

Sacred Geography HPCA 7014

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Sacred Geography emerged into Western academic thought as earlier as 1935 when Rene Guenon, French esotericist used the term, possible for the first time, when writing about the Glastonbury, UK, landscape.

See Guenon's paper, 'The Land of the Sun'

http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com/Public/articles/The_Land_of_the_Sun-by_Ren%C3%A9_Gu%C3%A9non.aspx

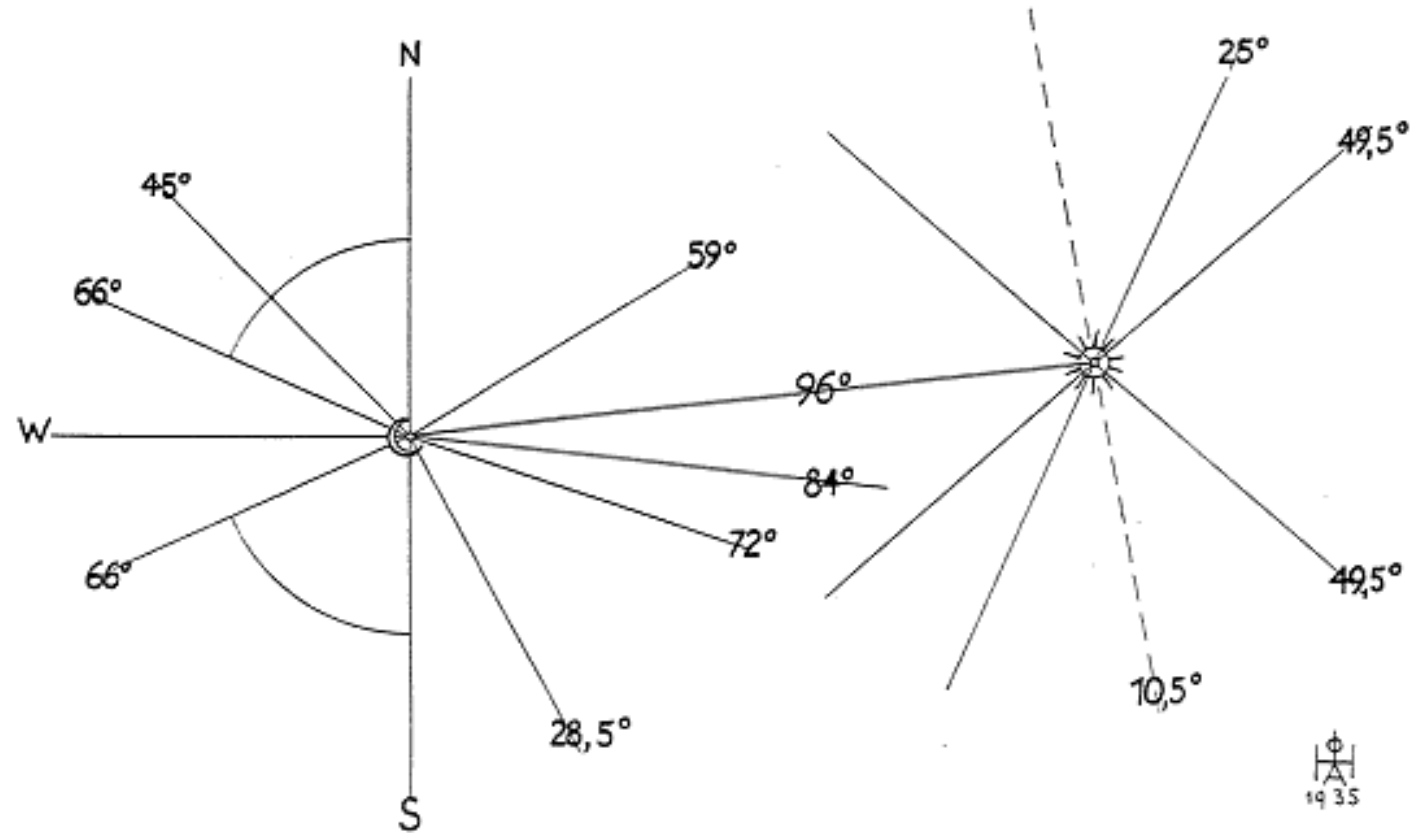
The notion of Sacred Geography emerged from the recent advent of aviation and the ability to view sites from the air. His work tended to be focused on the geometry of sacred cities, which we will deal with in Week 8.

Guenon's work also fueled geopolitical ideas which considers the tension between east and west as a struggle for the expansion of a sacred landscape.

In 1939 Josef Heinsch, a German town planner, wrote a paper on the value to modern town planning of fitting in with alignments of ancient sites. His followers became known as the 'Straight Track Club'.

You can read his paper here:

https://www.cantab.net/users/michael.behrend/repubs/ggw/heinsch_gvkg/pages/gvkg_en.html

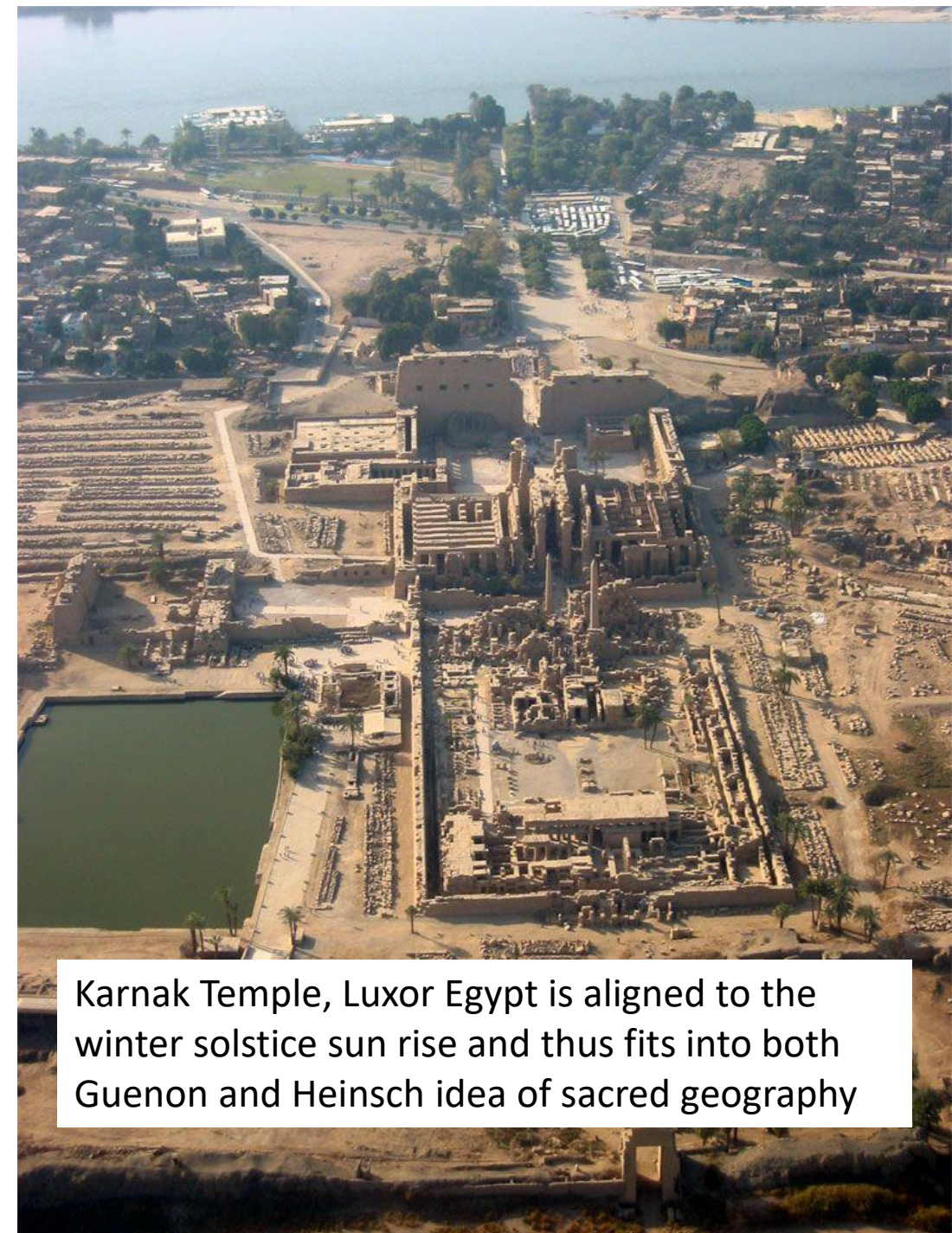


Heinsch: "Basic plan of the holy hill / solar site orientation"

These two early definitions or uses of Sacred Geography

Rene Guenon used the term sacred geography to describe a landscape that has been enhanced in some way (possibly even with earth works) but which also contained religious structures – thus a landscape made or enhanced by humans.

Josef Heinsch held similar views and suggested that a landscape could be viewed as an example of sacred geography when it allowed a structure to ‘draw in’ sacredness through aligning itself with either ancient sites or natural (solar) sky phenomena. Thus a landscape magnified or enhanced by human activity.



Karnak Temple, Luxor Egypt is aligned to the winter solstice sun rise and thus fits into both Guenon and Heinsch idea of sacred geography

Johann Wolfgang Goethe wrote:

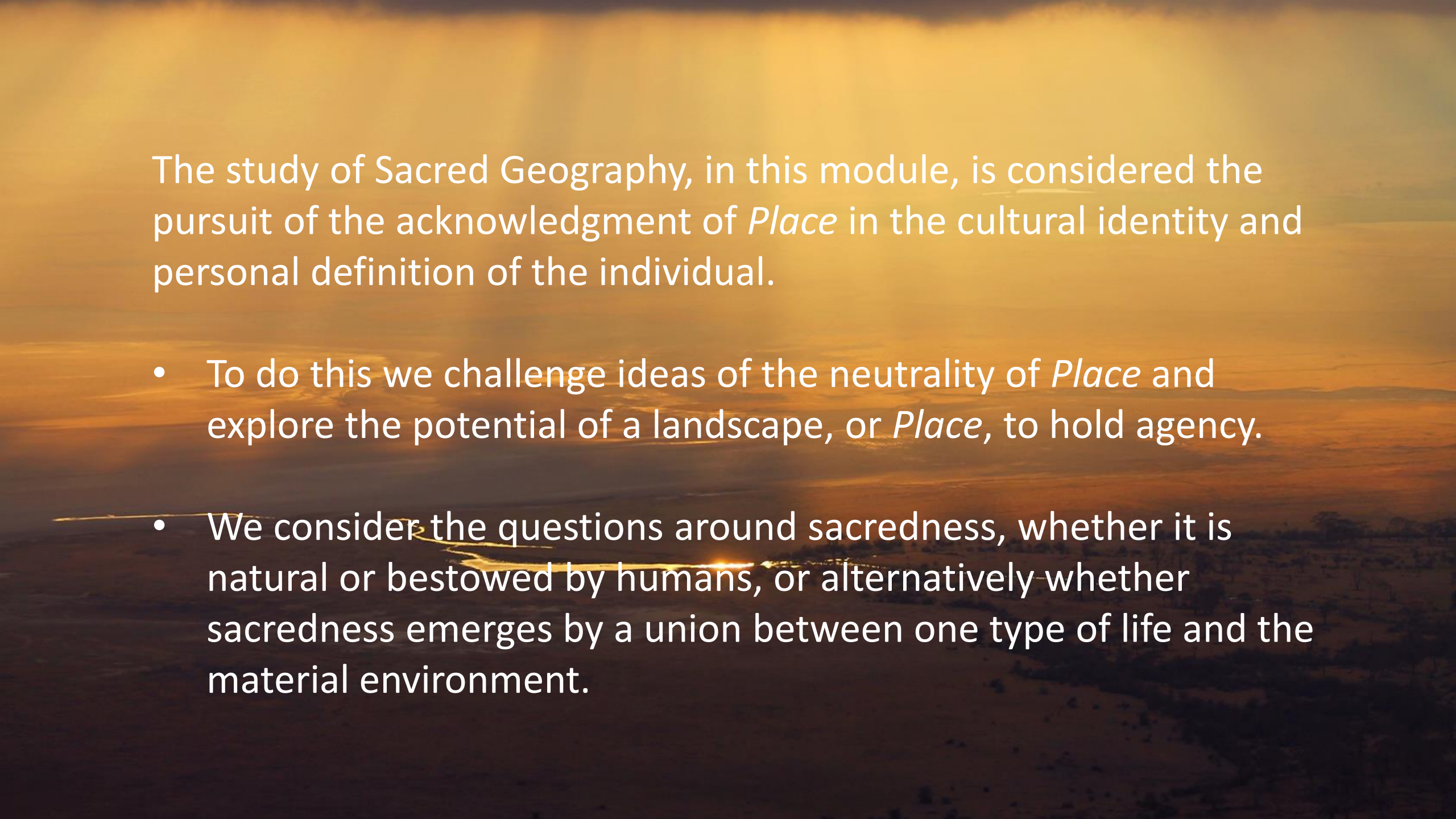
‘The human being only knows herself as far as she knows the world, which she only becomes aware of in herself, and only in the world she becomes aware of herself.’



Johann Wolfgang
Goethe 1749-1832

Sigurd Bergman in the introduction to *Nature, Space and the Sacred*, comments that Goethe rejected the classical imperative ‘Know yourself!’ Goethe considered it a **piece of occult cunning designed to confuse people and to delude them with a false introspectiveness leading their senses away from the environment.**

Bergman’s introduction can be found in Google Books
<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=ei5-K9p1p4UC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>

The background of the slide is a photograph of a landscape during the 'golden hour' of sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with soft, warm light in shades of orange and yellow, with some wispy clouds. Below the horizon, a river or a similar body of water winds its way through a dark, silhouetted landscape. The overall mood is serene and contemplative, which complements the philosophical nature of the text.

The study of Sacred Geography, in this module, is considered the pursuit of the acknowledgment of *Place* in the cultural identity and personal definition of the individual.

- To do this we challenge ideas of the neutrality of *Place* and explore the potential of a landscape, or *Place*, to hold agency.
- We consider the questions around sacredness, whether it is natural or bestowed by humans, or alternatively whether sacredness emerges by a union between one type of life and the material environment.





Small Caves and Sacred Geography: A Case Study from the Prehispanic Maya Site of Maax Na, Belize

King, Eleanor M ; Brady, James E ; Shaw, Leslie C ; Cobb, Allan B ; Kieffer, C. L ; Brennan, Michael L ; Harris, Chandra L



The Sacred Geography of Bangkok's Markets

WILSON, ARA
Oxford, UK: Wiley



Stone over Stone, where was the man? Perception and meaning of the stone in the sacred geography in andean societies

Luis Galdames Rosas ; Alberto Díaz Araya
Universidad de Buenos Aires
Runa (Buenos Aires, Argentina), 2015-12-01, Vol.36 (2), p.5-23



In Search of a Navajo Sacred Geography

Blake, Kevin S

Oxford, UK: Taylor & Francis

Geographical review, 2001-10-01, Vol.91 (4), p.715-724



Sacred Geography in Medieval India: The Case of the Twelve "Jyotirlingas"

Benjamin J. Fleming

Dordrecht: Springer

International journal of Hindu studies, 2009-04-01, Vol.13 (1), p.51-81



Symbolism, Sacred Geography and the Ethiopian Church

Heldman, Marilyn E

The Netherlands: BRILL

Journal of Religion in Africa, 1992, Vol.22 (3), p.222-241

Key Text and Leganto

Judith Bell – Doing your Research Project – eBook

Belden Lane – *Landscape of the Sacred*: need to buy

Tim Ingold – *Lines* eBook in library

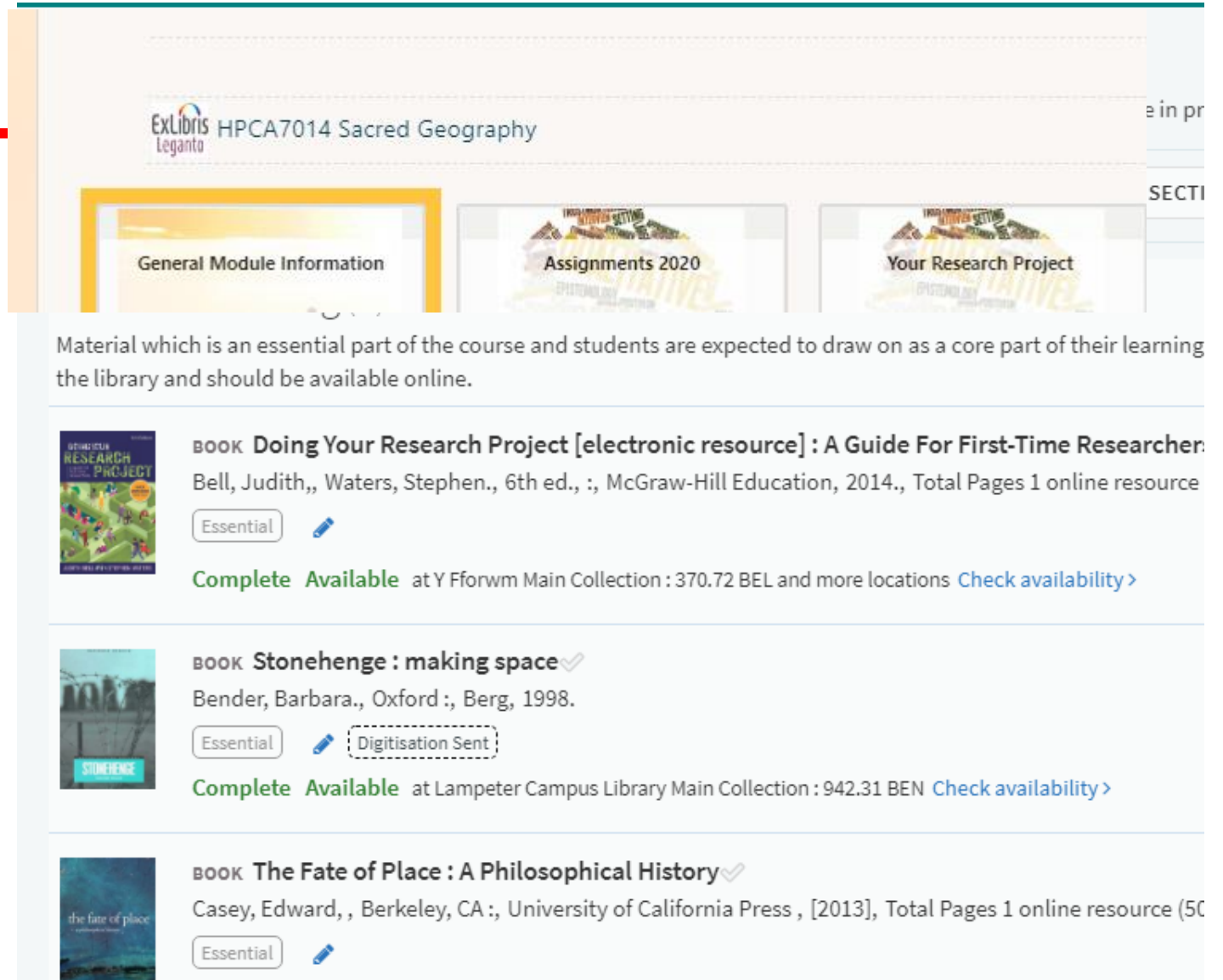
Mircea Eliade – *The Sacred and Profane* – eBook

Durkheim – *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, in Week 3

Barbara Bender – *Stonehenge*, PDF under Week 2

Christopher Tilley – *Phenomenology of landscape*, PDF under Week 2

Edward Casey – *The Fate of Place* - eBook



ExLibris Leganto HPCA7014 Sacred Geography

General Module Information Assignments 2020 Your Research Project

Material which is an essential part of the course and students are expected to draw on as a core part of their learning the library and should be available online.

BOOK Doing Your Research Project [electronic resource] : A Guide For First-Time Researchers
Bell, Judith., Waters, Stephen., 6th ed., :, McGraw-Hill Education, 2014., Total Pages 1 online resource
Essential 
Complete Available at Y Fforwm Main Collection : 370.72 BEL and more locations [Check availability >](#)

BOOK Stonehenge : making space ✓
Bender, Barbara., Oxford :, Berg, 1998.
Essential  Digitisation Sent
Complete Available at Lampeter Campus Library Main Collection : 942.31 BEN [Check availability >](#)

BOOK The Fate of Place : A Philosophical History ✓
Casey, Edward., Berkeley, CA :, University of California Press , [2013], Total Pages 1 online resource (50
Essential 

Assignments

Assignment 1: 2250 Words. For this assignment you need to compare and contrast two secondary sources. Choose one of the following titles:

1. Compare and critically contrast Mircea Eliade and Emile Durkheim's views of sacred space.
2. Is Barbara Bender's theory of contested space complemented by Christopher Tilley's phenomenological perspective?

Full guidance is given in the Sacred Geography Assessment Specifications in this Moodle Topic.

Assignment 2: 5250 words.

Is sacred space a human construct or a natural phenomenon? Discuss this question through a research project with reference to the work of at least three theorists.

You will discuss your research project on the forum and will also need to have your research project accepted by a tutor via submitting a Research Proposal Form Full guidance is given in the Sacred Geography Assessment Specifications in this Moodle Topic.

Émile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade

Dr Bernadette Brady
MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology
Faculty of Humanities and the Performing Arts
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Lampeter, Wales.

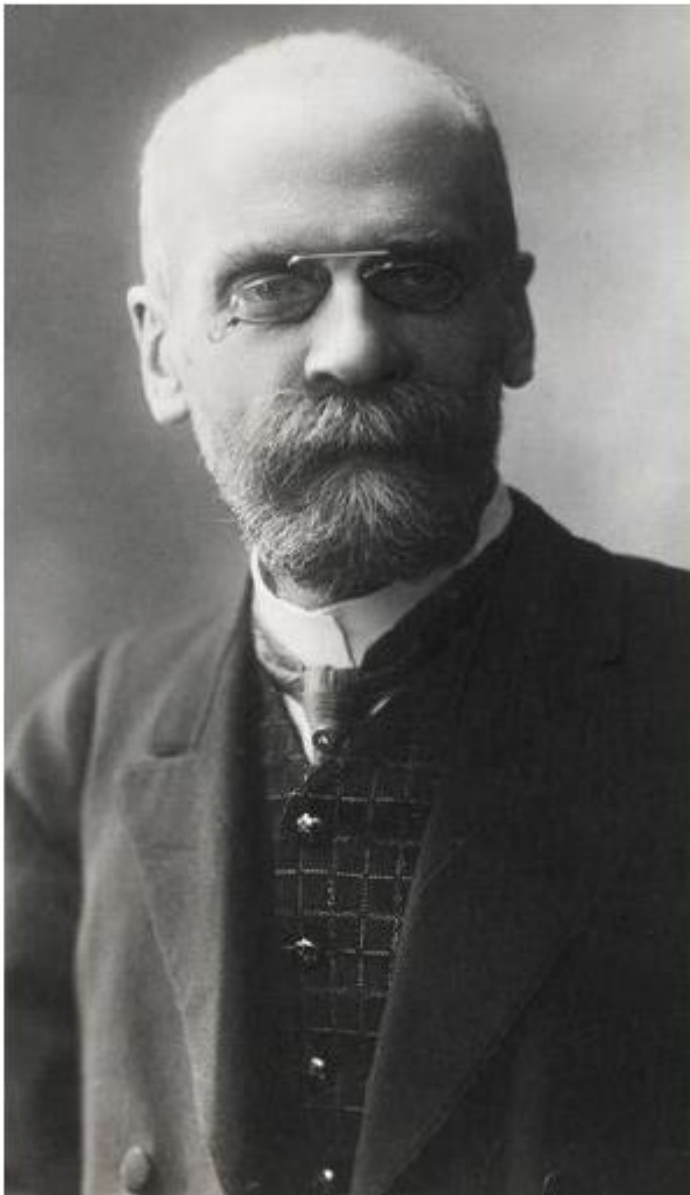


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David Émile Durkheim

April 15, 1858 – November 15, 1917

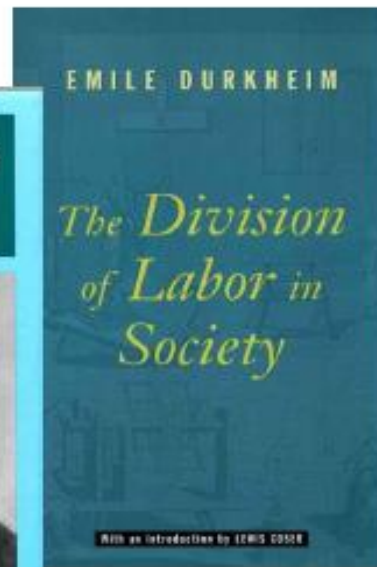
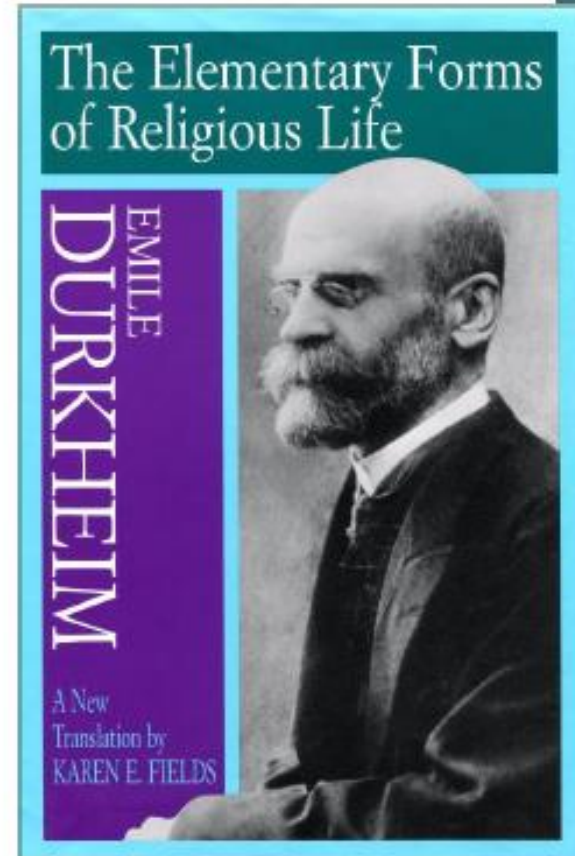




His major works:

- The Division of Labor in Society
- Suicide
- The Elementary Forms of Religious Life

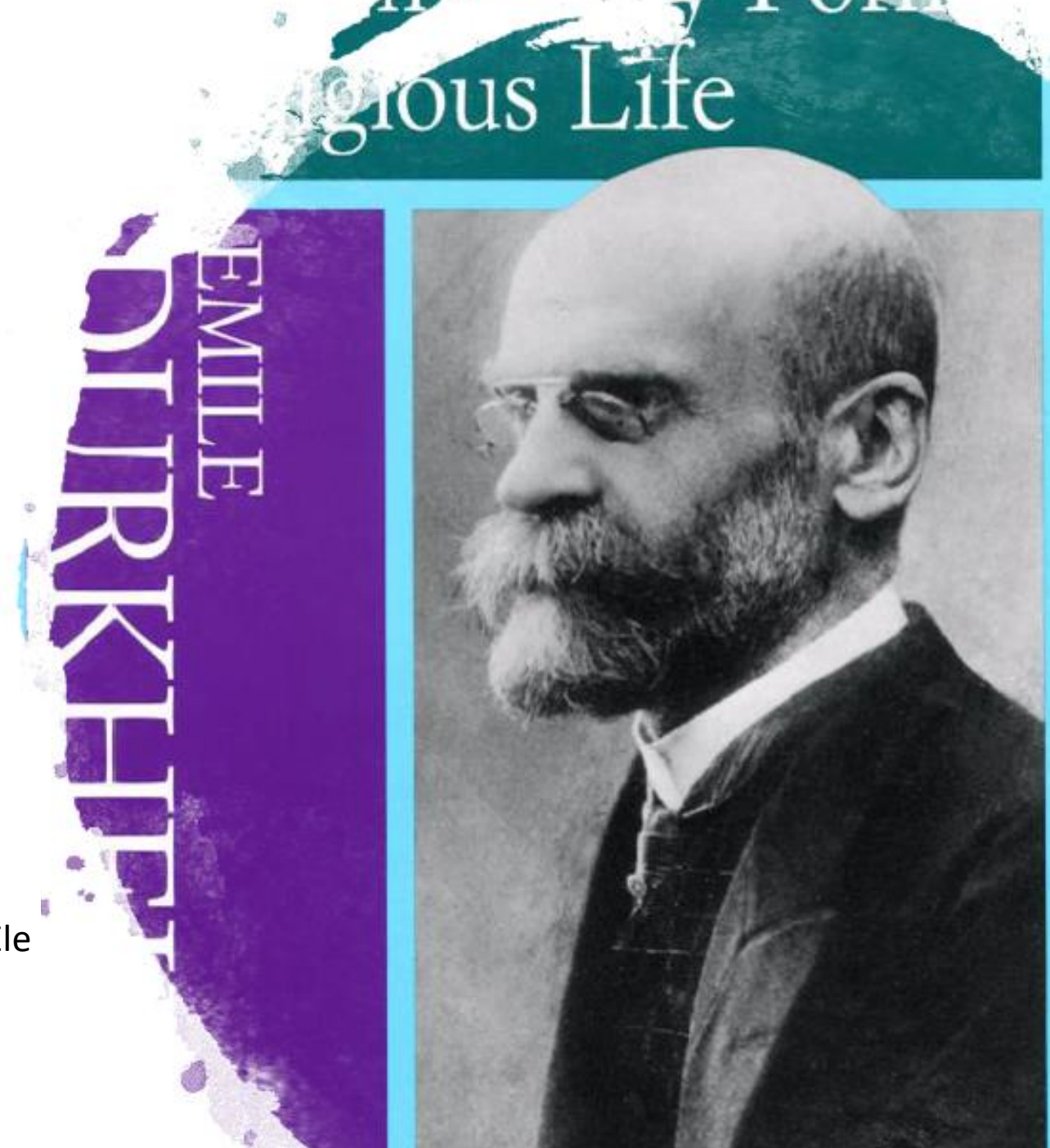
This latter work is also known as 'Forms' and is the work which is relevant for our approach to sacred geography.



Durkheim - Forms

In **Week 3** there is a link to the translator's introduction to Forms, but also you can follow the link below if you wish to see the entire book.

https://monoskop.org/images/a/a2/Durkheim_Emile_The_Elementary_Forms_of_Religious_life_1995.pdf



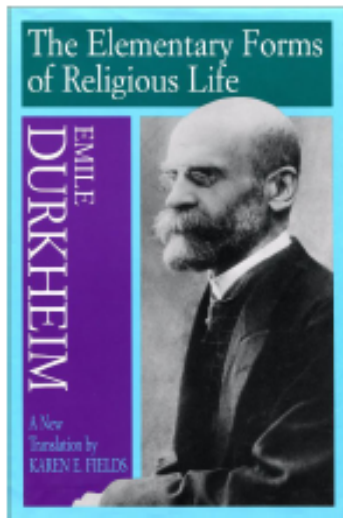
Émile Durkheim

A French sociologist who is considered to have been one of the founders of the discipline of sociology. He was concerned with the ways in which **society maintain its own cohesiveness in the face of change**, such as incoming modernity/capitalisms. He considered that the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time of increasing ethnic diversity in communities and personal freedoms while at the same the notion of shared ideas on religion could no longer be considered a central binding force of a society.

Based on Comte's work his drive was to establish sociology as a science well **embedded in the evidence of how society functioned**. In this regard he saw society as potentially separate to the individuals it contained. He used the term collective consciousness for this separate feature of society. Kenneth Allen defined this as, 'The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own. It can be termed the **collective or common consciousness**.' [1]

Émile Durkheim on Collective Consciousness and Soul

'The conscience collective is the achievement of mind that transfigures the real world and makes it a shared world that is in fact the real world as known and knowable by some group, some moral community.' (Field, *Forms*, p.xlvii).

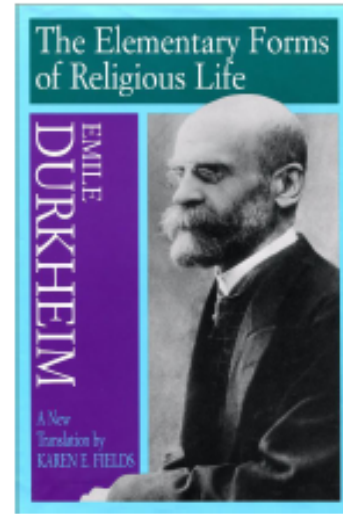


The idea of soul is needed to account for aspects of our human experience. To extend the idea of sacredness into landscape, into nature, is a way that humanity has made room for nature in society, made room for nature in our collective life or moral community. (rewording of Durkheim from Field p.1)

Thus according to Durkheim the human need for soul creates sacred landscapes or sacred geography.

Émile Durkheim

Durkheim sought to understand the nature and influence of religion and he did this by considering anthropological reports of indigenous people, most notable those from Australia. By studying such groups he hoped to find the **essence or bases which allowed for the belief that a place or object was sacred.**



‘Nature was for them the great surprise and the great fear; it was a permanent marvel and a permanent miracle.’

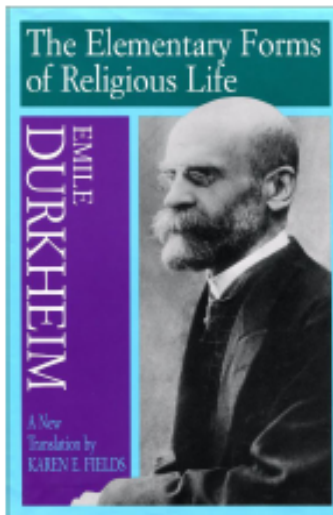
Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 71.

Émile Durkheim

Karen Field, the translator and editor of one of the English editions of *Forms* describe Durkheim's reasoning on how sacredness was gained by a place or object. Durkheim, coming from a position of positivism, believed that:

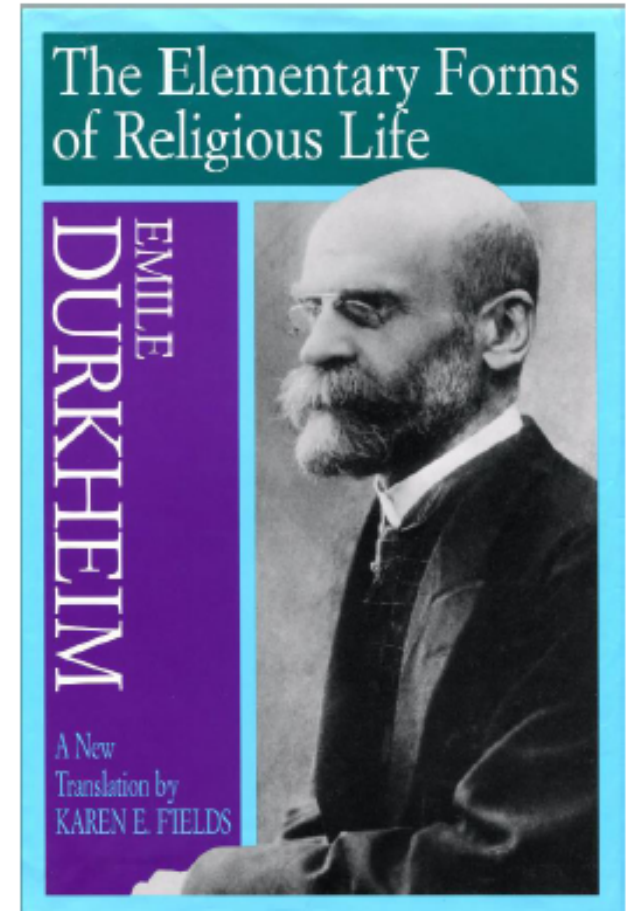
nonphysical attributes **can only exist in the individual mind**, then the mind must participate in this meaning to maintain it. Thus sacredness, according to Durkheim, 'is inherently impermanent and so must be added to the object again and again, just as it was originally; by collective human doing.' (Field, *Forms*, p.xliv).

Thus for Durkheim ritual and belief re-makes sacredness every time it engages with the object or the process. Hence the devoted follower who goes to church or the temple every week may not experience the sacred every week but does, by his or her actions, remake the sacred for their collective consciousness.



In order to help the making of the sacred Durkheim considered that a essential component of sacredness was isolation.
Turning to Field's introduction:

'Objects or places are made sacred by groups of people who **set them apart and keep them bounded by specific actions**; they remain sacred only so long as groups continue to do this.' (Field *Forms*, p.xlvi - v).

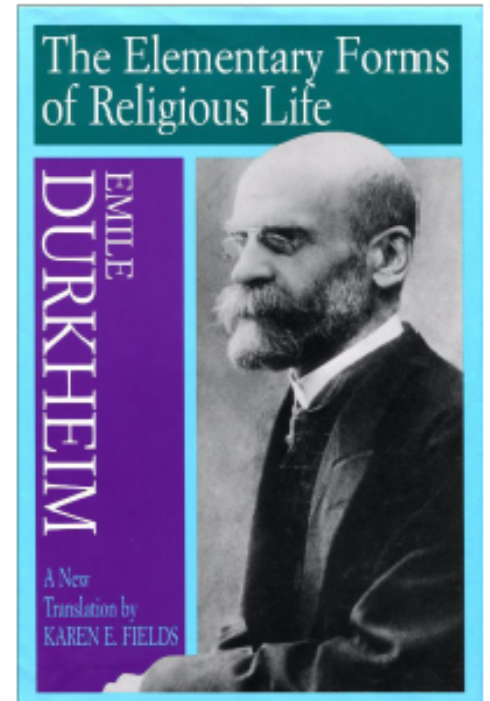


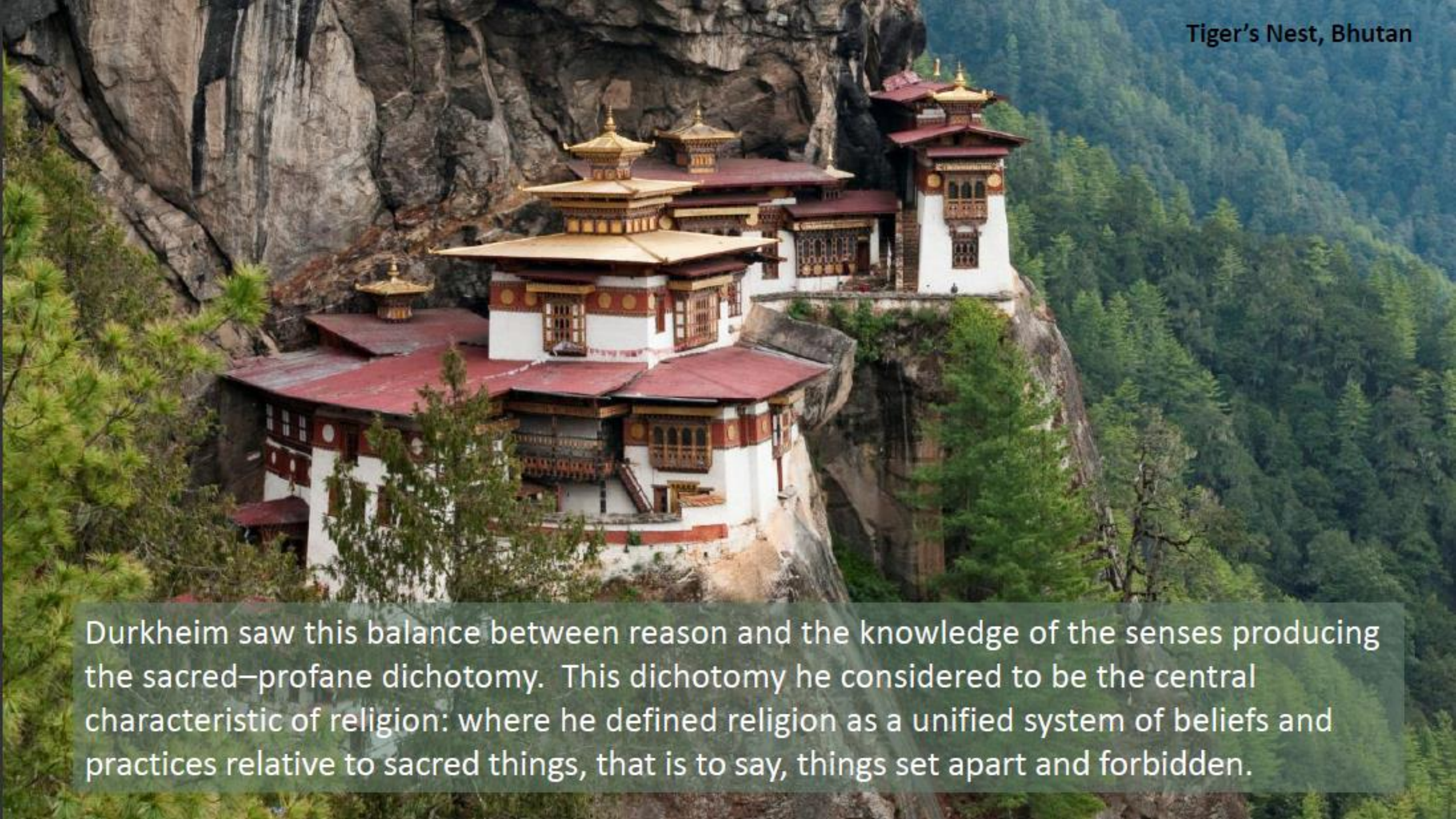
These actions form part of the collective consciousness.

Durkheim on reason and the senses

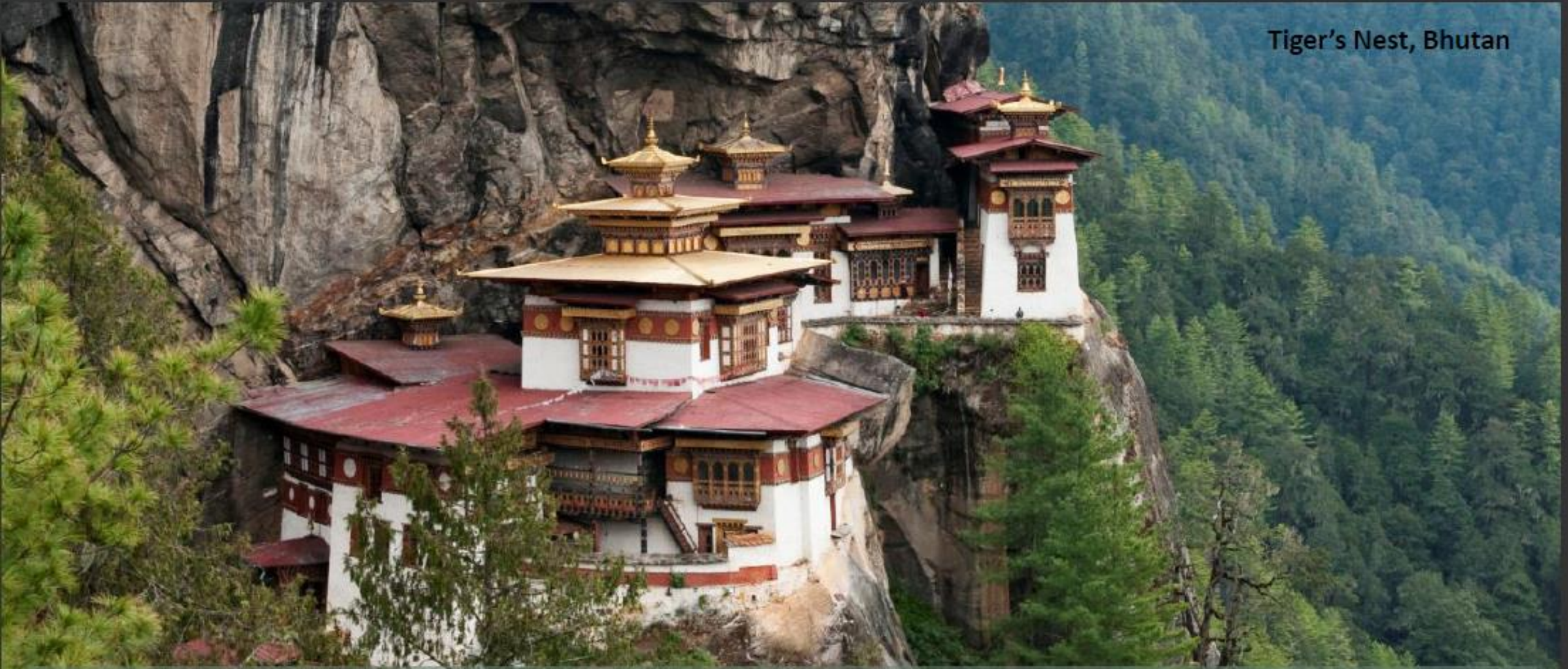
‘Here, then, are two sorts of knowledge that are like opposite poles of the intellect. Under these conditions, to reduce reason to experience is to make reason disappear – because it is to reduce the universality and necessity that characterize reason to mere appearances, illusion that might be practically convenient but that correspond to nothing in things.’

Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 13.





Durkheim saw this balance between reason and the knowledge of the senses producing the sacred—profane dichotomy. This dichotomy he considered to be the central characteristic of religion: where he defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden.



Thus according to Durkheim the Tiger's Nest in Bhutan (for example) is considered sacred because humanity has **set it apart** from the daily life PLUS it retains its sacredness by the actions of the community – the moral community. They remake its sacredness every day by acts of ritual and shared common belief –the collective conscious.

Do the gods
die if we
stop praying
to them?



Durkheim's answer would be; Yes, the gods are nothing more than an extension of the human mind which the moral community maintains. If the moral community fails to do this then the gods die.

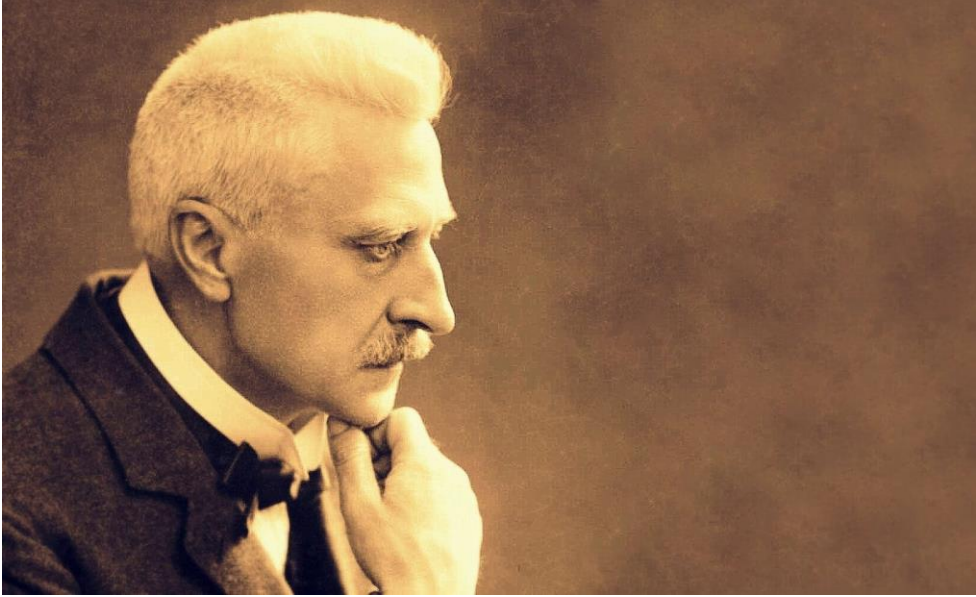




The realm of the sacred, for Durkheim, was always set in opposition to ordinary or profane life and space.



Numinosity, from the Latin *numin*, 'divine will'



Rudolf Otto called this experience of sacred as "numinous," and claimed it has three components.

- a) *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. As *mysterium*, the numinous is "wholly other"-- entirely different from anything we experience in ordinary life. It evokes a reaction of silence.
- b) *mysterium tremendum*. It provokes terror because it presents itself as overwhelming power.
- c) Finally, the numinous presents itself as *fascinans*, as merciful and gracious.



Durkheim –
sacredness is a
human construct

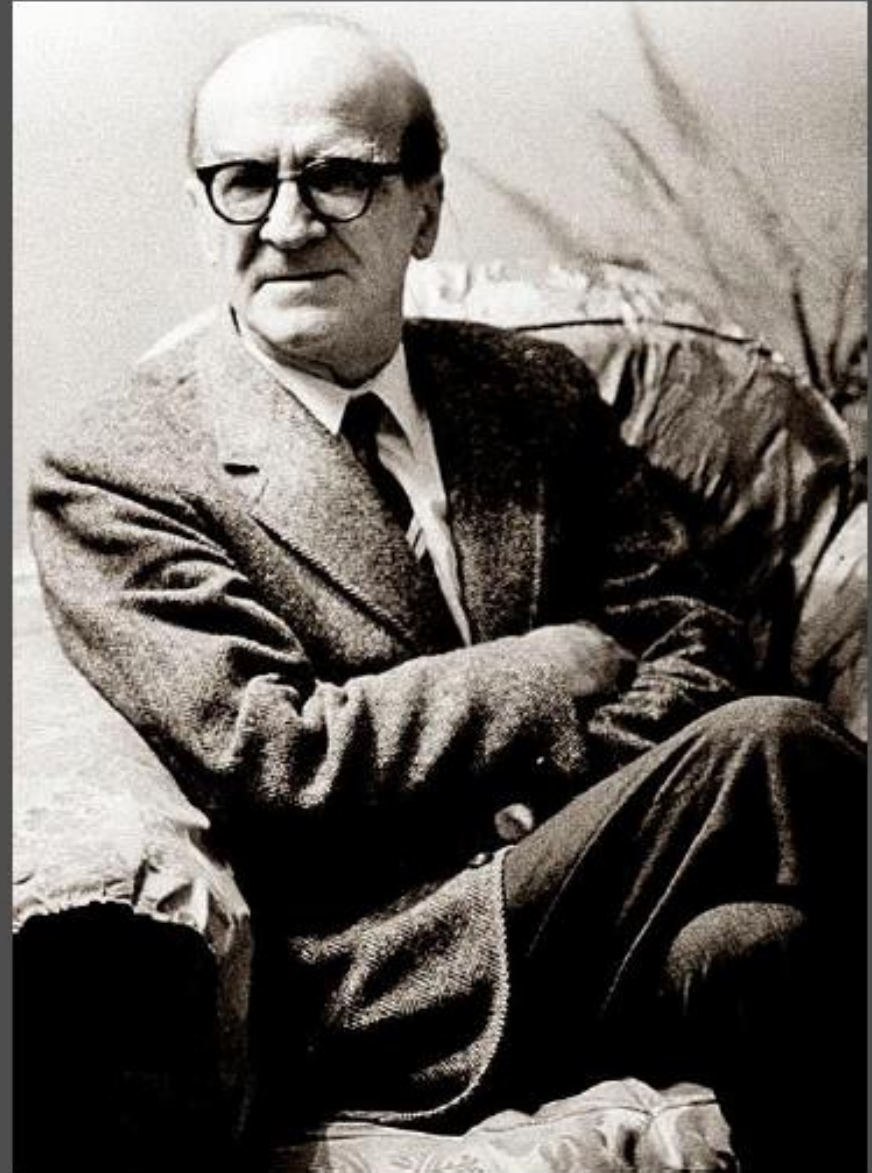
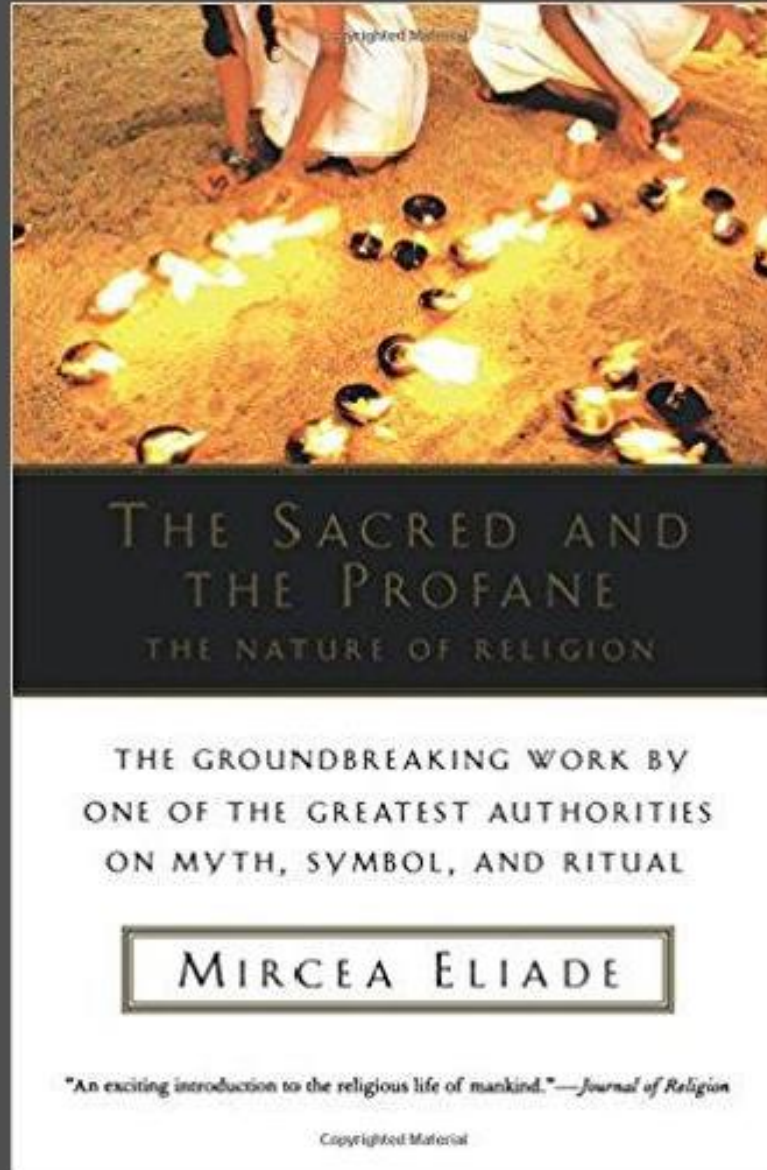


Otto – sacredness is an
experience of the
numinous

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) adopted Durkheim's language of **sacred and profane**, and Otto's focus of the experience and the irreducibility of religion which produced the **numinous**. He added to this the idea that the basis of religion was a '**hierophany**' or manifestation of the sacred, which is re-enacted through ritual and performance.

Mircea Eliade

1907 - 1986



Mircea Eliade

A Romanian historian of religion. He was a prolific writer in fiction and philosophy. In his youth he study in British India in particular at the University of Calcutta where he was a student of Sanskrit. He later published five volumes on the *History of Indian Philosophy*. He continued his travels by spending time in Egypt as well as in a Himalayan ashram.

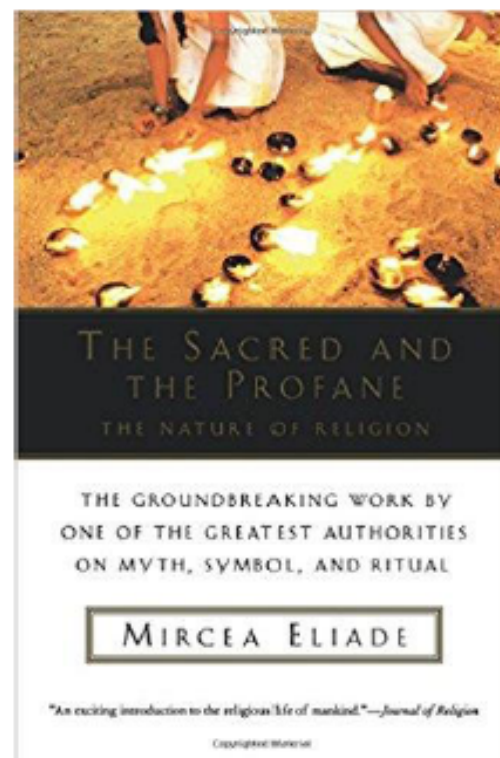
His life work was focused on the general nature of religion and in particular on what he saw as a dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. Strangely he does not acknowledge the work of Durkheim. In contrast to Durkheim he defined the sacred as:

The Sacred contains all 'reality' or value, and other things acquire 'reality' only to the extent that they participate in the sacred.(1)

Mircea Eliade – Space

A central concept in Eliade's thinking, which he states in his opening sentence to his book – *Sacred and Profane*, is that:

‘For religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, **breaks in it**; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others.’ (2)



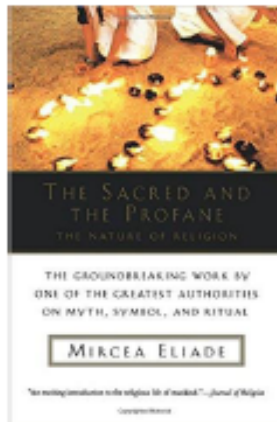
2. Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane, the Nature of Religion*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. London: Harcourt, Inc., [1957] 1987. p.20

Mircea Eliade – Space

Such interruptions or breaks by drawing on the idea of an hierophany: Hierophany, the plural is hierophanies, from the Greek, *heiro-* “sacred” and *phainein* “to show”. Thus an hierophany is a manifestation or eruption of the sacred.

Eliade defines the nature of space via the idea of orientation which is empowered or anchored by an encounter with a hierophany.

‘For it is the break effected in space that allows the world to be constituted, because it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation. When the sacred manifests itself in any **hierophany**, there is also revelations of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse.’ (S & P p.21)

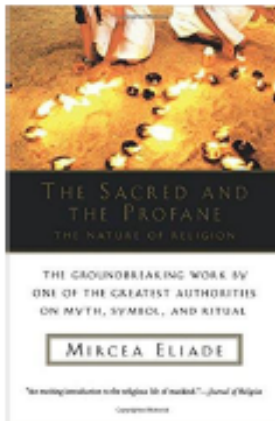


Mircea Eliade – Space

Profane space he defines as:

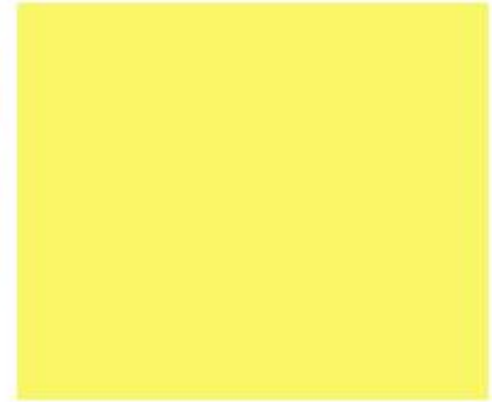
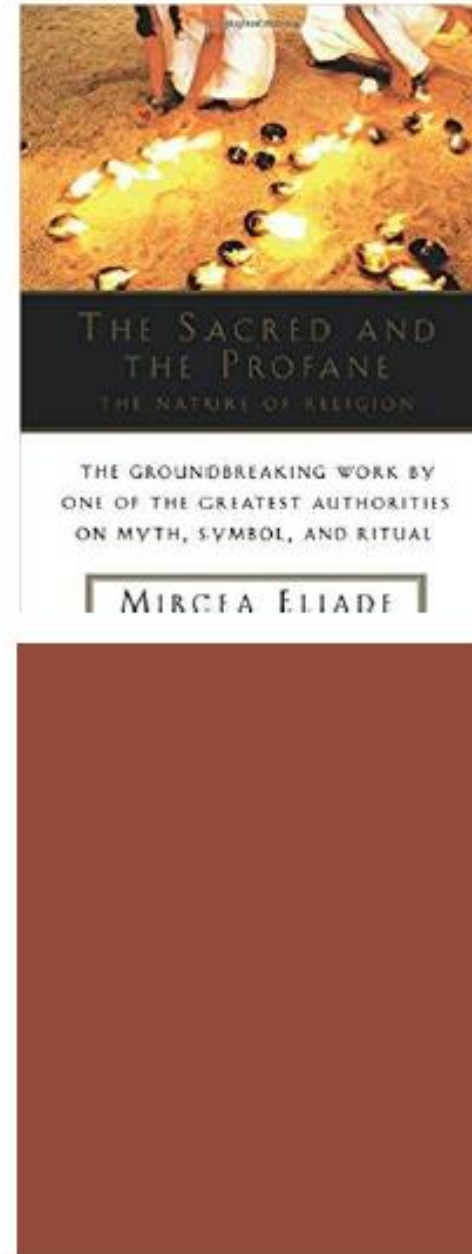
‘For profane experiences, on the contrary, space is homogeneous and neutral; no break qualitatively differentiates the various parts of its mass.

The profane experience,... maintains the homogeneity and hence the relativity of space.’ (S & P p.22 & 23)



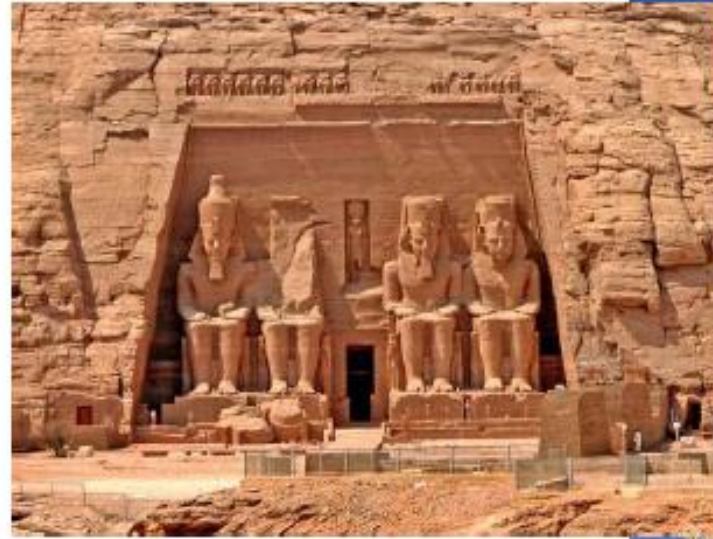
Mircea Eliade – The individual

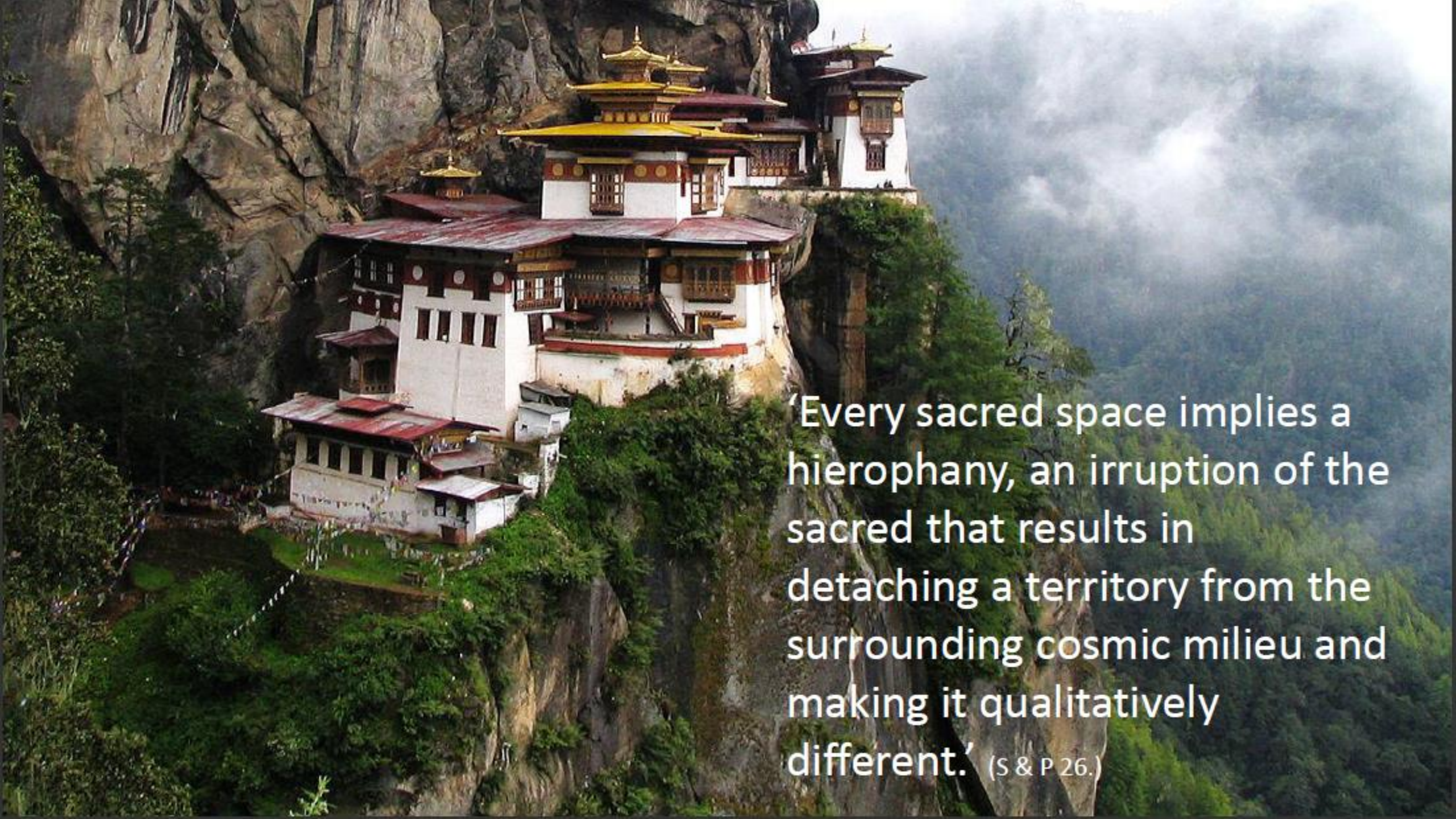
‘There are for example, privileged places, qualitatively different from all others – man’s birthplace, or the scenes of his first love, or certain places in the first foreign city he visited in youth. Even for the most frankly nonreligious man, all these places still retain an exceptional, a unique quality; they are the “holy places” of his private universe, as if it were in such spots that he had received the revelation of a reality *other* than that in which he participates through his ordinary daily life.’ (S & P 24)



Mircea Eliade – Entering the Sacred Place

‘The threshold that separates the two spaces also indicates the distance between two modes of being, the profane and the religious. The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds- and at the same time the paradoxical place where those two worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible.’ (S & P 25)



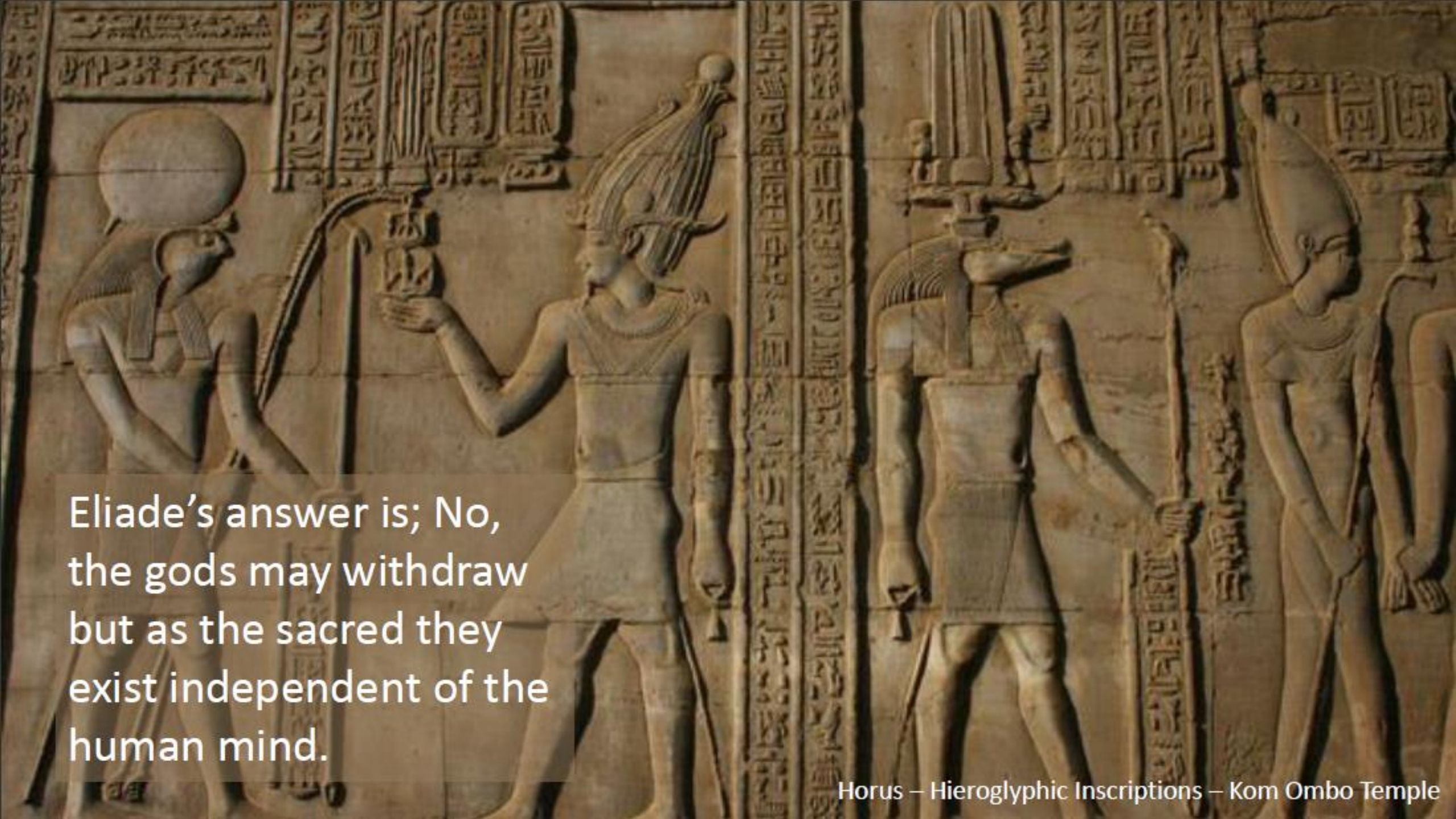


‘Every sacred space implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different.’ (S & P 26.)



This is a photograph of an ancient Egyptian wall relief from the Kom Ombo Temple. The relief depicts the gods Horus and Isis. Horus, on the left, is shown in profile, wearing a large circular sun disk (wesekh) on his head and holding a long staff or scepter. Isis, on the right, is also in profile, wearing a tall, multi-plumed headdress (wasekh) and holding a similar staff. They are standing between two columns of hieroglyphic inscriptions. The relief is carved into a light-colored stone wall.

Do the gods
die if we fail to
pray to them?



Eliade's answer is; No,
the gods may withdraw
but as the sacred they
exist independent of the
human mind.

Horus – Hieroglyphic Inscriptions – Kom Ombo Temple

JSTOR – 203 Journal articles that had ‘Eliade’ in the title of the paper and 694 with the word ‘Durkheim’



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[Douglas Allen](#)

The Journal of Religion, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Oct., 1988), pp. 545-565

Topics: [History of religion](#), [Dialectic](#), [Historical particularism](#), [Christian history](#), [Phenomenology](#), [Phenomena](#), [Religious symbolism](#), [Humans](#)

☐ JOURNAL ARTICLE

[Eliade's Theory of Millenarianism](#)

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[Robert A. Segal](#)

Religious Studies, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Jun., 1978), pp. 159-173

Topics: [Eschatology](#), [Semiotics](#), [Jewish history](#), [Archetypes](#), [Freight](#), [Desire](#), [Reality](#), [Divinity](#)

All of which are good secondary sources if you choose this essay topic as well as give you ideas on how to explore the sacred in your projects.



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[Durkheim](#) (pp. 69-76)

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[University of Ottawa Press](#) (2005)

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[Durkheim's Montesquieu](#)

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[W. Watts Miller](#)

The British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Dec., 1993), pp. 693-713

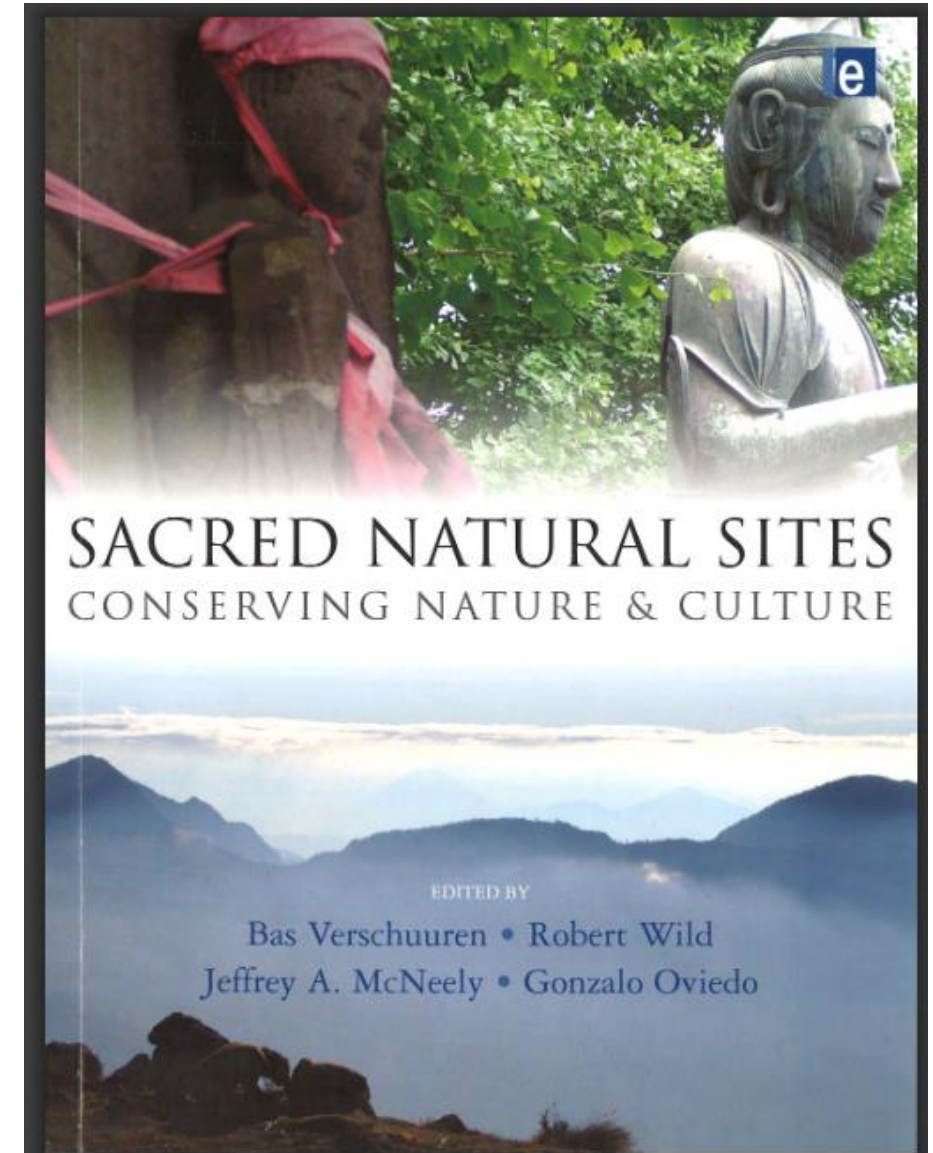
Spiritscapes

The term Spiritscape is used to indicate that sacred natural sites are frequently **networked across a physical and mental landscape** which are linked by creation mythologies, or by the genealogical relationships of ancestral beings. (*Sacred Natural Sites*, Glossary p.xxvi)

Denis Byrne, in this volume, talked of a spiritual topography or spiritscape which coexists with the physical topography. One's safety or to be able to flourish in these landscapes required knowledge of the local spiritscape.

The spiritscapes can also protect the environment for, as Byrne points out, there can be a fear of upsetting the powerful spirits of a place, thus there can be, for example, a prohibitions on cutting down trees.

Byrne, Denis (2010) 'The enchanted earth: Numinous sacred sites', in Bas Verschuuren, Robert Wild, Jeffrey A. McNeely and Gonzalo Oviedo, eds, *Sacred Natural Sites*, London & Washington: Earthscan, (53-61).



Full book is on line : <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2010-045.pdf>

Sacred Geography

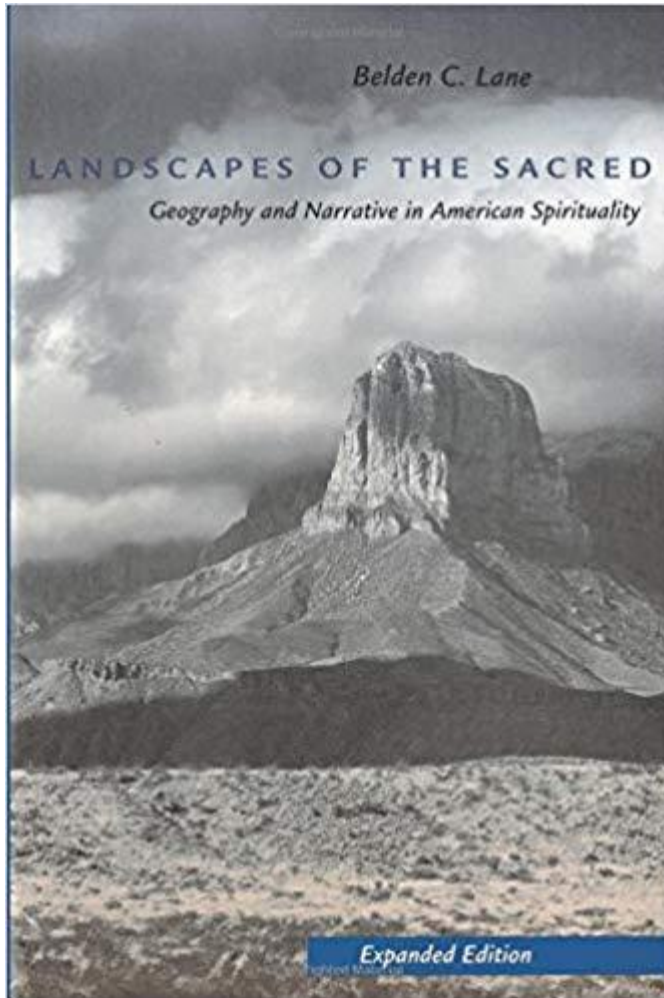
To explore academically the nature of sacred within a landscape:

Based on the ideas of past theorist and then exploring some of these ideas in your one's own field work, you can ask these types of questions:

- What is sacredness?
- Does it belong naturally to a place or is it bestowed by a life force?
 - Can this potential natural power be described by the idea of an Eliadian hierophany, Otto's idea of numinosity, or the notion of a spiritscape? A combination of these ideas or something else entirely?
- If we follow Durkheim's thinking then we can ask the questions about who or what bestows sacredness? Which in turn ask questions about sacredness, for example can a wolfpack make their landscape sacred?
- We can also ask HOW sacredness become bestowed on a landscape.

Your Reading - Beldon Lane – Chapter 1

Considering Lane's axioms for sacred place



- A sacred place is not chosen, it chooses.
- A sacred place is an ordinary place, ritually made extraordinary.
- A sacred place can be tread upon without being entered.
- The impulse of sacred place is both centripetal and centrifugal, local and universal.