

The Walking Dead: The Making of a Cultural Geography

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This workshop was organised as part of the project „The Walking Dead at Saqqara: The Making of a Cultural Geography“, which seeks to study the ways in which religion affected physical environments, and how, in turn, restrictions and possibilities offered by the environment shaped a site’s cultural geography. The main case study in „The Walking Dead“ research project is the Ancient Egyptian necropolis at Saqqara (c. 1400-500 BCE), but participants in the workshop engaged in a wider comparative confrontation with neighbouring disciplines and an enlargement of the methodology. Specialists not only from the field of Egyptology, but from a wider field were invited to test, criticize, and contextualize methods and first results, and present their views on cultural geography supported their research. Discussing pre-distributed papers, specialists from disciplines dealing with the history of religion, landscape archaeology, and transmission of texts and images in the Mediterranean, South- and West-Asia, and Europe, from the Bronze Age to the medieval period discussed cultural geography in three panels, of a full day each: (1) religious practices, (2) transmission of images and texts, and (3) potential changes and utilization of landscape. The division of panels follows from the thesis of „The Walking Dead“ project that human interaction with the environment (and vice versa) can be detected in ancient cultures through these three perspectives, which are considered three significant vectors of religious agency.

The papers presented in the ‘The Walking Dead’ expert workshop argued that religion should not be perceived as essentially static. The archaeological and textual evidence from Egypt and elsewhere clearly indicates otherwise. Individuals and groups

continuously shaped their environment and their agency was shaped by it. The various ancient cult places, temples, royal and non-royal tombs as well as access roads to various sites of religious significance reflect the continuous change in traditions over the course of time. How cultural geographies were shaped depended on context and situation. South Asian temple sites (ELIZABETH CECIL, Tallahassee, FL) were created in a more planned fashion than the cemetery of Saqqara in Egypt (NICO STARING, Leiden) or early Jordanian burial sites (AHMAD EL-JALLAD, Columbus, OH). It was also stressed that questions of access to a given site and intended audiences must be taken into account. This is true for certain Egyptian temple sites for which access appears to have been much more restricted in certain time periods (JULIA BUDKA, Munich) than was previously thought, whereas other fields of religious practices such as votive cults appear to have been more flexible (RICHARD BUSSMANN, Köln). The tangible results of religious appropriations by individuals and groups and their networks were nicely illuminated – in the use of domestic space (MIRIAM MÜLLER, Leiden), on tomb walls (ANNE HERZBERG, Berlin / LARA WEISS, Leiden), and through changing burial practices (MATTIAS BRAND, Leiden). Interactions with ancient texts were similarly diverse; inscriptions could be adapted and compiled from textual ‘building blocks’ through a process of ‘remediation’ (RAMADAN HUSSEIN, Tübingen), to form unique adaptations of canonical forms (LUCÍA DÍAZ-IGLESIAS, Madrid / HUW TWISTON DAVIES, Leiden). In more comprehensive form, this could consist of the systematic rewriting of a text to fit a new audience and purpose (PETER BISSCHOP, Leiden), but these texts and motifs could also be reinterpreted and recontextualised over time by different people in different locations (BURKHARD BACKES, Tübingen / UTE RUMMEL, Berlin).

One of the most important conclusions of the workshop is the importance of considering more carefully the life history of traditions which could change considerably over time. Religious appropriation becomes perhaps most obvious when new meaning

is added to existing spaces (ALEXIS DEN DONCKER, Liège) and when people can be questioned in modern sociological surveys (ANNA SUN, Gambier, OH). „The Walking Dead“ workshop stressed that elements of individual and group appropriation of religion shaped cultural geography also in ancient cultures.¹

Conference Overview:

Panel 1: Practices

Keynote

Anna Sun (Gambier, OH): Attending the Grave on a Clear Spring Day: The Linked Ecology of Religious Life in Contemporary Urban China

Julia Budka (Munich): Re-awakening Osiris at Umm el-Qaab (Abydos). New Evidence for Votive Offerings and Other Religious Practices

Richard Bussmann (Köln): Votive Practices in the Local Shrines of Ancient Egypt

Alexis den Doncker (Liège): In Hathor's Womb. Shifting Agency of Iconographic Environments: The Private Tombs of the Theban Necropolis under the Prism of Cultural Geography

Anne Herzberg-Beiersdorf (Berlin): Prosopographia Memphitica – Analyzing Prosopographical Data and Personal Networks from the Memphite Necropolis

Miriam Müller (Leiden): Appropriation of Territory through Migrant Ritual Practices in Egypt's Eastern Delta

Lara Weiss (Leiden): Immortality as the Reception of Fate

Panel 2: Transmission

Burkhard Backes (Tübingen): The Crying Game. Some Thoughts about the „cow and calf“ Scenes on the Sarcophagi of Aashyt and Kawit

Peter Bisschop (Leiden): From Viṣṇu to Sūrya / From Śiva to Sūrya: Tracking Processes of Transmission and Recreation in Sanskrit Religious Literature

Mattias Brand (Leiden): No more 'Christian burials'? Religious Identification and Funer-

ary Patterns in Late Antique Egypt

Lucía Diaz-Iguez (Madrid): Human and Material Aspects in the Process of Transmission and Copying the Book of the Dead in the Tomb of Djehuty (TT 11)

Ramadan Hussein (Tübingen): Text Transmission as a Composition Process: The Case of the Saite Religious Texts

Huw Twiston Davies (Leiden): Transmission at Saqqara: The Harpists' Songs

Panel 3: Landscape

Ahmad al-Jallad (Columbus, OH): The Talking Dead: Funerary Inscriptions, Cairns, and Landscape in the Jordanian Harrah

Johannes Auenmüller (Münster): Epigraphic Landscape Appropriation – New Kingdom Rock Inscriptions in Upper Nubia

Elizabeth Cecil (Tallahassee, FL): Tracing the Arc of the Sun: Sūrya Worship in the Borderlands of Early South and Southeast Asia

Ute Rummel (Berlin): How Landscape Shapes the Mind and Vice Versa: The Ancient Egyptian Engagement with the Physical Environment

Nico Staring (Leiden): A Landscape Biography Approach to the Study of the Saqqara New Kingdom Necropolis

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¹ All papers presented and discussed in the workshop will be published with Sidestone Press (2019) in the academic series *Papers on Archaeology of the Leiden Museum of Antiquities (PALMA)*: <https://www.sidestone.com/partners/palma>