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Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

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ARCHITECTURE OF THE SACRED

Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium

A distinguished team of scholars explores how architecture and ritual interact to construct sacred experience. Bringing together case studies from ancient Greek, Roman, Jewish, early Christian, and Byzantine sacred architecture, this book reaches beyond the cultural formulation of the sacred to articulate overarching themes in the creation of sacred experience across multiple religious traditions of the eastern Mediterranean. The authors probe our understanding of the nature (and recoverability) of ritual and the role of architecture as an active agent in the magnification, elevation, and ritualization of actions in sacred cause. Addressing key issues including the reciprocity of architecture and place; negotiation of social and spatial boundaries; passage of the body and the eye; interaction of space and iconography; construction of sacred topography; and the vitality of text, history, and memory in the accumulation of sanctity, the authors demonstrate the powerful ways buildings were enabled to perform as spiritually transformative environments.

Bonna D. Wescoat is Associate Professor of Art History at Emory University and director of excavations at the Sanctuary of the Great Gods, Samothrace, Greece. Her research concentrates on ancient Greek sacred architecture and iconography. Recent works include *Temple of Athena at Assos* (2012) and volume 9 of *Samothrace: Excavations Conducted by the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University, The Monuments of the Eastern Hill* (forthcoming).

Robert G. Ousterhout is Professor of the History of Art at the University of Pennsylvania, where he directs the Center for Ancient Studies. A specialist in Byzantine art and architecture, his research focuses on the vanishing architectural heritage of the eastern Mediterranean. He is the author of numerous books, including *Master Builders of Byzantium* (second paperback edition, 2008), *The Byzantine Monuments of the Evros/Meric River Valley* (2007, with Ch. Bakirtzis), and *A Byzantine Settlement in Cappadocia* (second paperback edition, 2011).

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Frontmatter

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*Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical
Greece to Byzantium*

Edited by

BONNA D. WESCOAT

Emory University

ROBERT G. OUSTERHOUT

University of Pennsylvania



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Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	page vii
<i>Contributing Authors</i>	xv
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xix
<i>Preface</i>	xxi
1 Material Culture and Ritual: State of the Question <i>Jaś Elsner</i>	1
2 Monumental Steps and the Shaping of Ceremony <i>Mary B. Hollinshead</i>	27
3 Coming and Going in the Sanctuary of the Great Gods, Samothrace <i>Bonna D. Wescoat</i>	66
4 Entering Demeter's Gateway: The Roman Propylon in the City Eleusinion <i>Margaret M. Miles</i>	114
5 Architecture and Ritual in Ilion, Athens, and Rome <i>C. Brian Rose</i>	152
6 The Same, but Different: The Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus through Time <i>Ellen Perry</i>	175

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00823-6 - Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium

Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi



Contents

7	Mapping Sacrifice on Bodies and Spaces in Late-Antique Judaism and Early Christianity <i>Joan R. Branham</i>	201
8	The “Foundation Deposit” from the Dura Europos Synagogue Reconsidered <i>Jodi Magness</i>	231
9	Sight Lines of Sanctity at Late Antique Martyria <i>Ann Marie Yasin</i>	248
10	The Sanctity of Place and the Sanctity of Buildings: Jerusalem versus Constantinople <i>Robert G. Ousterhout</i>	281
11	Divine Light: Constructing the Immaterial in Byzantine Art and Architecture <i>Slobodan Ćurčić</i>	307
12	Structure, Agency, Ritual, and the Byzantine Church <i>Vasileios Marinis</i>	338
	Afterword <i>Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout</i>	365
	<i>Index</i>	377

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

2.1 Black-figure band cup with procession.	<i>page</i> 31
2.2 Corinth, Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore, plan c. 400 B.C.E.	33
2.3 Corinth, Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore from north.	34
2.4 Corinth, Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore, plan c. 275 B.C.E.	35
2.5 Corinth, Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore from northwest.	36
2.6 Labraunda, plan of Sanctuary of Zeus.	37
2.7 Labraunda, Sanctuary of Zeus. Broad steps from the southeast.	37
2.8 Lindos, plan of the Sanctuary of Athena.	38
2.9 Lindos, model of acropolis from north.	39
2.10 Kos, plan of Sanctuary of Asklepios.	42
2.11 Kos. Reconstruction of Sanctuary of Asklepios.	43
2.12 Perachora, plan of Sanctuary of Hera.	47
2.13 Perachora, steps and adjacent altar (on right) from the southwest.	47
2.14 Argos, plan of Sanctuary of Apollo Pythios.	49
2.15 Argos, Sanctuary of Apollo Pythios. Steps adjacent to altar (on left).	50
2.16 Pergamon, Sanctuary of Demeter, plan under Apollonis.	51
2.17 Pergamon, Sanctuary of Demeter from east.	51
2.18 Knidos, plan of Sanctuary of Apollo.	53
2.19 Knidos, Sanctuary of Apollo from southeast.	54
3.1 Samothrace, Sanctuary of the Great Gods, view of the Theatral Complex from the Propylon of Ptolemy II to the east.	67



3.2	Samothrace, reconstructed plan of the Sanctuary of the Great Gods.	68
3.3	Samothrace, Sanctuary of the Great Gods, Theatral Circle, restored plan of the first, second, and third phases of construction.	71
3.4	Samothrace, Sanctuary of the Great Gods, section through the reconstructed Theatral Complex.	74
3.5	Samothrace, Sanctuary of the Great Gods, Theatral Complex, restored plan of the fourth phase of development.	75
3.6	Samothrace, Sanctuary of the Great Gods, reconstruction of the Propylon of Ptolemy II and the Theatral Complex, from the north.	76
3.7	Didyma, archaic shrine along the Sacred Way from Miletos to Didyma.	79
3.8	Epidaurus, orchestra of the theater.	81
3.9	Argos, plan of the agora, with circular structure, no. 5.	82
3.10	Argos, circular structure in the agora.	83
3.11	Naxos, threshing floor.	84
3.12	Delphi, plan of the Sanctuary of Apollo, with the open area below the temple's terrace, which was called the Halos.	85
3.13	Oropos, Sanctuary of Amphiaraos, view from the temple toward the curved steps (center) that face the altar (right).	87
3.14	Poseidonia/Paestum, two possible reconstructions for the Ekklesiasterion, with the altar set within the lower seats.	88
3.15	Thasos, plan of the agora, with the circular precinct of the altar of Zeus Agoraios, no. 35.	89
3.16	Thebes, theater facing the temple (foreground) in the Kaberion.	91
3.17	Samothracian conical bowl, 66.37.	95
3.18	Samothracian iron rings, 65.1026 (left); 70.0860 (right).	96
3.19	Samothrace, Sanctuary of the Great Gods, restored Corinthian column from the western façade of the Propylon of Ptolemy II.	97
3.20	Samothrace, Sanctuary of the Great Gods, leaving the Theatral Circle: view to the reconstructed Corinthian façade of the Propylon of Ptolemy II.	98
4.1	Detail of Ninnion pinax (Athens, National Museum 11036).	118
4.2	Eleusis, view of propylon of Appius Claudius Pulcher, from the west.	124
4.3	Eleusis, Doric frieze from propylon of Appius Claudius Pulcher.	125

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00823-6 - Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium

Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

List of Illustrations



ix

4.4 Eleusis, caryatid from propylon of Appius Claudius Pulcher (Eleusis Museum 5104).	126
4.5 Eleusis, detail of kiste carried by caryatid (Eleusis Museum 5104).	127
4.6 Athens, plan of area around Eleusinion.	130
4.7 Athens, fragment of caryatid A from City Eleusinion, Agora S 3517.	131
4.8 Athens, fragment of caryatid B from City Eleusinion, front view, Agora S 3519.	132
4.9 Athens, fragment of caryatid B from City Eleusinion, side view, Agora S 3519.	133
4.10 Reconstruction of caryatid B with Agora S 3519 added.	134
4.11 Athens, reconstruction of façade of propylon to City Eleusinion, east side.	135
4.12 Eleusis, Ionic frieze.	135
4.13 Athens, view of south side of the Church of Panagia Gorgoepikoos (Little Metropolitan Church).	136
4.14 Athens, frieze block from City Eleusinion, now in the Church of Panagia Gorgoepikoos.	136
4.15 Athens, detail of frieze block from City Eleusinion: myrtle and poppies.	137
4.16 Athens, detail of frieze block from City Eleusinion: plemochoe.	138
4.17 Athens, detail of frieze block from City Eleusinion.	139
4.18 Reconstruction of façade of propylon to City Eleusinion, west side.	141
5.1 Ilion, plan of Troy VIII.	153
5.2 Ilion, aerial view of Trojan mound.	154
5.3 Ilion, proposed restoration of the Athenaion.	156
5.4 Ilion, section of Well Ba.	157
5.5 Ilion, underground passage leading to the Athenaion's well, looking north.	158
5.6 Ilion, aerial view of the agora at Ilion, looking west, with the reconstructed Late Bronze Age fortification wall (Troy VI) running behind the Odeion.	161
5.7 Troad, the "tumulus of Achilles" or "Sivritepe."	162
5.8 Ilion, view of the late Bronze Age remains of the Northeast Bastion at Troy.	163
5.9 Athens, view of the Acropolis.	164
5.10 Athens, Propylaia, with remains of late Bronze Age fortification wall.	165
5.11 Rome, plan of the Palatine hill, showing the Temple of Cybele and Circus Maximus below.	166

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00823-6 - Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium

Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x



List of Illustrations

5.12	Silver plate with a bust of Attis from Hildesheim. Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Inv. Misc. 3779, 4.	167
6.1	Rome, plan of the archaic Capitoline Temple.	178
6.2	Denarius from 43 B.C.E.	180
6.3	Copy of a relief representing a religious ceremony in front of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus.	185
6.4	Panel relief of Marcus Aurelius sacrificing before the Capitoline Temple, Musei Capitolini, Rome, Italy.	186
6.5	Silver denarius from Gaul, 69 C.E. Reverse legend: I O MAX CAPITOLINUS.	192
6.6	Sestertius depicting the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, reign of Vespasian.	194
7.1	René Magritte, <i>La Trahison des Images</i> (1929), oil on canvas.	204
7.2a	Nineteenth-century lithograph of the Biblical Tabernacle in the Wilderness.	206
7.2b	Diagram of Tabernacle and sacrificial accoutrements.	206
7.3a	Reconstruction of Herod's Jerusalem Temple.	207
7.3b	Jerusalem, plan of the Temple.	208
7.4	Mt. Nebo, Theotokos Chapel, detail of Jerusalem Temple in apse mosaic, late sixth century.	210
7.5	Mt. Nebo, Theotokos Chapel, apse mosaic, late sixth century.	211
7.6	Mt. Nebo, Theotokos Chapel, apse mosaic, late sixth century.	211
7.7	Saller's excavation report of Mt. Nebo comparing mosaic outline with Kortleitner's plan of the Jerusalem Temple.	212
7.8	Sepphoris, synagogue, view of excavated floor mosaic, fifth century.	216
7.9	Sepphoris, synagogue, view of reconstructed exterior and entrance, fifth century.	217
7.10	Sepphoris, synagogue, view of reconstructed interior, fifth century.	218
7.11	Sepphoris, synagogue plan with highlighted sacrificial panels, fifth century.	219
7.12a	Sepphoris, synagogue, detailed drawing of central, sacrificial mosaic panels, fifth century.	220
7.12b	Sepphoris, synagogue mosaics, sacrificial panel with Aaron, altar, water basin, and sacrificial animals, fifth century.	221



7.12c	Sepphoris, synagogue, sacrificial animal and objects (incense shovels, flour, oil, showbread table, basket of first fruits), fifth century.	222
7.13	Sepphoris, synagogue, dedicatory priestly panel of Yudan and Parigri, fifth century.	223
8.1	Dura, plan of the synagogue.	233
8.2	Dura, paintings on the north half of the west wall of the synagogue.	237
8.3	Dura, original painting on the central area of the west wall of the synagogue (panel above the Torah Shrine).	238
8.4	Dura, the Torah Shrine in the synagogue.	239
9.1	Tebessa, Algeria, plan of the Basilica complex.	251
9.2	Qal'at Sem'an, Syria, plan of the complex with Church of St. Symeon the Stylite.	252
9.3	Qal'at Sem'an, Church of St. Symeon the Stylite, east arm, facing east.	253
9.4	Abû Minâ, Egypt, plan of Tomb Church (tetraconch to west) and Great Basilica (transept basilica to east) of St. Menas, Justinianic period.	254
9.5	Meryemlik, Turkey, plan of Basilica of St. Thecla, walls of above-ground fifth-century church are indicated in black, those of the subterranean "Cave Church" stippled.	256
9.6	Thessaloniki, plan of Basilica of St. Demetrios.	257
9.7	Thessaloniki, Basilica of St. Demetrios, detail of W. S. George watercolor of mosaics of north inner aisle (mosaic now lost) representing St. Demetrios before his ciborium.	258
9.8	Cimitile, Italy, plan of Christian complex, third quarter of the fourth century; Grave of St. Felix is labeled "F."	261
9.9	Cimitile, Italy, plan of Christian complex, early fifth century (including Paulinus's constructions); Grave of St. Felix is labeled "F."	262
9.10	Cimitile, Italy, Basilica Nova, view south along nave toward triple-arched entrance to the Basilica Vetus (left/east opening walled in).	264
10.1	Jerusalem, aerial view with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the foreground and the Dome on the Rock in the background.	282
10.2	Istanbul (Constantinople), view looking toward Hagia Sophia from Galata.	283

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00823-6 - Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium

Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii



List of Illustrations

- | | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 10.3 | Istanbul (Constantinople), Hagia Sophia, as seen from west. | 286 |
| 10.4 | Istanbul (Constantinople), Hagia Sophia, interior looking east. | 287 |
| 10.5 | Istanbul (Constantinople), H. Polyeuktos, remains of decorated niche from the nave, with inscription, now in the Archaeological Museum. | 291 |
| 10.6 | Jerusalem, Holy Sepulchre, plan of fourth-century complex: (1) Patriarchate, (2) Anastasis Rotunda, (3) Tomb Aedicula, (4) Courtyard, (5) Calvary, (6) Constantinian Basilica, (7) Atrium. | 292 |
| 10.7 | Jerusalem, Holy Sepulchre, interior of the Anastasis Rotunda, looking west toward the Tomb Aedicula. | 293 |
| 10.8 | Jerusalem, Holy Sepulchre, plan of twelfth-century complex: (1) Patriarchate, (2) Anastasis Rotunda, (3) Tomb Aedicula, (4) Crusader Choir, (5) Chapel of St. Mary (eleventh century), (6) Subsidiary chapels (eleventh century), (7) Prison of Christ, (8) Ambulatory and radiating chapels, (9) Chapel of St. Helena, (10) Chapel of the Finding of the Cross, (11) Calvary, (12) Monumental entrance. | 294 |
| 10.9 | Jerusalem, Holy Sepulchre, view toward the south transept façade. | 294 |
| 10.10 | Chios, Nea Moni Katholikon, interior, looking south, showing so-called Feast Cycle in the transitional zone. | 299 |
| 11.1 | Dorset, England, Hinton St. Mary, Roman villa. Floor mosaic, fourth century. | 309 |
| 11.2 | Gold coin, minted in Siscia (after 330?). A. Constantine I wearing radiant crown (obverse); B. God Helios (reverse). | 310 |
| 11.3 | Mt. Sinai, Monastery of St. Catherine, Church, Christ Transfigured; detail from apse mosaic, sixth century. | 311 |
| 11.4 | Palermo, Cappella Palatina, Transfiguration mosaic, 1142–1143. | 312 |
| 11.5 | Daphni, Monastery church, dome mosaic, circa 1100. | 314 |
| 11.6 | Cefalù, Cathedral, apse mosaic, Christ Pantokrator. | 315 |
| 11.7 | Thessaloniki, Rotunda, dome mosaic, detail of mandorla and Archangel, circa 400. | 316 |
| 11.8 | Lagoudera, Panagia Araka, dome fresco, 1192. | 317 |
| 11.9 | Trebizond, H. Sophia, narthex, vault fresco, thirteenth century. | 317 |
| 11.10 | Canon Table, detail; Gospels (Ms. 9422), Matenadaran collection, Yerevan, circa 1280, f. 8. | 318 |
| 11.11 | Canon Table, detail; Gospels (Ms. W. 539) Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, f. 8. | 319 |

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00823-6 - Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium

Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

11.12	Fresco border details. A. Serbian churches, thirteenth century. B. Chora Monastery church, Constantinople, circa 1320.	320
11.13	Hosios Loukas Monastery, Church of the Panagia; east end, tenth century.	322
11.14	Kurbinovo, Church of St. George, Annunciation fresco, 1191.	323
11.15	Annunciation, illumination; Psalter and New Testament Ms. circa 1084, Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, DC.	324
11.16	Arta, Church of H. Vasileios, east end; detail, gable, twelfth century.	325
11.17	Kostaniani, Church of the Arcestrategos, east end, thirteenth century.	326
11.18	Arta, Church of Panagia tou Vrioni, thirteenth century; east end, detail, upper part of apse.	327
11.19	Arta, Church of Panagia tou Vrioni, thirteenth century; apse, detail, wall masonry.	328
11.20	Asinou, Church of the Panagia, twelfth century; apse, detail of preserved exterior painting.	329
11.21	Pyrgoi, Chios, Church of Hagioi Apostoloi, twelfth century; dome exterior.	330
11.22	Peć, Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate, Church of the Mother of God, 1324–1337, single face of a dome drum exterior, reconstruction of painting.	331
11.23	Murano, Church of SS. Maria e Donato, twelfth century; east façade, detail of window arch. Watercolor by J. Ruskin.	332
11.24	Istanbul Archaeological Museums, Byzantine capital, Constantinople, twelfth century.	332
11.25	Bivongi, Church of S. Giovanni Vecchio, 1122; domed bay, interior view.	333
12.1	Istanbul (Constantinople), Monastery <i>tou Libos</i> , from the southeast.	339
12.2	Istanbul (Constantinople), Monastery <i>tou Libos</i> , ground plan.	340
12.3	Istanbul (Constantinople), Monastery <i>tou Libos</i> , Theotokos, plan at ground level (A), and gallery level (B).	341
12.4	Istanbul (Constantinople), Monastery <i>tou Libos</i> , Saint John, ground plan.	342
12.5	Istanbul (Constantinople), Monastery <i>tou Libos</i> , Theotokos Panachrantos, interior.	343
12.6	Istanbul (Constantinople), Monastery <i>tou Libos</i> , Saint John, interior.	343

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00823-6 - Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium

Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv



List of Illustrations

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 12.7 Istanbul (Constantinople), Theotokos Peribleptos,
circa 1028–1034. | 350 |
| 12.8 Istanbul (Constantinople), Saint George ton Manganon,
circa 1042–1057. | 351 |
| 12.9 Istanbul (Constantinople), Theotokos Pammakaristos,
twelfth century and later. | 352 |

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00823-6 - Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium

Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contributing Authors



xvii

Rhamnous; a volume on the City Eleusinion (the Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone) in the Athenian Agora; and *Art as Plunder*, a study of the impact of Cicero's ideas about the ethics of collecting art on our modern concept of cultural property.

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Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xviii



Contributing Authors

Christian churches and saints' shrines. Her current work explores various aspects of the materiality and temporality of Roman and early Christian buildings, examining the shifting meanings of ancient structures as they are used, appropriated, altered, and/or forgotten over time.

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Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

In the Western world, it is nearly impossible to think of sacred actions without conjuring up some image of accompanying architecture, be it the altar, temple, synagogue, mosque, basilica, or church. In fact, until the twentieth century, almost the entire history of architecture could be recounted in terms of sacred structures, for they played the dominant architectural role in fixing social and cultural identity. Despite the obvious connection between architecture as a creator and signifier of sacred space and the actions that concretized religious belief, archaeologists and historians of architecture of the historical, premodern Mediterranean world have lagged behind scholars in other disciplines in mining the rich interplay of architecture and ritual actions. Partly in reaction to nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century trends of the Cambridge School to invest ritual with meaning reflective of contemporary circumstances, archaeologists in the second half of the twentieth century aimed for less invested and more value-neutral description, explication, and historical precision – that is to say, what and how took definite priority over why. The attitude toward ritual theory often resembled the medieval opinion of pagan statuary: while the subject intrigues, it is regarded as vaguely malevolent, potentially dangerous, and best avoided. In 1981, Bryony Orme could write, “Ritual and religion are taboo subjects in archaeological circles, denounced by the brave and avoided by the sensible; only a perverse few continue their studies in this dangerous field.”¹

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Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Studies of ritual are now front and center, as Jaś Elsner lays out in this volume. But within the ever-burgeoning archaeological literature addressing excavated sacred sites and the standing remains of Mediterranean temples, sanctuaries, churches, and monasteries, only a few attempts have been made to situate the sites and physical remains within a broad theoretical or ritual context. Whereas emphasis has been placed recently on the domestic, civic, or funerary setting of ritual, as well as on the significance of pilgrimage, sacred contexts remain in the “dangerous” category.² On the one hand, the assumption that sacred architecture frames ritual appears so obvious as to not warrant comment; while on the other hand, the ritual actions have vanished to the point that their re-creation would seem to be a hopelessly speculative process. Discussions of specific ritual contexts or actions in the context of architecture are usually offered as brief and tentative speculations at the end of extensive “solid” discussions of the archaeological and architectural tangibles. By the same token, many excellent explorations of ritual, both theoretical and practiced, are often discussed in a nonspatial and non-site-specific context. Current ritual studies addressing sacred space focus on its political construction, its social and hierarchical dimensions, the dichotomy of status and power; it serves as the backdrop for change.³ When the specific architectural setting of ritual is discussed, however, it is usually limited to the organization of levels of purity or sanctity, and the movement of human participants through space. These aspects are, to be sure, important, but exploration of ritual too easily devolves to the negotiation of boundaries, with architecture appearing simply as the passive setting of actions. It is therefore a matter of some urgency that we again attempt to examine the interaction of architecture and ceremony in sacred places for its sacred value.⁴ The contributors to this volume, primarily archaeologists and architectural historians deeply rooted in the primacy of physical evidence, desire to make sense of that evidence in terms of the ritual actions that animate and give meaning to it in a sacred context.

The issues we address are basic to the discussion of sanctity and sacred ritual. How did a place or space become sacred? What or who were the active agents involved in the process of sanctification? How does the idea of inviolability become manifest in the built environment? By what process of invention and response do architects and patrons develop

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Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

architectural forms and craft spaces that meet ritual needs? How does architectural form shape ritual actions? How does it define them?

We contend that in premodern historical societies the architectural setting was an active agent in the ritual process; architecture did not simply house or frame events, it magnified and elevated them and it could also interact with them and engender the construction of ceremonial. In this volume, we hope to reassert the connection of ritual in architecture through close archaeological and architectural analysis of particular places and buildings. Each brings its constellation of questions; collectively, they may serve as building blocks to larger theoretical concerns. In the Sanctuary of the Great Gods at Samothrace or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (to cite two examples studied by the editors) the ceremonial settings developed in direct response to the changing nature of the rituals and the sacred presences they housed. Although the benchmark of ritual is its recognizability and repeatability, ritual itself was never static; neither was its setting. The complex relationship of ritual to sacred space, and particularly the ways in which each had the power to transform the other over a long history, deserves closer scrutiny.

In this volume, we propose to examine the active agency of architecture in the ritual processes of premodern historical societies of the Mediterranean, focusing on the archaeological evidence from the Greek, Roman, Early Christian, Jewish, and Byzantine civilizations of the eastern Mediterranean. Architecture is interpreted broadly to include individual structures, complexes of buildings, and other forms of human intervention in the landscape (and in one instance, the landscape of the human body). In examining ritual and sacred space across cultures and religions with fundamentally differing bases and goals, we aim to demonstrate the centrality of architecture and reassert its claim to shape the human experience of the sacred.

Notes

1. Orme 1981, p. 218. An outlier in the study of architecture and ritual is, of course, Thomas Mathews's 1971 account of the interaction of architecture and liturgy in the early churches in Constantinople.
2. For domestic, see Parker Pearson and Richards 1994; civic, Goldhill and Osborne 1999; for studies characterizing scholarship of the 1990s, note Schechner 1993, Ahlbäck 1993; for later work see Elsner, this volume. For pilgrimage, Eade and

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978-1-107-00823-6 - Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Ritual, and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium

Edited by Bonna D. Wescoat and Robert G. Ousterhout

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xxiv



Preface

Sallnow 1991, Morinis 1992, Elsner and Rutherford 2003. For changes and transformations, Chaniotis 2005, Mylonopoulos 2008.

3. Notably, Smith 1987.
4. See Jones 2000 for an exploration of the sacred in architecture, although as intrinsic to the architecture and not in active relation to ritual practice.

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