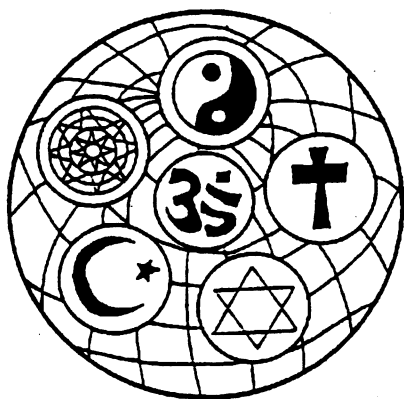


# Geography of Religions & Belief Systems



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

The summer edition of the newsletter has some very important information for GORABS members. First and foremost, we welcome Becky Dobbs as the newsletter liaison for student members. In this role she will serve as an assistant editor and students are encouraged to contact her with their contributions. Also, a number of important announcements are inside. We hope to hear from as many of you as possible. Your contributions to the work of the specialty group are essential. Thus I hope your summer program allows time to respond to our call for a list of your publications. See inside for details.

**FUNDING FOR THIS NEWSLETTER IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES AT SLIPPERY ROCK UNIVERSITY**

## GORABS Feature Essay\*

Landscapes of the Sacred: Avebury as a Case Study by Joel P. Geffen, Central Washington University, Ellensburg, Washington

The potential for places and landscapes to stimulate emotions is nothing new. Anyone who has been awed by a colorful sunset, by the soaring height of a mountain range, or by the quietness of a deep forest understands this. The look and feel of a place can affect people profoundly. Of all the inspiring sites found around the world, some of the most emotionally powerful are those which are considered sacred.

In sacred landscapes form and scale unite to convey something that the German theologian Rudolf Otto described as "a feeling of the Numinous." This was discussed in *Das Heilige*, published in 1917. Later, it appeared in English translation as *The Idea of the Holy*. In it, Otto noted that no matter how God or deity is intellectually conceived, there is always an aspect which remains beyond intellect; words cannot describe it. Otto chooses the term "numen" or "the numinous" to describe this indescribable aspect.

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Association of American Geographers

## GORABS FOCUS ON:

Thomas A. Tweed

Dr. Tweed is associate professor of religious studies in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His graduate work includes a PhD in religious studies from Stanford (1989) and an M.T.S. in Christian History at Harvard (1979). In addition to his work in religious studies Dr. Tweed has been a student of geography as well where he uses the concepts of landscape and diaspora to reveal the dynamics of transplanted religious practices. His work has much to offer geographers of religion, especially his most recent book about a Cuban shrine in contemporary Miami. The work cited below represents only a small part of his extensive publication record. If you would like to correspond with Dr. Tweed about his work, you can contact him at the Department of Religious Studies, CB#3225, 101 Saunders Hall, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3220; [tatweed@email.unc.edu](mailto:tatweed@email.unc.edu)

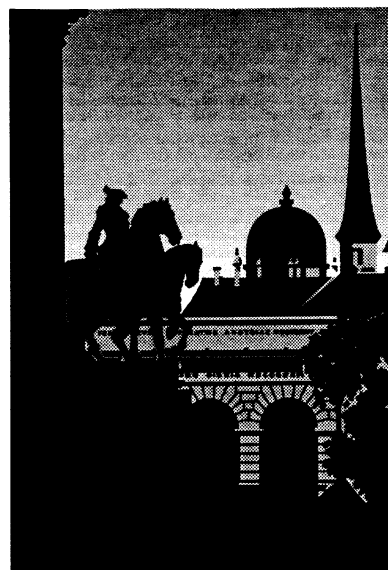
*Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion as a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami.* NY:Oxford University Press, 1997.

*The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent.* Bloomington:Indiana University Press, 1992.

"Diaspora Nationalism and Urban Landscape: Cuban Immigrants at a Catholic Shrine in Miami," 1998 in *The God's of the City: Religion and the Contemporary American Urban Landscape*, edited by R.A. Orsi.

"Inclusivism and the Spiritual Journey of Marie de Souza Canavarro," 1994 *Religion* 24:43-58.

"An Emerging Protestant Establishment: Religious Affiliation and Public Power on the Urban Frontier in Miami, 1896-1904," *Church History*, 64:27-48.



### Boston Minutes (abridged)

1. 1997 GORABS Minutes accepted
2. Treasurer Report: \$1988.26 is our current balance.
3. Bylaws: Board of directors have accepted the new wording of the bylaws. Those who returned the bylaws wording referendum accepted the new wording unanimously.
4. A special thank you is extended to Chad Emmett and Surinder Bhardwaj for their service on the GORABS executive board.
5. New executive board members for the 1998-2000 term are Gail Sechrist (Indiana University of Pennsylvania) and Linda K. F. Pittman (Richard Bland College, VA). Welcome!
6. 1998 D.E. Sopher New Scholar Award was presented to Bruce Crew (Michigan State University).
7. CV Prorok will continue as newsletter editor for the next two years.
8. Becky Dobbs, student representative on the executive board, will contribute to the newsletter as Assistant Editor.
9. Geography in America project. Bob Stoddard and Carol Prorok will write the GORABS section with assistance from Dick Jackson.
10. Funding for students for Hawaii: The AAG has funds available and an application process. We will use a similar process to award \$200 to a participating GORABS student.
11. Announcement from the SG Chairs Meeting: NSF has \$11 million available for research and education relating to the cognitive processes involved with spatial thinking and skills.
12. Support for Richard Cleve's presentation on remote sensing in Israel/Palestine at the Boston meeting. \$100 will be available from our funds.
13. Adjourn

## GORABS FEATURE ESSAY

(Continued from Page 1)

The emotional response on the part of people to the *numinous* can be described as “creature-feeling” (Otto 1958:10). This refers to a person’s experience of being absolutely overpowered by, and contrasted as virtually minimal against, that force which is the fountainhead of all life. Since the *numinous* is a “wholly other” reality beyond the self, and is thus impossible to comprehend through the intellect, people tend to rely on metaphorical

Old High German, and as *landskap* in Old Norse. Quite literally, it can be translated as “land-shape.” Originally a technical term for painters, it referred solely to the depiction of inland environments; people were excluded. Between 1600 and 1700 the definition was broadened. It came to encompass anything seen along with its setting, such as a valley, a sky, or even a person. Surprisingly, perhaps, it could even refer to psychological images; panoramas subjectively viewed within one’s mind (Oxford 1989:628-29). For each of these definitions “landscape” is held to be an association of forms that convey meaning. Sacred



and symbolic expressions of it instead (Otto 1958:12, 26-28). It is due to this sense of the *numinous* that all sacred landscapes have the potential to provide people with spiritual or religious experiences. Through the use of symbol and metaphor in those landscapes a given community of people may communicate and understand the meanings contained therein.

Symbolic meanings are suggested by the physical features or forms present in the landscape. Such meanings are often directly related to entities and places associated with divine and invisible realms as understood in a specific symbolic system. Sacred landscapes thus link the seen to the unseen. The existence of the latter is implied by the former. Therefore, such places not only present a coherent array of tangible forms, but these, due to what they suggest and symbolize, also present a coherent array or landscape of that which is intangible and numinous.

“Landscape,” as it is being used here, is obviously a multilayered term. “How,” some might ask, “can a landscape pertain to that which is spiritual and invisible?” Some may take exception to the fact that the firm ground upon which geographers normally stand is giving way. Yet, a closer look shows that it gave way centuries ago. For hundreds of years, actually, a variety of definitions have been applied to the term “landscape.”

By 1598 the word was already commonplace. It surfaced as *landschap* in Dutch, as *landscipe* in Old English, as *lantscap* in

landscapes have two additional elements. First, the meanings that they communicate are primarily spiritual or religious in nature. Secondly, such places use scale to augment what Rudolf Otto called “creature-feeling.” Avebury is an excellent example of this.

Avebury is an ancient site located in southern Britain. It dates from the neolithic era which is associated worldwide with the domestication of plants and animals as well as incipient agriculture (Piggott 1954:15; Burl 1979:78; Fagan 1992:315). Initial construction began at Avebury roughly 4,000 years ago (Piggott 1954:89; Smith 1965:xxvii). Even so, over a millennium was needed for it to evolve into the large and complicated site known today (Thomas 1991:174-75; Piggott 1962). Forming the hub of this two-mile wide archaeological complex is the Great Circle with its ring of tall stones and its two inner circles (see photo). A mile to the south stands the massive artificial mound of Silbury Hill. Another half-mile beyond that, the West Kennet Long Barrow and its subterranean burial chambers rests upon a ridge like a long green snake. An avenue of stones called the West Kennet Avenue leads southwest from the Great Circle to the toe of another ridge. There, two concentric rings mark the spot where another structure once stood. Also a mile and a half northwest from the Great Circle is Windmill Hill with its famous circular enclosure. Threading between all of these places is the gentle and winding River Kennet.

## GORABS FEATURE ESSAY

(Continued from Page 3)

Due to the constraints inherent in a brief article, only the Great Circle will be discussed here. Fortunately, archaeological and ethnological sources indicate that its meanings and use of scale is similar to those of Avebury's other monuments. Through the Great Circle it is possible to achieve a coarse-grained sense of the entire place.

The importance of scale did not escape Avebury's builders. A full 28 1/2 acres is encompassed by the Great Circle (Burl 1979:240; Keiller and Piggott 1936:417). Surrounding this grassy expanse is a ring of standing stones. Just outside of them is a deep ditch, and just past that and adjacent to it, is a great bank. The standing stones number almost a hundred. Several of the tallest are over fourteen feet high. Even the smallest one is nearly ten feet high. The ditch and bank are almost a mile around and a quarter of a mile in diameter. The crest of the bank reaches an average of 16 feet above the ground, and its base is a hundred feet across. The floor of the ditch rests a full fifty feet below the top of the bank.

Forms are just as important. The shape of the standing stones are of two types. One is relatively thin and linear, while the other is more like a squat diamond. Archaeologists working at sites in Britain and Ireland have proposed that such stones represent male and female generative forces (Fleure and Neely 1936:394-95; Smith 1965:197). Further, within the northern sector of the Great Circle's interior circles is another significant form. There one may see The Cove; comprised of three of Avebury's largest stones. Towering high above any visitor, each is over twenty feet long. At the center of the Southern Circle is a single standing stone called The Obelisk. The form of The Cove, like that of The Obelisk, is known from other neolithic sites, particularly in association with burial chambers. It is thought, therefore, that The Cove and The Obelisk symbolize tombs, the ancestors, and the power of the ancestors to influence fertility among the living (Smith 1965:250-51).

Beliefs revolving around the interplay of death, life, and agricultural fertility are known from many farming cultures. Treated respectfully, the ancestors can have a very positive influence upon the health and productivity of the people, the land, the crop, and the livestock (Smart 1976:36). Avebury's monuments show much evidence that propitiatory meals with the ancestors were held before the stones (Thomas 1991:166). Like the Celts and other early farming peoples, mythological and historical records contain powerful suggestions that Avebury's inhabitants believed the ancestors resided in the standing stones (MacCana 1970:19; McKenna 1938:4, 8-9).

The tangible features of the Great Circle, along with those of its two interior circles, are part and parcel of a landscape of the intangible. The physical features comprise a coherent association within a specific system of belief, and they convey meanings relevant to those beliefs. The scale of those features helped to heighten people's sense of the *numinous*.

Sacred landscapes like Avebury may be found all around the world, dating from ancient times to the present. At the heart of every one is a sense of the *numinous*. Each, through its forms, the way those forms are understood, and through the effect of scale in rendering people relatively insignificant in the presence of the *numinous*, reflects, symbolizes, and expresses beliefs about the cosmos and human relationships to it.

\*This essay was extracted from Joel's thesis: "Landscapes of Belief: Places and Perceptions of the Sacred" where four sites were analyzed using the idea of the *numinous*.

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# ANNOUNCEMENTS

An international conference on **Pilgrimage and Complexity** will be held at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in New Delhi from January 5 to 9, 1999. For more information contact the conference organizer: Kim Malville at [kim.malville@colorado.edu](mailto:kim.malville@colorado.edu).

## HAWAII AWARD

The Geography of Religion and Belief Systems Specialty Group will award \$200.00 to assist a student with travel expenses to the AAG annual meeting in Hawaii in March of 1999. Any student member of GORABS may be considered for the award if they are presenting a paper on a topic related to the GORABS. To be considered an applicant must send a copy of the abstract of her/his paper and a copy of confirmation of registration at the meetings to: Richard Jackson, Geography Department, 690 SWKT, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, on or before October 15, 1998. The recipient will be chosen by a random drawing with notification by November 1, 1998. Address any questions to Dr. Jackson (801-378-6063, fax 801-378-5110, [richard\\_jackson@byu.edu](mailto:richard_jackson@byu.edu)).

## STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE

I find it is much harder to write material for newsletters than I ever think it's going to be. What do I have to say that you will want to read? Well, in this case, I want to talk about student involvement in GORABS. I will start by introducing myself and then discuss opportunities for student members.

My name is Becky Dobbs, and I am a PhD student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. My interests include sacred landscapes (especially those of aboriginal and Eastern cultures); therapeutic landscapes; the socio-spatial construction and experience of health and illness; and the geography of Native Americans. I am the **student representative** on the GORABS executive board. This is a two-year term of office, which means that we will elect a new representative that will get to take up this opportunity at the Hawaii meeting. I am also the new **assistant newsletter editor**. In this capacity, I will solicit and process student contributions to our newsletter.

Okay, now for your opportunities. First and foremost, you are urged to **contribute to the newsletter**. We would like to start including regular features on student research and professional activities. For example, essays and book reviews that you get published here can go on that CV you are no doubt building as we speak! As the new assistant editor I will be coordinating and editing (with final approval by the editor) all student submissions, so please send them to me. Snail mail to G. Rebecca Dobbs,

CB #3220, UNC-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill NC 27599-3220; email to [dobbs@geog.unc.edu](mailto:dobbs@geog.unc.edu). Email submissions should either be cut and pasted into the actual email message or attached as a .txt file.

Second, the position of **student representative** will be opening at the end of this year. It is early yet, but if you think you might be interested let me know, and I will suggest your name to the board. It is a low pressure position, and you can put it on your CV!

Last but not least, the **Hawaii student travel grant** is announced elsewhere in this newsletter. I urge all GORABS student members who have a GORABS-type presentation to apply for this grant, as well as the annual **Sopher Award** to be announced in the next issue.

## AN APPEAL FOR ASSISTANCE

The AAG is sponsoring the publication of a volume, titled *Geography in America at the Dawn of the 21st Century*, that will contain a comprehensive assessment of geography as represented by its various specialties. We (Robert Stoddard, Univ. of Nebraska, and Carolyn V. Prorok, Slippery Rock Univ.) have agreed to serve as co-editors for the chapter on the geography of religions and belief systems. Because we are eager to make this chapter as comprehensive and meaningful as possible, we sincerely seek your input through the sending of information about publications during the last decade and ideas about the status of our field. It will help us most if you can send your contribution within the next few weeks; but, if it is difficult to meet this deadline, then a response by the end of the summer will still be welcomed.

We realize there are varying levels of involvement in this field by GORABS members; therefore, we are suggesting several different ways you can assist us. But, note that we will appreciate whatever you send us, whether one or all of the items listed here: (1) Send us the complete citation of all the publications and professional papers you authored in the last decade. (1b) If you have a copy that you could send us, that would be great. In that case, mail it to Carol Prorok, Dept. of Geography and Environmental Studies, Slippery Rock Univ., Slippery Rock, PA, 16057-1326. (2) Send us the citations of other publications and papers that you believe have contributed to our field. These do not need to be restricted to authors who are geographers or North Americans, but they should focus on contributions to North American geography. (3) Send us your ideas about what you regard (a) as significant progress in the field in the last decade and/or (b) as the major challenges to our specialization in the future.

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**\*\*GORABS NEWSLINE\*\***

Whenever space permits, the editor is happy to include in GORABS any news about you or your program that would be of interest to our members. Please type or print legibly. Also, send your vita to the editor if you would like to let the rest of us know a little more about you.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Research in Progress: \_\_\_\_\_

Recent Publications: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Activities: \_\_\_\_\_

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**\*\*GORABS NEWSLINE\*\***

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