

HANDOUT FOR LECTURE 4: GRAINS, ANIMALS AND THE VILLAGE WORLD

PEOPLE

Maasai (Kenya)
Luri (Iran)
Batammaliba (Togo and Benin)
Samarra Culture (5550-4800 BCE)
Gurunsi (Ghana and Burkina Faso)

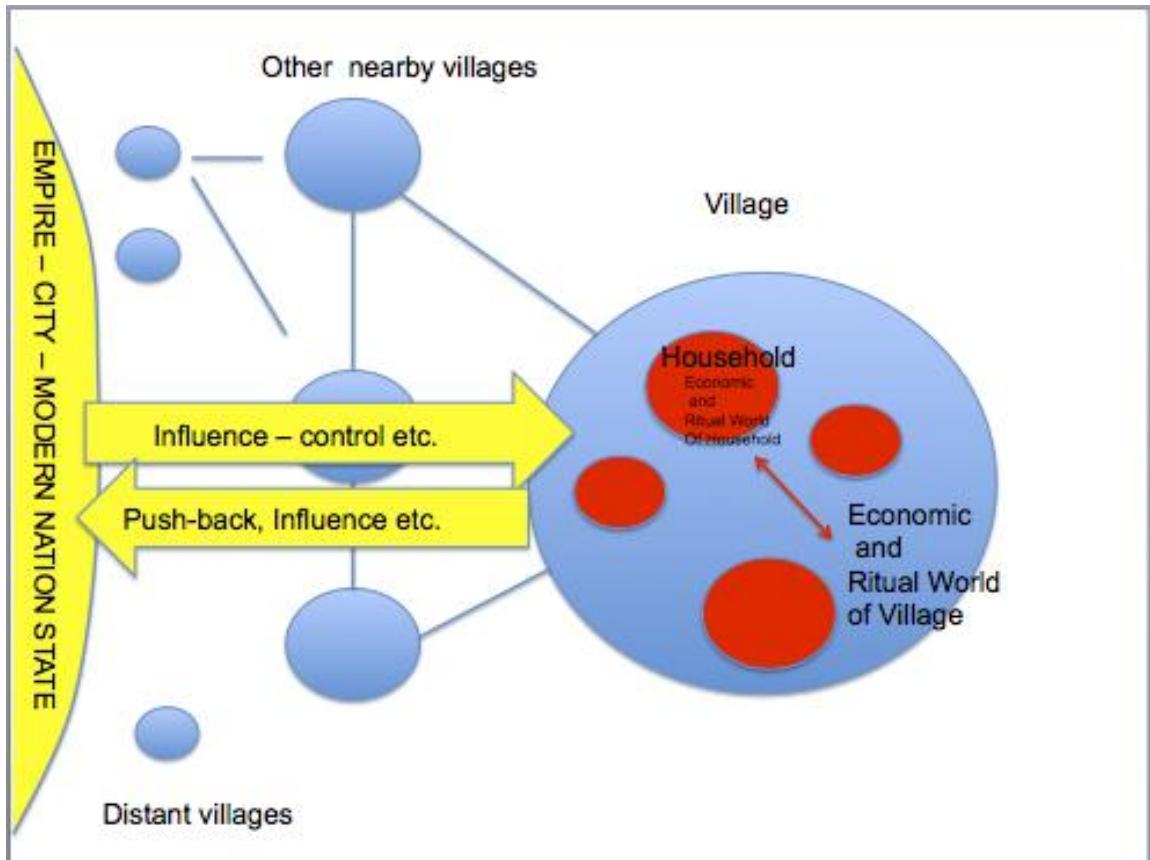
TERMS

Agro-pastoralism
Wattle and daub
Weir Dam
Obsidian
Bitumen
Mud Bricks - Adobe
Cult Building
Floor burial
Village economy
Tabote hole (Batammaliba)
House Shrine

PLACES

Göbekli Tepe, Turkey (9,000 - 5,000 BCE)
Çatal Hüyük, Turkey (7500 - 5700 BCE)
Jericho, Israel (9,000-6,000 BCE)
Tell es-Sawwan, Iraq, (ca 5500-4800 BCE)

Maasai
Göbekli Tepe
(Zoroastrianism)
Jericho
Çatal Hüyük
Obsidian
Tell es-Sawwan
Construction materials
Agro-Pastoral Village
Batammaliba



BATAMMALIBA (text by Mark Jarzombek)

The history of Africa though often portrayed as a sequence of indigenous tribes statically conceived in time and geography, is actually a series of small and sometimes larger scale movements making the historical connection between the large scale and local realities often hard to trace. The Batammaliba, for example, who reside in Togo east of the town of Kante are thought to have migrated into the area in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. But whether their architecture was brought with them or developed in contact with other peoples is not clear. Their architecture revolves around the direct relationship between grain, family structure and the universe.

For the Batammaliba, architecture is deeply rooted in the concept of the universe and in their understanding of what it means to be a human. The house in fact is treated like the anatomy of the human in that it has eyes and doors and front and a back. Houses are also aligned to the sunset of the winter solstice.

When the sun entering the house through the west-facing door symbolizes the return of Kuiye, who is considered the sun deity and who is also understood as the first architect who built the earth and constructed the first domicile here for himself and his first sons. He is both male and female. Kuiye's village is placed in the western sky as well as the village of the dead. Each house in the village of the living is a replica of that house. In addition to the door alignment a hole is put in the roof of the second floor which allows Kuiye to enter the bedroom when the sun transits the zenith directly over head. Kuiye is also understood as the first architect who built the earth and constructed the first domicile here for him/herself and his/her first sons.

The hole is known as tabote hole under which take place funeral rites and birth. The tabote is sealed with a flat circular stone (kubotan) which symbolizes the continuum of life, death and rebirth, the power of the gods Kuiye and Butan, and the life force of the house. Butan is the complementary power of Kuiye. She provides coolness and moisture and has both a corporal and a spiritual essence. She has an important role in house nourishing, protection, fertility, human pregnancy and delivery. She is also closely identified with the circle derived from the shape of the earth.

The corners of the facade are marked by two elevated, straw-covered granaries, each supported by a tall, earthen support tower. The main interior chamber, "the cattle room", is a dark, low-ceiling room that serves as a sleeping place for elder men and as a chapel and barn. The house altar is positioned at the back of this room along the wall that joins the two granaries. This place is defined as "the place of the dead." The roof is supported by a forked post and beam framework covered with wooden crosspieces and earth, forming a roof terrace. The remaining rooms are used for storage and for housing the domestic animals. The central sleeping room for women and children is located on the upper level. The kitchen is placed to its left. The roof level positioned above the cattle room incorporates at its center the tabote hole. Besides the hole is a dry-season fireplace. Here the family usually eats dinner. The rest of the house terrace is employed for work and recreation. Smaller terrace roofs above the kitchen and other rooms are used for drying crops and for sleeping during the hot months of late winter. During cold nights, a fire is lighted in the downstairs cattle room with the tabote hole serving as a chimney.

Daily life in the house reinforces the overlapping symbolisms. The bedroom is the womb that provides the house with children. After birth the child is brought to this secure space and will spend most of its first two years there. Whenever a person visits a friend, he or she must greet that person's house by offering a salutation to the mouth of the house. The house's two drainage pipes are conceived as penis and anus and direct potentially dangerous rain water outside during a rainstorm and during daily terrace baths.

Just as the interior is identified with the inner self and the ancestors, the front of the house represents the projection of the person in the community with

the.ⁱ There, near the door, one finds an earthen altar called lisenpo mound dedicated to Kuiye, Butan, and the village ancestors, and it is said to contain the essence of Batammaliba knowledge, history, economy, religion, and life, embodies food, divinities (Butan), future children and women necessary for life to continue. Near the door there is an open-sided, flat-roofed shelter, used for informal meetings and for daytime naps as well as drying sorghum. The north-south gender division within each house is reinforced by gender-related activities, rituals, and the placement of the deities' shrines. The second house division is the use of upstairs, female space and downstairs, male space. Finally the house is divided into the front and outside, men part and into the back and interior, women part. What becomes clear is that, in this spatial inversion, the house is defined primarily as a residence of the gods and deceased elders. Only secondarily is the house identified with humans.

The village is perceived as an oval, though it is designed as such and seen to represent a person through the distribution of shrines to Butan. The village landscape is ordered by paths which represent the pathways of the gods. The cemetery is modeled on the settlement and the tomb locations correspond to those of the house in the village.ⁱⁱ The tombs are similar to the house, but are carved into the earth as opposed to being built on top of it. Like the house it is a raised and plastered terrace with a circular roof defined by an overturned jar. They also have a west-facing portal and an interior sleeping chamber.

Each house is constructed by a master architect called otammali which manes "one who creates or builds well with earth." An otammali undergoes a lengthy apprenticeship. And only someone who has overseen the construction of more ten structures oversees the design of the ground plan of every new structure in the community. These masters, can even demand that part of a structure be rebuilt. House construction is generally undertaken between the dry-season months of December and February with an architect usually undertaking one house per season. Apprentices and even the house owner might help, but the architect is responsible for the layout and all its associated ritual significances. The house is only ready for occupation once the doorstep has been ritually installed.

ⁱ Suzanne Preston Blier, "Moral Architecture: Beauty and Ethics in Batammaliba Building Design," *Dwellings Settlements and Traditions, Cross-Cultural Perspectives* 335-355

ⁱⁱ 20-21 Michael Parker Pearson, Colin Richards, "Ordering the World, Perception of Architecture, Space and Time," *Architecture and Order: Approaches to Social Space*, Edited by Michael Parker Pearson, Colin Richards, (New York: Routledge, 1994)

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4.605 Introduction to the History and Theory of Architecture
Spring 2012

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