

### In illo tempore, at the center of the world: Mircea Eliade and religious studies' concepts of sacred time and space

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# *In illo tempore, at the Center of the World:* Mircea Eliade and Religious Studies' Concepts of Sacred Time and Space

Christiane Barth\*

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**Abstract:** »*In illo tempore, im Zentrum der Welt: Mircea Eliade und religionswissenschaftliche Konzepte von heiliger Zeit und heiligem Raum*«. Time and space, manifested in such well known phrases and expressions as *in illo tempore*, *ab origine*, *repetition* and *regeneration*, *center*, *omphalos*, as well as the *abolition of the profane*, belong to the most important yet immensely complex concepts within Mircea Eliade's work. Based on Eliade's central publications of *The Sacred and the Profane* and *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, this article attempts to trace Eliade's notions of the terms and their relation to human thought and practice. Furthermore, the article discusses crucial critiques and elaborations of the concepts, implications and methods of Eliade's research, in order to develop an approach to the social constitution of sacred space which also considers current research in the Social Sciences on the production of space.

**Keywords:** Mircea Eliade, sacred space, sacred time, Mezquita-Cathedral of Córdoba.

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## 1. Introduction

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Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) is considered one of the most influential and at the same time controversial figures in twentieth-century Religious Studies – due to his vast scientific and literary opus<sup>1</sup> as well as his difficult biographical and political background.<sup>2</sup> Eliade's ideas and theories, developed in an enormous

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<sup>1</sup> Apart from the enormous opus of scientific work in the history and philosophy of religions to which *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1958), *Myth and Reality* (1963), *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (1969), and *A History of Religious Ideas* (1978-1988) belong, Eliade is also a well-known author of fictional, fantastic and autobiographical literature in Romanian, French and English, like *Bengal Nights* (1993) or *Youth without Youth* (1988).

<sup>2</sup> Mainly because of his early years and certain texts of these years expressing highly controversial points of view concerning the Romanian traditional far right, Eliade's life was and remains subject to harsh debates. For a detailed account of Eliade's early years in Romania see the biography written by the Eliade-student Ricketts (1988); for a more critical interpre-

number of publications, have inspired the ensuing scholars of Religious Studies and other disciplines in various ways – with time and space always playing key roles. Expressions like *sacred time (illud tempus)*, *ab origine*, *repetition and regeneration of time*, *center* and *sacred space* are to be found in many books and articles that altogether compose a complex picture of Eliade’s temporal and spatial concepts. The most central ideas are assembled in *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, which Eliade (2005 [1949], xxix) himself deemed his most important book offering a comprehensive summary of his ideas about man in time, and *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Eliade 1961 [1957]), which elaborates on the sacred-profane-dichotomy in general but focuses on its spatial dimension. In mutual complementation these works provide access to Eliade’s existential research questions regarding his main topic: man and his understanding of the world and the meaning of his own existence.

An analysis of Mircea Eliade’s work and the way it was developed by subsequent generations of scholars can, in fact, offer an important contribution to a discussion of Space/Time Practices from a Religious Studies’ perspective. In order to give such an analysis, this article, in a first step, wants to concisely recapitulate Eliade’s concepts of time and space in relation to human experience and practice. In a second step, Eliade’s standing in the international research in the past and present will be examined. Because the defenses of as well as the attacks on Eliade’s work are just as vast as his work itself, only a limited selection of critiques and current adaptations of Eliadian concepts can be presented. This presentation will include an overview of some of the most important general critiques as well as a focus on one aspect of the review of Eliade’s work: sacred space. In order to develop a new understanding of sacred space, further developments of Eliade’s notions of sacred space will be discussed alongside contemporary studies of space in the Social Sciences that will, finally, lead to a brief discussion of my attempt at theorizing the construction and conception of sacred space.

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## 2. Human Thought and Practice of Time and Space in Eliadian Theory

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### 2.1 Two Modes of Being in the World

Time and space are constant topics in many of Eliade’s studies – not only as a backdrop of his inquiry but as key topics with regard to his principal research

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tation of the links between his (early) life, world-view and works see McCutcheon (1993); Turcanu (2006); Rennie (2006); Berner (2010).

focus on human experience and management of spatial and temporal life conditions. In general, Eliade diagnoses two ways of human dealings with time and space: the archaic and the modern. Eliade operates in many ways with dichotomies and dualisms shaping human life and this one already points to the most important opposition Eliade postulates: the universal distinction between what he calls the “two modes of being in the world” (Eliade 1961, 14), the sacred and the profane. Introducing a “morphology of the sacred”,<sup>3</sup> Eliade describes the sacred as the extraordinary, referring to Rudolph Otto’s (1896-1937) holy as the “‘the wholly other’ (*ganz andere*)” (ibid., 9)<sup>4</sup> which should, however, be examined “in all its complexity, and not only in so far as it is *irrational*” (ibid., 10). In spatial and temporal respects, the sacred comes into being through so called hierophanies, kratophanies or theophanies, which in the case of sacred space are expressed in a more violent language of irruption and breakthrough, whereas discourse about time is dominated by the terms of repetition and recovery (Smith 1972, 138). These manifestations of the sacred found the *real* world in the first place and thereby create a heterogeneous world of sacred spaces and times enclosed by the profane, that is, by ordinary spaces and times. The analysis of the hierophanies which Eliade extracts from traditional tales, stories and myths documented by anthropologists forms the basis of Eliade’s (2005, 3) understanding of the “authentic meaning” of archaic mythology.

The examination of archaic mythology is, therefore, of crucial importance to grasping how the traditional stories convey hierophanic events not as historical situations but as situations which allow man to define his place in the cosmos (Reschika 1997, 58). This definition, however, depends on the individual, since it is not mankind as such that is able to recognize the cosmic heterogeneity between sacred and profane spheres, but only the religious man who shows himself capable of perceiving the sacred. The quality of being aware of sacred phenomena has, for Eliade, declined in the present desacralized modernity, leaving only remnants, for example, in the context of modern ideologies, but also in ordinary acts with special – extraordinary – meaning for the individual. The “man of traditional societies” (Eliade 1961, 15), on the other hand, portrayed by Eliade as the paradigmatic *homo religiosus* comprising so called archaic or primitive societies as well as pre-modernity in general, not only experiences the division of sacred and profane, but also “tends to live as much as possible *in* the sacred or in close proximity to consecrated objects” (ibid., 12).

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<sup>3</sup> The first chapter of *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1958) in which Eliade summarizes his findings about the sacred from earlier books is called “The Structure and Morphology of the Sacred”.

<sup>4</sup> If not stated differently, emphases in quotes are always adopted from the original.

## 2.2 A Life in the Sacred

According to what Eliade (2005, 3) calls the “primitive ontology”, archaic man with all his actions seeks to free himself from “the terror of history” (ibid., 161) by living in the sacred as much as possible because “the *sacred* is equivalent to a *power*, and [...] to *reality* [...]. Thus it is easy to understand that religious man deeply desires *to be*, to participate in *reality*, to be saturated with power” (Eliade 1961, 12f.). Consequently, in order to actually be archaic man needs to ascertain the sacred and abolish the “*unreal*” (ibid.) and meaningless profane as far as possible.

The only way to establish an existence in reality and meaning for archaic man lies in the repetition of divine archetypes:<sup>5</sup> “an object or an act becomes real only insofar as it imitates or repeats an archetype. Thus, reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation” (Eliade 2005, 34). In a mythologically substantiated existence, to become real, human practice in all its conditions depends on the repetition of models provided by divine activities in a mythic time of the beginning, often indicated with the expressions of “*in illo tempore*” or “*ab origine*” (ibid., 4).

Myths, symbols and rites serve as keepers of the memory of these past hierophanies which pass on the knowledge necessary to repeat the celestial models and re-found sacred time and space. For Eliade, the role of human practice and creativity, consequently, only lies in the correct imitation of these given models to establish sacred history and to avoid misfortunes as results of deviation. But still, humans have an active role in the adaptation and appropriation of the given models, although their originality is limited to the literary adaptation of the “transformation of man into archetype” (ibid., 37) in the traditional stories, according to the primitive ontology. Elements of individuality in these stories are eliminated in favor of the mythic “exemplary” (ibid., 44) which frees myths in this way also from the “terror of history” (ibid., 161). The reduction of profane elements cannot be separated from the repetition of ancient archetypes:

Thus we perceive a second aspect of primitive ontology: insofar as an act (or an object) acquires a certain reality through the repetition of certain paradigmatic gestures [...] there is an implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of ‘history’ (ibid., 35).

Although the denial of history signifies an essential characteristic of archaic thought, a complete abolition of history for archaic man is equally impossible. The heterogeneous, paradoxical experience of a life between the sacred and the

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<sup>5</sup> Eliade does not really define the term archetype – just as he does not really define any other central term apart from hints and implications – but occasionally he refers to the Psychologist C. G. Jung and archetypes. The research on archetypes is, however, not limited to Psychology since the scholar of the History of Religions is the one who can truly recognize and understand this symbolism (Reschika 1997, 52ff.).

profane remains since the regeneration of time and abolishment of history is reserved to certain periods of religious activity typically associated with certain rituals. New Year's rites, for instance, represent the periodical regeneration of time which implicitly repeats the "cosmogonic act" (ibid., 52) of creation.

### 2.3 Finding the *Center*

Similar to the need to live in sacred time through repetition and regeneration, archaic man seeks to live in a space that is sacralized as well:

[S]acred space possesses existential value for religious man; for nothing can begin, nothing can be *done*, without a previous orientation – and any orientation implies acquiring a fixed point. It is for this reason that religious man has always sought to fix his abode at the 'center of the world' (Eliade 1961, 22).

The so called *Symbolism of the Center of the World*<sup>6</sup> is one of Eliade's most important notions for explaining the significance of sacred space as the "universal pillar, *axis mundi*, which at once connects and supports heaven and earth" (ibid., 36). From many samples of myths Eliade abstracts the link between the realms in the form of a sacred or cosmic mountain serving as the primal source of orientation for archaic man. And again, in order to live in the sacred as much as possible, every temple – and every sacred country or town – is built and read as an image of that original link, thus becoming a center itself. Sacred spaces are being founded wherever men live so that even every house is conceived as a center that allows archaic man to always live in real space.

The occupation of sacred space – be it constructed spaces like temples or open spaces like groves – is considered equivalent to the creation of the world and therefore requires certain rituals. In a similar way, the discovery and occupation of unknown territory, for example, is also always invested with cosmogonic value entailing special rituals. And again, the rituals associated with the construction of sacred space as well as the construction itself implicate original human activity only in as far as it shapes the terrestrial realm following a celestial model. Sacred space is considered "efficacious in the measure in which *it reproduces the work of the gods*" (ibid., 29).

### 2.4 The Development of the *Primitive Ontology*

A first fundamental alteration of the primitive ontology postulated by Eliade emerges with Hebrew monotheism, especially in the form of the Old Testament

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<sup>6</sup> Smith (1992, 15) suggests that regarding the symbolism of the center Eliade "borrowed" crucial ideas like "the cosmological world-mountain where heaven, earth and underworld are linked, and the replication of this pattern in human acts of construction, in temples and palaces" (ibid.) from the so called Pan-Babylonian school of thought which developed its concepts in the late 19th century after Babylonian and Akkadian texts had become available (Smith 1992, 15f.; 1993, 293).

Prophets. This also includes a new kind of ritual in which Abraham individually offers his son instead of the archaic collective ritual:

His [Isaac's] sacrifice by Abraham, although in form it resembles all the sacrifices of newborn infants in the Paleo-Semitic world, differs from them fundamentally in content. Whereas, for the entire Paleo-Semitic world, such a sacrifice, whose meaning was perfectly intelligible, in Abraham's case it is an act of faith [...] Abraham initiates a new religious experience, faith (Eliade 2005, 109f.).

Despite this beginning of an individual relation to God, elements of the archaic ontology survive insofar as the wish for the abolition of time still remains, but no longer through the cyclical renovation of sacred time, but with messianic or eschatological myths that locate the ultimate abolishment of time in a distant future *in illo tempore* (ibid., 111f.).

Man, with the change to monotheism, re-conceptualizes history profoundly: He does not experience it in cosmic cycles anymore, but increasingly as an irreversible, linear process:

[F]or the first time, we find [...] the idea that historical events have a value in themselves, insofar as they are determined by the will of God. This God of the Jewish people is no longer an Oriental divinity, creator of archetypal gestures, but a personality who ceaselessly intervenes in history [...] Historical facts thus become 'situations' of man in respect to God [...]. [...] the Hebrews were the first to discover the meaning of history as the epiphany of God, and this conception, as we should expect, was taken up and amplified by Christianity (ibid., 104).

For a long time, the concepts of cyclical repetition and linear history existed parallel, but Eliade detects the beginning of the triumph of linearity since the seventeenth century, culminating in the nineteenth and twentieth century's "historicistic philosophies" (ibid., 149) and resulting in the elimination of archaic ontology and periodicity in favor of an autonomy of "historical man" (ibid., 154). Human creativity, now, obtains a different meaning:

[T]he modern man can be creative only insofar as he is historical; in other words, all creation is forbidden him except that which has its source in his own freedom; and, consequently, everything is denied him except the freedom to make history by making himself (ibid., 156).

Modernity's problem, however, is that the historicistic period outlives itself, rendering the freedom of autonomy as an illusion resulting in extremist ideologies. The "terror of history" cannot be escaped unless historical man settles for "a philosophy of freedom that does not exclude God" (ibid., 160).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Smith (2005, xix) sees Eliade as "deeply ambivalent" with regard to Christianity, which he on the one hand sees as the "religion of 'fallen man'" (Eliade 2005, 162) because of its involvement in the making of modernity. On the other hand, knowing that the original, the archaic way of living cannot be revived, he considers the idea of a monotheist God the only way to avoid the "terror of history" (ibid., 139ff.).

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### 3. Methodological Considerations

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Eliade links his morphology of the sacred and the analysis of the development of human ontology to examples of religious phenomena from very different and distant geographical backgrounds, covering so called primitive societies as well as modern crypto-religious developments. For the most part, it is the Australian aboriginal culture from which Eliade derives his most elementary concepts to interpret them as one of the main representatives of the primitive *homo religiosus*. Thus, Eliade offers a new kind of understanding of such primitive cultures that no longer sees them as mere remnants from the past still waiting for historical progress but somewhat nostalgically and romantically as representing the original mode of human existence which implicitly and deeply depreciates modernity (McCutcheon 1993, 655). The exemplary traditional myths and stories Eliade uses are samples from ethnographic studies in many different languages, and he presents them in short quotations just containing the relevant passages underlining his argumentation that reveals history as a series of hierophanies manifesting the sacred. As an historian of religion, therefore, Eliade sees his task in the deduction and analysis of the timeless deeper essence, structure and meaning hierophanies hold for human thought as such so that chronological, geographical and cultural contexts become expendable (Smith 2005, xii).

In this kind of understanding of history of religion Eliade follows – besides the already mentioned German Protestant theologian Rudolph Otto who wrote about the irrational within the holy – the most important representative of the phenomenology of religion, the Dutch Protestant theologian Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950) (Reschika 1997, 57). Although not identifying himself as an adherent of phenomenology, Eliade uses its methods quite obviously to compare religious phenomena to come to their real, trans-historical meaning for mankind. Thus, Eliade's interest is set not only on studying history as a chain of hierophanic events, but on the history of the meaning these events gained for human experience and practice to eventually trace the evolution of human thought (Leach 2006, 279).

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### 4. Academic Appraisal

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Eliade's works have earned a lot of attention for their diverse (though still related) contents as well as for his literary way of presenting them. It is undeniable that he and his style of writing helped Religious Studies reach an extended audience beyond disciplinary borders and a strict scholarly public. Especially after becoming professor at Chicago Divinity School in 1957 and with the establishment of the so called school of History of Religions, Eliade was able



to spread his kind of understanding of religion and history – with *The Myth of the Eternal Return* and *The Sacred and the Profane* serving almost as classics (Smith 2005, xii). However, the opponents to his theories were just as dedicated to criticizing him as were his followers and students to defending him. But although still today within academics his standing is debated, the strong and lasting effects he had on the following generations of scholars are undeniable (McCutcheon 1993, 650).

The critiques of Eliade's work concern many different aspects of his research, broadly starting with its contents up to its theoretical implications and methodology. A very early, and probably the harshest critique in the form of a principal rejection, was put forward by the British social anthropologist Edmund Leach,<sup>8</sup> who sees Eliade preaching like a prophet or theologian instead of researching like a Religious Studies scholar. Leach's (2006) fundamental review covers various facets of Eliade's work, from his methods, his unsystematic (and wrong) argumentation and not clearly defined terminology to his selective and partly outdated choice of primary and secondary sources. He rejects Eliade's conception of history and especially controverts the general applicability and structural resemblance of the postulated cosmological pattern of the primitive ontology. Also, Leach (2006, 279) denies the "radical discordance between Christian cosmology and cyclical notions of time", as well as the comparative method of deducting generalizations from samples of sources collected and published by other anthropologists, for Eliade himself had no personal field work experience apart from the Indian context (ibid., 281).

Many of the points Leach mentioned were soon taken up, elaborated and enhanced by other scholars with different fields of specialization. John A. Saliba,<sup>9</sup> for example, also doubts the anthropological data base from which Eliade comes to his conclusions, especially with regard to the postulate of the *homo religiosus*. The critiques put forward by the German historian of religion Kurt Rudolph (1984) and Robert D. Baird (1970; 1991) go in a similar direction by negating the principal existence of an archaic *homo religiosus* and a related ontology. They also see Eliade – but not necessarily in a negative way –

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<sup>8</sup> Leach's (1962) article *Sermons by a Man on a Ladder* was published as a review of Eliade's (1979) *The Two and the One*, but also refers to other works. It first appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, vol. VII, 1966, 28–31. The version used here is part of the extensive volume *Mircea Eliade. A Critical Reader*, edited by Bryan S. Rennie (2006) in which he collected essays and chapters from Eliade's work as well as the most important critiques under several foci.

<sup>9</sup> John A. Saliba is himself a Jesuit priest and scholar of religious studies with anthropological interest. His critique of Eliade's *religious man* can be found in his volume *Homo Religiosus in Mircea Eliade* (Saliba 1976a) as well as in his articles *Eliade's View of Primitive Man: Some Anthropological Reflections* (1976b) and *Homo Religiosus in the Thought of Mircea Eliade* (2006).

not as an objective scholar of Religious Studies but more as a theologian with a clear normative claim.<sup>10</sup>

One of Eliade's students as well as his biographer and occasional translator, Mac Linscott Ricketts, formulated one of the answers to the many critiques. He tried to overcome what he deemed misunderstandings, for example, regarding the reproach of theological normativism, between some anthropologists – mainly with reference to Leach – and Eliade's history of religions in his programmatic essay *In Defense of Eliade*.<sup>11</sup>

Ulrich Berner (2010, 352), a German historian of religions, is right when he interprets this scholarly debate as a fundamental controversy about the scientific character of Eliade's approach together with the phenomenological one in general. This fundamental debate obtained, moreover, a new dimension when the scholar of Religious Studies Ivan Strenski (1987) first took Eliade's political past and the subsequent implications in Eliade's work into account. In his article *The Myth of the Apolitical Scholar* in which he gives an introduction to Eliade's life as well as work, the scholar of Religious Studies Russell T. McCutcheon emphasizes Strenski's assessment to come to the conclusion that at least some of Eliade's postulates, like the negative evaluation of modernity, could not be separated from his biographical background and political attitude:

Eliade sought to authorize a very particular understanding of contemporary history and politics by legitimizing it through appeals to a supposed golden past. Therefore, his constant emphasis upon the category of the 'archaic' is not so much evidence of an interest in such things as aboriginal societies as it is a *codeword* for his conservative world-view (McCutcheon 1993, 657).<sup>12</sup>

Eventually, McCutcheon finds himself wondering about the attraction Eliade still holds for students and scholars of religions (*ibid.*, 659). But, as already mentioned, this appeal seems undeniable. Berner, for instance, still considers a differentiated way of working with Eliade worthwhile insofar as it avoids the meta-scientific decision for or against his approach. Instead, different single aspects of Eliade's work, like the presentation and interpretation of religious phenomena, his explanations or the demarcation to other disciplines, could be subject to analysis. A central requirement for such a treatment, however, lies in an understanding of the sacred not in ontological terms but as anthropological

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<sup>10</sup> Apart from the most common reproaches against Eliade that are being cited here there are, of course, many more works dealing with Eliade, for example Dudley (1976), Smart (1978), Olson (1992), and Allen (1994). For a detailed overview see Rennie (1996, 119-212).

<sup>11</sup> Ricketts did his second Master's Degree in 1962 at the Divinity School in Chicago. Afterwards he taught History of Religions, translated both scholarly and fantastic literature authored by Eliade and published a lot further developing and defending Eliade's work. *In Defense of Eliade* first appeared in 1973.

<sup>12</sup> McCutcheon (1993, 660), moreover, explains Eliade's engagement at Chicago Divinity School with his political attitude that accommodated Cold War America with its need for psychic and physical security.

data giving (verifiable or falsifiable) hints about how people have interpreted religious phenomena in the past (Berner 2010, 352f.).

One of the scholars to have critically discussed Eliade in both ways relatively early was Jonathan Z. Smith.<sup>13</sup> He has been dealing with Eliade's theories for very long, starting with a critical appraisal and commentary in the essay *The Wobbling Pivot* in which he recaps Eliade's theory about sacred time and space and considers the relation of chaos and the profane, a wider understanding of the center-symbolism, the role of periphery, the interpretation of myths and the potential for a change of Eliade's dualist patterns.

With regard to sacred space and human relations to it, Smith develops on the basis of his critique as well as new treatments of Eliade's sources his own interpretation. Smith acknowledges Eliade's deduction of the "archaic ontology" from "the great imperial cosmologies of Eurasia and Mesoamerica" (Smith 2005, xiii) with their centrality of the king-god, but he does not affirm the universality of this ontology claimed by Eliade and sees the flaw in not clearly explaining his method of interpretation (ibid., xii).

Based on an alternative reading of the archaic mythology Smith counters Eliade's substantial, i.e. essential, understanding of sacredness with his own situational view. Smith reverses Eliade's reading after which earthly structures are built after celestial images turning the celestial structures into copies of earthly models. Sacredness, for Smith, is not the result of a hierophany, but effectively the product of the human labor of sacralization. Although Eliade himself accepts the heterogeneous nature of things insofar as only the religious man can recognize their sacred character (Eliade 1961, 12), Smith, however, principally doubts this sacred character by relating his conception of the sacred to Émile Durkheim's (1858-1917) sociological usage. In Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (2008 [1912]), in which for the first time the sacred is actually used as a noun, he provides a sociological analysis of religion. Even though Durkheim claims the duality of the sacred and the profane as the crucial characteristic for all kinds of religion, the nature of this duality is not an ontological or essential one. Sacred and profane both come to existence only through societal attribution. Smith supports the understanding of the sacred as a social construct and interprets sacred space in this reading as a way to focus attention:

The temple serves as a focusing lens, establishing the possibility of significance by directing attention, by requiring the perception of difference. Within the temple, the ordinary (which to any outside eye or ear remains wholly ordi-

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<sup>13</sup> Smith is a historian of religions and counts theory of ritual as well as Hellenistic religions among his fields of specialty. His first article dealing with Eliade was *The Wobbling Pivot* (1972); after that, he published other texts developing his own understanding of sacred space and ritual theory on the basis of a critique of Eliade's work, most important: *Map is not Territory* (1993 [1978]) and *To Take Place* (1992 [1987]).

nary) becomes significant, becomes 'sacred', simply by being there. A ritual object or action becomes sacred by having attention focused on it in a highly marked way. From such a point of view, there is nothing that is inherently sacred or profane. These are not substantive categories, but rather situational ones. Sacrality is, above all, a category of emplacement (Smith 1992, 104).

Ritual, then, denotes not a reaction to a hierophany but the human creation of sacredness: "Ritual is not an expression of or a response to 'the Sacred'; rather, something or someone is made sacred by ritual" (ibid., 105). Smith thus conceives the role of human practice and creativity totally different from Eliade, since for him it is man who *actively* creates not only his terrestrial sacred spaces but also their celestial references.

This understanding of sacred space as a social creation offers the possibility to analyze exactly these processes of the human labor of sacralization. Accordingly, Smith traces the emergence of sacred spaces in early Christendom which depend mainly on places that are connected with the memory of Jesus and the Apostles. But the work of sacralization is not only based on memory and attention; Smith also mentions the design, construction and the placement of people as criteria to analyze perceived sacredness (ibid., 47-73). By introducing the human agenda and politics into the analysis of sacred space, Smith simultaneously ends the absolute opposition of sacred and profane spheres.<sup>14</sup>

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## 5. Recent Strands of Adaption

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This advance in the theory of sacred space is currently being pursued by several scholars: David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, Jeanne Halgren Kilde and Kim Knott, for example, have tried to establish different detailed methodologies to analyze sacred space and adapt them to their respective case studies – with the combination of situational and substantial views as integral dimensions of analysis.<sup>15</sup> In their examination of contemporary *American Sacred Space* Chidester and Linenthal (1995) refer not only to "an opposition between 'insider' [believer] and 'outsider' [non-believer, scholar] perspectives [but to a] clash between [...] what might be called the poetics and politics of sacred space" (Chidester and Linenthal 1995, 6). In her analysis of "the form, function and meaning of [early] Christian worship spaces" (Kilde 2008, 10), Kilde, furthermore, emphasizes the importance of the scholarly ability "to negotiate

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<sup>14</sup> After a new investigation of Eliade's primary sources Smith also interprets the symbolism of center less as a religious phenomenon as more like a political one further indicating the political dimension of sacred space – already based on the original texts. With this deconstruction of the universality of the symbolism of the center Smith (1992, 16f.) reverses the burden of proof so that every single case has to be evaluated.

<sup>15</sup> For further contemporary studies dealing with the sacred and sacred space see Knott (2010).

between these perspectives, retaining the analytical character of the situational view while remaining cognizant of the power of the substantive view (ibid., 8).

Besides such detailed studies in historical and comparative perspectives, Knott represents attempts to expand the theoretical and methodological basis of a spatial approach for Religious Studies. For her methodology of religion and space Knott uses insights gained throughout the so called Spatial Turn.<sup>16</sup> In her *The Location of Religion* she develops a theoretically elaborated approach in order to find the location of religion and of the sacred in modern societies (Knott, 2005; Knott 2009) and hints at the profits Religious Studies can gain from an informed spatial analysis (Knott 2010, 488).

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## 6. Analyzing Concepts of Spatial Sacrality

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In my study on the Mezquita-Catedral of Córdoba, Spain, and its history as Muslim and Christian sacred space,<sup>17</sup> I also want to use the potentials offered by a combination of Religious Studies with Social Sciences spatial analysis. The basis of the substantial and situational views of sacred space are thereby complemented by the spatial approach elaborated by the German sociologist Martina Löw (2001) who offers a theory of the constitution of space in her *Raumsoziologie*. Löw (2008, 35) presents space as a „relational ordering of social goods and people” and differentiates

[t]wo basic processes of space construction [...]. First, space is constituted by the situating of social goods and people and/or the positioning of primarily symbolic markings in order to render ensembles of goods and people recognizable as such. *Spacing* [...] is positioning in relation to other positionings. Second, the constitution of space also requires synthesis, that is to say, goods and people are connected to form spaces through processes of perception, ideation, or recall (ibid.).

Löw conceptualizes space as a relational order of living beings and social goods which means that space is not just there but that it only comes into existence as an order of people and goods as well as their interrelations at a marked place. Although this combination is experienced as an objective order, it still remains a social arrangement. Löw identifies the so called spacing and the

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<sup>16</sup> See the introduction by Dorsch (2013) in this volume.

<sup>17</sup> The Mezquita-Catedral was founded as a mosque soon after the establishment of the Emirate of Córdoba in 784 and was in the following centuries expanded and redecored several times. After the Castile conquest of Córdoba in 1236 the mosque was consecrated as a church. Fundamental alterations occurred in the following centuries, culminating in the installation of a Renaissance Cathedral (Dodds 1992; Cresswell 1989). With its Muslim and Christian history, the preserved structures and the, at least for certain periods, good body of source material, the building can serve as a fit case study for research about the development and comparison of sacred space.

individual synthesizing as the two important processes in the constitution of space actively performed by humans. Spacing denotes the placement of living things and social goods, whereas the synthesizing of these to space means individual and collective processes of reception, imagination and recollection. Together, these processes constitute the active individual and collective production and reproduction of space which can contribute to the construction and consolidation of societal structures. This is only possible, however, if spatial structures are secured by institutional rules and resources.

Another key aspect of Löw's concept of the constitution of space lies in the creation of atmospheres which shape the individual and collective synthesizing perception of space:

Atmospheres are [...] the external effect of social goods and human beings realized perceptually in their spatial ordering. This means that atmospheres arise through the perception of interactions between people and/or from the external effect of social goods in their arrangement (2008, 44).

Atmospheres emerge out of the spatial order and also include the potential of being intentionally staged to evoke certain effects.

The aim of my study, now, is a methodological combination of Löw's understanding of the emergence of space with the described Religious Studies background of sacred space, foremost represented by the studies of Eliade and Smith. With the help of certain criteria, the social constitution of sacred space can be traced: Following the division of the "poetics and politics of sacred space", the first step of such an analysis consists in the examination of the believer's "insider perspective" by abstracting the image(s) of sacred space transported by the constitutive texts of the respective religion. Do we find a center-mythology as Eliade describes it, or is sacred space conceived in a different way? And do the Holy Scriptures and other important texts draw a homogenous picture of sacred space?

Concerning the architectural and liturgical realization of the sacred space, a first question, as Smith aptly put it, can deal with the meaning that is associated with the locus of the building and its prehistory. In accordance with Löw, this can be followed by an investigation of the concrete spatial order of the building, which initially requires a recapitulation of the present living beings and social goods and their interrelations as well as their arrangement. On the one hand, that implies research on the religious community using the building and, on the other hand, this also entails taking the architectural décor with its materials into account, with the present furniture and inscriptions. Based on that, it is possible to discuss the staged atmosphere with its axiality, light and sound effects, etc. and the way this atmosphere can influence the substantial view of the sacred space and the religion in general.

The question of usage can subsequently be tackled to explore the various functions the building fulfills. What functions are allowed and how do their purposes change the relational order of the space? An investigation of the dis-

tribution of people in all the functions is, as Smith shows, necessary to interpret the functions rightly but also to evaluate the societal interrelations within the present (as well as the absentee) community. Who is there? And who is allowed to be where exactly in the building? This question leads to the societal structures in which the sacred space is embedded. What rules and resources secure the space in a certain way, and who formulates and respectively executes these regulations? Putting these spaces in relation to the actual human practices in the space also allows us to take into account the possibilities and realizations of changes.

The possibility of an analysis of spatial sacrality on the source basis of a building and written sources was already suggested by Schwerhoff (2008) who put forward an analysis of religious spaces of the late Medieval and Early Modern Period. Instead of the essentialist sacred-profane-dichotomy, he introduces the idea of the management of sacrality that assumes different conceptions of sacrality in different contexts and, accordingly, different architectural realizations. Schwerhoff also proposed the idea of a comparison of specific concepts and forms of spatial sacrality, and this is what I execute in order to gain a deeper understanding of the religion in a specific historical context.<sup>18</sup>

In my view, this kind of analysis of the constitution of sacred space and inherent concepts of spatial sacrality can profit from all the strengths of the above mentioned approaches insofar as both the substantial and situational views of sacred space play important roles in the analysis. The refusal of ontological postulations paves the way for a decidedly social way of looking at the constitution of sacred space, including the dimensions of the ordering as well as the active perceiving by, for instance, an individual believer who is not just passive spectator but an active part of the constitution of space.

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## 7. Conclusion

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Despite all the criticism of Eliade's work, his contribution to the development of Religious Studies in the twentieth century should not be underestimated. As we have seen with regard to sacred space – and as a discussion of other facets of Eliade's theories like that of sacred time or his understanding of human practice and creativity would have shown – Eliade was not only the one who re-introduced a spatial understanding of religion as a significant topic of theoretical and critical inquiry after van der Leeuw had already discussed it in the 1920s. Eliade's ideas and central axioms about sacred space – for example, the center or axis mundi as the connection between the different realms enabling

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<sup>18</sup> With respect to the limited space in this article the research design of my analysis of concepts of spatial sacrality associated with the help of the case study of the Mezquita-Cathedral can only be outlined here.

communication between them – have, moreover, provided the frame of reference, positive and negative alike, for subsequent scholars (Knott 2010, 479f.).

Eliade still offers valuable insights into the poetics of sacred space and the believers' take on it, but a fruitful development of these insights is only possible on the basis of a research inspired by and about Eliade which is beyond ideologies. As this article has tried to show with a sample of current studies that deal with Eliade in this way but at the same time creatively enriching him with other approaches, it is feasible to use and develop elements of Eliade's theories. In this way, it is possible to understand sacred spaces as human practice and analyze the question of how men create and experience space by complementing Eliade and his following scholars – culturally oriented Religious Studies and their conceptions of sacred space can indeed profit from such an approach.

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