

A Review of
Vincent Scully's
THE EARTH, THE TEMPLE
&
THE GODS

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It is probably fair to say that this is the most distinguished book of its kind to be published in the English language since the publication of Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*. Like Ruskin, Scully writes prose which exudes a tense emotional involvement with his topic; like Ruskin, he has the gift of writing euphoni-ously as well as persuasively; like Ruskin, he has the power of transforming factual statements into a special poetry of his own, transmuting archaeological descriptions into passionately articulated assertions of an aesthetic vision. That each of his perceptions is transfused by a mystical vision of Space, rather than by Ruskin's mystical vision of God, is simply an accidental characteristic of the age. This book is a delight to read, even for its narrative alone, and it should not be long before Scully's description of the Parthenon (which concludes his ninth chapter) rivals Ruskin's description of St. Mark's in popular esteem. But more important than this, his book will also be highly valued as a completely new and re-freshing interpretation of Greek architectural ideals by every-one called upon to study the subject.

For if this book were simply a felicitously phrased inter-pretation of a well-worn theme, like Henry Adams' *Mont St. Michel & Chartres*, it would have little architectural or histori-cal interest. As it is, its author shows that he has not only liter-ary talents of exceptional value, but also that he possesses the rarest of all abilities to be found amongst archaeologists, namely the gift of historical imagination. Reading this book, one cannot but marvel that it has taken two centuries of star-ving at ruins and rumaging amongst fallen stones for an archi-tectural historian to raise his eyes at last to the horizon, and see the Greek temple in its totality, that is to say, as form-ing, with its environment, an inseparable whole, whereby earth, temple and god are but one.

Not that this book is simply a modernized *Voyage Pit-toresque de la Grèce*. On the contrary, it was only after careful study of the various literary sources available (notably the

vast amount of periodical literature published by the various archaeological schools) that the author visited each site, and related all the ascertainable facts to his own observations. He sensibly divides his book according to the dedication of each temple (rather than according to chronological or stylistic criteria) and is thus able to preface the study of each group with a discussion of the type of site evidently considered ap-propriate by the Greeks for each god or goddess. He then proceeds to analyse each building so dedicated, and to ex-plain not only how its location corresponds to the Greek no-tion of propriety (which was doubtless what Vitruvius meant to some extent in the sentence: "*Decor perficitur statione, quod graece θεματισμός dicitur*"), but also many other features which have hitherto been regarded as eccentricities or even errors in Greek design.

Inevitably there are passages in which the author's efforts to substantiate his thesis are not entirely convincing, and even the thesis itself seems curiously unsupported by the kind of solid literary evidence one might expect. His insis-tence that everything the Greek architects did was always motivated by profound aesthetic or religious reasons (as for example in his novel justification of the lack of curvature in the stylobate at Bassae) sometimes taxes the reader's credulity. Moreover, one could have hoped for a clearer indi-cation of the extent to which the Greeks went *inside* their tem-ples. But this is a splendid book, magnificently written, and its only blemish is to be seen in the photographic illustrations which, though profuse and more than adequate to illustrate the text, are of a quality which does less than justice to the theme.

Scully will readily be forgiven, especially by those who have visited Greece in the summer, for preferring to travel there in winter; but dull skies and shadowless buildings ill convey the impression of the Greek landscape at its best. It is to be hoped therefore that the next edition of this book will be a de luxe edition, with larger and brighter photographs, and that many of these will be in colour to form a harmonious accompaniment to the author's dazzling prose.