

Landscape and Sacred Architecture in Pre-modern South Asia

Dumbarton Oaks announces the annual fall colloquium for 2014 titled “Landscape and Sacred Architecture in Pre-modern South Asia.” To be held on Friday, November 14, the colloquium is co-organized by John Beardsley, Director of Garden and Landscape Studies, and Subhashini Kaligotla, doctoral candidate in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University and predoctoral fellow at the Getty Research Institute. Because Dumbarton Oaks and the field of garden and landscape studies more largely have already seen extensive research into Islamic gardens generally and Mughal gardens in South Asia particularly, we want to push the focus back in time. The colloquium will focus heavily though not entirely on temples, which form the bulk of the extant remains from the pre-modern era: Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain, both constructed and rock-cut. Speakers will also address other kinds of ritual sites, including monastic complexes, rock reliefs, water monuments, and funerary structures. Whatever the type, the architecture will be considered in connection to landscape: its relation to topography, climate, and hydrology; to water engineering and management; and to larger landscape contexts such as nearby settlements, rivers, and roads. Departing from the monument-based perspectives that have dominated architectural histories so far, presentations will explore the spatial configurations of sacred complexes, including the interrelationships of component structures, as well as the distribution of the larger built environment. Speakers will engage with the multiplicity of ways in which sacred places have been constituted: from worship rituals such as festivals and processions to the economic practices of food production and irrigation; from the pragmatic transformation of remote wilderness areas to the expression of landscape cosmology and symbolism; from spatial concerns such as circulation, approach, and orientation to the exigencies of transport and trade. Gardens and landscapes are also imagined realms. We therefore expect consideration of discursive modes as they pertain to material culture—how inscriptions, courtly texts, or architectural treatises, for example, gave rise to or relate to specific landscape practices. Much of the research to be presented in the colloquium is new and unpublished and marks both a paradigm shift within architectural history and an important contribution to the emerging field of South Asian landscape studies

An Enlightened Environment: Early Buddhist Relic Stupas in Relation to Agricultural Works

Kurt Behrendt, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

In recent years, considerable scholarship has been devoted to the Buddhist relic tradition and its importance to the earliest phase of Buddhist architecture in South Asia. Overlooked, however, is the fact that in many instances Buddhist communities installed relic stupas in direct line of sight with one another, on the crests of hills or within rock-cut caves in cliffs. In these cases, the constellation of sites was in the proximity of an urban area, but located in the countryside and accompanied by a monastic residence. The web of sites was also consistently set in panoramic locations overlooking rich agricultural areas, land that had been augmented by canals, reservoirs, and other waterworks meant to ensure agricultural productivity. Important examples include Sanchi Stupa 1, the surrounding Bhilsa tope stupas, and the many rock-cut sites of Junnar in the Deccan. Evidence suggests that these Buddhist communities understood that the Buddha's relics emitted in all directions the power of his enlightenment and the desirability of being in their line of sight, for monasteries and small stupas containing the monastic dead nearly always face relic stupas. My paper will consider a spatial aspect that has been overlooked: that key agricultural areas of the early urban centers were also presided over by these powerful relic monuments. In this light, the ubiquitous imagery associated with agricultural prosperity found on the exteriors of stupas makes perfect sense – imagery that emphasizes foliage, auspicious symbols, and representations of nature deities such as nāgas and yakshis. The discussion will be limited to the period between the 1st century BCE and the 2nd century CE, when the relationships among agricultural, monastic, and urban spaces were most closely observed.

The Cave as a Palace and the Forest as a Garden: Buddhist Caves and Natural Landscape in the Western Deccan

Pia Brancaccio, Drexel University

The proposed paper explores the relationships existing between Buddhist caves established in the Western Ghats of India between the 1st c. BCE and the 5th c. CE, and the surrounding natural environment. A combined analysis of rock-cut architecture and epigraphy from sites like Bhaja, Junnar, Nasik and Ajanta suggests that caves inhabited by monks in this region were not simply conceived as places immersed in the wilderness and conducive to solitary practices; on the contrary, they were intended as elaborate residences that contributed to the transformation of the surrounding natural space into a controlled environment, a garden worthy of the best palatial settings. Buddhist caves include elaborate systems of water control, and often evoke visual presences of local deities associated with the natural landscape. The caves' architectural layouts and inscriptions betray an anthropocentric perception of the natural space, where the potentially dangerous surroundings are fully tamed and domesticated.

Festival Architecture, Processions, and the Tamil Sacred Landscape

Crispin Branfoot, SOAS, University of London

The rich variety of site-myths that explain the appearance of deities at specific locations in Tamil south India emphasise the importance of landscape to an understanding of the construction and maintenance of the many temples built since the seventh century. Geographically-specific myths are celebrated in local literature and ritual, and explain the continued vitality of many temples as pilgrimage destinations. This paper examines the role of festivals and processions to an understanding of the Tamil temple in its wider landscape. By doing so, I wish to balance the experience of the inward-moving devotee with the analysis of the deities' movement in procession out of their dark, enclosed central shrine. The recognition of the frequency and scale of processions enables the spatial configuration of temples and their component structures – multiple shrines, corridors, columned halls, gardens, walled enclosures and towering gateways - to be considered as an architectural whole instead of the isolation and formal analysis of the main shrine alone. Furthermore, the impact of festival processions on architectural design can be seen both within the high walls and pyramidal gateways (*gopuras*) of the Tamil temples built from the eleventh century and later, and beyond the temple walls to the wider landscape. This includes the wider streets surrounding temples specifically for the annual *rathotsavam* or 'chariot festival' when huge crowds may gather to see the deities dragged around on huge, wheeled 'chariots.' My discussion will address the sacred landscape of the Madurai region, and the ritual, architectural and spatial connections between the temples of the city and its hinterland.

Pandukeshwar, Architectural Knowledge, and an Idea of India

Nachiket Chanchani, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

This talk probes a temple complex at Pandukeshwar — a sacred center near a glacial source of the Ganga River in the Central Himalayas — where lithic shrines in local, regional, and trans-regional architectural typologies stand side by side. I first descriptively analyze the forms and layouts of these edifices. Next, I meld the archaeological evidence with the historical record to date them to the ninth and tenth century CE. Thereafter, I show how their design, construction, and use appears to be connected to the emergence, refinement, and dispersion of an idea of India as a geocultural landscape extending from the Indian Ocean up to the high Himalayas.

Poolside Monks: Water Management in Early Buddhist Monastic Complexes of the Western Deccan

Robert DeCaroli, George Mason University

The issues involved in placing and building a monastery in the early years of Buddhism (2nd c. BCE - 2nd c. CE) were no simple matter. The setting needed to be remote enough to foster both meditation and spiritual pursuits and close enough to urban centers to facilitate continued financial support. Adding to these challenges was the need for water, which was overly abundant in the rainy season and all too scarce in the dry. For this reason the architects and excavators of early South Asian monasteries were ingenious in the ways they built alongside natural water ways and utilized the environment to collect and store water for times of need. The Buddhists accomplished their aims through a variety of techniques that ranged from carefully engineering cisterns and channels to diligently attending the shrines of local gods (*nāgas*) associated with rainfall and drought. Modern audiences might see these as two very different approaches, but to the residents of these monasteries, they were both equally vital to the continued habitability of their remote dwellings. Maintaining their relationship with such gods was a crucial aspect of ensuring sufficient water. Such feats of engineering and devotion have left us traces of garden-like settings situated on hilltops and alongside waterfalls that drew visitors and ascetics with their idyllic locations and spectacular views.

Circumambulation and its Opposite: Visual and Verbal Cues to Movement Outside and Inside the Kailasanatha Temple Complex in Kanchipuram

Padma Kaimal, Colgate University

The practice of walking around an object of devotion is shared among many traditions, among them Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu. The direction of that circumambulation at Hindu monuments should be clockwise, I had learned from textbooks, school, and every Hindu I met. And yet at the eighth-century Kailasanatha temple complex in Kanchipuram, I find that sculpture encourages the opposite direction of movement just as much. So do inscriptions. These forms of physical evidence encourage me to believe that instead of there being just one way to experience this monument, there were at least two, and one inverted the sequence the other established for revealing the monument's many signs. The signs could unfold in opposite directions. The pieces could fit together in different ways, and that could change their meanings. Viewers could have quite heterogeneous experiences, and that looks like it was part of the plan. The visual cues to movement that I find are, moreover, paired with cues that encourage the opposite kind of movement. Their pairing suggests a balancing or counterposing of these two kinds of movement, as if to hold clockwise and counter-clockwise circumambulation in dialog, or tension, or perhaps to express inversion. One element in the pair undoes or undermines or reverses the other. This pairing extends outward from the architecture and sculptural forms within the temple complex to embrace the monument's interactions with the surrounding landscape.

Articulating Jain "Place" in Early Medieval Tamilnadu

Lisa N. Owen, University of North Texas

Although the 9th century in Tamilnadu is widely perceived as a period when most Jain endeavors had been suppressed (or even eliminated) by a Hindu devotional “revival” in the 7th and 8th centuries, there are a number of understudied Jain rock-cut monuments in the hills of this region that challenge this characterization. These monuments are rock reliefs—boulders or expansive surfaces of rock that are carved with images of Jinas and Jain deities. Given their date and seemingly sporadic locations, these rock reliefs have simply been viewed as Jainism's "last gasp" in a predominant Hindu *milieu*. Moreover, they are only treated in the scholarship as repositories of sculpture that do little more than add to our knowledge of Jain iconography. Importantly, these rock reliefs have neither been viewed as part of a larger physical landscape nor considered for the ways that they define and create a *power of place*. Part of the reason for not thinking about these images as constituting a "site" or "place" is the fact that the carvings are not housed in rock-cut shrines or sheltered by other carved architectural elements. Instead, the figural carvings are incised across undulating surfaces of rock. Thus, Tamilnadu's rock reliefs cause us to rethink our standard definitions of rock-cut temple and monastic architecture. In this paper, I examine the possible functions of these rock reliefs and how they compel us to rethink the role of Jainism and Jain art in early medieval Tamilnadu. Specifically, I am interested in how the carvings engage with their distinct topographies and what this might tell us about the reasons for their creation. In addition to understanding these carvings as physical places, I am also interested in how place can be defined through the variety of activities that occurred or were performed there. In this fashion, I argue that we must consider the construction of *place* more broadly—where activity, landscape, and imagery come together to define sites of worship, memory, and Jain identity.

The Shape of Babur's Lake: Reimagining Temple Landscapes in the Central Indian Frontier

Tamara I. Sears, Yale University

In January of 1528, the Mughal emperor Babur stopped for two nights at a place called Kachwaha, identifiable today as the village of Kadwaha. During his stay, he took careful note of the landscape and topography, praising particularly a vast artificial lake, nearly a dozen miles in perimeter, that surrounded Kadwaha, like a moat, on three sides. Although this lake no longer survives today, it likely preceded Babur by several centuries, going back to the turn of the first millennium, when Kadwaha initially emerged as a new central place. This early core remains visible today through the presence of a Hindu monastery, fifteen temples, and nearly a half dozen tanks and wells. Taking Babur's lake as a point of departure, this paper examines the integral relationship between architecture and water, the latter of which served not only as a component of a site's sacrality, but as a consciously constructed component of a distinct urban plan. Utilizing GIS data gathered in the field, I reconstruct the approximate contours of the now lost artificial lake as a first step towards situating Kadwaha's built environment within a longer history of landscape. In so doing, I explore both the technicalities of landscape practices and the broader cultural associations of water landscapes as expressed in courtly literature, inscriptions, and religious texts. Water marked both the onset and culmination of life, from metaphors of cosmogonic waters to rituals of cremation and death. At the same time water gave rise to living settlements, not just routes that rose to support commerce but also military travel. In addition to engaging both symbolic and pragmatic associations, this paper comes full circle back to Babur, to reflect on the methodological problems posed by re-imagining earlier medieval landscapes and the necessity of doing so.