

## Sacred Spaces in Motion

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Our contemporary world witnesses contrasting approaches to sacred spaces. While in some regions (especially in Western Europe) there is a decrease in the interest for religious buildings as places for worship due to the decline of the number of practicing believers, and they are sometimes reused as public institutions, hotels or restaurants, in other regions one can testify for a revival of an intense attention to religious architecture. This is manifested either through the large-scale construction of national churches (e.g., Church of Saint Sava, Belgrade; People's Salvation Cathedral, Bucharest), the reconversion of former museums into places of worship (e.g., Chora or Hagia Sophia Museums), or shifts in their religious status (e.g., recent transformation of churches into mosques, as with the former Lutheran Church of Capernaum in Hamburg, Germany or the former church of Santa Maria Valverde in Venice). These contradictory tendencies and dynamics in understanding the role of sacred buildings highlights the exploitation of sacred spaces as areas for the affirmation of religious identity and negotiation of power resorts. Buildings concentrate different values, expectations, and social projections of a religious community, and most times the physical place itself where the building is consecrated bears an importance of its own (e.g., Al-Aqsa Mosque, Dome of the Rock and proposed third Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, Great Mosque of Mecca). The highly controversial call for a third Temple of Solomon exemplifies just how important the exact geography for worshiping God may be. But when different denominations request the same place (e.g., Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary of Jerusalem), or the same building (e.g., the Hagia Sophia) neither immediate nor long-lasting solutions are easily found.

This unique and topical issue of RES aims to bring together papers that deal with (but will not be limited to) questions such as: How do sacred buildings reflect the interferences of the political with the religious? What are the legal and theological bases for the (re)conversion of churches into mosques and of mosques into churches? To what extent and what foreseeable consequences building, decommissioning, repurposing, or converting religious spaces represent a form of domination and exclusion? Can one envision sacred spaces as communion places for different confessions or religions? Can historical sacred buildings become ecumenical edifices, in which different confessions and religions could worship under the same roof? We are also looking for contributions that discuss the complex significance that religious edifices bear in the architectural language of sacred spaces, from architects, archaeologists, art historians, historians of religions, theologians, philosophers or political scientists. Contributions are welcome on the confessional, ethical, political and aesthetical importance of historical sacred spaces in Abrahamic religions, such as the Hagia Sophia and historic Asia Minor, those in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, the Tigris-Euphrates Basin region and the wider Middle East, as well as from the Balkans.

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