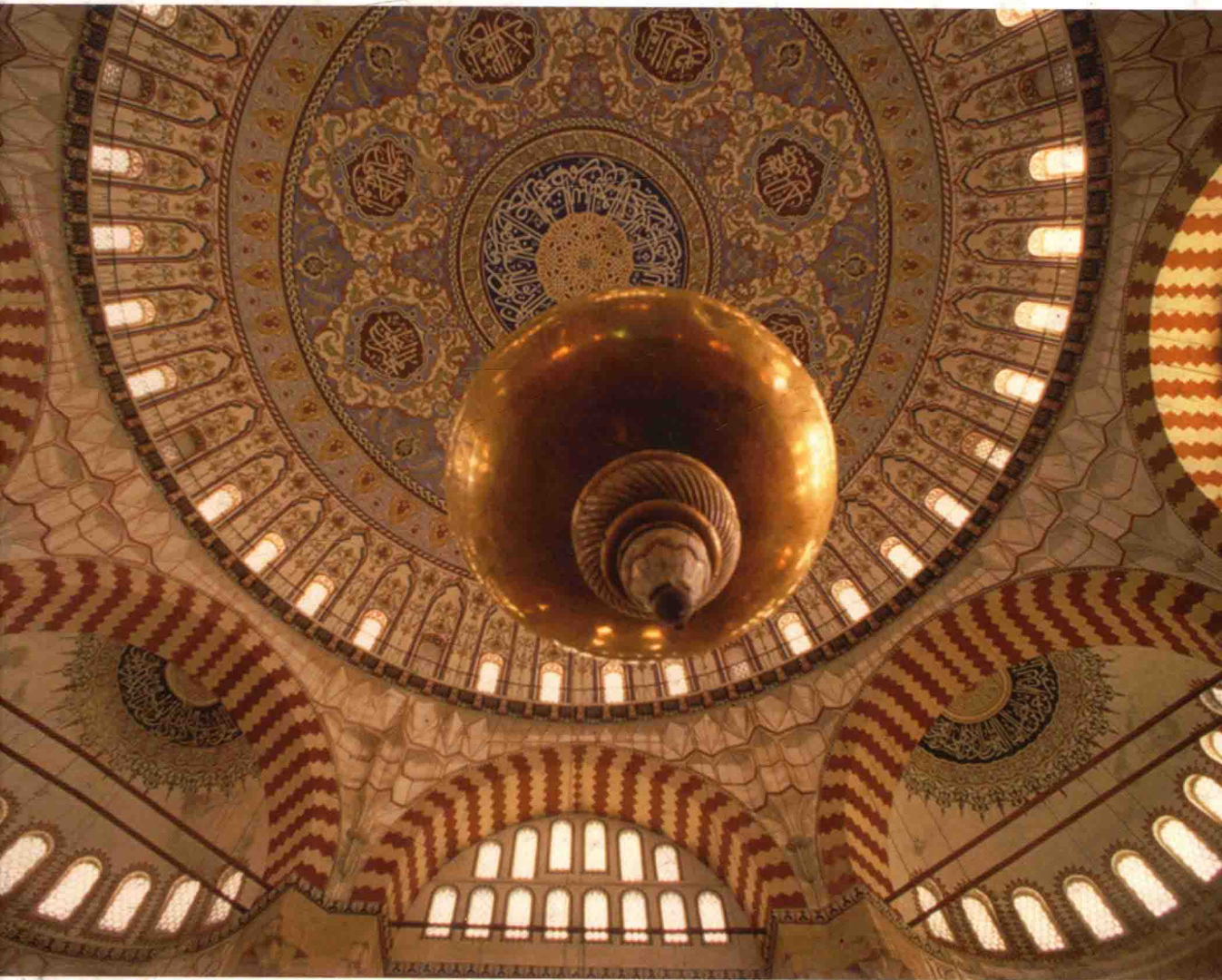# The Sacred
IN-BETWEEN

The Mediating Roles of
ARCHITECTURE

THOMAS BARRIE

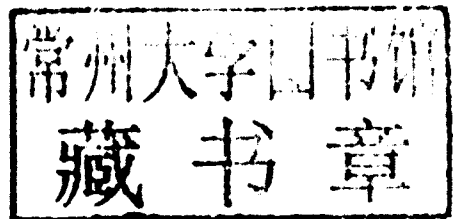# The Sacred In-Between

The Mediating Roles of Architecture

Thomas Barrie

The Sacred In-Between

The sacred place was, and still is, an intermediate zone created in the belief that it has the ability to co-join religious aspirants to what they seek. An essential means of understanding this sacred architecture is through the recognition of its role as an "in-between" place, connecting humans to the understandings they seek and the gods they worship. By establishing the broadened contexts, approaches, and understandings of architecture through the lens of the mediating roles often performed by sacred architecture, this book offers the reader new insights into the forces behind these extraordinary buildings.

Written by a well-known expert in the field, the book draws on a unique range of cases including:

- Carl Jung's house in Bollingen (Switzerland)
- Native American earthworks, burial mounds, and effigy figures
- Tongdo Zen Buddhist Monastery (Korea)
- Saint Benedict's Abbey at Vaals (Holland)
- the Sokollu and Selimiye Mosques (Turkey).

The book concludes with reflections on the author's personal experiences at these effective, elucidative, and inspiring places, their continuing ontological significance and the lessons they can offer today. It makes fascinating and essential reading for anyone interested in sacred architecture.

Thomas Barrie is Professor of Architecture at North Carolina State University whose scholarship on the symbolism, ritual use, and cultural significance of architecture has taken him to sacred places around the world. He is an award-winning architect and the author of *Spiritual Path—Sacred Place: Myth, Ritual and Meaning in Architecture* (Shambhala Publications, 1996).

To everything architecture means – and does.

Illustration Credits

All drawings and photographs by the author, unless otherwise noted.

1.1: Tate Gallery, London/Art Resource, New York.
1.2: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.
4.4, 8.1: Courtesy of George Michell.
4.8, 9.9, 9.11, 9.12, 9.14, 9.17, 9.18, 9.22, 9.25, 9.29, 9.30, 9.35, 9.37: Photos by Aras Neftçi.
5.1: Art Resource, New York.
5.3: Drawing by Glenn Robert Lym, courtesy of Clare Cooper Marcus.
6.1, 7.4: Mondadori Electa.
6.2, 10.1: Drawings by Richard Tobias, from Spiro Kostaf (1985) *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*, by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.
6.5: Drawing by Rodney Castleden, from R. Castleden (1992) *Neolithic Britain*, Routledge, p. 240, fig. 6.3.
6.6: Photo by Andrew Crompton.
6.7, 6.8, 6.12: Drawing from Squier and Davis (1848).
6.11: From *Mound City Indian Ceremony* by Louis S. Glanzman.
6.13: Ohio Historical Society.
7.3: *The Amiens Trilogy, Part II: Revelation*, Columbia University, 1997.
7.8: Drawing by Tim Kiser.
7.9, 7.10, 7.12, 7.16, 7.19, 7.20: Photos by Shim.
7.17: Photograph © 2009 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
8.4: British Museum Press.
8.5: Cistercian plan by Villard de Honnecourt.
8.6: Vanni/Art Resource, New York.
8.10, 8.11, 8.13, 8.19: Courtesy of Saint Benedict's Abbey, Vaals.
9.2: Photo by Julio Bermudez.
9.3: Werner Forman/Art Resource, New York.
9.4: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.
9.5: After Rowland Mainstone.
9.6, 9.7, 9.8, 9.10, 9.13, 9.16, 9.26: Drawings by Arben Arapi, from Gülru Necipoğlu (2005) *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire*, Princeton University Press, courtesy of Gülru Necipoğlu.

Acknowledgments

Writing is a solitary activity, but research depends on the assistance, generosity, and friendship of many. During the many years of field and scholarly research that resulted in this book, numerous organizations and individuals were essential to its success, but the following deserve special mention.

Two research grants from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts in 2001 and 2003, and a North Carolina State University Faculty Research and Professional Development Grant in 2005, provided essential support for the field research. A sabbatical at Lawrence Technological University in 2001 allowed me to frame the major issues of the book. A scholarly leave from NC State during the 2007–2008 academic year was crucial to the completion of the manuscript, and I am grateful to Dean Marvin Malecha and Professor Paul Tesar for their support.

The research in the United Kingdom and France was both successful and pleasant because of the assistance of old friends. In particular, the hospitality of Roger and Adrienne Stonehouse, Ian and Julie Hicklin, and Ray and Hassanah Burton is deeply appreciated. The C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich was instrumental to my research on Carl Jung's house in Bollingen and Daniel Baumann, an architect in Zurich, and Robert Hinshaw, publisher of Daimon Books, facilitated my field research. The monks at Saint Benedict's Abbey in Vaals displayed true Benedictine generosity during my stay there. In particular, Brother Hubertus opened the van der Laan archive and was instrumental in providing high-quality images of van der Laan's drawings. During the numerous trips to Turkey, many aided my work. Faculty at Istanbul Technical University, including professors Mine Inceoglu, Semra Ogel, Gunkut Atkin, Zeynep Kuban, and Arda Inceoglu, generously gave their time, and Aras Neftçi took the beautiful photographs of Sinan's buildings. Sevgi Parlak, a graduate student at ITU, provided consistent support – securing state permissions, obtaining resources, guiding, translating, and helping me to accomplish what alone I could not. The Korean field research would not have been possible without the generous support of Professor Jay Hwang of Chung-buk National University, and Professor Young-chul Chung of Kyungil University who over many years showed me paths that otherwise would have remained hidden.

Many conversations with colleagues, students, family, and friends have helped my understandings grow and deepen. Academia is a generous profession, and this book depended on the selfless assistance of those with the expertise and insights I lacked. Professor Robert Mugerauer of the University of

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

> Sacred space constitutes itself following a rupture of the levels which make possible the communication with the trans-world, transcendent realities. Whence the enormous importance of sacred space in the life of all peoples: because it is in such a space that man is able to communicate with the other world, the world of divine beings or ancestors.
>
> (Mircea Eliade)[1]

"How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?"[2] David cries in Psalms, a plaintive expression of the enduring religious theme of separation from the divine. "Why dost thou stand so afar off, O Lord?"[3] he asks, his question framing the perennial human condition of dislocation from larger contexts, broader knowledge, and deeper understandings. The disconnections may be spiritual, but they are often described spatially. In Taoism, the immortal gods reside on islands separated by vast waters. In Buddhism, unenlightened states are a "middle world" and texts describe a "crossing over" from delusion to enlightenment. In the first book of the Hebrew Bible, Adam and Eve are expelled from the place where God dwells and are separated by a gateway blocked by "cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way."[4] The Christian Gospels contain a number of references to gateways and thresholds, physical boundaries that both separate and connect one to the divine. As Jesus asserted: "The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those that find it are few."[5]

What is required to bridge these seemingly unbridgeable gaps – to cross these narrow thresholds? This book argues that sacred architecture was conceptualized, realized, and utilized as a response to this eternal question, and believed to connect what was formerly discontinuous.

1.1
The Magic Circle, John William Waterhouse, 1886

Source: Tate Gallery, London/Art Resource, New York.

The Mediating Roles of Religion and Architecture

Religious traditions insist that connections to deeper ways of being in the world are only possible through belief and participation in religion. The "holy" is the "whole" – the re-connection of humans with their god(s). Religious beliefs and practices from around the world, in all their variety, share the goal of connecting the individual to broader communal, cultural and theological contexts. The root word of religion is *reliquare*, "to bind together," suggesting its principal role of establishing connections with the divine. Hinduism views the ordinary world as *maya*, a scrim of illusion withdrawn only through the perspectives that religion provides. The term yoga means "to yoke" or "to bind together," and yogic practices served to join the separate individual with the universal "self." Religion, in this context, is a mediator, its beliefs and rituals serve to interconnect the individual, the community, the understandings they seek, and the gods they worship.
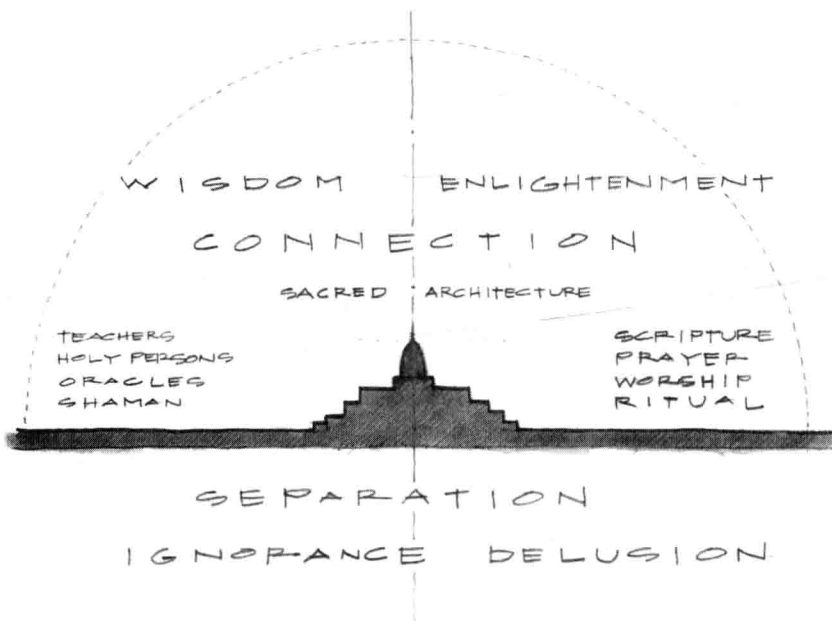
The principal argument of this book is that sacred architecture typically articulated an intermediary "position in the world" that was both physical and symbolic. Religion has traditionally articulated questions regarding the meaning and significance of human existence and mollified feelings of isolation and alienation. It has been intrinsic to the archetypal human endeavor of establishing a "place" in the world. Architecture has incorporated similar agendas – providing shelter, a meaningful place that embodies symbolic content, and a setting for communal rituals. Humans are unique because they are not only part of their environment, but actively and deliberately shape it – often in the service of cultural, socio-political, and religious imperatives. Sacred places were often precisely built at specific locations with the hope that connections would result and the otherwise inaccessible accessed. Throughout the book, I argue that sacred architecture performed, and in some cases continues to perform, a critical role in embodying religious symbols and facilitating communal rituals – with the goal of creating a middle ground, a liminal zone, that mediates between humans and that which they seek, revere, fear, or worship.

Religion and religious figures have traditionally been put into the service of mediating between humans and the knowledge or understanding they seek or the gods they worship. Similarly, sacred architecture was conceptualized and created as a physical and symbolic mediator, often in support of the religions it was built to serve. Just as scripture and mythology often describe the promise and potential of religion to join, to connect, to unveil, these themes were also symbolized by sacred architecture. In this context, analogous to scripture, prayer, worship, teachers, holy persons, oracles, shamans, and other mediums, sacred architecture was (and often still is) an intermediate zone believed to have the ability to co-join religious aspirants to what they sought. Moreover, communal rituals, as embodiments of myth, scripture, and belief, were another means of

1.3
The sacred place was (and often still is) an intermediate zone believed to have the ability to co-join religious aspirants to what they sought. The Western Wall, Jerusalem

WISDOM   ENLIGHTENMENT
CONNECTION
SACRED ARCHITECTURE

TEACHERS   SCRIPTURE
HOLY PERSONS   PRAYER
ORACLES   WORSHIP
SHAMAN   RITUAL

SEPARATION
IGNORANCE DELUSION

1.4
Analogous to scripture, prayer, worship, teachers, holy persons, oracles, shamans, and other mediums, sacred architecture was (and often still is) a means to establish revelatory links

4

connection where the architectural settings were vivified and completed. All were (and are) in-between places believed to provide bridges across liminal realms.

Context and Scope

This book positions architecture as a cultural artifact that responds to its social, political, economic, and environmental contexts and expresses a complex matrix of cultural beliefs and imperatives. In this context, it is presented as a communicative media that embodies symbolic, mythological, doctrinal, socio-political, and, in some cases, historical content. Moreover, it is often an active agent that performs didactic, elucidative, exhortative, and, in some cases, coercive roles.

The language or media of architecture serves to communicate its symbolic content to establish its often multiple, complex meanings. Central to the legibility of architecture is the active engagement it requires. One "reads" its content through deciphering its language to construct its meaning.[6] And because this engagement is context-dependent, this study includes pertinent social, cultural, political, historical, environmental, and liturgical settings that helped to shape the architecture. It recognizes that the deciphering of the symbolism of architecture often leads to deeper understandings of the culture that built it, and understanding its full context is essential to deciphering its meaning. Even though its meanings are often complex and subject to multiple interpretations, what we at times discover is the capacity of architecture to reveal a culture is equal to or exceeds textual or historical evidence.[7]

One early role of religion was to bind together a clan, tribe, nation, or culture in support of territorial and hierarchical agendas, which is why (both positively and negatively) religion, culture, and place are so inextricably connected. Architecture typically served these unified and multifarious cultural, religious, and territorial agendas. Even the most primordial of architectures, the burial mound, served to reinforce the continuity of the clan, the hierarchy of its leaders, and its territorial claims. Religious sites and edifices were rarely benign and typically served the political and social agendas of the organized societies that built them. The dark side of the declarative and didactic roles of architecture is its complicity in the reinforcement of social dictates and hierarchies. However, the incorporation of architecture's role in social coercion and territorial restriction in histories and theories of architecture can serve to deepen our understandings of its cultural significance. It can reveal the power that architecture did (and still does) possess.

This book establishes broadened contexts, approaches, and understandings of architecture through the lens of the mediating roles performed by sacred architecture. It examines a specific stratum of the layers of architectural history to provide heterogenous readings of its experiential qualities and communicative roles. I focus on sacred architecture because this particular "type" provides arguably the most accessible and diverse means to unpack the meaning and symbolism of architecture. In particular, sacred architecture was often the result of significant human and material resources – an indication of the value that it held. The book's focus, however, does not imply that other types

of architecture do not perform partial or similar roles in particular settings. Some may – or may provide additional means and media of communication and engagement – but are outside of the scope of this study.

Definition of Terms

The term *sacred architecture* defines places built to symbolize the religious axioms and beliefs, communicate socio-political content, and accommodate the rituals of particular cultures within their specific historical settings. *God*, or *the gods*, is used both specifically and generally. In some cases, the religious and architectural orientation is toward a singular god – in others, the gods are diffuse or multiple. The term *divine* is applied to include objects of veneration or worship, such as divine ancestors or wisdom. *Content* refers to the *symbolism* embodied by the architecture, whereas *meaning* is the outcome of individual or collective understandings that result from participation in or with the architecture. Additionally, a *symbolic language* is the convention used to embody the *symbolic content*, which is also described as *communicative media* – all of which constitute an inclusive definition of *symbolism*.

The definitions and etymology of the term *mediate* and words related by meaning, use, and their roots, are necessary to establish our scope of inquiry. *Mediate* comes from the Latin *mediare*, which means to be "in the middle," and its Germanic root, *midja-gardaz*, means a "middle zone" that lies between heaven and earth. *Mediate* is an active verb that describes actions for bringing together separate parties, producing results, or synthesizing information. As such, it is understood as a dynamic activity that oscillates between discrete entities. Related terms include *mediating, mediator, media, mean, medial, median, mediant,* and *medium*, all of which include space and spatial relationships.

The act of *mediating* is to serve as an intermediary between separate positions. *Mediation*, in its current use, is a form of conflict resolution where a mutually agreed-upon solution is facilitated, but not imposed, by a third-party mediator. This definition is useful because of the necessity of participation of the separate parties to reach a conclusion. (The other current form of conflict resolution is arbitration where the third-party arbitrator provides a binding final decision, most likely favoring one of the petitioners and aptly called an "award.") These roles are distinguished from those of a *medium*, an agency (such as a person or material) through which something is accomplished. In the case of a person, a medium has the ability to connect otherwise inaccessible worlds, most popularly to communicate with the dead, as in a psychic medium. Turning to words that have more direct material and spatial implications, we note that a *medium* is also an environment where cultures or other growths can thrive or even a substance that acts between other substances, as in the use of a solvent medium in painting. In geometry, the *median* is the line that connects the vertex of a triangle to the midpoint of its opposing side – in anatomy, it is the line that divides bodies into two symmetrical parts. In mathematics, the *arithmetic mean* is a value at the center of all described values. Lastly, *media* (which is related to *medium*) is the means of communication and connection. Its current use defines all the means utilized to communicate information or content and print and

broadcast media are the most common usages of this term. However, we should recognize that their hegemony is a rather recent development and that the media of the arts and architecture were at times predominant. That is why sacred architecture is often the most effective way to understand the beliefs of the religions that created it.

Aims of the Book

This book aims to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning the dynamic interactions sacred architecture requires, as well as its symbolism, ritual use, and cultural significance. Its intentions include framing broadened understandings of architecture. It positions architecture as a cultural artifact that expresses and influences the preoccupations, prejudices, values, and aspirations of the communal human endeavors we (inadequately) call culture. To do so, the book includes philosophical traditions that analogously express and influence cultural self-definitions and activities, and compares them to other cultural outputs – primarily religious beliefs and practices but also other creative media. It argues that architecture, like any communicative media, employs language that is accessible to a critical mass of participants while retaining sufficient nuance and variability of interpretation to facilitate personal resonances and connections. It recognizes that the language of architecture is primarily formal and scenographic and that through this media architecture is referential – leading one to connections with related cultural outputs, and thus contributing to individual and communal elucidation. It also suggests that because architecture provides the setting for communal activities, it consequently supports the most potent of human endeavors, the shared cooperative pursuit of knowledge, understanding, consciousness, and improvement.

In this book I focus on the more interstitial, hidden, and mysterious aspects of architecture to argue that traditionally it served as a media that incorporated and communicated content, engendered emotional and corporal responses and served to orient one in the world. This theoretical approach is consistent with more nuanced and multivalent understandings of architectural form and space, and includes a much broader context within which architecture performs and is experienced. It recognizes the power of architecture to re-veal ("un-veil"), to elucidate, and to transform – a concept intrinsic to architecture in the past, often misunderstood in the modern era, and essential that we reconsider today.

Theoretical Approaches

How do we effectively frame the issues and cogently establish reliable understandings of a cultural output as complex, nuanced, and ineffable as sacred architecture? First of all, we need to clearly establish the scope and limitations of our study and our methods of interpretation. Overall, I adopt philosophical approaches to understanding architecture, for, in the words of Hans-Georg Gadamer, "where no one else can understand, it seems that the philosopher is called for."[8] More specifically, I utilize comparative and intersubjective