

Entering a Sanctuary the Wrong Way

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Walking through the door is the natural way to enter or exit a building and to interact with its interior. In the case of a temple, a public building intended for both people and gods, use of the front door is the natural and most popular way for worshippers, priests and 'gods' to enter or exit. The front doorway is therefore a highly significant location in any sanctuary, requiring both architectural and ritual regulation and elaboration. However, the dominance of the doorway does not preclude other modes of access or worship. As the front doors may be closed, locked or barred in accordance with ritual or social rules, the worshippers, priests or gods could use alternative means of access for interaction with the interior. In this article, I examine evidence for such alternative means as well as their significance for understanding conceptions of the sacred space in Greco-Roman civilization. Did worshippers, priests and gods show any interest in contravening, circumventing or even subverting the accepted focus and flow/directionality of sacred structures? If so, how would they go about it?¹

Religious structures in general, and Greek and Roman temples in particular, are frequently delimited from the external world and internally differentiated. They are separated from their environment, physically by walls (pierced by door and passageways) and ritually by laws which regulate the conditions for entrance. This separation of interior from the exterior space ranges from complex systems, composed of a number of stages of entrance restrictions, to a simple doorway.² Furthermore, the structure is internally differentiated into separate spaces, in order to control the movement of people inside the structure. The main entrance is on one side of the structure or enclosure so as to allow free access to the majority of worshippers while the opposite side typically includes an area to which access is more guarded and which is seen as more sacred.³ Although the ritual focus of a sacred enclosure was typically the altar outside the *cella/naos*,⁴ it is the *cella* which held the cult statue, the focus of the gaze of any visitor who was allowed access. The cult statue was typically placed opposite the entrance, frequently behind some type of low barrier.⁵ With this placement,

¹ My interest is not orientation according to points on the compass or astronomical bodies, but rather directionality in accordance with what is assumed as the typical flow of traffic at the sanctuary. For the significance of orientation for understanding the siting of ancient temples and their architecture, see Boutsikas (2011). For theoretical analyses concerning the creation, mediation and management of power and hierarchy through architectural design, see Hillier and Hanson (1984); Dovey (2002), 17-27; for an application in sacred architecture, Irvine, Hanks and Weddle (2012).

² Cole (2004).

³ For Greek temples, see Pedley (2005), 57-77; for Roman temples, Scheid (1995).

⁴ I shall henceforth use the Latin *cella* also for Greek temples.

⁵ See Mylonopoulos (2011).

the god's cult statue faced the altar and the worshippers in order to be conveniently viewed, room being left for placing offerings or dedications.

The delimitation and differentiation of sacred space led to a directionality inherent in the structure that was focused on the axis between the doorway and the cult statue. This directionality can be examined as intended for three types of users of ancient sanctuaries: visitors or worshippers, temple personnel and the gods.

The typical movement of a worshipper entering the *cella* would be to proceed from the doorway towards the cult statue, where he or she could view it from up close, pray and/or present an offering or a dedication.⁶ In passing, the visitor could view other dedications, statues or texts placed in the temple.⁷ The visitor was not supposed to continue beyond the cult statue, whether in movement or in gaze; the statue was the apex of his visit. This directionality is thus inherent in both the architecture of the sanctuary and the worshippers' movement. Although the whole space is consecrated to the divine, the divine presence is focused at the furthest end of the structure where the cult statue was located. Another point of view is that of the god or goddess who were imagined to reside there. In antiquity, temples were seen primarily as the house of the god, whether permanent or temporary. As the owner of the house, the god who was represented, or was inherent in the cult statue, was meant to be willing to entertain human and divine guests.⁸ Seen from the divine perspective, the directionality of the structure and its rituals are not only a consequence of the flow of human movement, but rather the natural passage for the god to come and go, looking out from his sanctuary towards the altar, his worshippers — and beyond, to the city or landscape in which the sanctuary was located. A third perspective regarding the sanctuary is that of the personnel working there. The personnel were much less limited in their movement compared to the worshippers, having access to all the facilities of the temple: storerooms, basements, water-sources, kitchens, attics and residential areas, which were located in various rooms around the structure. The priests obliged the other users to maintain the structure's directionality, but did not abide by it themselves.

In opposition to the dominant directional interaction between the human and the divine in sacred space, I postulate a principle of proximity; for communication with a god and for attaining his or her attention and interest, it is desirable to be as close as possible to him despite walls and regulations standing in between.⁹ Directionality and proximity are to a certain extent contradictory, since the statue was placed at the far end of the *cella* so that the closest point of contact with the god — that is, his statue — was in reality from behind the *cella*. I attempt, therefore, to raise two questions as to whether a principle of proximity ever took precedence over directionality:

1) Was the area behind the cult statue outside and behind the *cella* marked in any special way in order to indicate its closeness to the cult statue within? In addition, were any rituals known to have taken place there?

⁶ For the interactions of worshippers with cult statues in antiquity, see Kindt (2012), 36-54; Weddle (2010).

⁷ For interior ordering and activities in Greek temples, see Corbett (1970); Pedley (2005), 100-118; Mylonopoulos (2014). In Roman temples, see Stambaugh (1978).

⁸ Jenkyns (2013), 26-34; Vernant (1991), 156-9.

⁹ See Versnel (1981), 30-31; Lipka (2009), 14.

2) Was it possible to enter temples from directions other than the main entrance — and how was such access characterized in our sources?¹⁰

Through these questions, I hope to understand how a temple's structure and regulations constructed expression of feeling for the religious and experience of a sacred space.

1. Marking of the Rear Area

Greek and Roman temples were usually bounded by a larger enclosure, or *temenos*. The *cella* itself was seldom placed right at the back of the *temenos* since some space was usually left in between, thus creating an area behind the *cella* but still within the *temenos* and presumably allowing for the separation of the *cella* from the outside world.¹¹ This area was closest to the cult statue, and at the same time furthest from the main entrance. In some Roman temples, the *cella* is set back in the *temenos* so there is no open space left. In this case, a double wall was sometimes built around the back of the *cella* (e.g., Caesar's temple of *Venus Genetrix*).

The most salient example for marking the rear of a Greek temple is the common back porch, also known as the *opisthodomos*. Access to the *opisthodomos* was usually only from outside the *cella*.¹² The function of this porch is unclear. Many assume that its chief function was simply to be in symmetry with the front porch of the temple (the *pronaos*).¹³ However, others have argued that symmetry cannot fully explain the widespread use of *opisthodomoi* since viewers could not typically see both porches at

¹⁰ A third question linked to these two, which I will not discuss here, concerns the possibility of participating in, or at least sensing, the rituals performed within the *cella* without entering it. This could occur through smelling odours or hearing sounds emanating from the premises, or by peeking into the *cella* through any aperture that may have existed. Sound, smell and sight allowed the manifestations of sacred space to extend beyond the structures' boundaries, producing a borderline area linked to the sanctuary but not inside it, whose radius varied according to topography, weather, acoustics and interest. I hope to relate to this issue in a future paper. See, e.g., Lucian, *de Dea Syria* 10, 30; Suetonius, *Claudius* 33; *BT Yoma* 39b.

¹¹ A corridor or space around the *cella* was not unique to Greek and Roman temples; it is common in temples of the ancient Near East and in contemporary Egyptian, Iranian and Gallo-Roman temples.

¹² Many temples included an additional room behind the cult statue or under it, known either as the *adyton* (signaling a room not to be entered) or as the *opisthodomos* (signaling its location behind the main structure) (see Hollinshead (1999); Ainian (2005)). Access to such back rooms could be either from the *cella* exclusively, only from outside, or from both. In cases in which access was only from the *cella*, the room would probably be used as a treasury or for priestly functions, as indicated from some literary hints, inventory inscriptions and archeological finds. A treasury would of course not be open to the public, or even to most cult officials, not for reasons of sacredness but due to the wealth kept there. This option is not relevant for our discussion, as it is only a matter of interior arrangement, without any external access. In certain cases, an *opisthodomos* open to the outside could be closed in and opened to the inside; this seems to have been the case in the temple for Aphaia on Aegina.

¹³ Thus according to a widely used textbook, Kleiner (2006).

once. While symmetry and proportion were of course of prime importance for the architecture of Greek temples, functionality was also significant, and it is unreasonable that such rooms would be built routinely if they lacked any functionality at all. In a number of temples — the temple of Hephaestus in the Athenian agora, the Parthenon, and the temple for Aphaia on Aegina — there are indications that external access to the *opisthodomos* was blocked by wooden doors or marble railings, thus transforming it in effect into an inner room that could also function as a treasury or archive. In the majority of cases, however, there is no indication of external doors or railings. In any case, it does not stand to reason that a room intended as a treasury would be built open on three sides.

Typically, there was, thus, easy access to the rear of the Greek temple. Vitruvius (3.3.6-9) makes a favorable note concerning temples with wide intercolumniations so that ‘there will be no obstruction at the entrance, and the walk round the cella (*circa cellam ambulatio*) will be dignified’ (tr. Morgan). Furthermore, in case of a sudden storm, he adds, people ‘might have in the temple and round the cella (*circaque cellam*) a wide free space in which to wait’. In other words, he expects visitors to walk freely all round the temple. Ease of access is also reflected in Lucian’s description of Herodotus’ reciting his *Histories* before the crowd gathered in Zeus’ temple in Olympia while standing in the *opisthodomos*, whom he contrasts to the visitor who comes there for usual ‘sight-seeing’ (θεατήν).¹⁴

What sights could a visitor have expected in an open *opisthodomos*? Many *opisthodomoi* were decorated with reliefs in the friezes and/or pediment, as were other parts of the temple.¹⁵ In this, the *opisthodomos* was simply a part of the temple, and there was no specific marking of this area as a “back” area. Some literary accounts lead us to expect artwork in the *opisthodomos*. Thus Achilles Tatius (3.6) describes how his characters visited a temple: ‘after worshipping the deity and consulting the oracle ... we went round the temple (περιήειμεν τὸν νεῶν) and near the back porch we saw a double picture (κατὰ δὲ τὸν ὀπισθόδομον)’. The lone surviving oak column in the *opisthodomos* of the temple of Hera in Olympia was a well-known sightseeing attraction as was a wooden chest located there.¹⁶ Furthermore, there is no reason to think that such artworks were specifically intended for this space — or reflected its status. Pliny (*HN* 36.4.32), mentions a statue of Hecate placed inside the sanctuary (*in templo*) of Diana (= Artemis) in Ephesus, behind the temple (*post aedem*). Its exact location, not to speak of its possible cult functions is unknown.¹⁷

Archaeology has produced little evidence for statuary placed inside *opisthodomoi*. There are a number of exceptions: markings on the floor of the *opisthodomos* of Apollo’s temple in Delphi indicate that a large monument was once placed there. Pierre Amandry raised the hypothesis that this may have been a large statue of Apollo

¹⁴ Herodotus 1.28. The same place used for oratory in Lucian, *Pereg.* 32; *Fug.* 7.11.

¹⁵ Ridgway (1999).

¹⁶ Paus. 5.16.1, Dio. Chr. 11.163.15. *Opisthodomos* used for arms manufacture in Syracuse in time of unrest: Diod. Sic. 41.6; as a place where inscriptions could be found: Polybius, *Hist.* 12.11; as a place of temporary and sacrilegious residence for a general: Plut., *Demet.* 23.3 (but this is in the Athens Acropolis *Opisthodomos*, which may or may not have been a separate building; see Hollinshead [1999], 211-12).

¹⁷ Coulson (1980).

mentioned by a few writers, or perhaps the famous omphalos itself.¹⁸ An inscription from the temple to Mnia and Auzesia (*IG IV*² 787.9-10) in the island of Aegina mentions a statue of Dionysos in the *opisthodomos*, though its function is unknown. In the Isthmian temple of Poseidon a monumental female statue was located suggesting that it had been originally placed in the *opisthodomos*.¹⁹ These are, however, exceptions. In the vast majority of temple sites, no indication has been found for statuary or cult functions having taken place in the *opisthodomos*.

The typical Roman temple was not built on a stylobate, but on a podium, with no open *opisthodomos*. In other words, although it may have been possible to walk around the temple, all that would greet the inquisitive visitor would be a high blank wall, not a porch. Of course, the typical Roman temple was atypical as each temple was differently planned and built, functioning in different contexts for different needs. A dense urban context posed special constraints for temple siting and planning. In towns such as Pompeii, Ostia or Dura Europus, a temple was frequently one of a number of structures located along a road, so that behind the temple's *cella* there would simply be another house, alleyway, or temple service rooms.²⁰

An example of such a situation is the temple to *Fortuna Augusta* in Pompeii, a small temple which stood at a crossroad. In the first stage of its construction it had a doorway in its back wall leading to a short corridor from which it was possible to access a side alleyway and adjacent structures, which may have functioned as service rooms for the temple, as well as to a side alleyway; at a later stage the corridor was closed and became a small storeroom. Access to or from the back of the temple was thus possible, probably for utilitarian purposes. Corridors behind the *cella* and the platform of the cult statue were, however, only accessible from within the *cella*, as we also find at the Capitoline temple of Pompeii, and the temple to Magna Mater on the Palatine.

The Isis temple in Pompeii reflects what may be a different approach to temple directionality, originating in Egypt. Like many other temples of Isis and Serapis throughout the Empire, the architecture and decorations of this temple combine Egyptian and Roman motives. The temple stands on a podium and has a *pronaos* with a door to the *cella*, where the statues of Isis and Serapis once apparently stood. Around the podium was a portico, leading to additional rooms, which probably served the community of worshippers for assembly, dining, and perhaps as residence for priests. Unusually, the rear wall of the *cella* contains a niche, where a small statue of Dionysos stood — and in the context of an “Egyptian” temple, Dionysos may have been identified with Osiris. The niche was framed on both sides by a stucco relief of ears.²¹

The niche is similar to niches in contemporary temples of Egypt, where reliefs of the gods were common on the exterior back walls of temples. Many of these back areas also featured reliefs of ears and/or inscriptions identifying them as temples of “places of ears”, referring to the god's attention to prayers in this place. In a number of Egyptian

¹⁸ Amandry (1993).

¹⁹ Broneer (1953). In the temple of Aphaia, a table was found *in situ* in the *opisthodomos* (Gill [1991], 39-40), but this room was not open but converted into an inner room.

²⁰ According to the *Twelve Tables* (Crawford (1996), 2.666.), two houses (and certainly a temple and a house) were not supposed to share a wall; see Saliou 2011.

²¹ Blanc, Eristov and Finker (2000).

temple complexes, secondary structures developed around reliefs in the back of temples, but orientated opposite to the main temple (known as “contra-temples”).²² Some scholars argue that these areas were more accessible to commoners than the primary temple, though this is contested.²³ Could this have also been the case in Pompeii? It stands to reason that the porticos (and thus the back niches) were more accessible than the *cella*, and so perhaps would be better suited for worship by non-priests, but the whole enclosure may have been closed to those who had not been initiated into the community. Alternatively, the niche may simply reflect the transfer of imagery and architectural customs from Egypt but lacking a cultic function.

An additional function of back areas could be the deposition or burial of dedicated objects in pits whether as the result of primary deposits, or following occasional clearing out of the sanctuary’s dedications. Though there is much evidence for the deposit of objects in and around temples in the Greek and Roman world, this does not seem to have occurred in the back of the *cella* specifically, rather than in various places in the vicinity of the sanctuary.²⁴ Though worshippers and temple personnel preferred to deposit votives close to the temple, extreme proximity to the cult statue was apparently not imperative.

2. Back-to-Back *Cellae*

A number of temples in the Greek and Roman world featured back-to-back *cellae* of similar length, each with its own cult statue to a different god.²⁵ Although only a few examples for such temples exist (and did not appear to have raised opposition, or great wonder), they testify to a certain type of directionality: one should approach a god from the front, but the overall direction from which one approaches is not significant.

The archaic temple of Apollo in Corinth has a long *cella* divided into two rooms, one slightly larger than the other, as well as a *pronaos* and *opisthodomos*. This temple has traditionally been seen as dedicated to two gods, as it was claimed that a statue base was found in the smaller *cella*. However, newer studies have cast doubts on this ascription, arguing that the smaller *cella* was in fact used as a treasury.²⁶

The temple of Artemis at Sardis presents better evidence: here there were certainly two *cellae* oriented in opposite directions with at least one cult statue in each *cella*. At its earliest stage (3rd cent. BC), the temple had only a single *cella*, but it was divided into two — either in the Hellenistic era with *cellae* for Zeus and Artemis, or in the Roman era, with an additional *cella* for Antoninus Pius and Faustina.²⁷

²² Barguet (1962); Brand (2007), 61; Klotz (2008); Frankfurter (1998), 52. For god’s ears steles in Asia Minor, see *IG IV*², 1, no. 126 (Edelstein and Edelstein (1945), 1:248); Aelius Aristides, *Sacred Tales* 1.10; for these and the epithet ἐπήκοος for gods, see Versnel (1981), 34-5, with bibliography.

²³ Ausec (2010).

²⁴ For general overviews as well as many specific cases of votive deposition, see the articles in Schäfer and Witteyer (2013).

²⁵ For some of the problems which may arise from dedicating one *cella* to two deities in Roman religion, see Livy 27.25, Plut. *Marc.* 28.

²⁶ Bookidis and Stroud (2004).

²⁷ Hanfmann (1983); Price (1984), 151-2; Burrell (2004), 104.

The temple of Apollo and Diana in Rome, mentioned by Vitruvius (3.3.4), has been identified by some scholars with the temple of Apollo on the Palatine, of which only the concrete core of the platform still survives. It has recently been conjectured on the basis of literary and archeological evidence that the temple was built (c. 30 BC) with back-to-back *cellae*, separated by a wall or by columns.²⁸

Hadrian's temple of Venus and Roma in Rome is the best-attested example for back-to-back *cellae*.²⁹ This very large temple was inaugurated in 135. The choice of back-to-back *cellae* was obviously intended to link Venus, who was long venerated in Rome, with the city of Rome, and at the same time to provide each of the deities with their own separate space.

In all cases of back-to-back *cellae*, there is an attempt to create a strong link between the deities involved. Such a link could also have been created, of course, by placing the deities' statues in one *cella* or in a number of small *cellae*, as found in many temples. Placing them in opposite directions creates a greater separation of the deities, with each one accepting the visitors to his or her house separately, and yet with some awareness of the other's proximity. The few ancient writers who described these buildings (e.g., Dio Cassius 69.4) did not see any reason to comment on their unusual orientation, indicating perhaps that it was not seen as problematic or strange. On the other hand, the extreme rarity of this type of architectural solution to the problem of linking two deities (despite the fame and centrality of Hadrian's temple in Rome) may indicate that such a blatant challenge to directionality was not easily incorporated in Greco-Roman religious conceptions and architecture.

3. Alternative Access to the *Cella*

Although temples were typically open only from one direction, some temples had back entrances that may have been used by personnel or even by worshippers. Whether access was from below or above, this was certainly not the usual way of entering a temple.

a. Back Access

The temple of Aphrodite in Knidos was famous in antiquity for its statue of Aphrodite by Praxiteles, considered the first monumental nude statue of a goddess (Pliny, *HN* 36.20), and very frequently copied.³⁰ This unusual statue was housed in an unusual temple.³¹ Pliny claims that the 'shrine is completely open, so that it is possible to observe the image of the goddess from every side' (tr. Pollitt). In a text attributed to Lucian, the statue features in an argument over the relative advantages of sex with boys vs. women, and the interlocutors go to visit it. Ps.-Lucian (*Amores* 13-14) says that 'the temple has two entrances, for those who wish to see the goddess directly from the back, in order that nothing about the goddess shall fail to be marveled at... to see the goddess in her entire

²⁸ Wiseman (2014).

²⁹ Boatwright (1987), 119-30; Stamper (2005), 206-12.

³⁰ Havelock (1995).

³¹ Scholarship is undecided whether the literary accounts can be identified with a specific site; see (Montel) 2013.

splendor, we went around to the back' (tr. Pollitt), where a locked door was opened for them by a female attendant. For both authors, the form of the temple is clearly untypical, and serves to accentuate the uniqueness of the goddess' image as one which can and should be seen from all angles (or, for Ps.-Lucian, from back and front), as opposed to the usual uni-directional stance of cult statues.³²

b. Access From Above and Below

Many temples had crypts, basements, or other rooms built into the podium. Such rooms were generally used for storage or, as in the famous but atypical case of the temple of Apollo at Claros, for oracular consultation. In some cases access to such rooms was from inside the temple while in others access was via external openings or passageways. I do not know of Greek or Roman literary evidence for using these rooms as a means of alternative access to the *cella* or to the cult statue.³³

An alternative way to enter the *cella* was from above. Many temples had stairs allowing access to an attic or the roof; in some cases, the attic may have been used not only for storage but also as a ritual space.³⁴ While access to such spaces would usually have been limited to temple personnel, there are a number of instances which show the potential for unguarded entrance. In Euripides' *Iphgenia in Tauris*, Orestes and Pylades contemplate stealing the statue of Artemis from the locked temple by climbing through an open space 'between the triglyphs', near the roof (l. 113).³⁵ An inscription from the Asclepion in Epidaurus tells us of Aeschines, who 'climbed up a tree and tried to see over into the *abaton*, but he fell from the tree on to some fencing and his eyes were injured. In a pitiable state of blindness, he came as a suppliant to the god and slept in the temple and was healed.'³⁶

Gods, too, may wish to have an aperture in the roof of their temple in order to see the sky — thus Terminus in the Roman Capitoline (Ovid, *Fasti* 2.669-72) and Dius Fidius (Varro, *LL* 5.66). Opening the temple's roof could also be an instrument for purification of the cult statue from grave defilement: a man once hanged himself 'stealthily, during the night' behind the statue in the temple of Athena in Lindos. The goddess instructed her priest in a dream to open the roof above the statue for three days so that the statue would be 'purified by her father's rainwaters'.³⁷ Though this could simply be a practical

³² Platt (2011) and Haynes (2013), with additional ancient literature featuring Aphrodite (both the goddess and the statue) as the focus for all-around viewing.

³³ Compare *TJ San.* 51a: The angels close the windows of heaven so that the prayer of idolatrous King Menashe will not enter God's throne-room; to solve the problem, God 'dug a tunnel under the throne of glory'. Menashe's sin was placing an idol in the temple, thus obstructing the usual ritual channel of communication.

³⁴ Miles (1998); Patrich (1986).

³⁵ The passage is difficult, and various emendations and translations have been offered. See Stieber (2011), 65-74.

³⁶ *JG IV*², 1, nos. 121-122 (Edelstein and Edelstein [1945], 232).

³⁷ Blikenberg, *I. Lindos II*, 2, col. D, ll. 60-77. Compare Plut. *Roman Questions* 5, where Romans 'who are falsely reported to have died' enter their house through the roof, a custom which Plutarch explains by appealing to death defilement, adding that 'they perform all their rites of purification under the open sky' (tr. Babbitt).

solution for ritually washing the statue, we may also surmise that such a radical notion was proposed because the normal ways of entering the temple and dealing with pollution were obstructed by the suicide's action.

The Roman Near East

Temples in Roman Palestine and Syria and its borderlands, such as Palmyra and Nabatea were built under the influence of both local and Greek and Roman architectural traditions. They thus frequently differ in many respects from the classic Greek or Roman temple, including, for example, no *opisthodomos*, podium or stylobate, a raised platform at the far end of the *cella* with cult reliefs and/or statues, a triple apse, a number of windows, and roofs used as sacrificial spaces.³⁸ Many have a façade with a large central doorway and two smaller ones on the sides. Additional doors in the façade would have let in more light, but may have also allowed for differentiation of access for priests in contrast to worshippers, or for better management of passage during the festivals. Some small temples in this region feature additional entrances in the side walls: the temple at Kedesh in Upper Galilee as well as the "Small Temple" in Petra.³⁹ The function of these side entrances is however unknown: they may have been used by worshippers to improve traffic flow or solely by priests.

In two Greek literary accounts of temples in the East, they are adorned with secret trapdoors used by the priests: *2 Maccabees* (1.16) speaks of trapdoors hidden in the ceiling of the temple of Naniah in Elam, from which the priests stoned Antiochus IV; in *Bel and the Dragon* (added at the end of LXX Daniel), the priests and their families enter the temple of Bel through a secret door 'beneath the table' in order to partake of the offerings. Although the latter refers to a passageway to the outside, this is a hostile account intended to discredit the cult.

One example exists in this region for usage or marking of areas behind the *cella*: the Nabatean temple at Khirbet et-Tannur, which had a doorway in the *temenos* wall behind the main altar platform and cult statues. In line with this opening a small altar was found, presumably as an addition to the main altar.⁴⁰ It is not known, however, how this altar would have functioned.

The main literary corpus from this area relating to sacred space concerns the Jerusalem temple and the synagogue; some of these texts explicitly discuss theoretical ritual issues such as directionality.⁴¹ The Qumran *Temple Scroll* describes an imaginary or future temple, borrowing many features from the desert sanctuary, Solomon's temple,

³⁸ Steinsapir (2005); Kaizer (2008); Segal (2013); Alpass (2013).

³⁹ Ovadiah, Roll and Fischer (1984); Reid (2005).

⁴⁰ McKenzie, Gibson and Reyes (2002), 73. At a temple of Baalshamin at Sia in the Hauran, a terrace was built behind the *cella*, at the very edge of a cliff, which 'may have had cult significance. It was deliberately terraced and buttressed, but no buildings were erected there, so perhaps it was a place of gathering of devotees for an open-air ritual' Steinsapir (2005), 15.

⁴¹ These descriptions were frequently colored by nostalgia, apologetic, rhetorical concerns, or programs of ritual and theological reform, as is always the case with texts on ritual in Greco-Roman culture (or elsewhere); see Rosen-Zvi (2012).

and especially the temple described by Ezekiel. One of the features of this temple is a structure standing to the west of the holy of holies (i.e., behind it): ‘to the west of the sanctuary you shall build a circular place, a porch with columns. The columns for the sin-offering and for the guilt offering, separated from one another ... so they shall not be mixed up’ (11Q19 35.10-11). Thus the structure would be used for preliminary preparations for sacrifice, an activity which does not imbue the area with any special sanctity.⁴²

A number of Tannaitic sources (2nd-3rd cent.) explicitly speak of an area of the temple ‘behind the house of the cover of the ark’, i.e., behind the holy of holies. *Sifrei Numbers* (18.7) says that this area was used for examining the genealogical purity of the temple priests. As in the *Temple Scroll*, the function of this area is one of preliminary examination and separation, though of temple personnel rather than of sacrificial victims.

R. Yossi son of R. Yehuda (end of 2nd cent.) is cited in the *Tosefta* (*Tem.* 4.2) as saying that a harlot’s contribution should not be accepted in the temple ‘to make [gold] foil, even [to put] behind the holy of holies’; in another place (*Tosef. Zev.* 7.1) he says that there were small windows in the *cella* of the temple so that sacrifices could be slaughtered and eaten anywhere in the courtyard while fulfilling the condition that such activities take place ‘at the entrance to the sanctuary’, adding that this permits slaughtering and eating ‘even behind the holy of holies’. These texts indicate that this area would *a priori* be seen as less sacred than the rest of the temple courtyard, but nevertheless considered of equal status. Other texts mention this area as a possible site for prayer, which should be oriented towards the holy of holies, or for prostration when the rest of the courtyard was full with worshippers.⁴³

More explicit discussions of directionality are found concerning synagogues. Many of them are associated with the name of R. Yehoshua ben Levi, an early third-century Palestinian *amora*, who emerges as a major theoretician of orientation in religious ritual. R. Yehoshua is cited as saying that ‘a person may not go behind the synagogue while the community is praying’.⁴⁴ According to the discussion of the Talmud *ad loc.*, the reason for the prohibition is that passing in this area during worship shows the person’s lack of interest or even denial of the value of worship. However, a more probable reason is that such movement shows disrespect towards the divine presence brought about by communal prayer. This interpretation is strengthened by comparison with other sayings of this sage that a person should not pass in front of a praying person or sit nearby (*TB*

⁴² For this structure, see Milgrom (1978), 506-9; Runnalls (1991). In Ezekiel’s temple, behind the holy of holies there was an empty, “restricted space”, and behind it — a large building (41.12-13), the function of which is unknown.

⁴³ *TB Ber.* 30a; *Yoma* 21a. *Ruth Rabba* 4.4 mentions the Sanhedrin convened at the ‘back of the temple’ without detailing the precise location.

⁴⁴ *TB Ber.* 8a. Cf. *TB Ber.* 6a, in the name of R. Huna, ‘anyone who prays behind (or: at the back of) the synagogue is called wicked, for it is said, “the wicked walk round”’. Compare the story on Elisha ben Abuya, who heard an oracle while walking ‘behind a synagogue’ (or, in some versions, ‘behind the temple’) informing him that his wickedness is too great for repentance (*Ruth Rabba* 6). For orientation in prayer according to Rabbinic sources, see Ehrlich (2004), 65-98; for the presence of the divine, *idem.*, 237-46. For the orientation of excavated synagogues, see Levine (2005), 326-30; Hachlili (2013), 205-6. For orientation of synagogues according to rabbinic *halakha*, see Amit (1995).

Ber. 27a, 31b). Furthermore, when the Talmud discusses the question of combining a quorum of worshippers inside and outside a room, R. Yehoshua is cited as saying that ‘even a wall of iron does not separate Israel from their father in heaven’ (*TB Pes. 85b*), i.e., that the physical walls of the structure do not matter. The same sage is also cited as saying that ‘the divine presence (*shekhina*) is in the West’, against the opinion that it is everywhere (*TB BB 25b*). All of these sayings are in accord with the interpretation that a person passing behind the rear wall of a synagogue towards which the community is praying may be seen as disrespectful of the divine presence. Although the synagogue did not contain a cult statue or a holy of holies, its sacred space was directionalized by the creation of a single direction for prayer for the whole community.

Conclusion

An examination of the usage of the space behind the *cella* in Greek and Roman temples did not reveal definitive conclusions. Although it is clear that such a space existed in most sanctuaries despite limited possibilities for its use, there is little evidence — literary or archeological — for a specific ritual function in such areas, as opposed to the more dominant areas of the altar, cult statue, or doorways. When closed off as structures, such areas could be used for storage or other supportive uses for the temple and its rituals, presumably only for personnel; when open to visitors, it could be employed for uses such as oratory, presentation of art-works, and votive deposits. The status of such areas cannot be discerned from archeological evidence and is not detailed in Greek or Latin texts. However, sources on the Jerusalem temple attest to these areas being considered less sacred. In the synagogue, movement in these areas at times of worship is policed. Here, the absence of architecturally differentiated cult spaces may have made the maintenance of the directionality more difficult, requiring clear legal restrictions.

Alternative methods of access to the *cella* are not well-attested either. The only clear attestation to worshippers entering a temple through the back door concerns the Knidian Aphrodite. In this case, the back entrance serves to frame the narrative of viewing both the front and from the back and of the goddess, in contrast to the usual frontal viewing only. Alternative access from above appears more often, serving people who wish to enter a closed sanctuary or peek into it. In parallel, some gods were believed to be interested in contact with the sky, and not only with their altar through the main door.

The few sources on transgressive or untypical ways of moving in a Greek or Roman sanctuary demonstrate not only that movement was typically through the front door — this is obvious — but that there was little interest in these cultures in attaining close proximity with cult statues and temples in ways not sanctioned by the authorities. This may be tentatively compared with the late ancient Christian relationship to sacred space, where many sources attest to the desire of believers to get as close as possible to sacred relics, in life or in death.⁴⁵ This attitude can be explained by seeing the Greek and Roman temple as a house or resting place for the god, to which people may come as

⁴⁵ This is the subject for another paper, but compare the late ancient desire for burial “*ad sanctos*”: Sodini (1986), Duval (1988), or the atrium located behind the apse of the church of St. Martin of Tours, where pilgrims attended the relics of the saint and the rituals within through a small window (Jacobsen [1997]).

guests: It is unthinkable to arrive at the house of your host through the window, or from the back door. Despite the interest of the worshippers in placing votives and praying near the cult statue, the overwhelming sense is that of the temple as a whole, including its rules and walls, as the house of a god, rather than of the cult statue as a node of sacrality or divinity.

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