# Key Buildings from Prehistory to the Present

## PLANS, SECTIONS AND ELEVATIONS

**Free CD-ROM with all drawings**

Andrew Ballantyne

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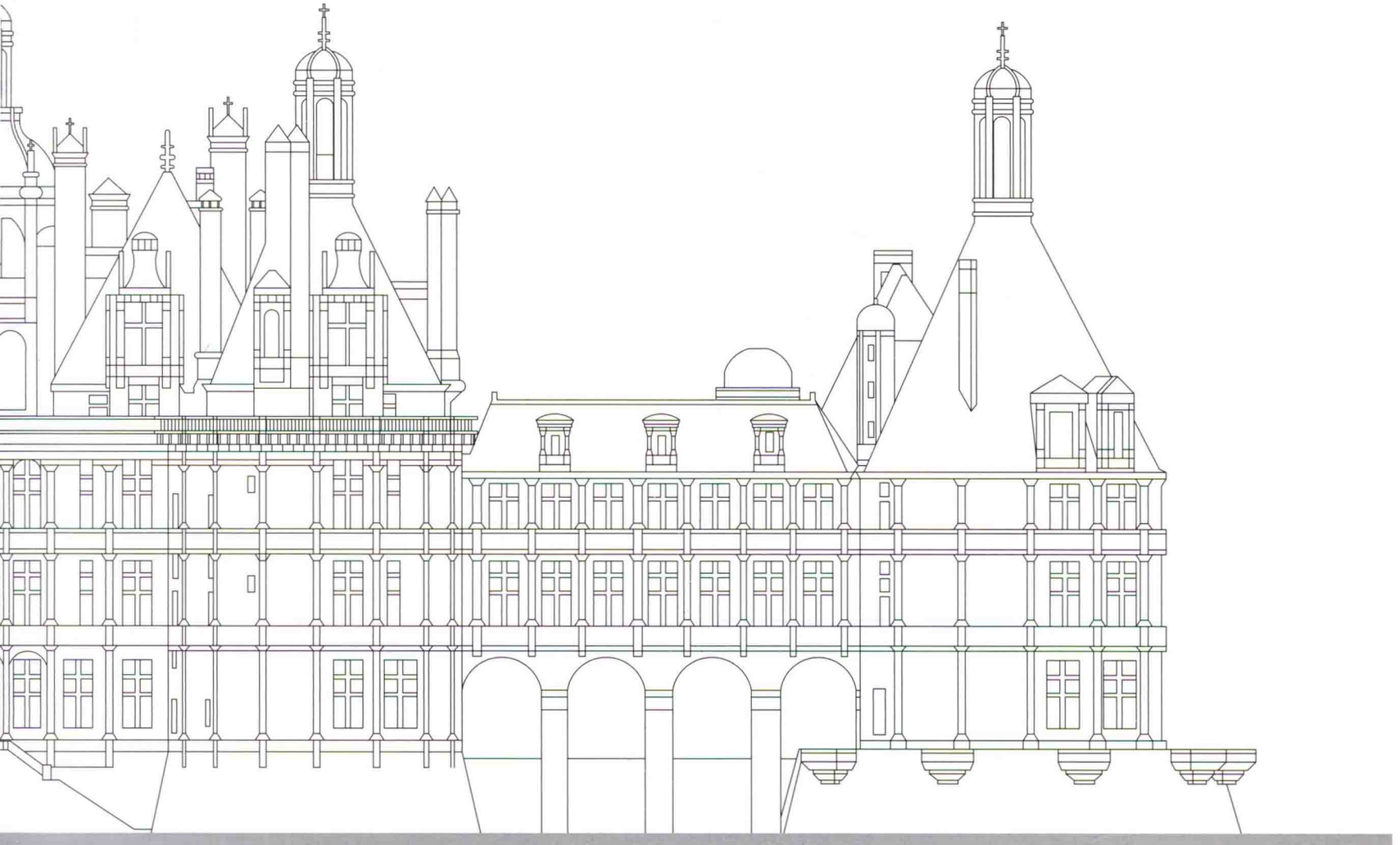
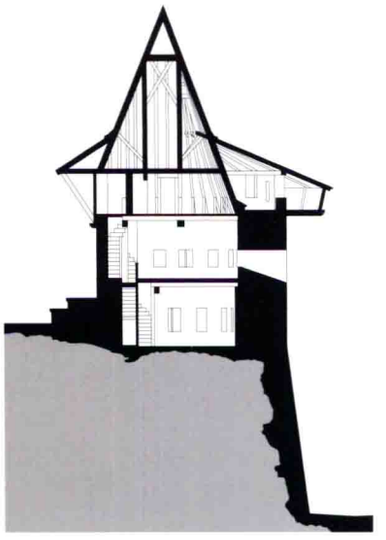
# Introduction



Great Temple of Amon-Ra



Carcassonne

Architecture does many things, and ***Key Buildings from Prehistory to the Present*** explores a range of them. Each chapter covers an aspect of architecture through a number of buildings from around the world. The buildings are illustrated in plan, section and elevation, as well as photographically, and appear in chronological order in each category.

In many cases, a building could be put in more than one category. The **Great Pyramid of Khufu** (pages 14–15) is a memorial and the **Empire State Building** (pages 38–39) is an office building, for example, but they are both included in chapter 1 in order to highlight how some buildings come to designate a culture. There is an international shorthand that can evoke the idea of a complex and varied country in an image of a single building. France is signified by the **Eiffel Tower** (pages 36–37), China by the **Twin Pagodas** at Suzhou (pages 30–31).

The choice of representative buildings poses a dilemma. While the best buildings are remarkable, ordinary buildings can tell us far more about the culture, climate and technology of the society that made them. This tension is clearest in chapter 2, whose subject is dwellings. It includes traditional houses from different parts of the world alongside some acknowledged masterpieces and royal retreats. One of the **Karo Batak Houses** in Sumatra (pages 58–59) is different in every way from Andrea Palladio's **Villa Capra** (pages 70–71) or the castle of **Neuschwanstein** (pages 84–85), for example, except that all three were dwellings that met the needs of their occupants.

Places of worship, covered in chapter 3, always call for special efforts from the community that builds them, and they usually have pride of place in a settlement. Sometimes – as in the case of the **Great Temple of Amon-Ra** (pages 100–101) – they are associated with the state and can be colossal. Other examples, such as the **Lingaraj Temple** (pages 122–23) and the **Basilica of the Madeleine** at Vézelay (pages 130–31), have been sustained by popular support from pilgrims.

At the heart of chapter 4 are historical defences, but those that are still in use can be impossible to document in plan, section and elevation. (For example, Britain's signals-monitoring station at Menwith Hill in Yorkshire could not be represented, despite its eerie beauty.) The Athenian **Acropolis** (pages 168–69) had a military use in the seventeenth century, when a Venetian shell hit a store of Turkish explosives and blew up the Parthenon. It was a celebrated place, but difficult to visit. In the nineteenth century, when they were judged to be militarily redundant, the ramparts of **Carcassonne** (pages 184–85) were transformed into a potent vision of a medieval city.

Villa Capra

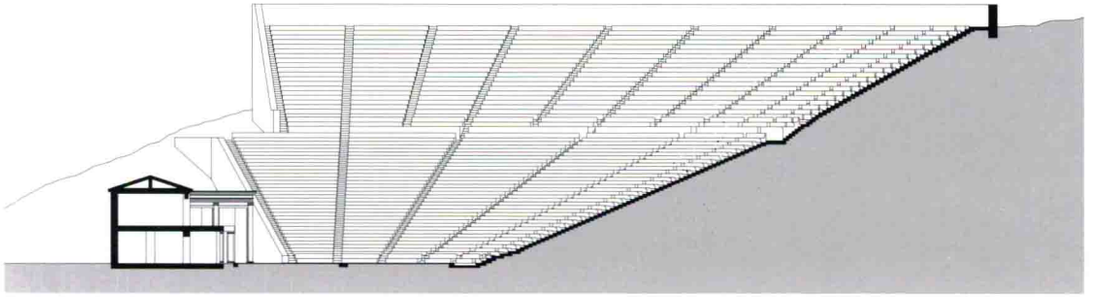
Chapter 5 covers buildings where people work, study or pass through on their travels. Such edifices often have to be built economically, but even then their scale and the pride taken in their design can make them internationally significant. Titus Salt's worsted mill at **Saltaire** (pages 208–209) and the **AEG Turbine Factory** in Berlin (pages 220–21) are buildings designed for a firmly utilitarian purpose that have nevertheless had a profound cultural influence.

Chapter 6 is concerned with government buildings ranging from the grandiose **Residenz at Würzburg** (pages 252–53) to Alvar Aalto's little **Säynatsälo Town Hall** in Finland (pages 260–61), while chapter 7 is devoted to buildings designed to enhance the quality of people's lives. The **Theatre at Epidauros** (pages 266–67), a sanctuary and health resort, transformed the slope of a hillside into a powerful geometric form that, even now, commands the surrounding landscape.

The memorials described in chapter 8 are reminders of great lives and great deeds. No one now remembers much about the Persian satrap Mausolus, but the **Tomb of Mausolus** (pages 288–89) proved the model for the many mausoleums that followed. The **Lincoln Memorial** (pages 300–301) is not one, since it is not a burial place, but it serves to commemorate a life and to remind a mighty nation of its values.

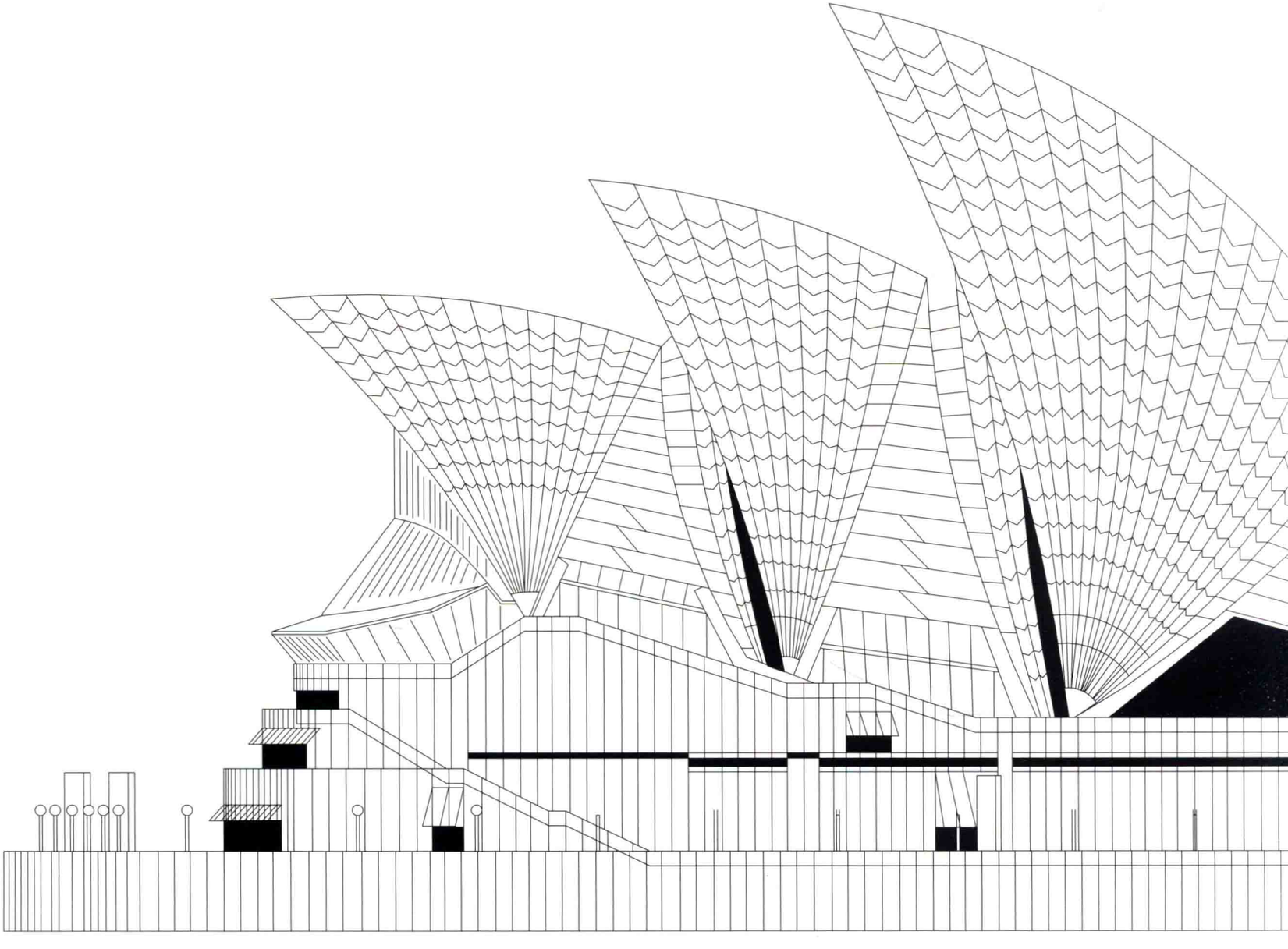
The public spaces in chapter 9 are reminders of how cities work, illustrating the fact that urban vigour and vitality depend on chance or casual meetings in the street and in public, as well as on formal meetings in more private places.

In short, this book presents a wide range of structural achievements. It is incomplete, of course, but all the examples chosen are interesting and intended to open your eyes to other things that are equally interesting and may be closer to home.



Theatre at Epidauros

# Culture-defining monuments



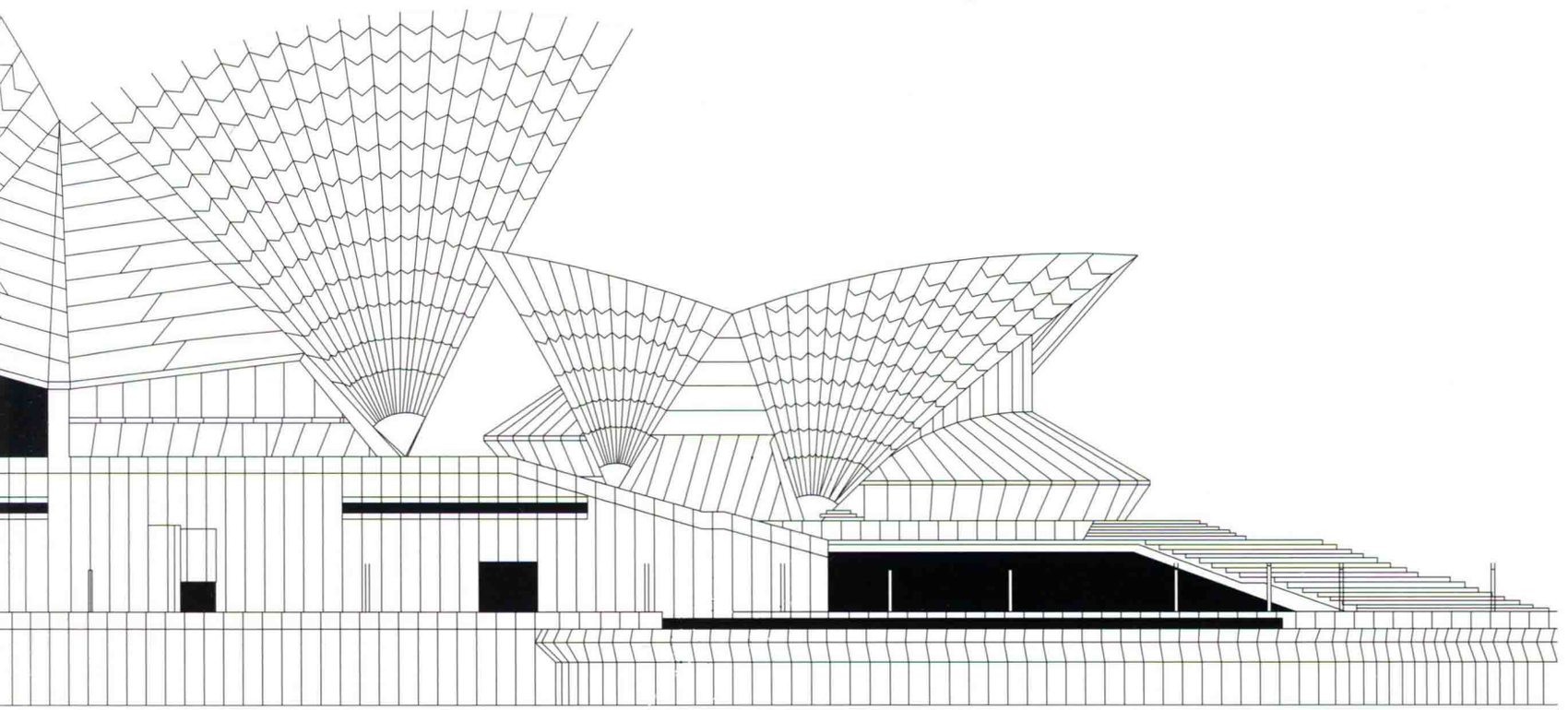
Many cultures produce no monuments. The Mongols were one of the great dynamic civilizations and their culture revolved around horsemanship rather than building. Architectural history hardly notices people such as the Mongols, giving pride of place to sedentary cultures that walled themselves in with blocks of stone – Egyptians, Romans, Chinese.

Uluru is a striking landscape formation that was adopted by the nomadic Aboriginal population in Australia and made to do all the things that monuments do, so it is included in this chapter as landscape architecture that has a monumental role for a culture that grew up around it.

The temples at Tik'al in Guatemala – man-made mountains – are much smaller. The platform at the top of them is tiny compared with the plateau on top of Uluru, but people who make the ascent are touched by a change in feeling about their place in the world that is no less dramatic. At the bottom, there is endless forest, where paths are easily obscured by the quick-growing vegetation and a sense of direction is easily confounded. At the top, the distant horizon can be seen over the tops of the trees. It is like being taken into another world with a completely different conception of space. These structures were plainly important for the civilization that built them – they consumed a huge proportion of the society's resources – and they have come to define the civilization for later ages. How did these people conduct their lives? We hardly know. But we do know that they sacrificed people there – and, for us, this became the civilization's distinguishing characteristic.

There are other places where a raised plateau takes on overtones of divinity, such as the Acropolis at Athens, where the Parthenon was built, and Machu Picchu, where a whole government took on semi-divine status, living as it did among mountain peaks. Perhaps this quality lingers in very tall buildings from the modern world, which invite us to step outside our normal, street-level experience of the city. From the top of the Eiffel Tower or the Empire State Building, the city becomes a landscape, and people who have attained those summits can see their own position in relation to other peaks – the Tour Montparnasse and the Sacré-Coeur, or the Chrysler Building and the Rockefeller Center – just as the rulers at Machu Picchu did. As far as the experience is concerned, it makes little difference whether the landscape is natural or man-made, intended or accidental.

Los Angeles is one of the world's great cities, and it has some fine buildings, many of them shut away from public view, but they do not seem particularly characteristic of the place. Its defining monuments are the freeway interchanges, which work at the scale of a grand landscape. In the modern world, travel is the expression of freedom, and the interchanges are the great monuments to that freedom. Imagine them redundant, a thousand years in the future, when our successors have learned to be content to stay where they are. How metaphysical and monumental those buildings will seem to be.



# Uluru

Pitjandara tribe

Northern Territory, Australia; Dreamtime

The great rock shown here, which is 345 metres (1,130 feet) high, has two names: Uluru and Ayers Rock. This is because the site has significance for two cultures that both have a hold on it.

The modern administrators of the Australian continent are of European descent, and their history goes back to the nineteenth century, when the name Australia was adopted – derived from the Latin word *australis*, meaning 'of the south'. In this era the rock was named after Sir Henry Ayers, who was governor of Australia in 1873, when the rock was 'discovered' by William Gosse. In 1987 it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Seen through European eyes, Ayers Rock is not an architectural object at all, but a striking geological formation that has been left standing above an enormous plain while the surrounding rock has eroded away. *At some point in the distant past, the rock's strata must have been deposited horizontally, but upheavals have left it with strata that are now almost vertical.*

The visible part is a small proportion of the whole, which penetrates deep underground. The rock's prominence in the landscape means that it can be seen from huge distances, and in different atmospheric conditions, especially when the sun is low in the sky, it seems to change colour and to be responsive and alive. It is a natural wonder, a source of fascination, a place that people want to visit.

The name Uluru has been in use for much longer – maybe for 10,000 years. Aboriginal culture developed separately from that of the continent's incomers, and when the two cultures came into contact it was clear that the Aboriginal people had a fundamentally different way of interpreting the world. In Aboriginal culture there is no linear history or book-learning, and there are no houses. There is strong attachment to place, through a profoundly ingrained nomadic habit of moving along traditional tribal journeys. Many of those journeys converge at Uluru.

*There are various accounts in Aboriginal tradition of how the Earth's features took shape. In the time of the ancestors, the Dreamtime, the world was featureless until the rocks were given form by singing or by other means – and the songs that conjured the rocks and streams are sung on the traditional journeys, or Songlines, which maintain the creation.*

Far from being unique to the Aboriginal people, the recognition of resonance between place and music is one of the few cultural insights that are very widely shared. In western tradition it was Orpheus who civilized by his song and Amphion who charmed the stones of Thebes into place by music. Joshua at Jericho played music that caused the city walls to fall. German Romantics said that architecture was frozen music. Birdsong establishes territories, and human beings share a surprising amount of DNA with nest-building birds, so perhaps in music and building we awaken our 'inner bird', calling forth ancient primitive instincts.

The various caves and fissures at Uluru are interpreted as incarnations of events that took place there. There is a mouth that silently screams in anguish, a scar that runs with water when a word is shouted, and bodies everywhere. However it came to be as it is, Uluru is experienced in Aboriginal culture as a memorial.