



INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP

MONUMENTAL RELIGION

Construction, Destruction, and Future-Making

Roma Tre University · Department of Humanities · Rome, Italy

6–7 April 2027

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CONCEPT AND SCOPE

The recent inauguration of monumental religious sites — the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces near Moscow, the Cathedral for the Salvation of the People in Bucharest — shows how heavily contemporary states and dominant religious institutions lean on architectural grandiosity. Pentecostal megachurches mobilise thousands of practitioners in gargantuan structures across the Americas, Africa and Asia; national cathedrals in Eastern Europe reassert majority dominance within pluralising urban landscapes. Such grandiosity can be read in several ways; two possible, partly overlapping directions are state-led enterprise within a state's own borders, as with the national shrines of Moscow, Bucharest, Tbilisi, Belgrade and Warsaw, and construction as an instrument of soft power projected abroad, as with the competing mosque-building initiatives of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates across the Balkans, Africa and Central Asia. Neither exhausts the call's scope, and contributions that cut the material differently — by scale, tradition, legal regime, or period — are equally welcome.

The global expansion of monumental religious construction decentres the Western European paradigm, in which religious architecture has often come to mean chiefly adaptive reuse, decommissioning and heritage management, one regionally specific outcome among several rather than the norm from which other regions deviate. The building of religious space could instead be seen as an act of future-making: a forward-looking intervention through which states, religious bureaucracies and communities project legitimacy, public presence and, in the properly religious register, an eschatological horizon. That horizon, however, is rarely new: historical and archaeological research are especially well placed to show it, since the deep history of religious monumentality — from late antique temple-to-church conversions to early modern cathedral-building — and comparative traditions of political theology and sacred kingship let today's cases be read as recurrence rather than novelty.

Following recent research that moves beyond viewing religious materiality solely as a medium for the transcendent or as preserved heritage, the workshop treats religious infrastructure as the network that enables religious organisations to operate and claim space: it comprises houses of worship, shrines, monuments, but also sacred landscapes, pilgrimage routes and administrative hubs, alongside financial pipelines, bureaucratic apparatuses, technical expertise, and informal labour networks (Kirby 2024). Religious leaders and institutions must in turn navigate the ordinary mechanics of urban governance — municipal bureaucracy, planning law, spatial competition — through which religious life is drawn into what Burchardt (2023) calls the profane realm of ordinary urbanism. Scale itself — height, capacity, dominance of the skyline — is an analytical category here, operating as much in competition between religious traditions as between religious and secular claims on the same skyline. Perceptibility and centrality (Hayden & Walker 2013) within a settlement measure a community's dominance, or a challenge to it, whether the rival claimant is another confession or the secular state itself.

Alongside construction, the workshop investigates structural and symbolic dismantling. The targeting, desecration and destruction of religious sites — through inter-religious conflict, intra-confessional rivalry or military aggression — form another grammar of the same power to shape religious space, not its simple opposite. The damage inflicted on the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra and, more broadly, on religious buildings across Ukraine since 2022 is one register of this; the destruction of Armenian churches and cemeteries in Nagorno-Karabakh is another, closer to a contested campaign of erasure than to wartime collateral damage. The erection, alteration or removal of monuments and public statues belongs to this same logic of visibility and displacement, and deserves to be read alongside the destruction of houses of worship rather than as a lesser register of the same phenomenon.

Construction and destruction together mark a starting point for the call rather than its limits. Monumentality, whether raised in triumph or reduced to rubble, always amounts to an act of claiming, defending or contesting a place in the world — a register at once political and, for those who build, theological. The workshop invites contributions from anthropology, sociology, history, archaeology, human geography, architectural history, religious studies and related disciplines.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND PRACTICAL INFORMATION

- **Abstract Requirements** Abstracts should be maximum 300 words, accompanied by a short biographical note (max 100 words). Submissions must be sent in English to Dr. Giuseppe Tateo (giuseppe.tateo@uniroma3.it).
- **Important Dates**
 - Abstract Submission Deadline: **4 October 2026**
 - Conference Dates: **6–7 April 2027**
- **Venue** Roma Tre University, Department of Humanities, Via Ostiense 234/236, Rome, Italy.
- **Publication Outcome** Selected papers presented at the conference will be developed for a peer-reviewed edited volume submitted to a leading international academic press.
- **Funding Information** The coverage of travel and accommodation expenses can be provided for selected participants without institutional support.

*This workshop is organised within the project **RELINFRA: Tracking the Boom of Religious Infrastructure in Romania (1990–2026)**, led by Dr. Giuseppe Tateo (Department of Humanities, Roma Tre University), in collaboration with SHARP-LAB – SHARED Religious Places LABORATORY, Centro Interuniversitario di Studi e di Ricerca sugli Spazi Religiosi Condivisi.*