

Ilia M. Rodov, ed., *Enshrining the Sacred: Microarchitecture in Ritual Spaces* (New York: Peter Lang, 2022), 443 pp. incl. 158 colour ills, ISBN 9781433189647, £74 (hardback); ISBN 9781433194344, £59.20 (ebook) doi:10.1017/arh.2023.15

Reviewed by SALLY J. CORNELISON

Shrines, whether they are sacred or secular, preserve, enhance, protect, honour and conceal or reveal their contents. The thirteen essays in this volume concern the modes and meanings of enshrinement in the Christian, Jewish, Islamic and Buddhist traditions. Although they are too many to enumerate individually, these studies examine a considerable range of types of shrines and spaces whose contents include saints' relics, the consecrated Host, miraculous Marian images, Torah scrolls and ancestral objects and remains. Some also consider spaces and tabernacles that indicate direction or replicate location, such as mihrābs oriented towards the Kaaba in Mecca, Torah niches in synagogues that reference Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, and Christian churches in Spain that house shrines situated so as to recall the sacred topography of the Holy Land.

This book was conceived by a team of Israeli and German scholars, and four of its contributors participated in the related conference 'Framing the Sacred: Shrines in European Architecture' held at Bar-Ilan University in Israel in June 2018. These are supplemented with others to create an ensemble of geographically diverse but predominantly Eurocentric and Mediterranean-focused essays. Most of the chapters concern sacred spaces, structures and objects from the medieval and early modern periods, but the last two extend the book's chronological parameters to modern and contemporary domestic shrines in Vietnam and Japan respectively.

In several cases, the varied sizes and types of shrines discussed in this book correspond very loosely to its subtitle and preface, both of which indicate a focus on small-scale, even miniaturised, architecture — which invites the question of how 'micro' is 'micro'? François Bucher, in an article published in *Gesta* in 1976, was the first to identify gothic structures such as tombs and sacrament tabernacles (some of which can be sizeable), and smaller, sacred objects such as architectural reliquaries, monstrances and censers, as examples of microarchitecture. More recently, Alina Payne turned her attention to diminutive architecture in early modern Italy in her 2009 article 'Materiality, Crafting, and Scale in Renaissance Architecture' in the *Oxford Art Journal*. In that study, she invoked the nineteenth-century German term *Kleinarchitektur*, which pertains to altars, tombs, ciboria, baptismal fonts, tabernacles, free-standing chapels and the like, and while there is a certain amount of overlap, there are also significant differences between the two types of structures. Whereas most examples of microarchitecture enshrine sacred relics, the Eucharist or ecclesiastical or secular remains, not all types of *Kleinarchitektur* are shrines. There is a similar degree of variety and, at times, imprecision between form, use and terminology in the structures and objects discussed in this volume, which, as Ilia M. Rodov's introductory chapter indicates, encompass an almost overwhelming array of types, sizes, materials, contexts and meanings.

The most successful essays in this volume engage closely with the objects and structures they discuss and illustrate. Among these are Achim Timmermann's study of containers for the consecrated Host and their portals in German gothic sacrament houses and Paul Davies's examination of early modern Italian chapels and tabernacles for miraculous Marian images. These scholars discuss a type of shrine that exemplifies both microarchitecture and *Kleinarchitektur*. The formal and functional connections to those architectural types are less clear in, for example, Katherine Aron-Beller's study of the trials and tribulations of early modern Italian Jews, who were forced to grapple with living in homes where the walls were decorated with Christian images, and Yumna Masarwa's essay on the architectural and devotional context of the Kullamā verse. The latter, a Qur'anic text that invokes the names of Christ's mother, Mary, and St John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, was often inscribed around the entrances to mihrābs in Ottoman mosques.

It is perhaps more appropriate to associate these and some of the other subjects studied in this volume with microarchitecture not as art and architectural historians typically use the term, but rather as computer scientists and programmers employ it. Also known as computer organisation, in the technological context, 'microarchitecture' refers to the structural design of a microprocessor that ensures the proper function of its complex and interconnected components. Thus, in Masarwa's essay, those interdependent, microarchitectural parts consist of Turkish mihrābs decorated with the Kullamā verse that was targeted at a multicultural audience of Muslims and Christian converts and potential converts to Islam, for whom the passage's references to New Testament saints stressed the intersection of Christianity and Islam and would have held particular relevance.

A similar, syncretic overlapping of structural, visual and sacred traditions is at the heart of many of the other essays in this volume. Simon Paulus provides a broad overview of Ashkenazi Torah arks with designs that were deeply indebted to gothic Christian architecture and symbolically referenced Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. An equally wide-ranging survey by Aintzane Erkizia-Martikorena and Justin Kroesen addresses Iberian sacrament tabernacles that predate the sixteenth-century Council of Trent, many of which invoke gothic and Islamic decorative traditions, whereas Jelen Bogdonović explores the enshrinement of True Cross relics in Byzantium, Serbia and Italy and the ways in which it evoked the architecture of the Holy Land.

*Enshrining the Sacred* concludes with Hannah Gould's discussion of Japanese butsudan shrines, domestic Buddhist altars for the dead at which ancestor veneration and Buddhist devotional practices have been combined since the Edo period began in the early seventeenth century. The steady decline of their presence in contemporary Japanese homes has brought with it a kind of devotional amnesia regarding their function and meaning. As their numbers dwindle, some butsudan shrines have become increasingly secular, whereas the owners of others have embraced less complicated and rigorous Christian funerary practices. The latter phenomenon demonstrates the continued relevancy of enshrinement and the ways in which it is impacted by cultural, devotional and ritual syncretism in the present day.

*Sally J. Cornelison is professor of art history at Syracuse University*