**Scoping Workshop ‘Defining Sanctuaries’**

**A scoping workshop was held at the Max Weber Kolleg in Erfurt on 27th-28th April 2015 on the theme of defining sanctuaries. Our discussion was led by four experts each approaching the subject from a different disciplinary perspective.**

[Timothy Taylor,](https://urgeschichte.univie.ac.at/timothy-taylor/) Professor of the Prehistory of Humanity at Vienna spoke about sanctuaries as places of separation and elevation, as places of terror and of terror management. Drawing on examples from the prehistories of Europe, Asia and the Americas he illustrated long sequences of reuse, rebuilding, modification and elaboration of physical structures. Drawing on a range of activities that might be inferred from special treatment of human and animal skeletal material and from the inclusion of exotic materials in sanctuaries, he offered suggestions of the sort of social narratives implicit in placement and the meaning of the zones created by sanctuary building and use.

[Esther Eidinow](https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/classics/people/esther.eidinow), an ancient historian at the University of Nottingham, offered a set of observations about absence and time, and the way sanctuaries might materialize transcendence. She showed how Greeks collectively and individually made sanctuaries through from divisions of space, marking boundaries that reflected a community of interest and creating spaces where gods and mortals might meet. Sanctuaries were also places distinguished as places of story telling and by their place in narratives, and she showed through very varied examples how these activities elaborated special forms of temporal experience.

[Rubina Raja](http://pure.au.dk/portal/en/rubina.raja@cas.au.dk), Professor of Classical Archaeology at Aarhus and a Fellow of the MWK offered a view of sanctuaries as characterized from their physical and architectural present and pointed out how this view differed from impression of religious practice gained from other kinds of evidence. Only a few of the deities attested in many Near Eastern cities were ever given huge sanctuaries complexes. Temples were often less important than spaces and especially altars. Sanctuaries in the historical period became a key focus of political action and dispute. Sanctuary construction was often a long and elaborate process, and was not always once brought to completion (even when iconography suggested the reverse). Sanctuary making was a key arena of social and political interaction.

[Cory Crawford](https://www.ohio.edu/cas/about/directories/profiles.cfm?profile=crawfoc1), Professor of Classics and World Religion at Ohio University spoke of the differences between various religious traditions in the ancient near east as manifested in sanctuaries, about the close relationship between palaces of human rules and the home of the gods, and of what happened to sacred places when translated from one architectural and cultural medium into another.

Participants in the workshop, who included Max Weber Fellows and members of the Lived Ancient Religions project, raised a number of related issues. Sanctuaries might be thought of as places of accumulation of objects, traces, investment and memories. Sanctuaries were places of transcendence, offering worshippers special access to the divine, the dead access to afterlives and exposing participants to special risks. We also discussed the difficulties of reconstructing the use of sanctuaries in any single period given the concentrated efforts to clean, repurpose, modify and appropriate many sanctuary sites. Sanctuaries emerged most strongly as bounded or located places of intense human activities, sites repeatedly modified and transformed even as many were presented as of enormous antiquity and outside mundane time.

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