofty elevations). Examples are replete from the biblical sources (Theophanies on mountaintops: Abraham on Mount Moriah, Moses on Sinai, Elijah on Mount Carmel, Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration). As shall be seen, mountaintops are a natural temple. Elsewhere, temples built by human hands placed on lofty elevations fulfill the requirements of communion with deity and in other examples man-made mounds atop which the sanctuary is stationed also qualify. John Lundquist states that one of the typologies of the temple is that it must be built on "separate, sacral, set-apart space."⁴

Mount Sinai - As was mentioned earlier, a temple need not be an edifice or structure to be considered a temple. Of course the classic example is the meeting between God and Moses on Mount Sinai. It has been suggested

³ Lundquist, What is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology, p. 206

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 209

that Mount Sinai (the location where the sacred event occurred) is a temple, a temple made without hands.⁵ It is significant that God chooses such an elevated and lofty location from which to reveal himself to his prophet Moses, when other locations could have been selected. God himself calls the location "holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). It also appears that God wishes his people to worship him on the mountain (Exodus 24:1). In many instances mountaintop locations are selected by God as a place to reveal himself. Other examples beside Mount Sinai are Mount Hermon where Christ was transfigured and God revealed himself (Matthew 16:13-18. Location of site disputed) as well as Elijah's lengthy sojourn to Mount Sinai seeking the presence of God. Even Christ himself was "led up of the spirit into the wilderness, to be with God" (Joseph Smith Translation of Bible, Matthew 4:1, emphasis added). Traditional accounts say that it was upon the Mount of Temptation where Christ retired to be with God.

That the Tabernacle itself was not located on some mountaintop or high elevation is obvious. But that does not invalidate the notion that the Tabernacle is still a model of the "heavenly temple" revealed to Moses in the heights of Mount Sinai. The tabnit, the heavenly model of the temple, is alluded to in the Nag Hammadi Texts.⁶ There is also ample evidence from the biblical record showing that God specifically revealed to Moses how to build the Tabernacle, the layout, materials, decorations and appurtenances so that God might reveal himself within a sanctuary (Exodus chps. 35-40). Carol Meyers stated: "It's function within the community was that of a temple. Thus it was actually a portable temple, as befits a community without a fixed geographical locale, central govern-

⁵ Freedman, Temple Without Hands, p. 21

⁶ quoted by George MacRae, The Temple as a House of Revelation in the Nag Hammadi Texts, p. 178

ment, or permanent capital."⁷

Temple Mount in Jerusalem - The location for the Temple of Jerusalem is perhaps the most familiar site to people the world over. Several temples have been built on this location, known by various names such as Mount Zion, Mount Moriah, the Temple Mount, the Mountain of the Lord, the Holy Mountain. The Temple Mount is located on the highest point of the northern end of Mount Zion (2,437 feet above sea level). Of course it is presumed (with good reason) that other temples have shared this same elevated location down through time: the Temple of Solomon, Zerubbabel's Temple and Herod's Temple. The point is, all of these temples at different times have shared the most elevated point on Mount Zion. Perhaps the fourteenth verse from the fifth chapter of Matthew echoes a voice of tradition and necessity for the location of the temple: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." Other temples around the Israelite area also share this element of "the holy mountain." The Temple of Baal at Ugarit, the Temple of Dagon, the temples at Megiddo, Lachish and Hazor. Clearly there exists some element of sharing or perhaps a common thread in origin. Israel was not unique in their selection of the holy mountain upon which to build the temple. Striking parallels are had from the tablets of Ugarit of the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. In brief, the major deities of the Ugaritic texts, El and Baal, dwell in a tent or palace on their mountains while celebrating banquets, issuing decrees, sitting in council with other deities and proclaiming their kingship.⁸

⁷ Meyers, The Elusive Temple, p. 36

⁸ Clifford, The Temple and the Holy Mountain, p. 108-9

Egypt - Pyramids and Temples - Egyptian culture and geography offer a direct contrast to other areas of the ancient Near East as far as temple building is concerned. It is immediately obvious that the geography offers no natural elevations upon which to build and situate temples and sanctuaries, yet Egypt is best known for the numerous pyramids and temples that have been erected (Perhaps because of the seemingly insurmountable feats that the Egyptians accomplished). In Mesopotamian culture where similarity of geography is present, artificial mounds were constructed upon which ziggurats were built, atop which a temple would reach heavenward. Similarly in Egyptian building artificial "mountains" or high places were constructed out of the necessity of providing a link between heaven and earth, namely the pyramids. The term pyramid is of Greek origin, it's meaning somewhat obscure, but the Egyptians used the word mer to describe these monuments which has been translated to mean "Place⁹ of Ascension," perhaps a clue as to the function of the pyramid.

After death the king would pass from earth to heaven, to take his place amongst the gods and to join the retinue of the sun-god. However, he needed a way of reaching the sky from the earth, a bridge slung between this world and the next, a 'Place of Ascension'. The true pyramid form could have been developed at the same time as the rise of the sun-cult to provide this means of ascent, and in the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom, which were intended to aid the king's passage to the next world, certain spells refer to a 'staircase ... provided for the king's ascent to heaven'.(10)

It seems apparent then that one of the intended purposes and symbols of the pyramid was a deliberate outreaching heaven-ward as if to escape the earthly bounds - a way to establish a connection with the gods of

9 David, Cult of the Sun, p. 55

10 *ibid.*

heaven. The Pyramid Texts mention two devices to enable the king to reach the solar region (according to myths, the king would spend much of his afterlife with the sun-god) - the staircase and the rays of the sun.¹¹ Perhaps the staircase referred to would be the step pyramid. It has also been shown that the Egyptian hieroglyph associated with the idea of a stairway is the silhouette of the step pyramid itself.¹²

Mesopotamia - Temple building in Mesopotamia, as has been mentioned, exhibits some of the same characteristics as found in Egypt. The ziggurat is the primary kind of edifice found upon which the temple or sanctuary is situated. Examples of these are located at Tepe Gawra near Ninevah and at Uruk on the east bank of the ancient course of the Euphrates where the remains of three temples have been excavated on the Anu ziggurat mound. The ziggurat is an artificial man-made mound upon which a temple can reach towards the heavens.¹³ The Temple of Marduk at Babylon, the Ziggurat at Ur and Tell Ugair on the Euphrates all share, in this characteristic element of the "holy mountain" upon which they are placed. Ziggurats themselves, as manifested by their step-like structure, witness to this reaching out heaven-ward scenario in the same fashion as the "high places" mentioned in other cultures. In fact the term ziggurat signifies "high edifice".¹⁴ According to E.O. James, the Sumerians built their temples and sanctuaries on elevated mounds for more than practical purposes:

11 Covensky, The Ancient Near Eastern Tradition, p. 68

12 see R.O. Faulker, The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts (Oxford 1969) p. 183 (utterance 508:1108), p. 196 (utterance 523:1231) as cited in William Murnane, The Penguin Guide to Ancient Egypt, p. 82-3

13 E.O. James, From Cave to Cathedral, p. 134

14 *ibid.*, p. 137

When the Sumerians settled on the alluvial plains and marshes of the Euphrates valley they were doubtless compelled to raise their buildings above the water level on artificial foundations secure against the periodic floods. But apart from this practical necessity, being in origin a mountain people they were accustomed to worship their gods in sanctuaries elevated on hills. Therefore, they continued this tradition placing their temples on mounds and platforms, the ziggurat being given a lofty elevation symbolizing the mythical mountain of the world, representing in miniature the structure of the universe.(15)

It would seem reasonable to postulate that the Tower of Babel (a ziggurat edifice) would be a representation and effort of the ancients to narrow the distance between them and their gods. (see Genesis 11:4)

STRUCTURE, ORIENTATION AND UTILITY

The Tabernacle - At the onset, let it be pointed out that a discussion of the Tabernacle in terms of comparison to other temples is a valid treatise. In the early days of scholarship the Tabernacle was questioned as having ever really existed. It was suggested that the idea of the Tent of Meeting was really a retrojection made back into history to substantiate the "concerns of a postexilic community."¹⁶ This view has been challenged and modified and evidence to the contrary has been presented. Carol Meyers concludes that "there can be no doubt that a portable sanctuary ... existed in the pre-Solomonic period."¹⁷

Perhaps one of the most fascinating elements of the temple "make-up" is the actual physical identity of the structure itself which alludes and points to the specific purposes and uses of the edifice. Building orientation is also an important element to be considered since

15 *ibid.*, p. 135-6

16 see Wellhausen, Prolegomenon to the History of Ancient Israel, 1957, p. 38-51 as quoted by Meyers, The Elusive Temple, p. 36

17 Meyers, The Elusive Temple, p. 37

in many cultures (particularly those under consideration) it was considered indispensable to the proper function of the temple. John Lundquist, in his article, The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East, lists nineteen points or areas that are common among Near Eastern temples. Specifically, his sixth proposition states that "the temple is oriented toward the four world regions or cardinal directions, and to various celestial bodies such as the polar star."¹⁸ We will examine orientation as found in several temples to further establish a common ideology.

It has been observed by Eugene Seach that one of the most ancient sacred spaces to be established was in reality a model for future temples:

There, arranged on three different levels, the Israelites entered into their redemptive relationship with their "Husband" (Isa. 54:5)- the masses just outside of the mountain's limit (Ex. 19:12,23), Aaron, his sons, and the Seventy part way up the side (24:1), and Moses alone at the very top (19:20; 24:2), where he entered directly into the presence of Yahweh, making atonement for the sins of the people (Ex. 32:30). This was the prototype of the Holy of Holies in the Temple: the place where God dwelled, into which only the High Priest could enter, while the rest of the people watched from without (Ex. 19:11). (19)

If Mount Sinai does in fact serve as a model for future temples, particularly for the Hebrew race, then the same three levels seen on Mount Sinai become over a period of time the tripartite plan of the temple itself, with its forecourt (Ulam), Holy Place (Hekhal), and Holy of Holies (Debhir) along with the veil (Parokhet) of the temple. This tripartite organization of the temple is seen again and again in temples throughout the Near East.

¹⁸ Lundquist, The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East, p. 57

¹⁹ Seach, Ancient Texts and Mormonism, p. 54

In traditional Jewish thought, Moses was allowed to view the "blueprint" or model of the heavenly temple (the Tabnit) by which the Tabernacle and all temples should be modeled after. (see Exodus 25:8-9;26:30)
 However, not all scholars agree that the Tabnit is of divine origin.²⁰

There is an allusion from the Wisdom of Solomon in the Nag Hammadi Texts that the Temple of Solomon was modeled after the "holy tent" ... "which thou didst prepare from the beginning." (Wisdom of Solomon 9:8) Apparently that which was prepared from the beginning is the heavenly model. Considering the striking parallels between the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon, it would seem likely that the Tabernacle was also patterned after the heavenly model also.

The tripartite model shown to Moses on Mount Sinai can be seen unmistakably clear in the Tabernacle itself. Philo, at the time of Christ, described the Israelites in the Temple as being engaged in a three-part journey towards god, but with unequal attainments:

At the top Moses; then those who are capable of traversing the path to higher knowledge; and at the bottom the mass, which is entirely unorganized and must remain at the foot of the mountain, only a few of who will catch even a glimpse ... of a path open to higher regions. (21)

In comparison then with the pristine temple, Mount Sinai, the Tabernacle consisted of three main areas, divided distinctly from each other.²² The inner most area, the Holy of Holies, was a single perfect cube. The next area just outside of the Holy of Holies, separated from it by the veil, was the Holy Place which was a double cube. Outside this second

²⁰ for example see Cross, The Priestly Tabernacle in the Light of Recent Research, p. 96

²¹ see Reinhardt Wagner, Die Gnosis Von Alexandrien, p. 23, as quoted by Seach, Ancient Texts and Mormonism, p. 55

²² these dimensions are quoted by Cross, The Priestly Tabernacle in the Light of Recent Research, p. 93, from unpub. article

room we find the forecourt or outer court. These arrangements suggest an increasing of holiness from the outward towards the center, the center being the most holy place. God promises Moses that he will "dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God" (Exodus 29:45) and that he will "meet with the children of Israel, and the Tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory" (Exodus 29:43). When it is remembered that only specific people are allowed in specific portions of the Tabernacle, such as the High Priest being the only person to gain admittance to the Holy of Holies²³ then it can be seen, in connection with the foregoing material, that the purpose of the Tabernacle was to instruct the Israelites through commandments and ritual via the temple complex that they too might progress and become sanctified. God intended this to be accomplished by instructing his prophet in the Holy of Holies.

Few references exist to substantiate the exact orientation of the Tabernacle, however it would seem reasonable to assume that it's orientation would be like that of Solomon's Temple since both edifices could be derived from the same "heavenly model" (see page 9 herein). The book of Exodus, chapter twenty seven, also alludes to the main entrance as being the east gate. Joseph states: "As to the Tabernacle itself, Moses placed it in the middle of that court, with its front to the east, that when the sun arose, it might send its first rays upon it."²⁴

Temple of Solomon - The debate continues as to whether the design of the Tabernacle had any influence over the Temple of Solomon, but as has been pointed out, more recent scholarship has challenged and modi-

23 Mishnah Middoth 1:3

24 Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 3, chp. 6:3

fied these ideas. Frank Moore Cross, Jr. has observed: "The parallel proportions of the inner rooms of the Temple and Tabernacle cannot be explained as chance. Evidently one has influenced the other or both derived from an older model."²⁵ No archaeological remains of Solomon's Temple have as yet been found so it would be very convenient for us to use the Tabernacle as a model of comparison thereby gaining a greater appreciation for the Temple. The Bible has left us some good information relative to its construction and use (see I Kings 6-8; II Chronicles 2-4; Ezekiel 40-46).

As in the divisions of the Tabernacle, Solomon's Temple also had the basic tripartite construction - three chambers, one behind the other.** As in the Tabernacle, progressing from the east gate to the center of the temple, we have the forecourt (Ulam), the Holy Place (Hekhal) and the Holy of Holies (dehbir). The general plan was identical to that of the Tabernacle except that the Temple of Solomon was²⁶ twice as long, twice as wide and three times as high. A famous passage from the Midrash further illustrates the importance of the inner chamber, the Holy of Holies, and it's orientation:

Just as the navel is found at the center of a human being, so the land of Israel is found at the center of the world. Jerusalem is at the center of the land of Israel, and the Temple is at the center of Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies is at the center of the Temple, the Ark is at the center of the Holy of Holies, and the Foundation Stone is in front of the Ark, which spot is the foundation of the world. (27)

It really comes as no surprise that the inner sanctuaries of the

²⁵ Cross, The Priestly Tabernacle in the Light of Recent Research, p. 93

²⁶ see I Kings 6:2. Measurements are given for Solomon's Temple. Cf. with Exodus 26:16 for difference in height.

²⁷ Midrash Tanhuma, Kedoshim 10, quoted in Lundquist, The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East, p. 65

**see illustration 25-A on page 25

Temple of Solomon contained many of the same appurtenances as were contained in the Tabernacle. This can be shown by the detailed account contained in the biblical record.²⁸ First, the same objects (i.e., the Golden Altar of Incense, the Table of Shewbread, the Candlestick, the Ark of the Covenant, etc.) from the Tabernacle are specifically mentioned as being in Solomon's Temple. Secondly, the record indicates that the Tabernacle of Moses was brought to the Temple and apparently stored there, along with all the holy vessels.²⁹ All of this becomes extremely important in terms of the purposes and utility of both these Temples. If both the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple used the same holy vessels and other appurtenances, it would stand to reason that the rituals, rites, ceremonies and other temple associated activities would be very similar if not the same.

In general it is thought that temples had their main entrances towards the east and the corners of the temple were in line with the four cardinal directions or world regions.³⁰ There is much evidence to show that the Temple of Solomon was indeed oriented with its main gate towards the east.³¹ Josephus substantiates this. Voelkl also observed:

It is usual for people to locate themselves with reference to some immovable point in the universe ... The dogmatic tendency of the first centuries which created the "holy line" pointing East ... reached its final form in the mystical depths of Scholasticism. (32)

28 items contained in the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple:

Golden Altar of Incense (Ex. 30:1-9 cf. I Kings 6:21-22)
 Table of Shewbread (Ex. 25:23-30 cf. I Kings 7:48)
 Candlestick (Ex. 25:31-40 cf. I Kings 7:49)

Ark of Covenant (Ex. 25:10-22; 26:34 cf. I Kings 8:6)

²⁹ II Chronicles 5:5; I Kings 8:4 (ref. to Tabernacle; see II Chronicles 1:3)

³⁰ Lundquist, The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East, p. 57

³¹ Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 8, chp. 3:2

³² see L. Voelkl, quoted in Nibley, What is a Temple, p. 23

Modern archaeological digs have also determined that Solomon's Temple
 33
 faced east, that is, it was entered from the east gate.

The structure of temples mentioned to this point (Mount Sinai, the Tabernacle, Temple of Solomon) seem to prescribe a progression from the outer courts towards the inner court or most holy place, where communion with God would take place. Because of the tripartite construction it should be noted that the different areas in the temple were intended for specific groups of people, say, an initiated group. Only the outer court (Ulam) was intended for the "lay" person. Beyond the outer court strict directions were issued that only those vested with the priestly robes could enter and officiate. Last and most important, only the High Priest was allowed in the inner court (Debhir) to officiate in behalf of the people. "There were three buildings specifically for sacrifice in Jerusalem. The one facing west was called "the Holy." Another facing south was called "the Holy of the Holy." The third facing east was called "the Holy of the Holies," the place where the High Priest enters." (34) According to Jewish belief (Mishnah Kelim) the objects in the temple all varied in degree of purity and holiness according to where they were located in the temple. Upon entering the walls of the city the worshipper senses an aura of holiness. As he progresses towards the temple this sense of holiness becomes more potent and increases progressively as one penetrates into the temple area and moves through the
 35
 different levels until finally reaching the Holy of Holies.

33 Kaufman, Where the Ancient Temple of Jerusalem Stood, BAR p. 42-58

34 Gospel of Philip, Nag Hammadi Texts

35 Mishnah Kelim 1:809

Temple of Zerubbabel - Not much is known about this particular temple except what references are made to it from biblical sources and from later helenistic records. The general plan was similar to that of Solomon's, but with some changes. It was built on the same location on Mount Zion. The tripartite construction was still present, but the inner sanctum or Holy of Holies was left empty as the Ark of the Covenant had been lost. A stone was put in it's place (Eben Shetija). It is thought that Zerubabel's temple was lacking in grandeur and splendor as compared to Solomon's Temple. The Rabbis seem to elicit this mood when they said: "The second temple had five things less than the first temple. The sacred fire, the ark, the urim and thummim, the oil for annointment, and the Holy Spirit (Prophecy)."³⁶

Temple of Herod - Josephus stresses the fact that the this temple was built at the top of the mountain³⁷ and sources indicate that this temple greatly surpassed the temples that had been built on Mount Zion³⁸ previously. As would be expected the tripartite construction is still present (perhaps due to the fact that Herod rebuilt this temple as a move to gain Jewish favor and support). It is not necessary to describe in great detail the dimensions of the various courts and sanctuaries, but sufficeth to say that there is abundment source material verifying³⁹ the existence of the three basic component parts: Ulam, Hekhal and Debhir.

³⁶ see P. Taanit 2.1, quoted by Cohen, The Temple and the Synagogue p. 158

³⁷ Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, 8:430

³⁸ Tractate Sukkah 51:2

³⁹ see Mishnah Middot 2-4; Antiquities 15:391-425; War 5:184-247

Egypt - Much has been said regarding pyramids and temple building in Egypt. These massive building projects that so clearly characterize the Egyptian culture have not always been a continual heritage. In fact there is a distinct progression and evolution in these massive monuments that is clearly intertwined with the changing religious and social strata of the country. To more fully understand and appreciate the purpose and functions of these Pyramids and temples in relation to other temples of the Near East it is important to realize the origins of these structures. (by the way, we know very little). In predynastic Egypt, a simple rectangular mound of sand was placed above the pit-grave of the deceased. In the late predynastic period and during the first dynasties, kings and nobles were buried in mastabas (these consisted of a substructure below ground and a superstructure of brick built on top of the ground in the shape of a rectangular platform). Mastabas were considered to be an imitation of a dwelling house for the deceased. In the Third Dynasty (at the start of the Old Kingdom) a number of developments transpired under King Djoser. At Sakkarah was built the first of the Egyptian pyramids under the direction of Imhotep - the step pyramid. It is reasonable to conclude that the step pyramid was an extension of the mastaba, each succeeding level built on top of the other. Two important developments during this time are noteworthy. A distinction was made between the burial tombs of the kings and those of the nobles. From this time on, only the king and his immediate family were buried in pyramids. The nobles and other common people were buried in mastabas (this practice continued for centuries). Secondly, the step pyramid was built entirely of limestone instead of brick. Brick was relatively perishable - stone

was eternal. In the Fourth Dynasty under King Snefru, two new developments emerged. A step pyramid was constructed at Meidum and was modified when the steps were filled in to form a regular pyramid with smooth casings. Secondly, the institution of a valley chapel leading to a causeway which joined the mortuary temple on the east side of the pyramid.⁴⁰

This evolution of Egyptian architecture in pyramid building, from mounds of sand, to mastabas, to step pyramids, to full pyramids bears witness to the emergence of the Egyptian notion that the king or pharaoh was entitled to partake of the riches of the gods and to communicate and enjoy their company in the hereafter. This shift in religious practice and belief reaches its zenith and corresponds directly with the building of the full pyramid. Hence the full pyramid is the product of a new religious cult. It is the vehicle by which the pharaoh can continue his journey in the afterlife.

Rosalie David summarizes the importance of the pyramid:

We can only deduce that, in architectural terms, there appears to have been a direct development from the earliest graves with their superimposed mounds to the true pyramid form, and that, in religious terms, the pyramid was the royal place of burial, protecting the king's body and his funerary possessions. It may also have been regarded as a means for the king to reach heaven.⁽⁴¹⁾

Having thus examined the importance of the pyramid in the king's ascent to heaven, it would seem very natural to conclude that the pyramid itself is indeed a sort of temple on an equal basis with other temples of the Near East, that is, equal as to purpose and utility. For sake of comparison, the pyramid as a burial chamber, housed and protected the

⁴⁰ see Milton Covensky, p. 63-69 for a more complete overview
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⁴¹ David, The Cult of the Sun, p. 57

body of the dead pharaoh, but with the ultimate purpose of his communion with and acceptance by the gods. Because of this expected reunion with the gods, the pharaoh's tomb within the pyramid could be considered as sacred ground, sacred space, a Holy of Holies. This notion seems to be brought forth by James Breasted: "The pyramidal form of the king's tomb therefore was of the most sacred significance. The king was buried under the very symbol of the Sun-god which stood in the holy of holies of the Sun-temple at Heliopolis..."⁴²

The Pyramid Texts are replete with references to the pharaoh's eventual reunion with the gods and his triumph over death: "thou livest, thou livest, raise thee up"⁴³ or "thou diest not, stand up, raise thee up"⁴⁴ and "O lofty one among the Imperishable stars, thou perish not eternally."⁴⁵

Breasted also suggested that the pyramid itself transmitted life-giving light and power from heaven to earth because it was the chief symbol of the Sun-god.⁴⁶ In connection with this, the pyramid has been identified with the Primal Hill, which "figures as the birthplace and the place of first appearance of the Primal God, and the place where the oldest god sat enthroned"⁴⁷ and that the capstone of the pyramid was "the only point of contact with the gods."⁴⁸

42 Breasted, Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt, p. 72

43 Pyr. 1262

44 Pyr. 867

45 Pyr. Ut. 464

46 as quoted in Nibley, The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri, p. 156

47 Kees, 78:43, as quoted in Nibley, The Message of the..., p. 156

48 Wilson, Culture, p. 73, as quoted in Nibley, The Message of the..., p. 156

it has been suggested that the temple cult that arose in Heliopolis was a forerunner of the pyramids. This cult held that the temple was the power-house of God and that in its holy place there was a symbol called the benben, a pyramid-shaped stone representing the sun-god. By extension, this pyramid-shaped stone in the holy place which can be seen sitting atop the pyramid may represent the divine communication with man. See also Berrett, Discovering the World of the Bible, p. 39; K.A. Kitchen, vol. 1, p. 429; Pyr. 600:1652

Later developments out and around the temple itself gave even more insight into the religious beliefs and practices of the Egyptians. Usually on the east side of the pyramid a mortuary temple was built whose back wall formed with the east face of the pyramid itself. This back wall contained a false door(s) through which the king might step forth and partake of the offerings presented to him here. From the temple building itself a covered causeway led down to the valley and connected with the valley temple, within which the king's body was prepared for burial.** It would seem reasonable to view this entire temple complex as the tripartite construction found in other Near Eastern temples. Certainly, as in the case of other temples, a progression was intended from the outer courts to the inner court and finally to the most Holy of Holies, the central sacred spot. In this aspect, the temple complex qualifies on an equal par with other temples. The various functions and performances carried out in each area of the pyramid complex illustrates this progression. The dead pharaoh was brought to the valley temple and here it is believed the mummification process was performed as well as other rituals. ⁴⁹ With the pharaoh's body prepared and ritually pure, profane eyes must not view his funeral cortege. His mummy was placed in a wooden coffin and carried toward the mortuary temple through the covered causeway, unseen now by all except those carrying his coffin. The mortuary temple was the focus of the cult of the dead king once he was entombed inside the pyramid. These three areas then parallel those tripartite areas of other temples - valley temple (outer court, Ulam), covered causeway and mortuary temple (inner court, Hekhal), and finally the

⁴⁹ Mertz, Temples, Tombs and Hieroglyphs, p. 65-6; see also Stewart, The Pyramids and Sphinx, p. 40-1

**see illustration 26-A on page 26

pyramid itself (most inner court, Holy of Holies, Debhir). As the procession continues, only selected people may be permitted to accompany the pharaoh until only the pharaoh himself is left in the heart and center of the pyramid, there to communion with and enjoy the company of the gods. Mohiy el-Din Ibrahim writes:

The basic plan of an Egyptian temple is logical and comprehensible. The Holy of Holies was a small dark room in the central axis of the temple towards the back. It thus appears as at the end of a long road which passed through the forecourts and narrowed through porticoes and halls until the hidden shrine was reached. This road also mounted steeply in the case of the pyramid temples and the door we find a few steps or a ramp to mark the rise. For the Holy of Holies was ideally conceived as the primeval hill, the first land to arise from the waters of chaos on the day of creation...(50)

A discussion of Egyptian pyramid and temple building would not be complete without considering the later development of hidden tombs which supplanted and replaced the magnificent pyramids. This change occurred with the start of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Many of these tombs were located in the Theban hills. In general, the plan and structure of these tombs consisted of the following: (1) an outer courtyard (2) a portico, or broad front hall (3) a long hall beyond this and (4) a burial chamber.⁵¹ The ceremonies connected with the deposit of the king's body in the inner most chamber in the tomb were similar to those connected with the deposit of the mummy in the pyramid. After burial, ceremonies would be conducted to ensure that the deceased could continue the journey into the afterworld. As in the mortuary temple associated with the pyramids, false doors were constructed in the burial

50 "The God of the Great Temple of Edfu," Glimpses of Ancient Egypt, p. 170 as quoted by Lundquist, The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East, p. 63

51 Murnane, The Penguin Guide to Ancient Egypt, p. 69

chamber to allow the ka, the spiritual double of the king, to pass easily from the tomb and to re-enter again as needed. Tombs then represent (as in the pyramids) the orderly progression of the deceased pharaoh towards his joyous reunion into the afterlife to meet with the gods, all of this culminating in the burial chamber, the Holy of Holies.**()

The temples of Egypt represent the Egyptian's effort to pay homage to the various gods and to gain their divine favor. The temples for the worship of the gods differed from the tombs of deceased kings in that they were separate from and independent of any other buildings. Essential features were common to all temples: (1) the forecourt was open to all comers and lay in front (2) next, intermediate rooms were accessible only to those in the divine service and (3) inside lay the Holy of Holies, the sanctuary where the god dwelt. In theory the king was the sole officiant within the temple, but ritual functions had to be delegated to the High Priest, who would act on the ruler's behalf.⁵² Again, the tripartite organization of the temple is evident (that processional journey towards the most sacred chamber).***

The main idea behind the arrangement of the Egyptian temple worship is penetration, especially of light into darkness.(53)

The heart of the Egyptian temple, according to Frankfort, was "a small dark room ... at the end of a long road" ... "the primeval hill ... a place of immeasurable potency."⁵⁴

52 *ibid.*, p. 62-3

53 Nibley, The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri, p. 158

54 Frankfort, Ancient Egyptian Religions, p. 153, as quoted by Nibley, The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri, p. 159

**see illustration 27-A on page 27

***see illustration 27-B on page 27

Orientation - Generally speaking, orientation of Egyptian architecture was significant and played a big part in the social and religious aspects of daily life. Countless books have been written describing the orientation of the pyramid, it's four sides facing due north, south, east and west.⁵⁵ We have already noted the fact that the funerary complex of the pyramid was located on the east side. The Pyramid Texts reiterate time and time again that the east is the most sacred of all regions and that to which the dead king should fare. He is explicitly cautioned against going to the west: "Go not on those currents of the west; those who go thither, they return not (again)."⁵⁶ Certainly the worship of the sun-god Re, with his dawning in the east and eventually death in the west created a central force in daily life.

Canaanite Temples - Several Canaanite cities will be considered, specifically looking at various temples that have been located:

Temples at Hazor - The ruins of Hazor lie in the Hulah plain at the foot of the mountains of upper Galilee. Several temples have been located here, all of which exhibit similar characteristics. "It is a simple plan, consisting of three chambers built in succession from south to north: a porch, a main hall and a holy of holies."⁵⁷ Also in the front porch, on either side of the opening leading to the main hall, two round pillars were discovered. Yadin observes that this particular temple is a prototype of Solomon's Temple, with the two pillars on the porch emphasizing the resemblance.⁵⁸ Vriezen observes

55 for example see Smyth, Our Inheritance in the Great Pyramid

56 Pyr. 2175

57 Yadin, Excavations at Hazor, p.215

58 *ibid.*, p. 218

that the temple which most resembles the temple in Jerusalem is located in Northern Syria at Tell Tainat.⁵⁹ With the discovery of these four temples at Hazor, Yadin concludes his article by saying: "Area H, with its four strata of temples reveals that the tradition of a Holy place lasted for centuries."⁶⁰

Temples at Ugarit (Ras Shamra) - One of the oldest cities in the world (c. 6000 B.C.), ancient Ugarit first came to light from correspondence on the Tell el 'Amarna Tablets of Egypt as well as the Mari Tablets. Two temples have been discovered, one to Dagon and one to Baal. Both temples had a great inner room, a "holy of holiest" where the images of the gods were placed. Before it was another room or innerroom and outside this room was a forecourt with the remains of an altar, where it is believed people of the city would gather. The construction of the Baal Temple is much the same as that of King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.⁶¹ Other temple remains have also been found at Beth-shan, Megiddo, Lachish and Shechem.

Mesopotamian Temples - The most conspicuous and characteristic feature of so many Mesopotamian sanctuaries is the ziggurat. John Lundquist has concluded that the ziggurat is the best example of the idea of a successive ascension toward heaven.⁶² The ziggurat consisted of three, five or seven levels or stages. Staircases led to the upper levels where a small temple stood. The basic ritual pattern followed

59 Vriezen, The Religion of Ancient Israel, p. 55

60 Yadin, Excavations at Hazor, p. 221

61 Kapelrud, Ugarit, Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol.4, p.725-26

62 Lundquist, The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East, p. 57

was for the worshipper to ascend the staircase to the top, the deity descended from heaven and the two met in the small temple which stood
⁶³ on top. Examples of these ziggurats are the Temple of Marduk at Babylon (has been destroyed), the Temple at Ur and the Temple at Tell Uqair on the Euphrates. Ziggurats were undoubtedly used for astrological observations but it also appears that their main function was that of a reproduction of the sacred mountain, upon which the god would dwell. It is interesting to note that the Tower of Babel was built as a means to enable men to reach heaven (Genesis 11:4) At Nippur the temple was called "the Mountain House" and the ziggurat the "Mountain of Heaven," which suggest a sort of facilitation for the descent of the god to the earth. The temple on the apex was analogous
⁶⁴ to the Holy of Holies.

Hittite Temples - Archaeological evidence for religion of any kind in the area of Hittite domination is very scarce. Hence not many good examples of Hittite temples exist. Five temples have been found in Bogazkoy, several in Yazilikaya, a temple at Alaca Huyuk, a probable temple at Inandik and the sparse remains of a temple at
⁶⁵ Tarsus. It can be said in general that Hittite temples conform to the same basic plan:

Hittite temples - what few there are - all conform to the same distinctive plan. There is an elaborate entrance, usually on the axis of the court, a large central courtyard, which is bounded by corridors and finally the important cult rooms and the adyton itself are offset, and not immediately visible or accessible from the court. Within the court there may be a small chamber, most probably used for the ritual washing...(66)

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. 57-8

⁶⁴ J.P. Peters, *Nippur* (1897) vol.2, p.122, as quoted in E.O. James, *From Cave to Cathedral*, p. 138

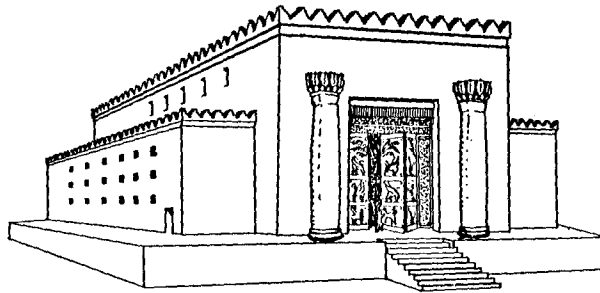
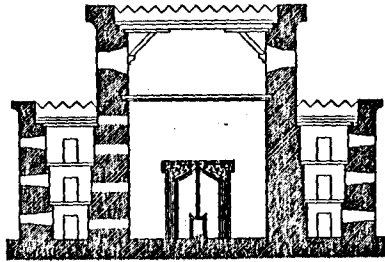
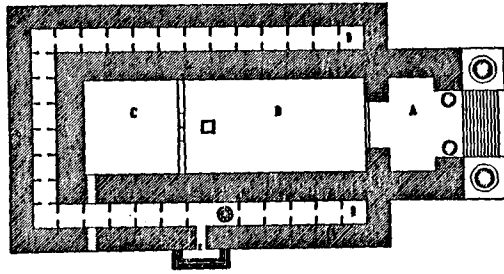
⁶⁵ Deighton, *The Weather-God in Hittite Anatolia*, p.11

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p. 18

Conclusion - From the standpoint of location, structure, orientation and utility as presented in this study, it is very apparent that strong parallels and similarities existed among many of the temples of the ancient Near East. Particularly striking are the parallels of the tripartite construction, suggesting in part the exclusiveness of portions of the temple for the "initiated group" as well as a progression from the outer areas of the complex towards the center portion of the temple, the Holy of Holies. It is significant that this central, sacred spot is referred to consistently throughout temples of the Near East, whether they be on Mount Sinai, or found in such temples as the Tabernacle, Solomon's Temple, the temples and tombs of Egypt and those of the various Mesopotamian-Canaanite cultures. In addition, the significance and importance of the Holy of Holies throughout the different temples is amazing - that being the communion between god and men on earth.

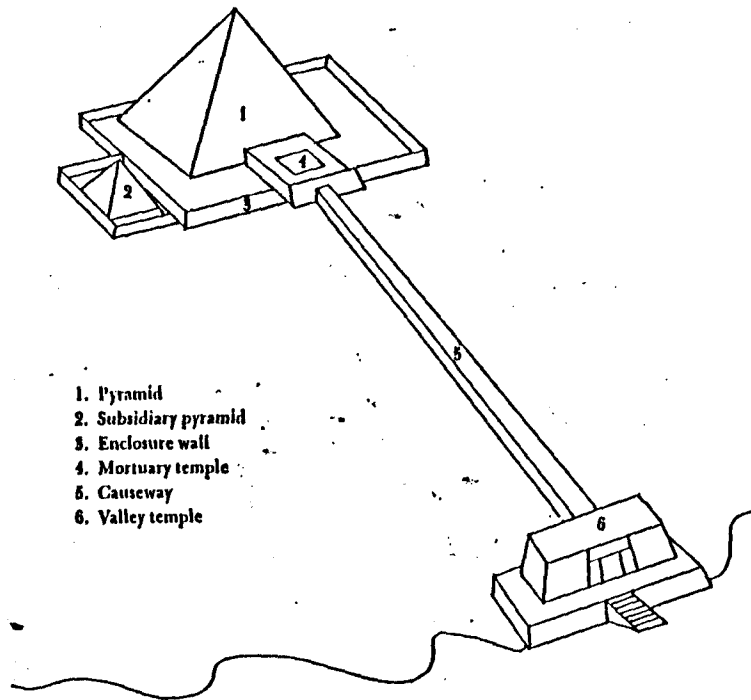
Undoubtedly a sharing of social and religious customs and beliefs occurred between the various peoples, which would account for the many similarities among temples buildings and temple significance. How this might have all come together is definitely a complex and little understood study. I do feel confident in saying that there is more than meets the eye in terms of the significance of temples and tombs in the ancient Near East. We cannot deny what the numerous ancient documents and records are telling us.

The Temple in Jerusalem



*Reconstructed view, plan and section of Solomon's temple at Jerusalem.
After Stevens*

Fig. 25-A (reproduced from E.O. James, *From Cave to Cathedral*, p. 181)



- 1. Pyramid
- 2. Subsidiary pyramid
- 3. Enclosure wall
- 4. Mortuary temple
- 5. Causeway
- 6. Valley temple

The pyramid complex

Fig. 26-A (reproduced from Mertz, Temples, Tombs and Hieroglyphs, p. 65)

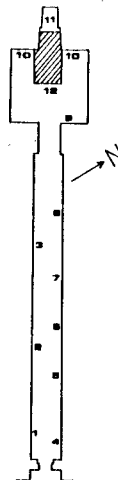
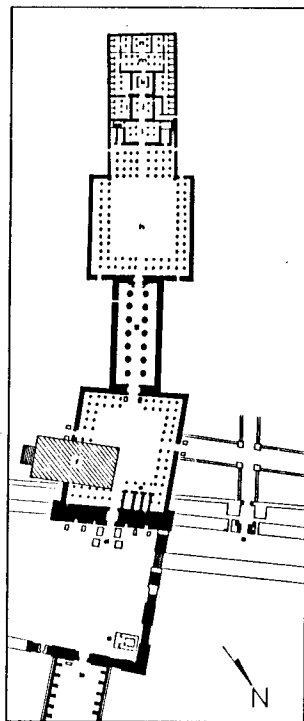


Fig. 110 Antefoker Vizier*
(Th 60) Dynasty XII (Sesostris I)

- 1 Gardening and picking grapes, dancers and tumblers, filling granary.
- 2 Abydos pilgrimage.
- 3 Funeral procession.
- 4 Agricultural scenes.
- 5 Marsh scenes, with sub-scene of agriculture.
- 6 Hunt in desert.
- 7 Butchers, bakers, brewers, cooks.
- 8 Inspecting New Year's gifts.
- 9 Musicians, offering bringers, butchers.
- 10 False doors.
- 11 Shrine of wife.
- 12 Statue of wife (found in shaft).

* One of the seminal tombs of the Theban necropolis: see it if you possibly can.



Temple of Luxor

Fig. 27-B (reproduced from Murnane,
The Penguin Guide to Ancient Egypt, p. 239

Fig. 27-A (reproduced from Murnane,
The Penguin Guide to Ancient Egypt, p. 288

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