

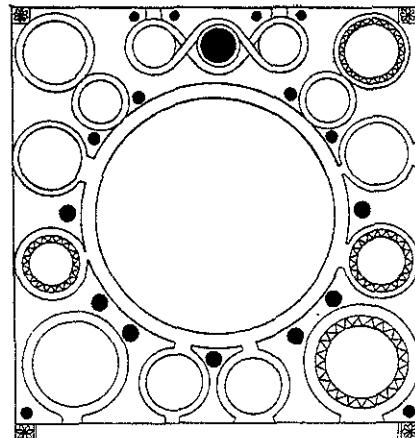
CITY, HOUSE, AND GRAVE

Symbolism in Central and South-Asian architecture

Burchard Bröntjes

— and the simple oratoria of Bernhard de Clairvaux are refusals of such concepts. But to identify the cathedral with Jerusalem in Heaven meant in the same time to identify church, palace and capital — to remember the old concept of Roma quadrata³, the ideal plan of Rome as centre of the world.

This idea of a central “navel of earth” — may it be the omphalos at Delphes or the tree of world in Germanic mythology or the Ka’aba in Islam brings us to Asia, where the idea of “mandala” is shared by buddhists, hindus and old Iranian tribes — and even in China we find

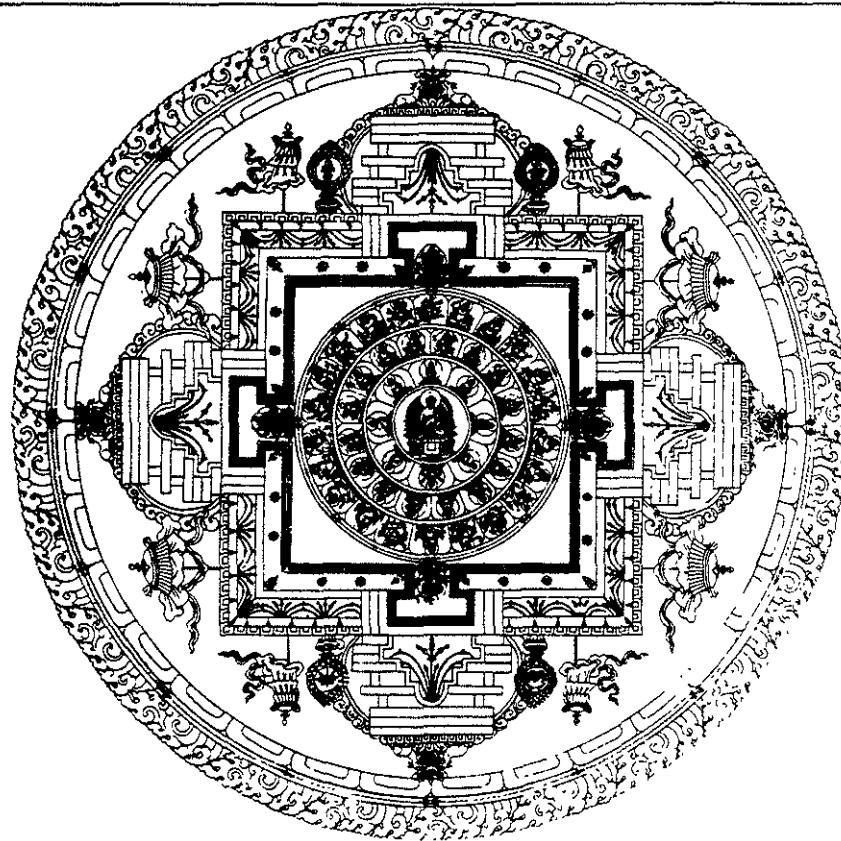


The “world”-mosaic in the Hagia-Sophia.
acc.to: E. Unger, 1935, Nr. 35-36, S.433-447, Abb. 1. (Fig. 1).

A review about architecture in India has to give room for some ideas about the symbolic values of architectural forms, expressed in the model concepts of city, house and grave, interconnected with concepts of world and life¹.

This may sound simple to the Italian reader, trained to see St. Peter as the theater of the world, at least as the cosmos, inside which the liturgy repeats the religious history from creation to redemption — the cupola as heaven and the quadrangular room as the organized world, as it is expressed verbatim by Kosmos Indikopleustes, to whom the cosmos was quadrangular, has four walls and the cupola of heaven. The model is Hagia Sophia at Istanbul, where even a non figurative mosaic represents a square with 15 small circles around a big circle, the last the world, 12 signs of zodiacus, and one for Jesus, Sophia and the logos² (fig. 1).

It is wellknown that at least the architectural concepts to erect churches depends on concepts of world believed in by the builder — for example the gothic cathedral should symbolize the heavenly Jerusalem



the circle and the square as the main forms to express the world and the rule over it. The “quadrature of circle”, known in the tradition of european mathematics as an insoluble

Lama-mandala. acc.to Gordon,a.k.; tibetan religious art. New York 1952, fig. 38. (Fig. 2).

task is nothing else than the secularized concept of the world expressed by square and circle. In the sufi-literature⁴ it took the form, that the perfection of quadrature means the end of the world, being constituted by the motion of matter (square) and spirit (circle).

In sanscrit-tradition the ancestor-fire should burn at a square hearth — cared for by the men — and the wife works at a round hearth. The consequence is, that in the late bronze age — burials at Tulchar (southern Tadzhikistan) — the men are buried with a square hearths and the women with a round one.

Similar symbolism ruled the architecture of Mykenaian Greece, in the royal compounds the centre was a round hearth in the square hall of the royal court.

Such material, as the Bishkent graves, show, that the use of square and circle as symbols is going back at least to the second millennium B.C.. An excavation in Northern Afghanistan has given proof, that the famous mandala of ancient India is as old as Tulchar. Tucci⁵ describes in his famous book "Geheimnis des Mandala, Theorie und Praxis" the mandala as a psychocosmogram; "Es ist in der Tat ein Kosmogramm, das wesentliche Schema des Universums, ... das Universum nicht nur in seiner unbeweglichen räumlichen Ausdehnung, sondern in ständiger zeitlicher Revolution... In ihm spiegelt sich auch das ideale Bild des Königssitzes von Cakravartin, dem universalen Monarchen der indischen Überlieferung..." (S. 29).

"In der Mitte dieses ersten Kreises ist das eigentliche Mandala eingezeichnet, das auch Palast genannt wird..., d.h. den Ort bedeutet, wo sich die Bilder der Götter befinden ... (S. 46)".

"In der Mitte von jeder der vier Seiten öffnet sich eine Pforte in Gestalt des Buchstaben T ... (47)". "Eine Zeremonie, die sich in Mandala vollzieht, ist vor allem ein abhiseka, eine Krönung ... Die Buddha-Bilder im Mandala weisen königliche Gewänder auf ..." (48).

(It is in fact a cosmogram, the man model of the universe... the universe not alone in its unmoving extension in room but in endless timely revolution... It mirrors the model of the royal residence of Cakravartin, the universal monarch of Indian tradition... In the centre of the first circle the true mandala is designed, named palace too... that means, it symbolizes the spot, where the figures of gods were kept... In the middle of each of the four sides opens a gate in form of the letter T... A ceremony, held in the mandala, is in main an abhisaka, a coronation ... The figures of Buddha inside the mandala, have royal garments") (fig. 2).

A mandala is a square, with a T on each side; inscribed to a circle — often added eight angles ("half-Ts") — symbolising the residence of the ruler of the world — and the world itself in extension and motion. It is a characteristic symbol in lamaistic and other buddhist art, in Jainism, it could be found on mirrors of late Chou — and Hantime and as the plane of Ming-T'ang at Xian of Han-period⁶ (fig. 3), a hall of the "heavenly light". We find it again at Polonnaruva, the monastery Jetawanarama, at the Ananda-temple at Pagan or as the stupa Mahacetiya at Nagarjunakonda. It is the main form of the vihara — but the eldest form known up to now in the middle of Dashly — oasis in Afghanistan. It was built in the middle of the second millennium B.C. (the published C 14 — date

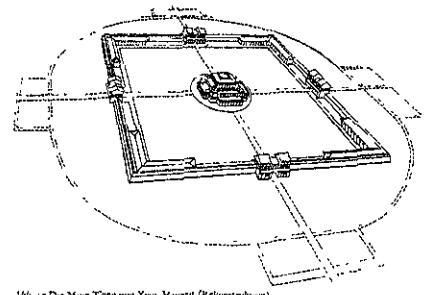


Abb. 12 Die Ming Tang von Xian - Hanzeit (Rekonstruktion)

The "Ming-T'ang" at Hian, reconstruction. acc.to Brentjes, 1981, Abb. 12. (Fig. 3).

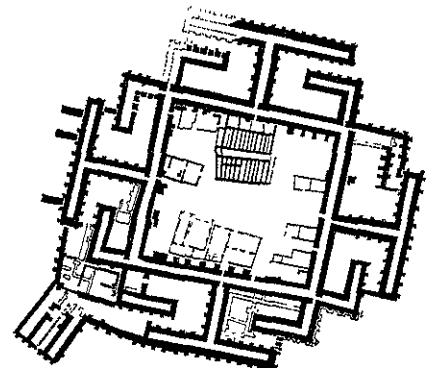
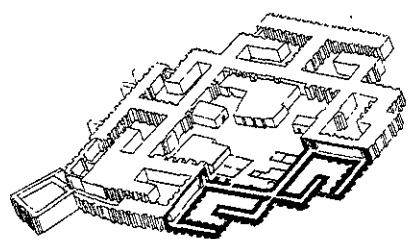
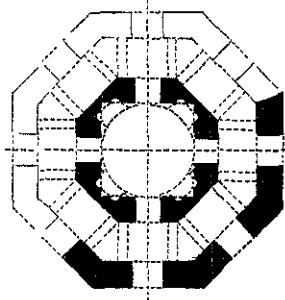
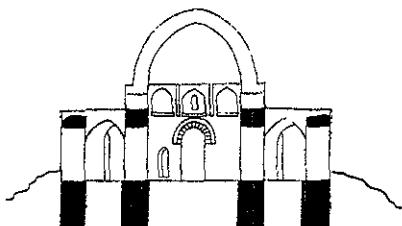


Abb. 2 Das „Mandala“ von Dashly 3, 2. Jahrtausend v. u. Z

The "Mandala" at Dashly 3. acc.to Brentjes, 1981, Abb. 2. (Fig. 4-5).



Qubbat as-Sulaibiya, Samarra. acc.to Brentjes, 1981, Abb. 39. (Fig. 6).

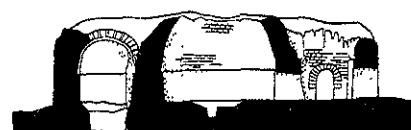
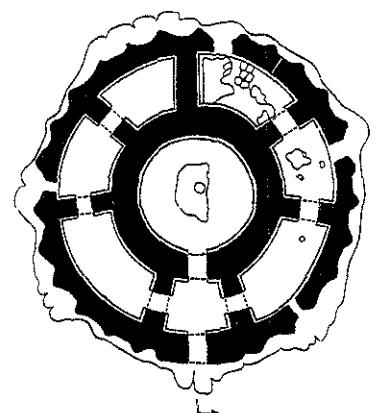


Abb. 24 Der sakische Grabbau Balandi-II 3-2. Jahrhundert v. n. Z.

Mausoleum of Balandi II. acc.to Brentjes, 1981, Abb. 24. (Fig. 7).

has to be corrected with about 400 years)⁷ (fig. 4-5).

It is a Çakravartin-palace of an old Aryan-tribe, 88 m. to 84 m. The court is 38 m. to 40 m., surrounded by four nearby equal corridors of one m. breath, in the middle of each side we find a corridor in T-shape and at each corner two angles equal to one T as was shown by another "palace" of Central Asian bronze age — Sapalli-tepa⁸.

Inside the court was a small palace and some fences, may be for the animals of the eastern calendar. The area is fortified. Sapalli-tepa has two at each side, built in a way to make the building revolving to the left. Both architectural complexes were later used as residential quarters, but seemed to be built for the coronation of a Çakravartin.

That these structures mean the universal rule by the owner could be supported by the Islamic architecture of Abbasid time, giving the capital (or a symbolic building) the form of a wheel around a square palace — with a central cupola-hall, for instance the "madinat as-salam" of Bagdad or the unfinished monument of Heraqla near Raqqa. The last one is a circle form 1 km diameter, with four doors and a central square palace⁹. Four iwans guide to the central hall. The four door rooms differ markedly inside, the first has a round room, the opposite a square one, the next has six and his opposite door eight corners. They show the steps from square to circle — a quadrature. The monument was built by Harun ar-Rasheed as sign of his universal rule after having defeated the Byzantine caesar near Heraclia (today Eregli).

The similarity with the great mausolea in Islam is not a fortuitous one. They are going back to Central Asian roots too. The model

link is the Samanid tomb at Bukhara¹⁰ — a square building with cupola and four iwans, equal at each side. A mock-gallery runs around the upper storey — the rest of the old gallery going around, as we see them still at the Abbasid Qubbat as-Sulaibiya at Samarra¹¹ (fig. 6). The ancestors are Sakian tombs east of Aral, as Babisch-Mulla II or Balandi II¹² (fig. 7), the last one in the tradition of such "kurgans" as Arzan in Tuwa (8th century B.C.), the second the prototype of Chozemian or even early Muslim palaces as Kyrk-Kyz¹³ or Samarra. That square and circle are used in Islamic culture to symbolize the "world of Islam" could be demonstrated with such maps of the world as given by Ahmad Sharfi in his atlas, made at Sfax in 1551. There the square Ka'aba is the navel of a wheel, formed by the countries of Islam¹⁴ (fig. 7/A).

The concept of a round world is of course taken from the visible horizon and the square from the house, the defence against the alien. The 6,8 or 12 corner-structures are steps of quadrature — shall express the reconciliation of square and circle — so that the famous eight ribbed vaults at the mosque of Bib Mardun (Toledo) signifies Allah's rule, the reconciliation of matter and idea in architecture¹⁵. The same is true for the cupola above the mihrab at Cordoba and the other mosques in Islam.

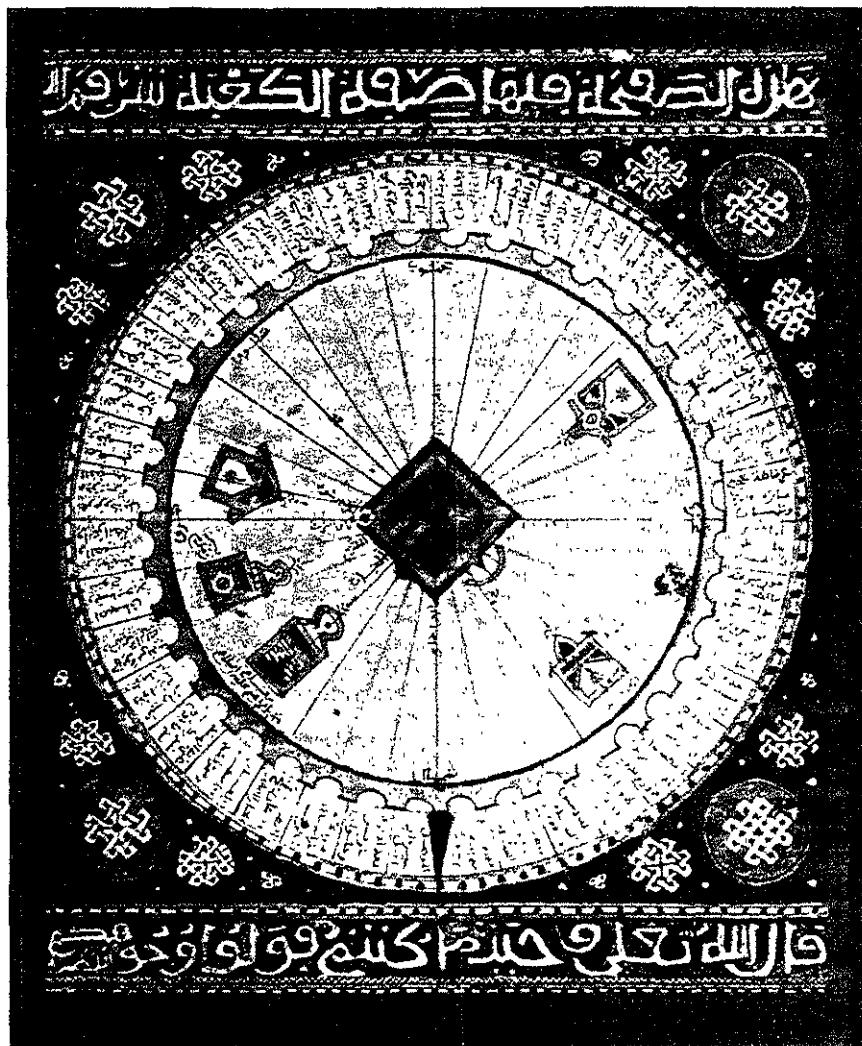
To go back to India, we find the same forms and architectural concept — for example the tomb of Ghiyath ed-Din at Delhi — Tughlaqabad¹⁶, the Jami Masjid at Champanir¹⁷ — or the famous Kotila of Firuz Shah at Delhi¹⁸, where even one of the old pillars of Asoka is taken to represent the centre of the world according to hindu-

tradition. A real catalogue of world-conceptions seems to be used by the architects of Akbar. The divan-i khas at Fatehpur Sikri placed the sultan in the centre of a square, on a column, connected with four bridges, below the meeting-place for the representatives of all religious, listened by the head of the Din Illahi — the Çakravartin, sitting in the round column head again the heaven — or the sun, the celestial wheel, guiding the ruler to the dominion over all regions¹⁹. The concept of Çakravartin rules the architecture of Akbar's grave at Sikandra too²⁰. The square rules the famous Moghul gardens, the garden-rugs of Iran etc.

The indoislamic architecture found this concept once in the old Indian tradition — the stupa, the vihara and the rôle of column as the navel of the world — and the Afghan and Moghul dynasties brought it again from central Asia, where it could be found since the second millenium B.C. — as it was known in Europe and China.

Even in ancient Mesopotamia the god-like ruler was the "ruler of the four quarters of the world", residing in a square palace as the pharaohs of the old empire buried in square pyramids.

The use of square and circle was not limited to the "old world", but were in use as symbols in Old America too. But they are not used everywhere, for example in the Greek architecture of the first millenium B.C. use was limited to heron, the prytaneion or similar traditional buildings, while the great temples were rectangles and only exceptional squares or circles — the symbols of the world and the heaven.



The world of Islam with the Ka'ba on the centre. Ahmad Sharfi, Sfax 1552. acc.to Lewis, 1976, p. 17, pic. 1. (Fig. 7/A).

NOTES

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3. Müller, M.: *Die heilige Stadt Roma quadrata, himmlisches Jerusalem und die Myrthe von Weltnabel*. Stuttgart 1961
4. Nader Ardalan and Laleh Baktiar: *The Sense of Unity. The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*. Chicago-London 1975
5. Tucci, G.; *Geheimnis des Mandala. Theorie und Praxis*. Weilheim 1972
6. Brentjes, 1981, Abb. 12.
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9. Land des Baal. Berlin, 1982, p. 365, Abb. 75
10. Hoag, J.D.: *Islamic architecture*. New York 1977, Pl. 277
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14. Lewis, B.: *The world of Islam*. London 1976, p. 17, No. I
15. Hoag, 1977, Pl. 102-109
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