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The Sacred City

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With thanks to Anthony Thorley

Sacred Geography

Key Ideas



Questions:

1. In what sense can cities be perceived as sacred (essay title: 'Is Sacred Space a Sacred Construct').
2. When are cities designed to be sacred (bearing in mind definitions of sacred: set aside? Special? embodying divine principles? embodying cosmic principles?)

This presentation deals with (2).

And touches on Utopias

Symbolic Topomorphism

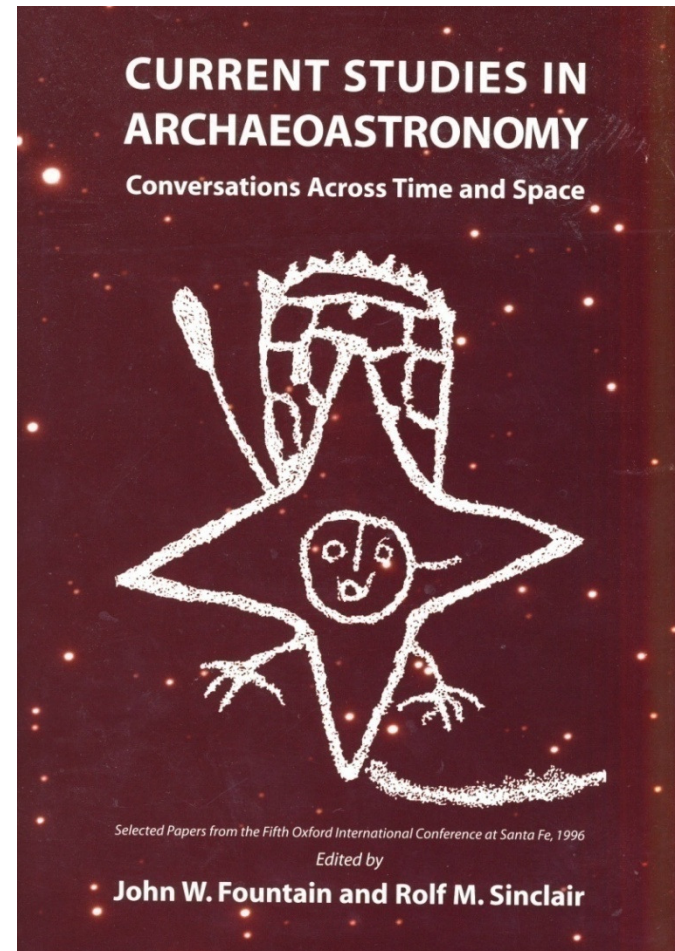
- Thorley, Anthony, and Celia Gunn, *Sacred Sites: an overview*, Gaia Foundation, 2007, <http://www.earthskywalk.com/SacredSiteReport.pdf>
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- Thorley, Anthony, 'Sacred Geography: a conceptual work in progress', *Spica*, Vol. IV, no 2, April 2016, pp 4-8, (p. 8), http://sophia-project.net/Spica/pdfs/SPICA_4.2.pdf

Academic Rationale

‘Researchers who have made a study of past cultures’ interest in and conception of the heavens have often treated the topic narrowly, rather than in the context of the entire culture’.

‘...to truly comprehend a culture we must have some sense of its cosmology – the group’s conception of themselves in relation to the heavens.’

George Gumerman and Miranda Warburton, ‘The Cosmos in a Cultural Context’ in John W. Fountain and Rolf M. Sinclair, ed., *Current Studies in Archaeoastronomy: Conversations Across Time and Space* (North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), p.15.



Mircea Eliade on Sacred Space

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- *The sacred is not absolute as once there is a link with a space, there is a limitation to this 'abstract absolute...in order to become manifest'; there is a central absolute fixed point; '...it is the break effected in space that allows the world to be constituted, because it reveals the fixed point, **the central axis for all future orientation**', creating a cosmology or new world.*
- Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 21.



Cosmic/Planned or Unplanned/Local

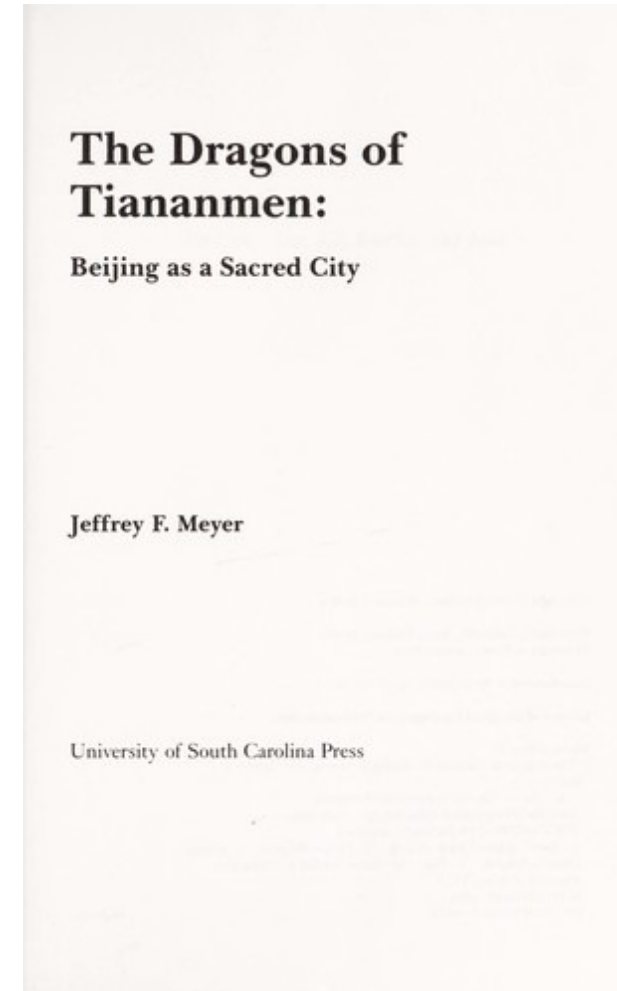
Mayer developed the notion of sacred cities either as (1) planned-cosmic, or (2) as unplanned-local, but concluded that most cities of religious importance contain characteristics of both.

Meyer, Jeffrey F., *The Dragons of Tiananmen: Beijing as a Sacred City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina press, 1991), p. 147.

For example, Beijing was clearly a cosmic planned city for the Emperor and the court, but from the 'perspective of ordinary people, manifestations of locals the quality are more important'.

Meyer, Jeffrey F., *The Dragons of Tiananmen: Beijing as a Sacred City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina press, 1991), p. 170-71.

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Plato: the Heavenly City

Plato straddled the boundary between the possible and the impossible.

On the one hand he set out in great detail the rules and regulations by which his ideal republic could be managed by a virtuous, wise and self-aware elite in line with cosmological principles. On the other his perfect city was an Idea, with a capital 'i', that was functionally impossible to realise because human beings, being imperfect, would always destroy it.

'The city whose home is the idea...can be found nowhere in earth...', and exists only 'in a pattern...laid up in heaven for him who wishes to contemplate it'.

Plato, *Republic*, 2 vols., trans. Paul Shorey (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1935), 592 A-B.

See also Plato, *Laws*, 2 Vols, trans. R.G.Bury (Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1934), book V, V.738B, 745B-C, VI.759B-C.

Plato established the enduring paradox according to which the perfect city can never exist; yet, implicitly, if we have to contemplate it, there must be a reason to do so, and this reason can only be to inspire us to improve society. Is it enough just to contemplate perfection, or should we try to implement it? And if perfection is unattainable is a compromise acceptable?

Can we improve so society by the very act of working to create a utopia which might itself be unattainable? That we can try is the foundation of social democracy.



The Nature of Power in Stoic Cosmology

as Chrysippus says in the first book of his *De finibus*;

our individual natures are parts of the nature of the whole universe. And this is why the end may be defined as life in accordance with nature, or, in other words, in accordance with our own human nature as well as that of the universe, a life in which we refrain from every action forbidden by the law common to all things, that is to say, the right reason which pervades all things, and is identical with this Zeus, lord and ruler of all that is. And this very thing constitutes the virtue of the happy man and the smooth current of life, when all actions promote the harmony of the spirit dwelling in the individual man with the will of him who orders the universe.

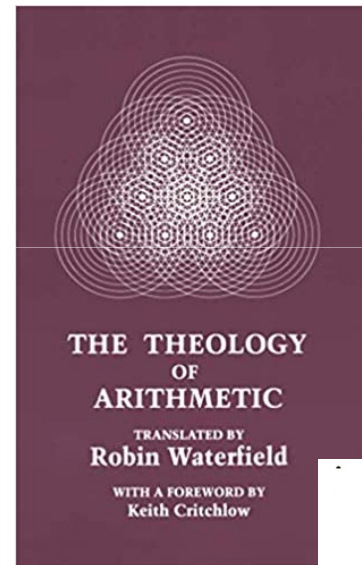
Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2 Vols, Vol 1 trans H.R.Dicks, introduction by H.S.Long, Vol. 2 trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, Cambridge Mass., London, 1925 – 8, VII.88



The Cruciform City

The representation of symbolic form or forms in the landscape or locality.

- Cardinal Directions accentuated – ie North, South, East, West.
- A Twelffold pattern (Plato: The Republic)
- Squaring the Circle
- Cruciform
- Honouring the circle of the horizon: reflecting the heavenly dome on earth



THE THEOLOGY OF ARITHMETIC

On the Mystical, Mathematical
and Cosmological Symbolism
of the First Ten Numbers

Attributed to Iamblichus

TRANSLATED FROM THE GREEK BY
ROBIN WATERFIELD

WITH A FOREWORD BY
KEITH CRITCHLOW

A Kairos Book

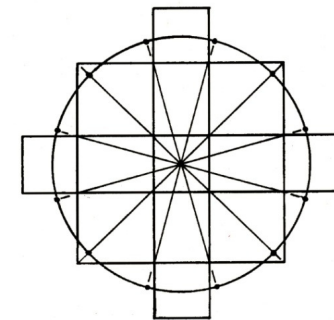


FIGURE 13 The Holy City as a symbol of unity with the two incommensurables square and circle, reconciled by the cross. The diagonals of the square and the points where the square meets the circle are used to divide the circle into 12 virtually equal parts.

THE CRUCIFORM CITY

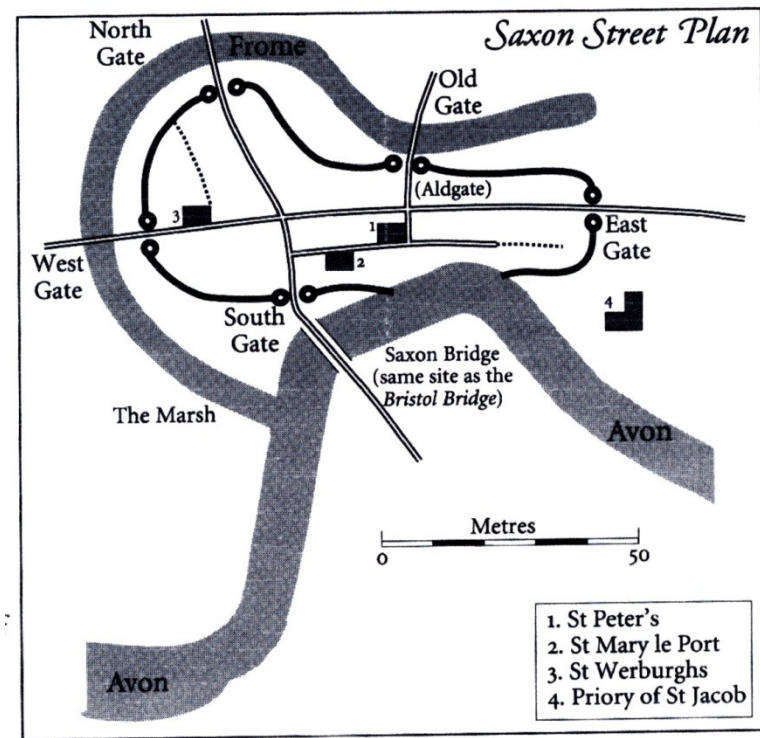
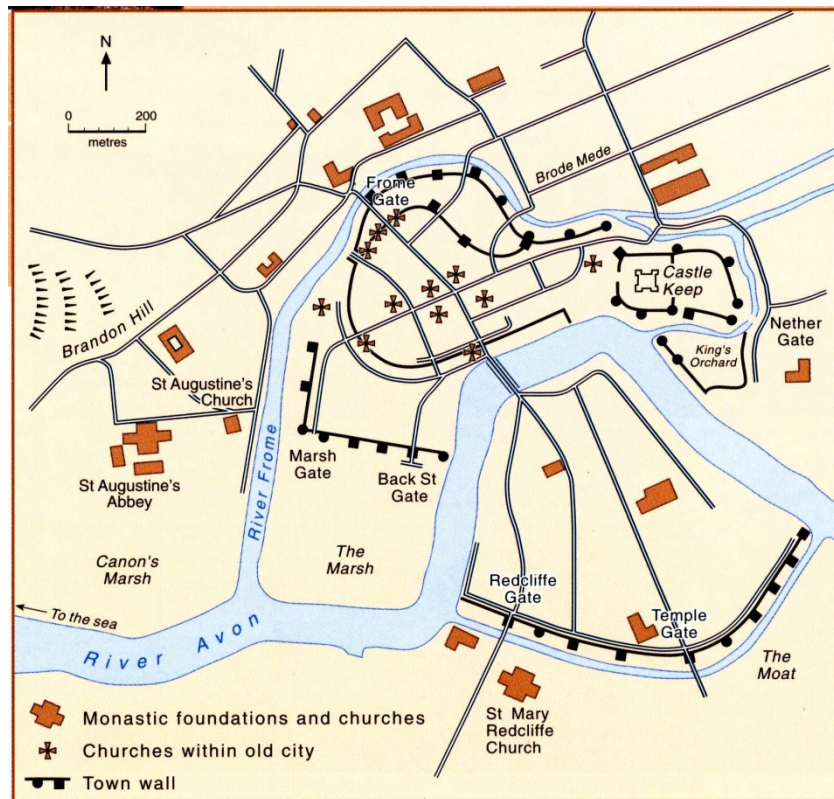


Figure 4.10 – Chichester, the medieval plan. Founded as Noviomagus Regensium, this site, in common with

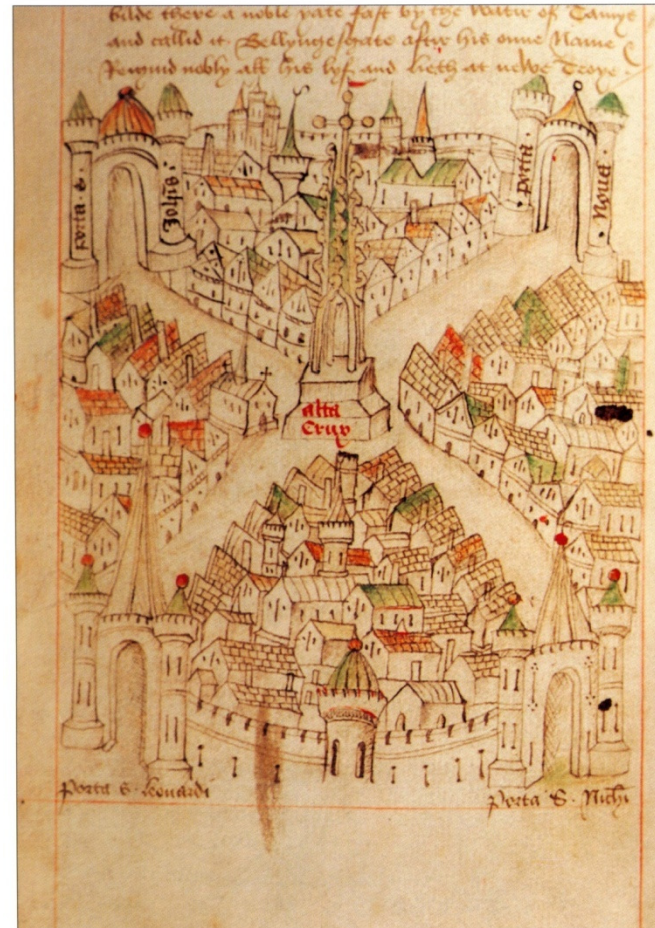


20. Brilon, Westphalia, Germany, a classic holy-city, divided into four quarters by streets from four gates, a market-place being almost at the centre.

Bristol UK, founded 10th century



- BRISTOL IS SMALL: THE RELIGIOUS HOUSES ARE OUTSIDE THE WALLS
- BY CONTRAST
NEWCASTLE IS LARGE
AND THE RELIGIOUS
HOUSES ARE WITHIN
THE WALLS





12 The sanctuary and adjacent buildings enclosed by a wall in the fourth century.

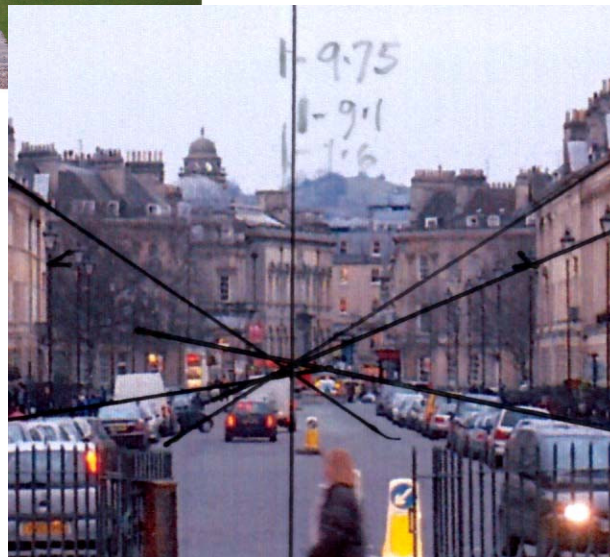
Bath, England

JOHN WOOD PLANNED GREAT PULTENEY STREET ORIENTATION TO DISPLAY THE SUNSET OVER BARROW HILL ON JANUARY 27TH FOR A SPECIAL REASON

BARROW HILL WAS ALLEGEDLY THE BURIAL SEPULCHRE OF BATH'S MYTHICAL FOUNDER DRUID-KING, BLADUD (?900 BCE!)

JANUARY 27TH 1539 WAS THE DATE BATH ABBEY WAS RETURNED TO KING HENRY VIII IN THE DISSOLUTION OF THE MONASTERIES

AS DEFENDER OF THE FAITH, WOOD SAW HENRY VIII AS ENGLAND'S FIRST PRIEST-KING, AN ECHO OF BLADUD AS DRUID-KING





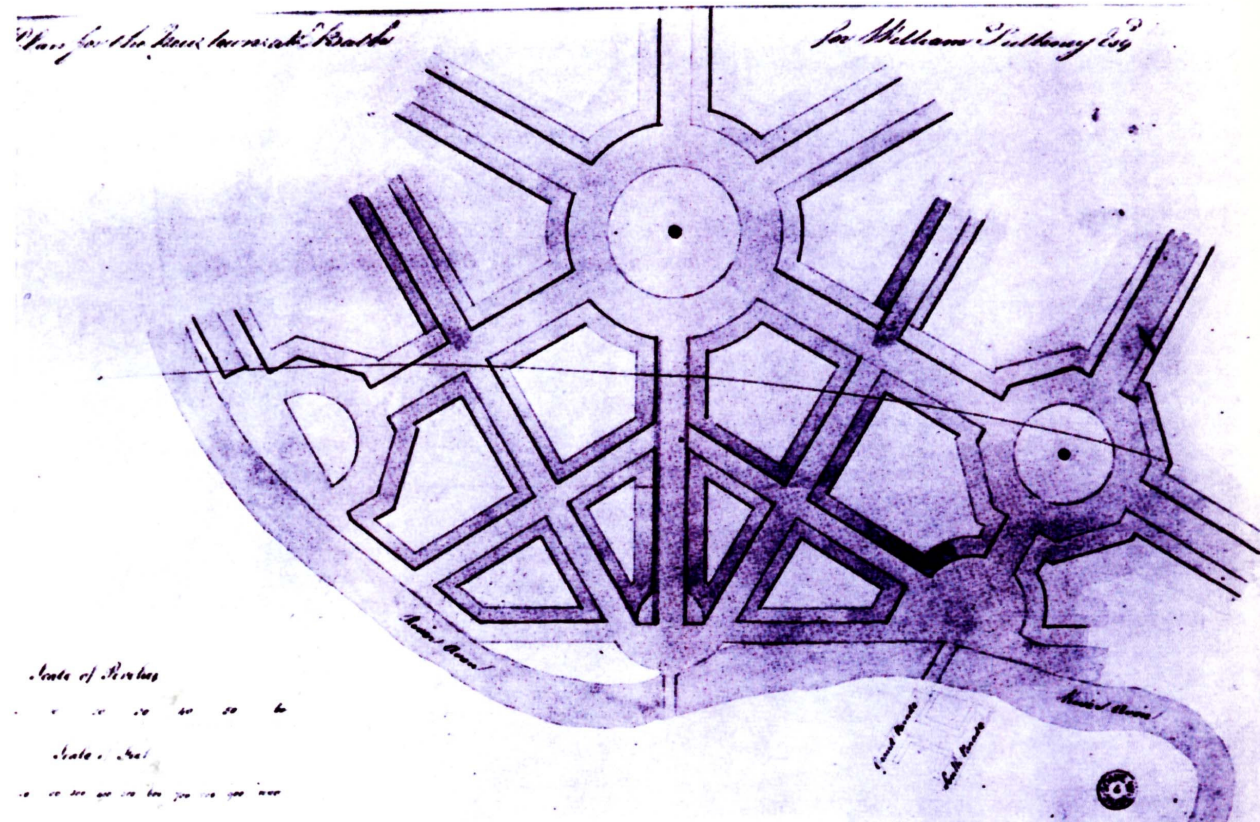
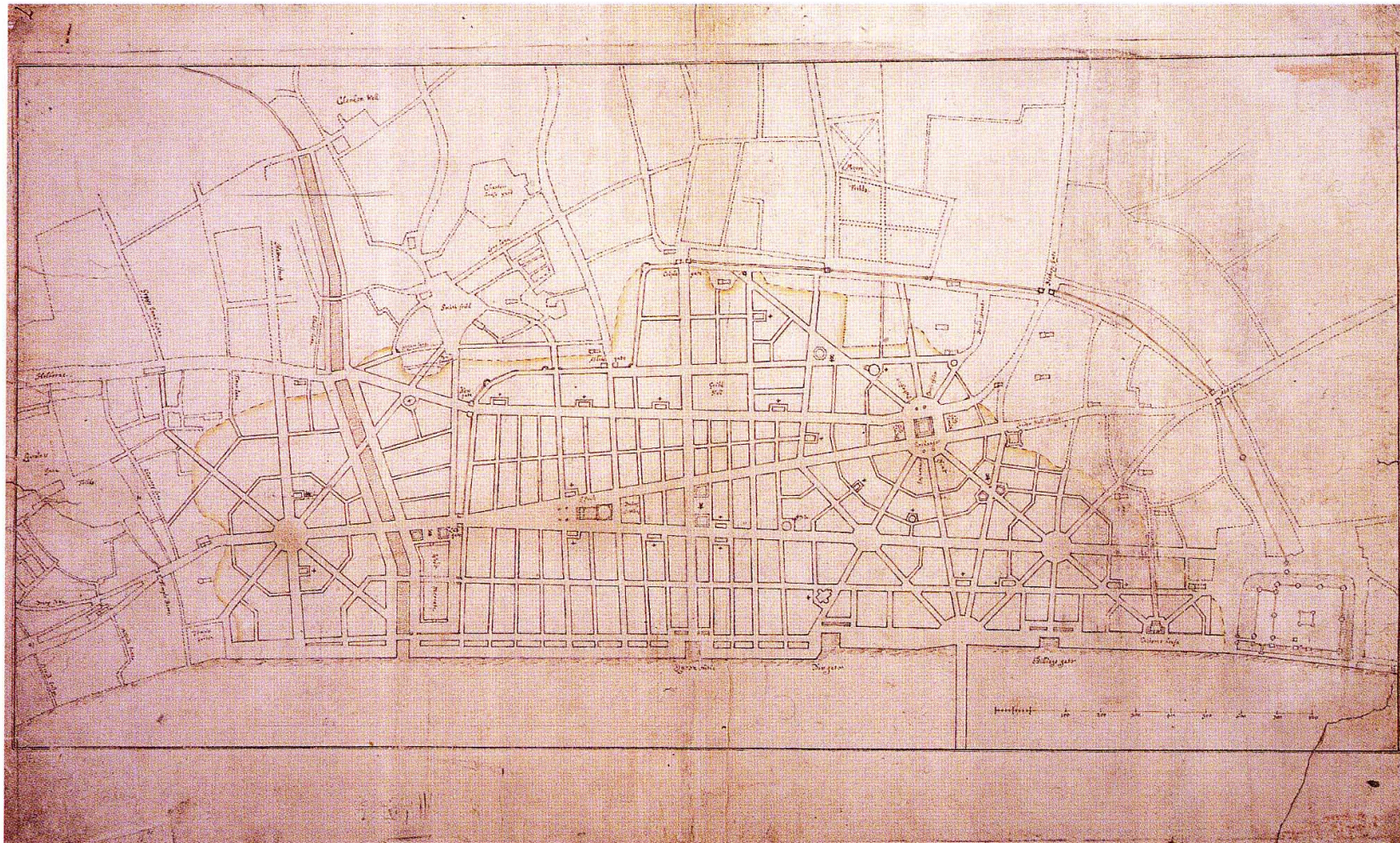
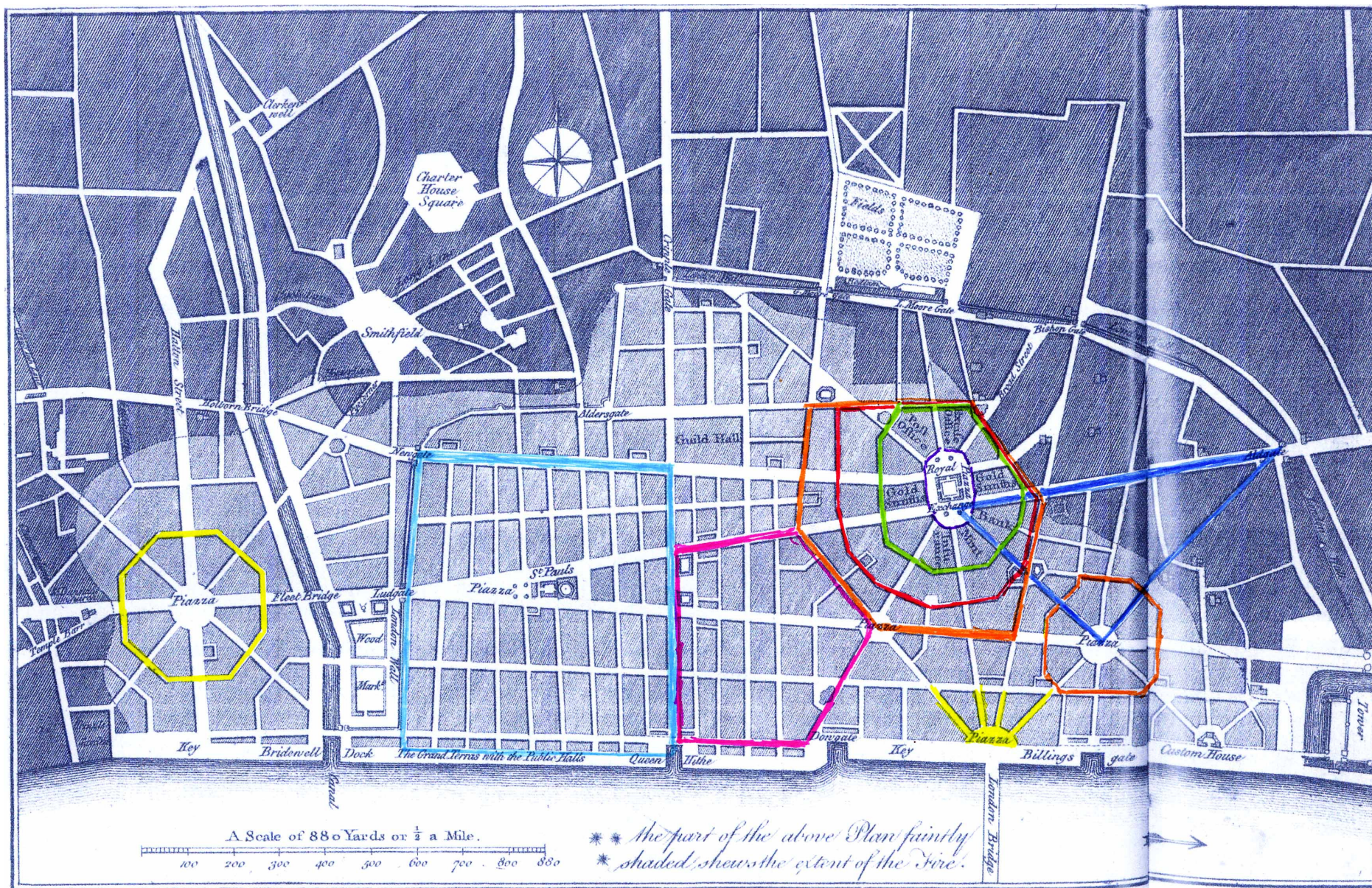


Fig. 22. 1 Robert Adam's plan for the Bathwick estate of 1777.
The suggestion of a masonic square and compasses
is striking. From original in Sir John Soane Museum.



London as designed by Christopher Wren 1660s-70s





Earthscape and skyscape

Precedents for the foundation of cities

Left: Babylonian Boundary Stone 1100 BCE



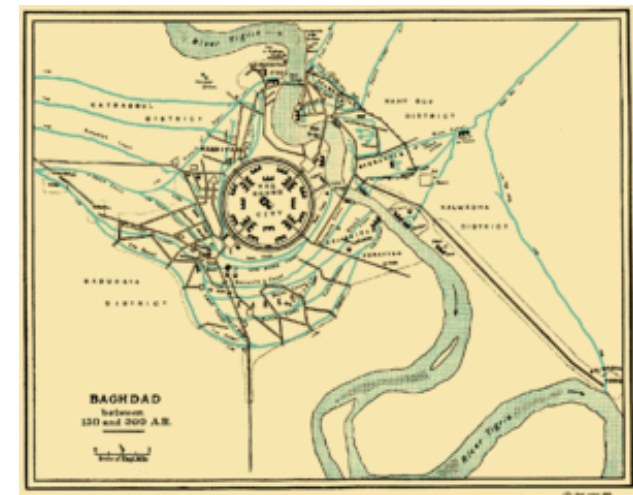
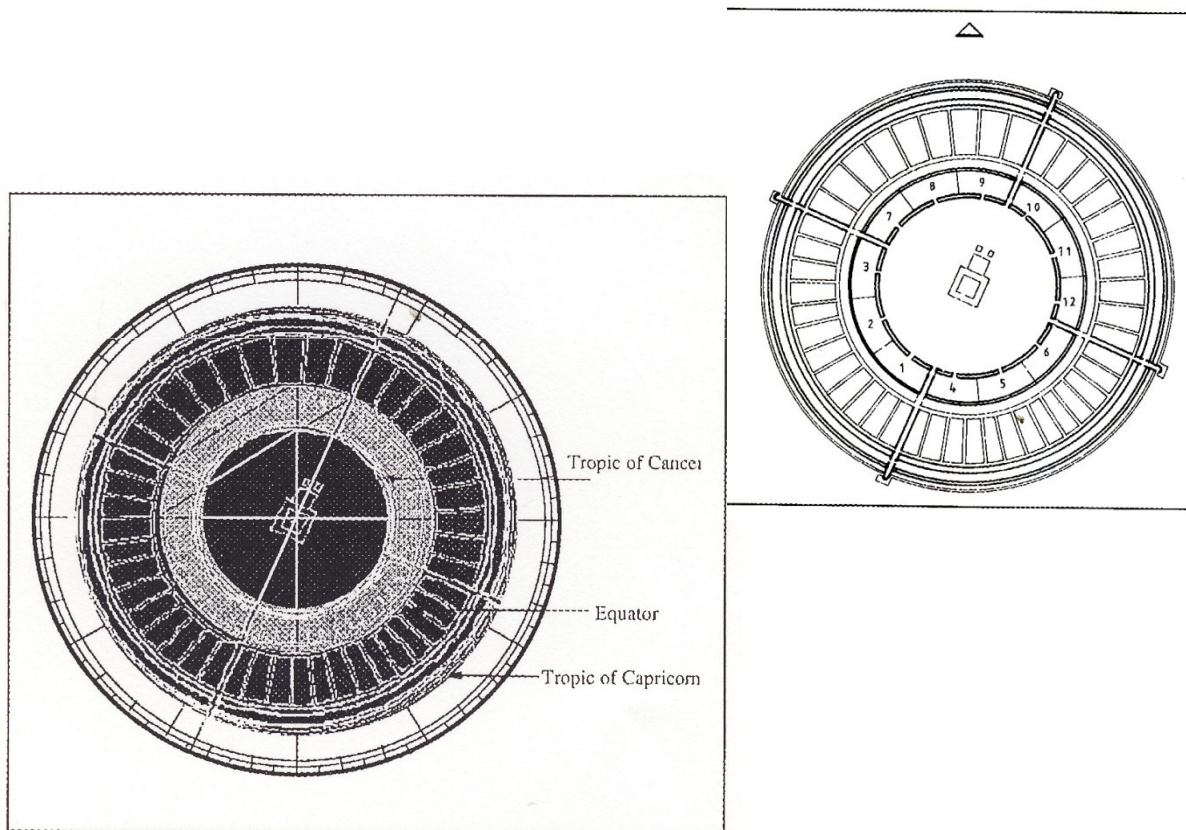
- Dream of Gudea
- Persepolis: a cosmic city
- Selucia: story of astrological election
- Constantinople: story of astrological election

The Foundation of Cairo July 969

- *On the very night Jawhar settled on the site he marked the perimeter of the city with wooden stakes string together with belled ropes. It was decided to break ground for the perimeter wall when the astrologers determined that the time was most propitious. According to legend, a crow landed on the cord and set the bells jangling, which the workmen took a signal to start work. The astrologers reckoned that the planet Mars (al-Qahir, the “Ruler,” when Qahira) was in the ascendant, which was considered an unfavourable sign. But according to another tradition, Mu’izz* had given Jawhar instructions to build a city called Qahira that would rule the world.*
- Raymond, André, *Cairo*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 37.
- * **Abu Tamim Ma'ad al-Mu'izz Li-Dinillah** (fourth Fatimid Caliph, 953-975, 14th Ismaili Imam)

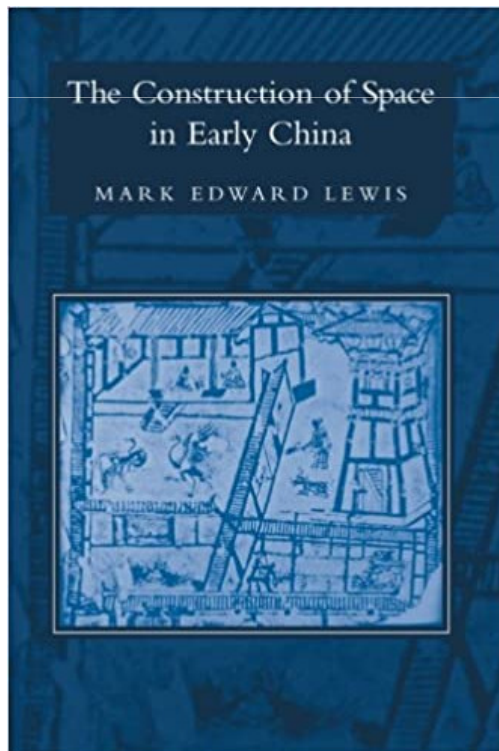
Baghdad was founded on a circular plan, as a mirror of the sky

Allawi fig 7



China

- In the early Han period (202 BC–220 AD) there was a concept of the Dark Hall which represented winter and the bright hall that faced south and represented summer.

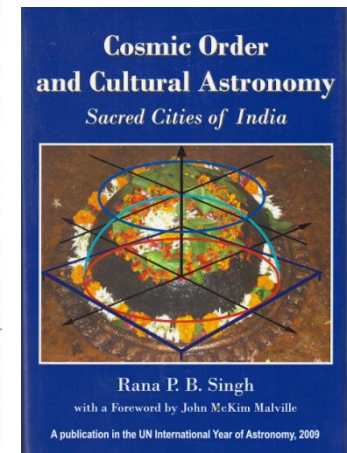
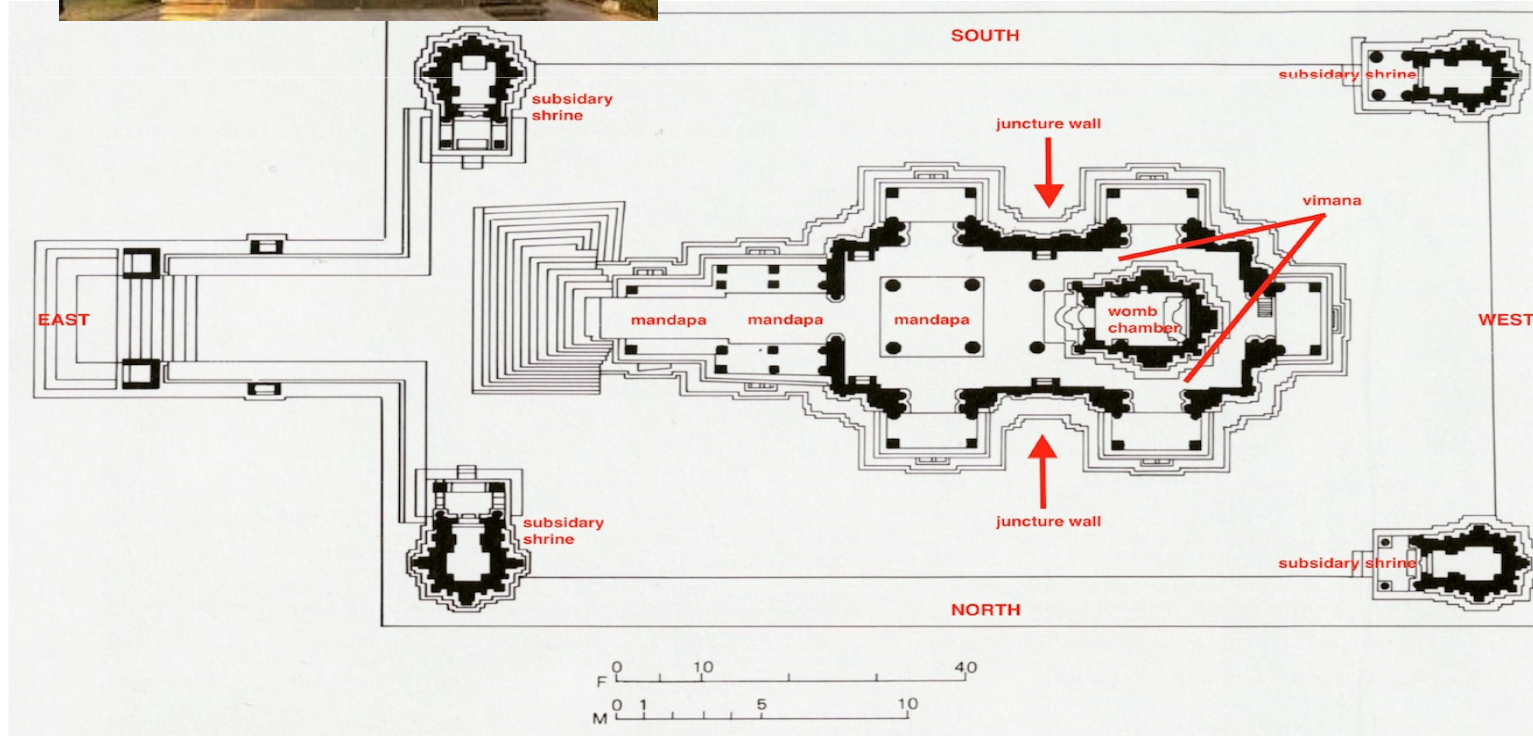


In a passage from the *Huainanzi*:

'In the past the policies and teachings of the five Emperors and three Kings invariably used "three" and "five". What is meant by "three" and "five"? They looked up to adopt images from heaven and looked down to adopt measures from Earth. In the middle they took their models from men. They then established their courts in the Bright Hall and practised the ordinances of the Bright Hall in order to balance the energies of *yin* and *yang* and to harmonise the rhythms of the four seasons... To investigate the sequence of the four seasons and their months in order to establish the rituals of senior and junior and complete the government offices is called "three". To institute the duties of Prince and minister, the kinship of father and son, the distinction of husband and wife, the order of senior and junior, at the meeting of friends is called "five".'

Lewis, Mark Edward, *The Construction of Space in Early China*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 266, citing *Huainanzi* ch. 20, 'Tai zu, p. 51).

India: Khajuraho – Temples – centres of cities



The Maya Chichen Itza





Theory: Utopia

The term utopia is derived from the Greek for 'no place' and was the title of the mythical land of Utopia described in the English statesman and philosopher Thomas More's account of the ideal republic, published in 1516.

- The word utopia has achieved a persona beyond anything that More intended. The word describes any **perfect place** or **society**. **Therefore it may be defined by either (1) place in itself or (2) the place made by people.**
- A utopia may exist entirely in the imagination, or people may try to create utopias.
- People may attempt to create utopias through the arts, architecture, social reform, democratic change or revolution.
- Artists may represent places which are not utopias as if they are utopias.
- In its general usage, any vision of a better future can now be considered utopian in a general sense.
- However, because utopia means '**no place**', there is a paradox: can a utopia ever actually exist and if people try to create one, are they doomed to fail?

But do we all have a personal special place? A personal utopia?



Literary Origins

Before Thomas More Utopias draw their inspiration from two chief sources;

1. Plato's ideal Republic (Plato, *Republic*, 2 Vols., trans. Paul Shorey, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1935 (an e book in the University Library)

2. The Biblical New Jerusalem.

- The two came together in St. Paul's epistle to the Hebrews which, in the King James version reads,
- 'But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly one: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city'. Hebrews 11.16.

- St John the Divine and the New Jerusalem, 14th c tapestry



Contested Meanings: Dystopias

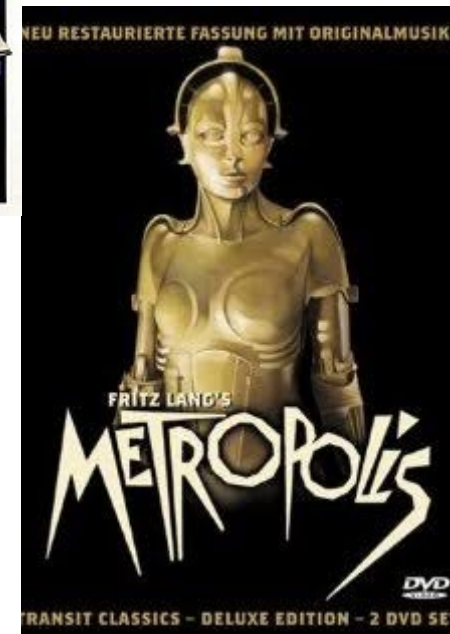
Utopia is a contested concept. This does not mean simply that people disagree about what a utopia is, and about what the good society should be like. Rather the word changes its meaning depending on who is using it and whether they position themselves either for or against their chosen definition. One person's utopia is another's nightmare – a **dystopia**. The notion of contested space has now become familiar in landscape studies, in which the same site may have completely different meanings and uses for different people. Utopias are partly contested spaces, even when they have an imaginary location, but because they exist in the future, they exist within a contested timescape.

Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Hemel Hempstead: Allen Lane, 1990);

Kumar, Krishan, *Utopianism* Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991.

Barbara Bender, and Margaret Winer, ***Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place***, (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

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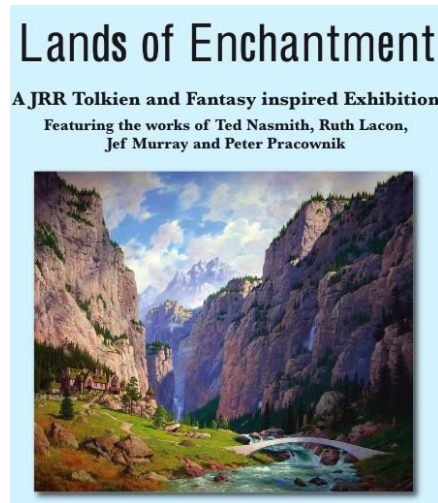
Varieties of Utopia

While utopias are commonly thought of as collective – as societies, or as the spaces and places which we all inhabit – like any other idea or activity, they can equally well be personal. In a sense, we all create our personal utopias where ever we are, or seek out the utopias which appeal to us. We make our homes and our gardens.

But when we leave home we are faced with the utopian dreams of architects, from nostalgic fantasies to modernist triumphalism, from rural isolation to urban intensity, and we learn, work and participate in educational, economic and political structures influenced by the ideas and actions of people who dreamed of perfect worlds.



- Utopias may also exist in the sky.
- In medieval Europe, Heaven was a kind of utopia.
- In the era of modern science fiction, from Jules Verne to Star Trek, utopias may be imagined on other planets and distant galaxies.
- A utopia may exist in the past as a lost golden age, or in the future as an aspiration, as what we might call an 'ontology of the not yet', a knowledge of the unknown.

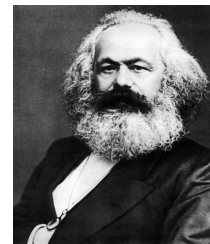
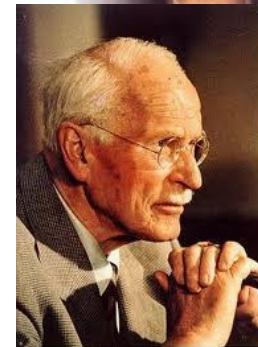
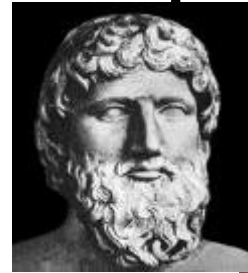


Utopia and Perfection: Political and Spiritual Utopias

We can analyse utopias in different forms. The chief distinction is between

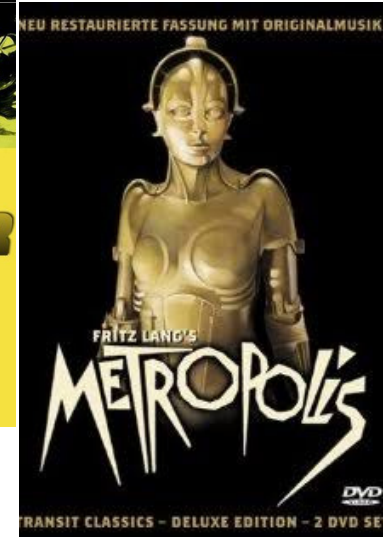
- A) The belief that, while the perfect society can be imagined, it can never be created because human beings themselves are imperfect.
- B) A compromise in which it is believed that, if model societies are created, human behaviour will necessarily improve: this is the basis of social democracy, socialism and communism.

Plato is regarded as the ancestor of theories of the perfect state, and of both theories of a spiritual new age (eg Blavatsky, Crowley, Bailey, Jung) and communism (Marx, Lenin, Mao)

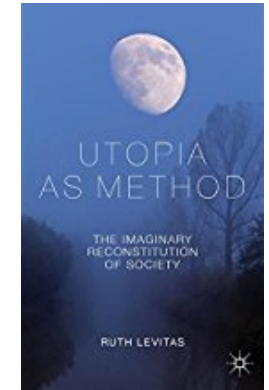


Urban Utopias in the UK: Georgian Bath; a pub built to evoke the Elizabethan golden age (16th century), and a modernist dream;
Utopianism in Film

Easy Rider (1969), Metropolis (1927)



Utopianism = programmatic, as method, structuring time



One feature of utopianism is its **programmatic** nature.

When its rules and regulations are prescribed, and when its future inauguration is established by some system of numbers, or quirk of the calendar, or movement of the heavenly bodies, then the fantasy becomes locked into the 'real' world.

The very reliance on external measuring devices means that the promised future will arrive. Endowing the future with reality in this way has been described as a kind of '**thaumaturgic**' or **magical, prophecy**; the act of making the prophecy is itself a means of bringing it into existence.

They provide what has been called a '**temporal integrity**'.

The various constructions used to time the inauguration of the coming era, whether New Age, Aquarian Age, New Jerusalem, Kingdom of God or Dictatorship of the Proletariat, provide connectors between time and eternity, connecting them with the vital moments at which eternal recurrence becomes real instead of imaginary.

The names under which the future age is known assume a magic power which encourages devotees to struggle for them to the point of self-sacrifice, even death. They are 'time-fetishes'.

Davis, Fred, 'Why all of us may be hippies someday', *Trans-Action* Vol. 5, no 2, pp. 10-18. 15, 17.

Lukacher, Ned. *Time Fetishes: The Secret History of Eternal Recurrence*. London: Duke University Press, 1998, x-xi.



Golden Ages: America

Whilst the Platonic notion of the ideal commonwealth took hold of the Renaissance imagination, it became clear that a perfect society could also exist in a state of nature.

Michel de Montaigne (1533-92), 'Of Cannibals', published in the 1580s. Montaigne's starting point was the American New World, specifically Brazil.

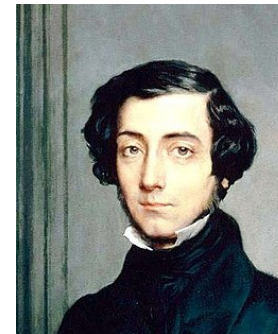
Montaigne considered classical antecedents, like Plato's account of Atlantis, but concluded that America was a genuinely new, previously unknown continent. It is his account of the ideal society, though, which established a template for a major current of utopian thinking down to the present day.

The debt owed by Montaigne to golden age literature going all the way back to Hesiod is clear. He even explicitly stated that the simple, close-to-nature quality of life in Brazil exceeded anything imagined by Plato or described in the poetry on the Golden Age.

'These people have no trade of any kind, no acquaintance with writing, no knowledge of numbers, no terms for governor or political superior. No practice of subordination or of riches or poverty, no contracts, no inheritance, no divided estates, no occupation but leisure, no concern for kinship – except as is common to them all – no clothing, no agriculture, no metals, no use of wine or corn. Among them you hear no words for treachery, lying, cheating, treachery, avarice, backbiting or forgiveness.'

Michel de Montaigne, 'Of Cannibals', chap. 31, in *The Complete Essays*, trans M.A.Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), 233.

Alexis de Tocqueville – American Exceptionalism
Donald Trump – 'Let's make America great again'



Golden Ages

Montaigne's portrait of the honest, simple human, untouched by civilisation, was paraphrased and disseminated by Shakespeare in Gonzalo's famous speech in *The Tempest* that concluded with the words 'I would with such perfection govern, sir, To excel the golden age'.

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 2, Scene 1, lines 173-4, see also lines 153-62, 165-70; see also Charlotte Scott, *Shakespeare's Nature: from cultivation to culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 197-202.

Montaigne established the modern concept of an ideal society as essentially pure and virtuous because it is based in harmony with nature, as opposed to the complex, alienating customs and institutions of European civilisation.

If one lived in accord with nature, there would no longer be any need for political hierarchies, private wealth, agriculture or industry. And, having abolished such unnecessary burdens on the human condition, so the theory goes, individual behaviour would then naturally improve.

The challenge to those standard Platonic and Christian views which regarded human nature as deeply flawed was explicit and from now on perfect societies could depend on less regulation, rather than more. Ultimately, the state would wither.

Utopia moves from requiring control of human beings' worst nature to arising out of human beings' best nature

This then leads to **ROMANTICISM**



Modern Literature – William Morris

(1834-96)

1890 *News from Nowhere*.

Morris positioned himself firmly in the world of revolutionary socialism, believing profoundly in the virtues of social and political transformation: yet the whole point of his art and craft was spiritual elevation.

His belief in the inspirational effects of medieval imagery gave him an identity not so far removed from the esotericism of the Romantics.

In one exchange, in a short chapter entitled 'Concerning Politics', the question is posed 'How do you manage with politics?', to which the answer is given, 'we are very well off as to politics, - because we have none'.

- William Morris, *News from Nowhere and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 2004), 116.
- See also Stephen Coleman and Paddy O'Sullivan, eds., *William Morris and News From Nowhere: A Vision for Our Time* (Bideford, Devon: Green Books, 2000), 28.

- Below. Morris' home, The Red House, 1859, designed by Philip Webb, regarded as the beginning of the Arts and Crafts movement, two examples of Morris' wallpaper, 1864; Jane Morris

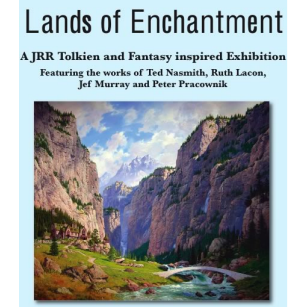
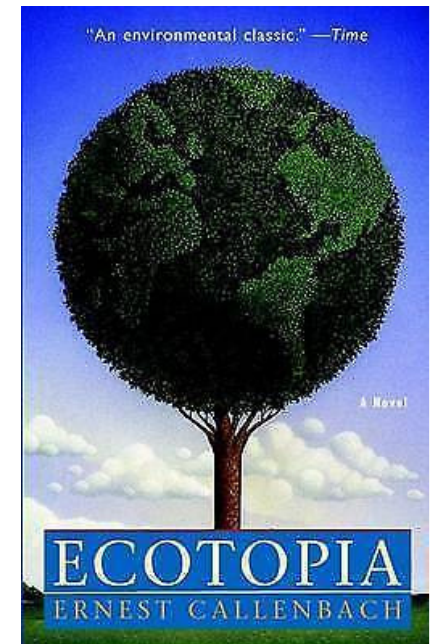
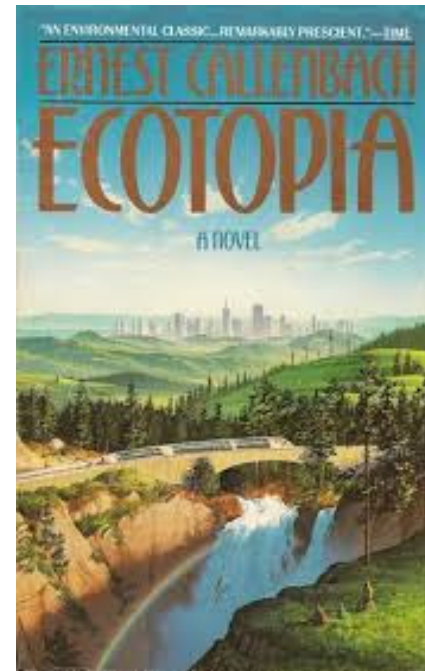


Ecotopia

The naturalism of 1960s hippy culture was to find literary expression in the imaginative future of 'Ecotopia', a mid 1970s vision extrapolated from attitudes and ideologies in mid-1960s California. In the Ecotopian account, 'the meadow sustains itself on a steady-state basis – unless men come along and mess it up'. In this sense, human society exists in opposition to nature. However, individuals who have renounced the world of conventional, materialist, capitalist and suburban America, through whatever means, are freed from their alienation from nature and return to their pure condition:

'Ecotopians, both male and female, have a secure sense of themselves as animals. At the Cove, they lie about utterly relaxed, curled up on couches or floor...They stretch, rearrange themselves, do mysterious yoga-like exercises, and just seem to enjoy their bodies'.

- Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia* (Berkeley: Banyan Tree Books, 2004), 30, 31.



A little theory: Kenneth Olwig

‘A painted landscape is a concrete thing, a signifier’, which signifies an abstract meaning, often a normative conception of the way things ‘naturally’ ought to be if they are to conform to the natural order of things’.

- Kenneth Olwig, ‘Sexual Cosmology: Nation and Landscape at the Conceptual Interstices of Nature and Culture; or What does Landscape Really Mean?’, in Barbara Bender (ed.), *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 1993, p. 319.

**We can imagine cosmic cities a
‘painted landscape’,
redolent with abstract
meaning**



The Theory of Place

David Harvey: the fundamental importance of time-space relations to social relations. A location in time and space clarifies and determines social relations.

Harvey, David, *The Urban Experience*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 175.

Vincent Berdoulay: 'a place comes explicitly into being in the discourse of its inhabitants, and particularly in the rhetoric it promotes'

Vincent Berdoulay, 'Place, Meaning and Discourse in French Language Geography' in Agnew, John A., and James S. Duncan, *The Power of Place*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1989, p. 135.

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