



Representations of Spirituality in Postcards

Samantha Lesser

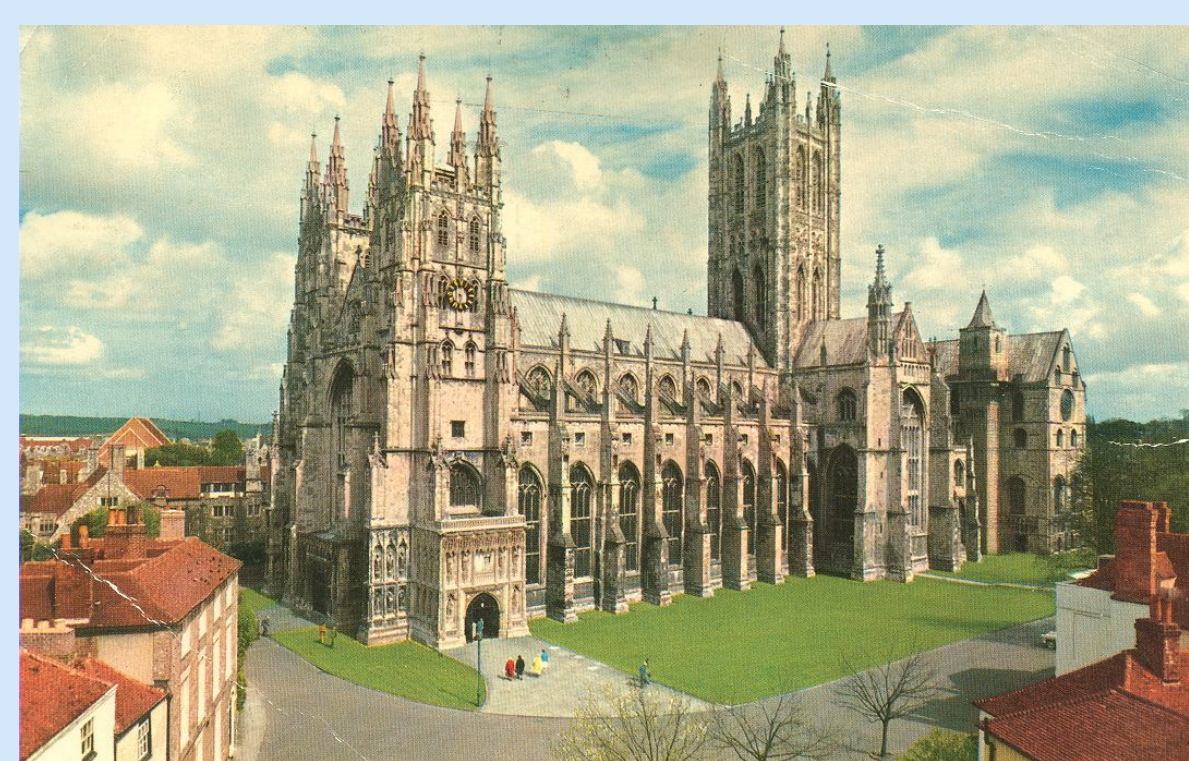
Supervising Professor: Dr. Michael Neal • Florida State University English Department



Background

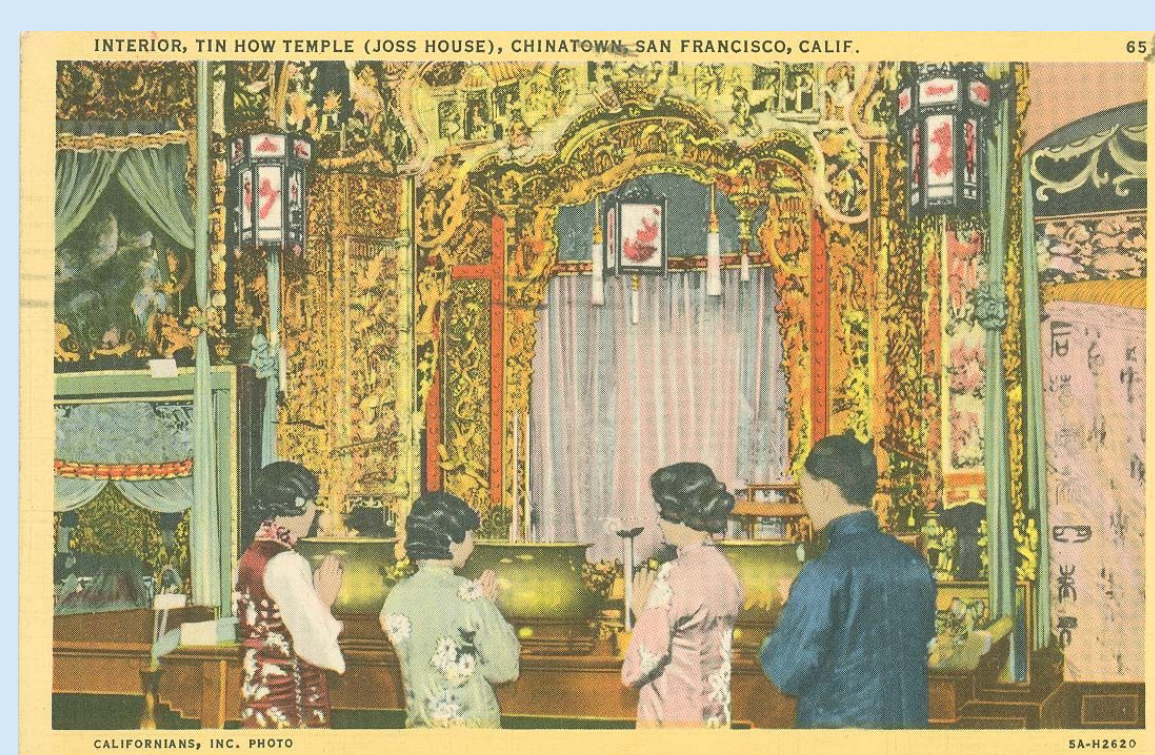
The FSU Card Archive collects thousands of postcards from different places and time periods. In my project, I used cards available in the archive to investigate the ways different religions and spiritual beliefs are presented. Though depictions of Christianity are common, there are many other belief systems which can be found in the cards.

Postcards that document characteristics such as spiritual practices, devotional architecture, and sacred objects, were examined and compared to reveal how different forms of spirituality were perceived and presented.



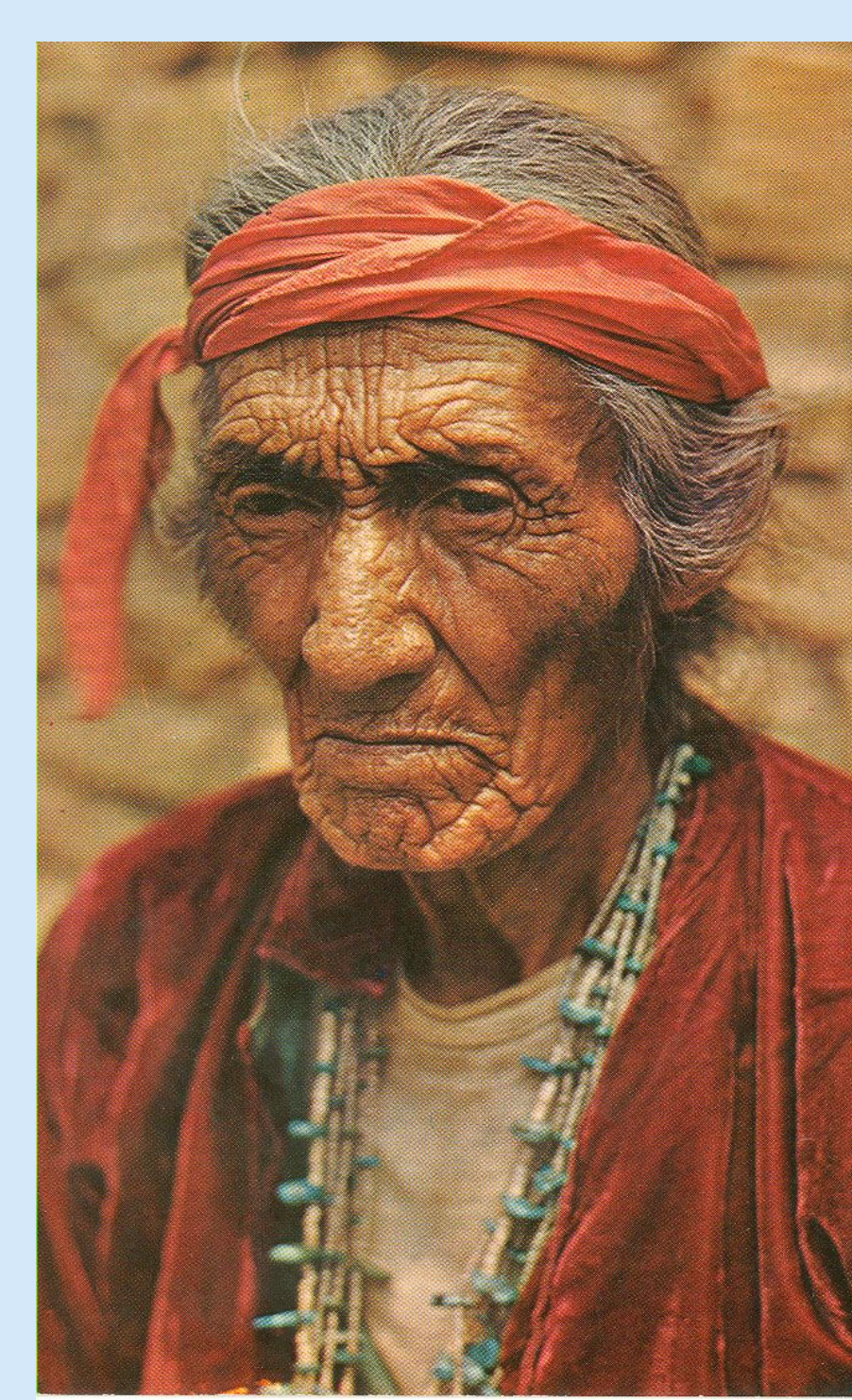
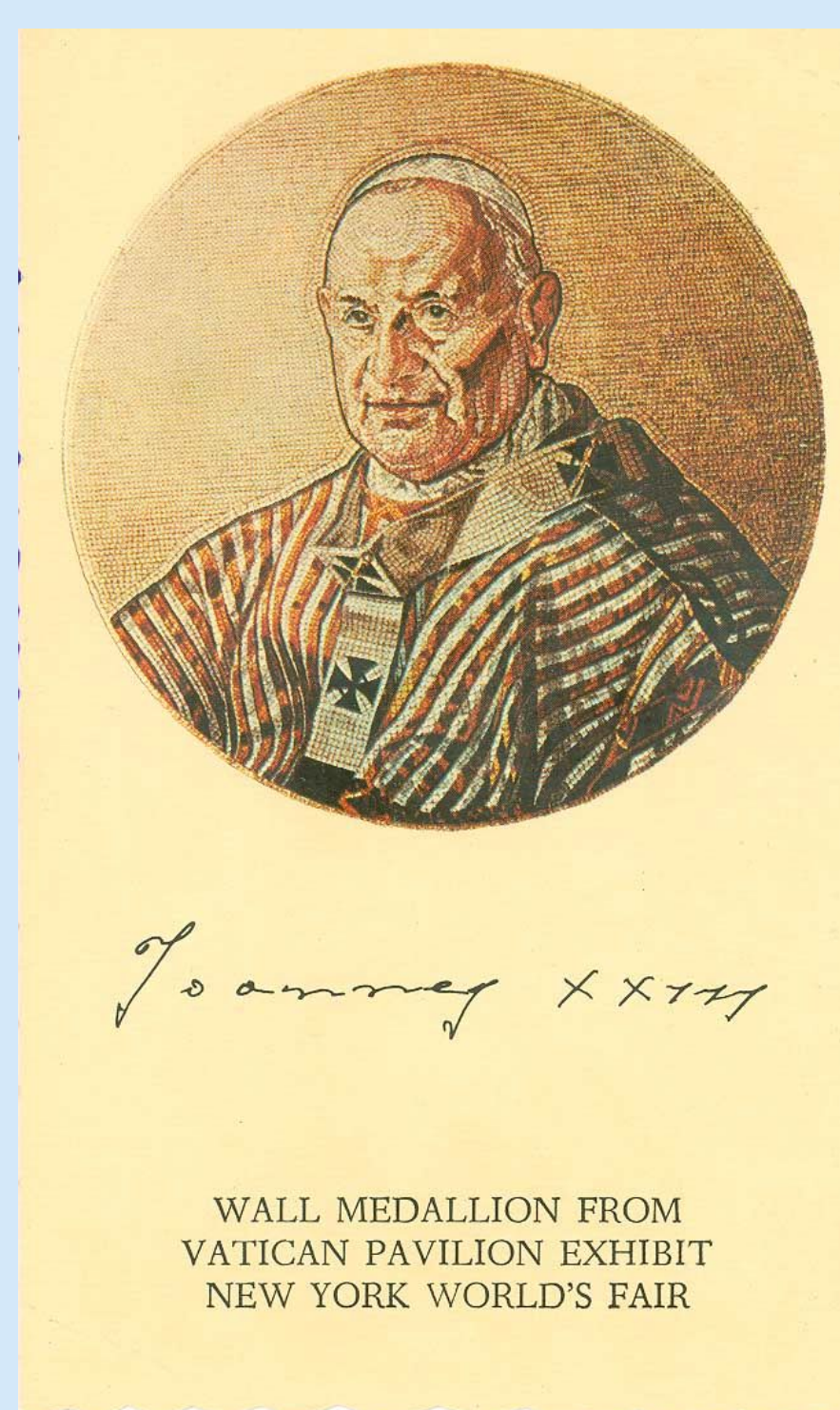
Methodology

To investigate my inquiry, I searched the digital postcard archive using specific keywords to find cards relevant to my topic. I used terms related to religion such as 'Catholic', 'church', and 'baptism'. I also searched for terms like 'temple' and 'mosque'. I searched for various indigenous groups. Many terms did not lead to relevant results, but I was able to find around 25 cards that matched my criteria. I organized them according to belief system and coded them. I established five major types that a card could fall into - architecture, individual, ritual, and object. For each of these categories, I also included subcategories that documented characteristics such as costume, props, and perspective.



Results

Card	Religion	Type	Figures	Date	Country
Buddha statue	Buddhist	Interior	No	N/A	Vietnam
Japan	Buddhist	Exterior	Yes	1952	Japan
Hall of the Great Buddha	Buddhist	Exterior	No	1900s	Japan
Entrance to Temple	Buddhist	Exterior	No	1963	Thailand
Grand Altar	Buddhist	Exterior	No	N/A	China
Lama Temple	Buddhist	Exterior	No	1933	America
Tin How Temple	Taoist	Interior	Yes	1945	America
A Catholic Mass	Christian	Interior	Yes	1963	Vatican
Catholic Altar	Christian	Interior	No	1977	America
Canterbury Cathedral	Christian	Exterior	No	1973	England
Wall Medallion	Christian	Individual	Yes	1964	America
Blessed Pius X	Christian	Individual	Yes	1951	America
"Negro Baptism"	Christian	Ritual	Yes	N/A	America
La Statue Miraculeuse	Christian	Object	No	N/A	Canada
Blessing of the Water	Christian	Ritual	Yes	N/A	America
Greek Epiphany Ceremony	Christian	Ritual	Yes	N/A	America
Cherokee North Carolina	Cherokee	Ritual	Yes	N/A	America
Medicine Man	Navajo	Individual	Yes	N/A	America
Hopi Eagle Dance	Hopi	Ritual	Yes	N/A	America
Kachina Doll	Hopi	Object	No	N/A	America
Hopi Indian Dancers	Hopi	Ritual	Yes	1949	America
HOPi SNAKE DANCE	Hopi	Ritual	Yes	1923	America
Hopi Harvest Dance	Hopi	Ritual	Yes	1909	America
The "Mormon" Temple	Mormon	Exterior	No	1940s	America
Jewish Chapel	Jewish	Interior	No	N/A	America
Jerusalem	Jewish	Exterior	No	1992	Israel



Discussion

- A majority of cards are architectural. Among three cards depicting three different types of religious structure, all have an almost identical composition. The Buddhist architecture is more striking than the Catholic architecture due to the use of bright colors not often found in other works of religious architecture depicted in the cards.
- Most architectural cards do not include people, suggesting that the focus of the card is not on the religion itself but the grandeur of architecture. Many cards, such as Tin How Temple, it seems to focus on emphasizing the difference between religious structures, especially in terms of decoration.
- Most depictions of altars available omit figures, unless some type of ritual is being depicted as well.
- Other than altars, cards depicting interiors are uncommon for structures that are not churches or cathedrals.
- Cards depicting rituals are most common to the Hopi. Many of these cards show the Hopi performing dances, such as the Harvest Dance. The captions on these cards indicate that they were made for tourists. Groups like the Hopi did not create as elaborate architectural works.
- Cards depicting a single spiritual figure as the subject were uncommon. Two are Catholic, showing an illustration of a Pope. The other has photograph bust of a medicine man. Both popes are depicted with genial expressions, and the medicine man has a more stern appearance. This could indicate a cultural difference, or perhaps a difference in how people from these two cultures are seen.

Conclusion

Ultimately, there are many similarities and differences that can be seen in the depictions of different forms of spirituality. Many of these differences stem from a practical need to utilize different modes of presentation for different subjects. Architectural cards are very similar regardless of what specific religion they are depicting, because ultimately some conventions work best to capture large structures. In the case of groups like the Hopi, who's architecture is less distinct than their rituals, the presentation shifts. Postcards are a fairly limited medium in terms of depicting the intricacies of spirituality, however, they are a fair depiction of the forms of spirituality that most people would have been likely to engage with outside of personal beliefs and practices.

References

"Hopi House ." *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, <https://www.nps.gov/places/000/hopi-house.htm>.