

Sterrett, Joseph and Peter Thomas, eds. *Sacred Text—Sacred Space: Architectural, Spiritual, and Literary Convergences in England and Wales*. Foreword Richard Chartres. Vol. 4 of Studies in Religion and Arts Series, eds. James Najarian and Eric Ziolkowski. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011. Pp. xvi + 372 + illustrations. \$166.00 paper.

Two important concepts underlie this collection of essays edited by Joseph Sterrett and Peter Thomas: *sacred space*, a place or places where man can find “what is real in the midst of the formless expanse”; and *text*, considered in its sacred character, as something given to and developed by man in order to guide his own spiritual life. While they seem to proceed from opposite directions, the opposition implicit in these concepts between concrete and spiritual is not so strong when we consider that (according to Helen Wilcox) sacred spaces are everywhere when considered in the general context of the spiritual life.

The relations between sacred texts and sacred spaces presented in this volume are the result of research done at Cardiff University, and are limited to England and Wales. Due to the history of these two countries it is easy for the reader to understand how these concepts are related with the evolution and transformation of religious belief and of society in general during the period under consideration. The book is divided into three temporal sections, focusing on the medieval era, the early modern period, and the nineteenth century. The twelve essays that make up the book look at sacred texts, at sacred spaces, and at both of them in very different ways: from the work by Thomas Pickels related to the location and construction of monasteries during the eighth to the eleventh centuries, which created new sacred spaces in the landscape, transforming a “locus horribilis” into a “locus amoenus”; up to a specific debate around the building of stained-glass

windows at the end of the nineteenth century in the chapel of Manchester College at Oxford, an essay by William Whyte which demonstrates how influential the debate was on architecture and building when related to conceptions of the sacred in Victorian England. Each chapter in-between shows how many different declinations can be sought when dealing with the links among these terms, using an interdisciplinary approach. This heterogeneous profile does make it difficult, however, for the reader to keep her or his interest all the way through the volume. But this same variety is also one of the strengths of this book, as it offers many new points of view to the reader. Sterrett and Thomas' ultimate goal is to understand fully how intimate the relations between sacred texts and sacred spaces are in order to produce a fully religious experience. According to them, there is no possibility for the existence of one term without the other, and both serve to educate the public, but also to sanctify and glorify the spaces of worship.

For this same reason, this is not an easy book to conceptualize as a whole, but when the reader goes further into the different sections and chapters he or she can fully understand how interwoven are these relations with the history of the England and Wales. The illustrations that accompany some of the chapters, though grouped at the end of the book, are very helpful to comprehend fully the relations that exist between space, defined as different architectural elements and plans of the buildings, and text, defined mostly as the publishing layout used to relate written works with the idea of a building. The use of buildings as symbols to access the "Word," communicating to believers the fundamentals of the Christian religion, but also as a material representation of an idea, is the theme running through the whole book.

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