

City Builder Volume 9:
RELIGIOUS PLACES



*By Michael J. Varhola, Jim Clunie,
and the Skirmisher Game Development Group*

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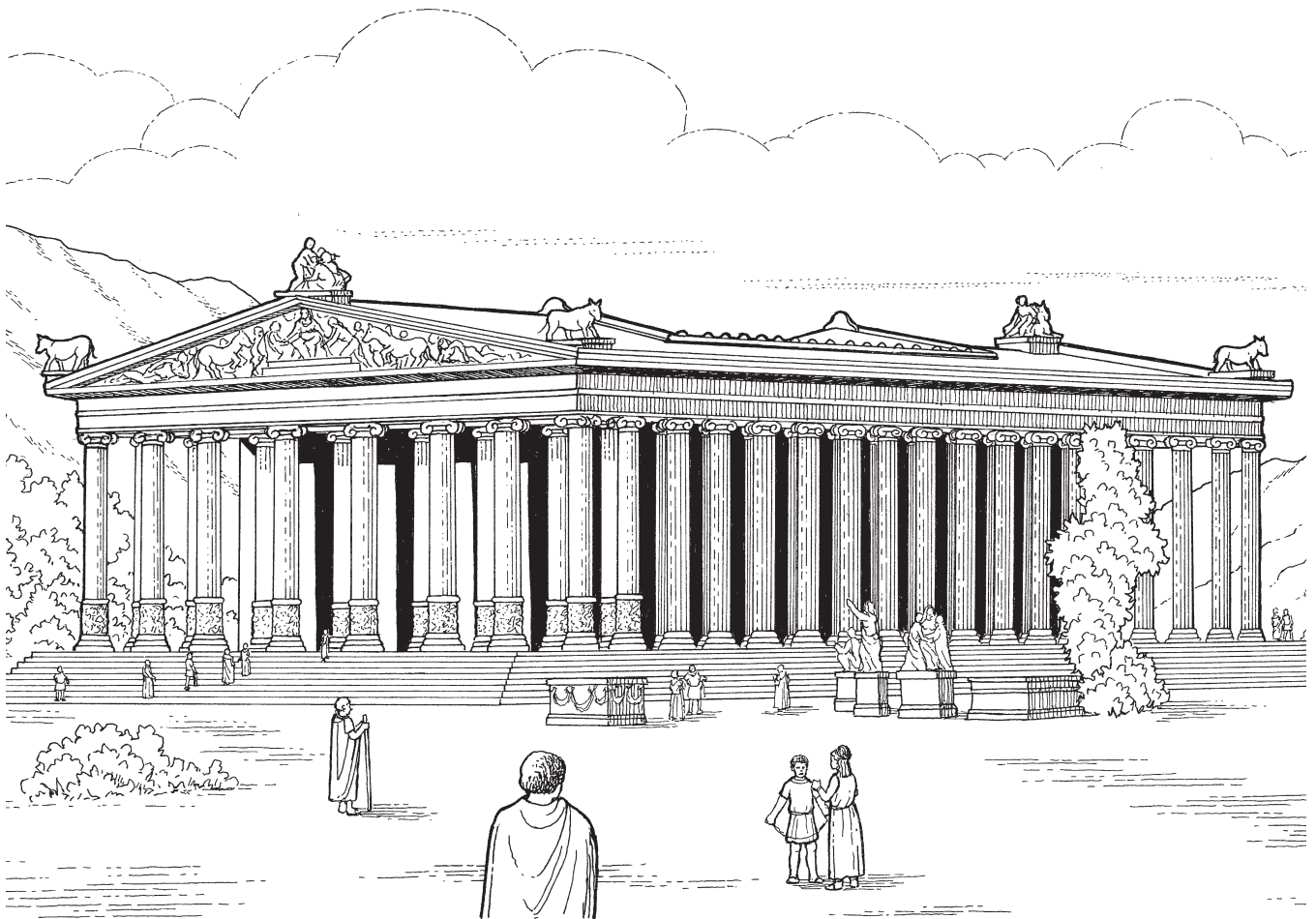
This book has been designed to be as user-friendly as possible from both the perspectives of printing out for use in hard copy and viewing on a computer screen. It has been laid out like a traditional print book with the idea that each even-numbered page complements the odd-numbered page that it should face (e.g., the illustration of the rural monastery on page 9 is set up to face and illustrate the Monastery/Convent entry on page 8).



With the above in mind, the optimal way to view and enjoy this book would be to print it out and organize it in a binder so that the pages are arranged as described above. This is by no means necessary, however, for using and fully benefiting from *City Builder Volume 9: Religious Places* and its contents.

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Introduction

Some of the most immersive, varied, and interesting places in many role-playing game settings are those devoted to the mythical deities and fantastic moral codes to which player characters might variously be fanatically devoted or zealously opposed. Religious establishments within a campaign setting can provide many specific game benefits as well, such as the opportunity to deal with serious ailments, injuries, spiritual distress, curses, or even, in some settings, untimely death; interaction with the leaders of religious sects in the setting, many of whom also wield considerable temporal authority; and advice from knowledgeable characters or extraplanar sources about dilemmas that characters face with regard to religion and the supernatural entities that form the elements of its mythoi.

Several sorts of religious place — including shrines, temples, monasteries and convents, and cemeteries and graveyards — are described in this volume of the *City Builder* series. Other religious places that characters might encounter or visit include hermits' dwellings, tombs, oracles' fanes, initiation chambers, processional and pilgrimage routes, places of sacrifice, seminaries, charity offices, miracle sites, sacred wells, statues, monuments, and wonders, and even legendary locations like purported gates to the underworld or other planes of existence.

Religious places often stand at the heart of communities of believers and consequently vary in complexity and richness according to the size, history, ethos, and membership of their associated congregations. For example, a mature and well-organized religious group might be able to build a major fane at a holy site or as a newly founded settlement in the countryside or wilderness with resources provided by the central treasury of the faith, but a less prosperous sect will have fewer options. Religious structures — being generally well-built, associated with an institution more long-lived than mortals or their mundane enterprises, often protected by feelings of respect during periods of depredation by bandits and invaders, and potentially able to be reused for the purposes of a different faith — often remain intact after the peoples who first raised them have long since passed away.

Structures intended for religious purposes tend under ideal conditions to use the best and most permanent materials available to the faithful, most often stone or perhaps brick. Early structures of a new faith or community, of course, or the religious buildings of barbaric lands, might instead be constructed of sturdy timber or other readily available materials. Specific types of religious places might also make use of existing caverns or chambers tunneled into the ground — perhaps to connect to natural underground sites that are venerated as holy, or for climatic, security, liturgical, or eco-

nomic reasons. Such buildings are often designed around the focus of worship or religious feeling for which they exist, with apartments for clergy and other ancillary areas secondary elements at best.

High, soaring central spaces lit from above, perhaps through multi-colored stained glass or from concealed light sources, with an eye toward uplifting or impressing onlookers with a sense of otherworldly glories, are typical of the places of worship for many faiths. Such chambers may have one or more levels of galleries, and incidentally provide some of the greatest structural challenges that a culture's architectural traditions may face.

Typical contents of religious places include images and symbols of the gods honored there; depictions of episodes from the religion's history, hagiography, or mythology (all of which might be intertwined and indistinguishable); sacred fonts, candles, lamps, and incense burners; vessels and implements for ceremonial practices such as sacrifices, ritual meals, or anointing of favored congregants; robes and costumes; mechanical contrivances for special effects (such as a statue that appears to move and speak); musical instruments; scriptures and other books; offering-boxes and coffer; and mundane tools for maintenance, cleaning, and other specific needs (e.g., excavation in a graveyard).

With regard to security, for many holy sites, religious awe and respect are adequate to provide a potent discouragement to thieves and looters, and in some settings these expectations of godly wrath are well-justified by divine magic laid permanently upon the site through its consecration. Sturdy soldier-priests adept at battle, fanatical bands of devotees, or dedicated holy warriors of great skill are also often present at such sites. Those who desecrate religious sites must reckon, too, with the widely accepted view that crimes against religion are worse than other sorts and deserving of more extreme methods of investigation and punishment.

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In light of the above, many religious groups secure their buildings with no more than the sorts of simple locks that an ordinary residence might use at night. The ethos of the religion also might dictate that the site remain open to all. Religions that are less humane and more secretive, however, or which regard the inviolability of certain religious places as a law transcending concern for human welfare, might surround the forbidden areas of their fanes with all manner of deathtraps and guardian monsters (and it is just such areas, of course that might serve as some of the most difficult and memorable challenges for adventurers).

About This Series

This is the ninth volume in a series of 11 books designed not just to provide Game Masters with concrete information about how to create places essential to their own role-playing campaigns, but also to inspire them to develop ones that are believable, colorful, and exciting for their players' characters to visit.

City Builder Volume 9: Religious Places looks at places where characters can visit to fulfill various spiritual needs, meet with the people associated with them, or try to commune with deities or their agents. Places of this sort described here include Cemeteries and Graveyards, Monasteries and Convents, Shrines, and Temples.

While it is a generic resource not keyed to a particular system of rules, *City Builder Volume 9: Religious Places* has also been written so as to be fully compatible with the various Skirmisher Publishing LLC d20 publications, including *Experts v.3.5*, *Tests of Skill*, and *Warriors*.

Using This Book

Each section in this book contains a description of the place to which it is devoted. It includes such things as the kinds of communities in which the place might be found, the kinds of leaders, proprietors, and staff associated with it, and the sorts of goods, services, or other things that characters might visit the place to obtain.

Following the description are one or more adventure hooks that are designed to describe interactions beyond the normal operations of the place that might concern player characters and turn any particular one into a venue for adventure.



At the Garden Shrine. John William Godward (1861-1922)

Cemetery/Graveyard

Cemeteries and graveyards are places where the remains of dead people are interred (and are technically differentiated by the presence of a place of worship in the latter and a lack of one in the former). Famous cemeteries of note include Père-Lachaise in Paris, Forest Lawn in Los Angeles, and Swan Point in Providence, Rhode Island.

Customary methods of laying the dead to rest vary widely amongst various cultures and religions, and may also be influenced by such things as the circumstances of death or the wishes of an individual. Beyond burial of a body — possibly with grave goods and tomb-markers and sometimes with the later removal of the bones to an ossuary — various peoples might also dictate that a dead person ought to be burned, preserved for display, given to the sea, or exposed for consumption by wild creatures (e.g., birds, rats).

Perhaps equal to or even more important than the disposition of mortal remains themselves are grave markers that honor the dead and allow surviving kin — or expected descendants in future ages — a place to visit and remember the lives of the deceased. Those of modest means might have graves marked by low stones or mass-produced busts of popular gods (or nothing at all for the most indigent), the middle class generally tends toward markers and statuary as impressive as they can afford, while the true aristocracy and old wealthy families of a community favor tombs or vaults as large as small buildings. Royal tombs might be of almost any size and extravagance, comprising many of the architectural wonders of a particular age. People lost at sea or buried far from their homelands may also merit a memorial stone in their home communities, and larger memorials, often in the form of walls or cenotaphs, are sometimes employed to list the names of groups whose headstones have been shifted or lost over the ages or who met a common fate (e.g., those who died in a great disaster or war, the victims of a particularly terrible shipwreck).

A burial place is often also equipped with one or more funerary chapels, as well as ancillary structures like toolsheds and perhaps even dwellings for custodians. Workshops for embalmers or stonemasons, shops for vendors of flowers or grave-ornaments, or carriage-houses for hearses and their draft animals might also be located on the premises or conveniently nearby.

An individual burial ground might be attached to a major church that claims preeminent right to inter its

worshippers there. Most communities generally expect, however, that dead people who have no place of their own faith to rest can also be laid to rest in the local graveyard, barring a lack of material resources or transgressions so dire that they are actually denied ordinary burial. Separate burial places used variously just for indigents or transients, often known as “potters fields,” are thus often located on public or granted land at the edge of communities.

As facilities serving a broad constituency, cemeteries in a large town or city might instead be administered by the civic government, or by a council of representatives of different religions, sects, or congregations that divides the allotment of space and responsibility for maintenance in each place among the religious bodies that it represents. Potters fields in particular are especially likely to be administered by secular community officials.

Once interred, bodies are vulnerable to desecration or defilement by causes as diverse as disrespectful behavior, vandalism, scavenging animals, cannibalistic undead or people, or depraved beings like necromancers who seek to commune with the spirits of the dead or animate their remains. To prevent such abuses, the keepers of cemeteries generally rely on such measures as walls, fences, and regular inspection by attendants; ceremonial protections such as funeral rites or which dedicate burial places as holy ground; and possibly even various sorts of magical protection. When such measures are not adequate to prevent serious problems (e.g., infestations of undead beings who terrorize a community as much as anything by their resemblance to once-living loved ones), religious and community leaders will generally respond in ways dictated by tradition and ritual (e.g., burning necromancers, de-animating bodies in special religious ceremonies, contracting adventurers to dispose of them).

Adventure Hook

* A wealthy and influential but infamously cruel man has died — perhaps the PCs had something to do with bringing it about — and the party must help convey his body with proper respect to his family’s ancestral burying-ground and see him interred with appropriate honors in order to be absolutely sure that his spirit will depart quietly and not haunt the countryside, doing further evil.



Graveyard Under Snow, Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840)

Monastery/Convent

Monasteries are places where monks, nuns, or other people set apart for a religious purpose live and work. Monasteries are among the most restrictive sorts of religious communities and require their members to live on the premises, work and worship together collectively, and follow specific rules that are more severe than those applying to common worshippers of a deity. A religious community of this sort that exclusively admits women might be called a convent or nunnery. Other sorts of religious communities have varying aims but tend to be somewhat more lenient than monasteries or to not require their members to share every aspect of their daily lives.

Depictions of monasteries in literature and film include those in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, Ellis Peters' "Brother Cadfael" mysteries, and in Matthew Lewis' classic Gothic novel *The Monk*.

Characters who are not themselves monks, priests, or holy warriors sometimes need to visit monasteries in their roles as centers of learning and crafts, to speak with particular people who have taken holy vows, or to find lodgings in an otherwise isolated area. It is also possible that one or more characters may need to seek sanctuary from assault or persecution in a monastery—provided, of course, that the characters can convince the monks that they deserve the protection of their facility.

Many religions might operate monasteries or equivalent establishments, provided that the religion is sufficiently wealthy, politically favored, and organized — both in doctrine and practice — to support members who devote their time exclusively to the service of their deity. Monasteries are less likely to prosper among cultures where the struggle for survival exceeds tolerance for, or interest in, abstract philosophies, or which recognize overriding social bonds that conflict with the necessary vows of devotion that a monk must make to a religious order (e.g., clans, totems).

Because monasteries are as far as possible self-sufficient and separate from the society that surrounds them, they can usually exist equally well either in the countryside or within a town or city. In the latter case, a monastery often plays a major role in civic affairs despite the restrictions on contact that apply to the monks, providing vital services such as schooling or healing, or even acting as the feudal guardian of several villages or towns.

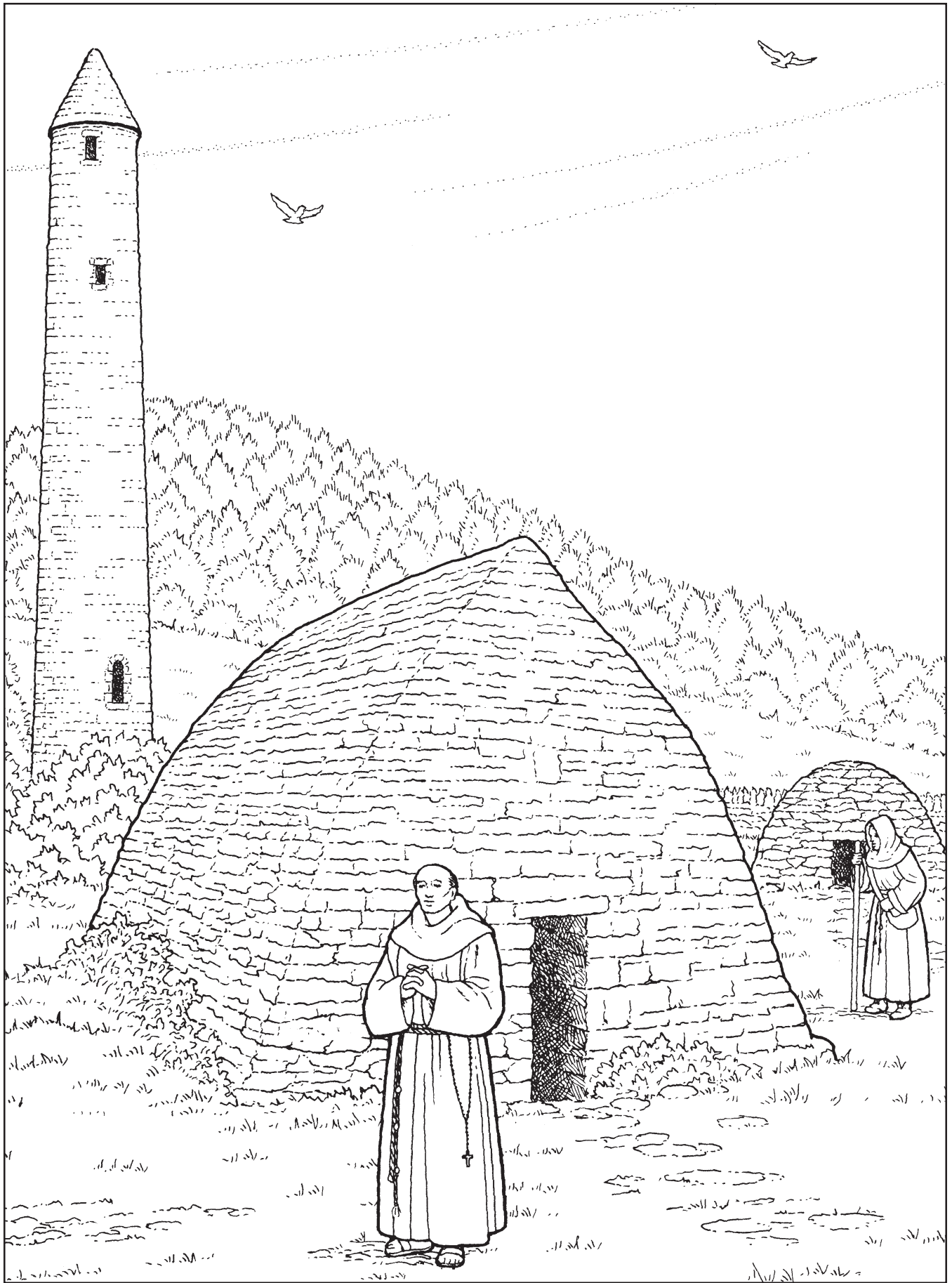
A monastery is usually a compact arrangement of

well-built permanent structures, typically of brick, stone, or excavated from rock, sufficient to serve the daily needs of all of its members without the need to leave the premises. Such a complex generally has a minimum number of entryways, each handy to the quarters of an appropriate senior monk who can observe and intercept visitors as they enter or novice monks as they leave. These features lend themselves easily to defense, even if the monastery is not deliberately fortified. Many monasteries are built with security in mind, however, especially if established in unsettled wildlands or during periods of political turmoil or threat to the religion in question.

As a religious institution, the largest building and dominant component of a monastery complex is typically a temple or prayer-hall. The living facilities of a monastery are sometimes attached to one side of this sanctuary, and often around one or more courtyards or cloisters (quadrangles of roofed walkways facing onto central open areas) and include a dining hall (refectory), formal meeting hall (chapterhouse), common room, sleeping quarters (dormitories or individual cells), and the abbot's or abbess' chambers. Ancillary structures, usually toward the periphery of the complex, often include quarters for guests of different types, an infirmary, schools, gardens, workshops, stables, and pens for farm or working animals.

Backgrounds of monks vary widely and the personality and motivations of those who join a particular religious order vary with the ethos and aims that the community promotes — for example, characters who would join a military order such as the Knights Templar are much different than those who follow a doctrine of deep contemplation and universal compassion like Zen Buddhism. Generally, however, those monks who join out of true devotion to their religion live alongside many others who enter a monastery to escape, hide from, or atone for events in their former lives (and, in the case of a convent, often unsuitable romances or betrothals); to remove the burden of their support from their families; or even to infiltrate and steal secrets — whether for their own advancement or on behalf of others.

Daily activities of monks depend on the specific needs and rules of their order, but usually include many sessions of organized prayer, lessons, meditation, common meals, chores, manual labor, and perhaps pursuit of some vocation. Many of the latter sorts of activities are with an eye to providing for the monastery, both by



Monastery/Convent

producing necessities for use within the community and by making items to sell outside of it. Beyond the grade of novice, this often still allows a good deal of time for monks to pursue individual interests and hobbies, to learn and practice many different crafts, and to meditate on the mysteries of their religion. Unfortunately, if the personal inclinations of some monks are at odds with the prevailing dictates of their religion, they usually also have much time to misbehave and to develop and promote heterodox or rebellious opinions.

Adventure Hooks

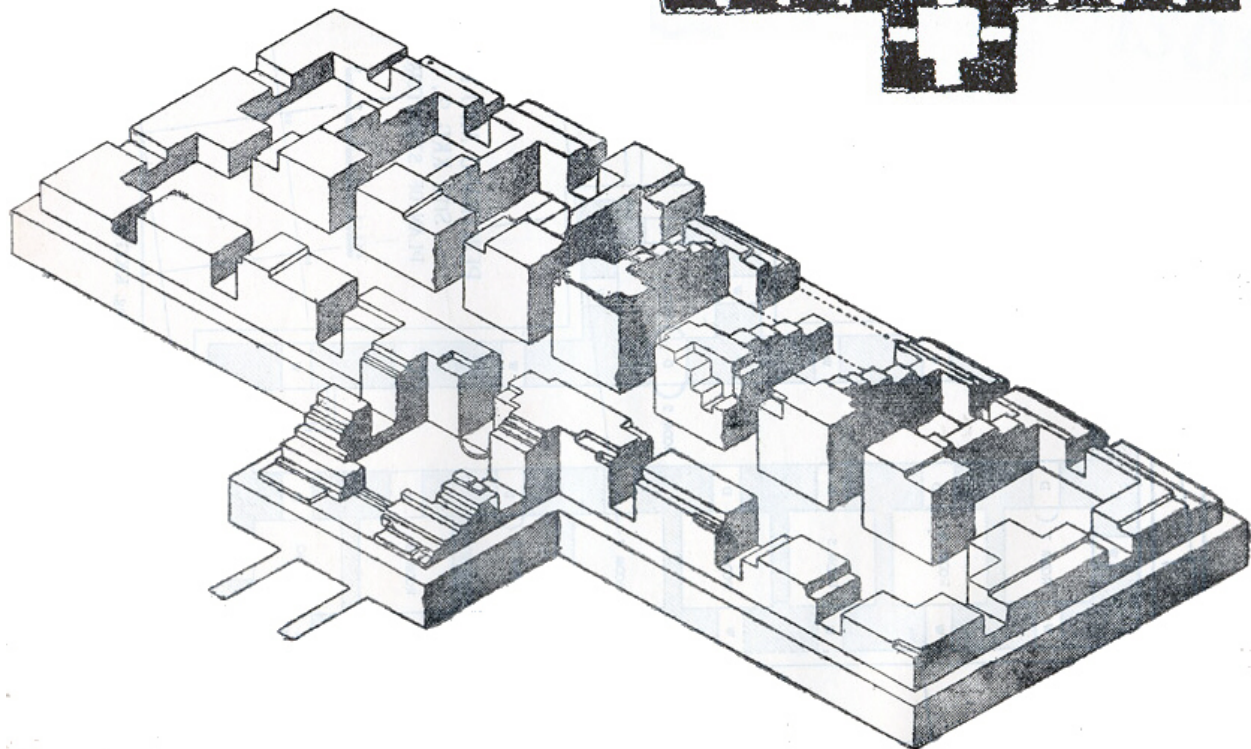
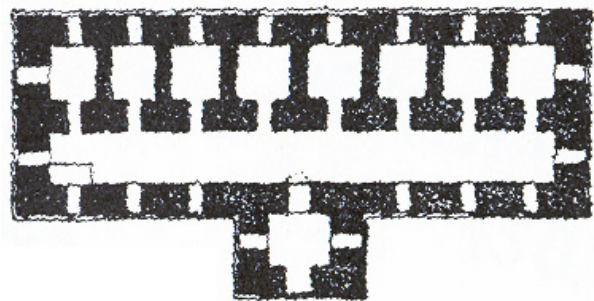
* Characters might visit a monastery to speak with — or to investigate the sudden death of — a former ad-

venturer turned monk, who in his former career dealt with threats that have reared their heads again to trouble the characters.

* Novices in a monastery, questioned over an outbreak of hedonistic and disobedient behavior, claim they are beset by devilish beings interrupting their prayers and urging them toward all sorts of wicked deeds. The player characters must search for the origin of this curse (if not merely in the imaginations of those seeking to escape discipline) — and may find that some of the older monks have through their actions laid this consecrated place open to the assault of supernatural evil (e.g., by practicing black magic, by selling off and replacing with counterfeits some of its holy relics).

Sample Monastery Floorplan

Shown here is a floorplan of a Buddhist monastery in Peikthano, in central Burma. It was built between the 1st and 5th centuries A.D. of large, baked bricks, and was about 115 feet long and 41 feet wide.





Shrine

Shrines are places of worship where lay worshippers can variously offer prayers, make minor sacrifices, and perform other ceremonies on a daily basis, on particular occasions, or for specific purposes. They are the simplest, smallest, and most numerous of religious constructions, ranging through a great variety of forms from isolated effigies to small chapels, and dedicated to innumerable local variants of well-known deities, otherwise-unknown minor gods, or even for customary acts of worship the original object of which is lost to the ages.

Role-playing encounters and visits to shrines sacred to deities that the player characters acknowledge can provide both concrete in-game benefits to the party (e.g., through magic invoked by any priests who attend the shrine, from blessings placed upon the shrine by the gods to which they are devoted) and a deeper experience of the characters' relationship with the spiritual beliefs of the game setting.

Shrines can exist almost anywhere, depending on the deities to whom they are dedicated and the purpose for which they were consecrated, including within or attached to private homes, places of business, public buildings, other religious establishments (whether dedicated to an aspect of the same, or a different but related deity), at the side of a public street or road, or at an appropriate site in natural surroundings, as well as in settlements of every kind and rural or even wilderness areas. Almost every deity that attracts any sort of direct personal worship will have shrines of one sort or another, and only the home territories of entirely atheistic races lack them.

The basis of a shrine is generally an image representing the object of worship, such as a statuette or pictorial panel in paint or mosaic, sometimes with accompanying decorations or significant items; a small shelter or niche protecting the likeness; and a cleared space in front for offerings, such as candles, flowers, and small sacrifices of sorts pleasing to the deity. A chapel is a slightly larger affair consisting of a separate chamber or stand-alone building, or a recessed bay in a larger temple, where a group of worshippers can gather, usually with a slightly more elaborate centerpiece.

Shrines dedicated to special purposes include wedding or funeral chapels in locations appropriate to such occasions; civic shrines at the historic centers of towns honoring the founding deities or demigods of the settlement; and chapels of the beasts in the wilderness or

at places where people bring many animals for particular purposes, such as stockyards or veterinary specialists' offices, set aside in the hope that animals might also benefit from the presence of those gods or aspects that watch over such lesser creatures.

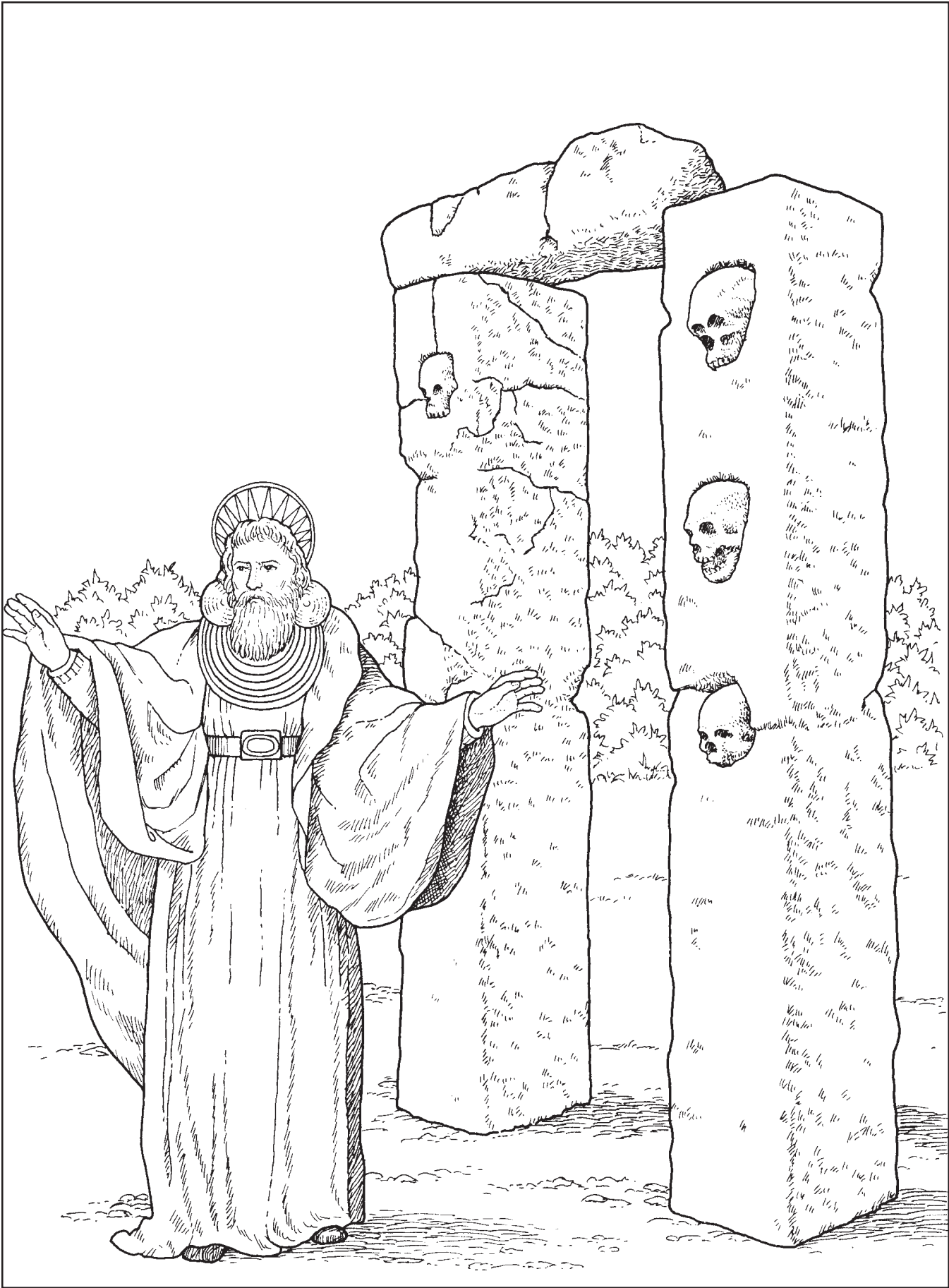
Shrines often exist alone on city streets or in the countryside, or within ordinary buildings, for the use of any passersby who may happen upon them, and as such few of them have any specific security precautions. Occasionally, a shrine of special virtue might have an individual hermit-priest or holy warrior under a special vow — or even a more unusual creature — dwelling nearby to maintain and protect it, or a curse of divine origin might be known to befall those who damage the shrine or steal its offerings. Defilers might also be subject to retribution from locals angered by those presuming to profane their deities.

Adventure Hooks

* Player characters might come across a strange shrine on their travels in some wild out-of-the-way place, guarded by a menacing and violent individual who challenges them to combat or some other form of contest. The encounter is more than it seems, potentially granting the characters a divine blessing or the use of a magic item if they overcome the guardian by honorable combat, but ending the encounter in some eerie fashion that promises dire consequences to follow if they show cowardice or attempt to win through treachery.

* Whether in hopes of receiving divine favor or in thanks for having obtained it, it might be incumbent upon a player character to undertake construction of a shrine. Challenges associated with such a venture might include selecting a suitable location, building the structure to a suitable standard, and perhaps consecrating it with the acquisition of some appropriate relic.

* A shrine that is neglected or defiled might harbor a curse or attract the attentions of appropriate monsters (e.g., undead, disturbed spirits). Specifics of such manifestations vary by the region where they arise, the religion with which they are associated, and the particulars of what has led to the disuse of the shrine in question. Rectifying such a situation by the proper means, however, and restoring a shrine to its proper state is certainly an appropriate task for an adventuring party.



Temple

Temples are generally grand and sumptuous religious structures or complexes that have been built to glorify the gods to which they are consecrated and are used as sites of devotion for large numbers of the faithful. Such a place usually indicates the presence of a particular community or region's leading religion and serves as a major center of its worship. A temple almost always guarantees the presence of a high priest or an even more exalted ecclesiast capable of performing the highest functions of the religion in question and of granting the highest blessings it is able to bestow.

Adventurers often visit temples in the hopes of achieving such ends as removing particularly nasty and intractable curses they have incurred in their exploits or raising slain companions from the dead. Characters might also attempt to avail themselves of the abilities of temple priests, who can often divine the will and knowledge of their gods; conduct ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, baptisms, rites of passage, ordinations, and exorcisms; give advice on moral dilemmas or upon the mysteries of life, death, the planes, and the gods; or provide blessed items such as holy water or even holy relics or weapons dedicated to the purposes of the religion that can repel or destroy various sorts of enemies, especially those of an undead or demonic nature.

Raiding evilly-inclined or enemy temples is another activity common to particularly skilled and bold adventurers, since such places often store much in the way of wealth, secrets, and sometimes supernatural creatures allied with (or bound in isolation by) the faith. Once the occupants of a temple have been driven out and removed from influence in the local area, it is not uncommon for clerics allied to the attackers to rededicate the site, even the same structures, to a new patron deity in order to consolidate their hold on a well-recognized religious center.

A temple may exist inside a city, in which case it will certainly occupy a prominent location close to — or even eclipsing or dominating — the principal buildings of the municipal government; on its own at a particularly spectacular or holy site in the countryside; or associated with an even more important special-purpose sanctuary, such as one housing a major oracle. In any case, the temple is likely to be the focal building of a complex of related uses serving the same religion (and perhaps related deities, aspects, or saints), such

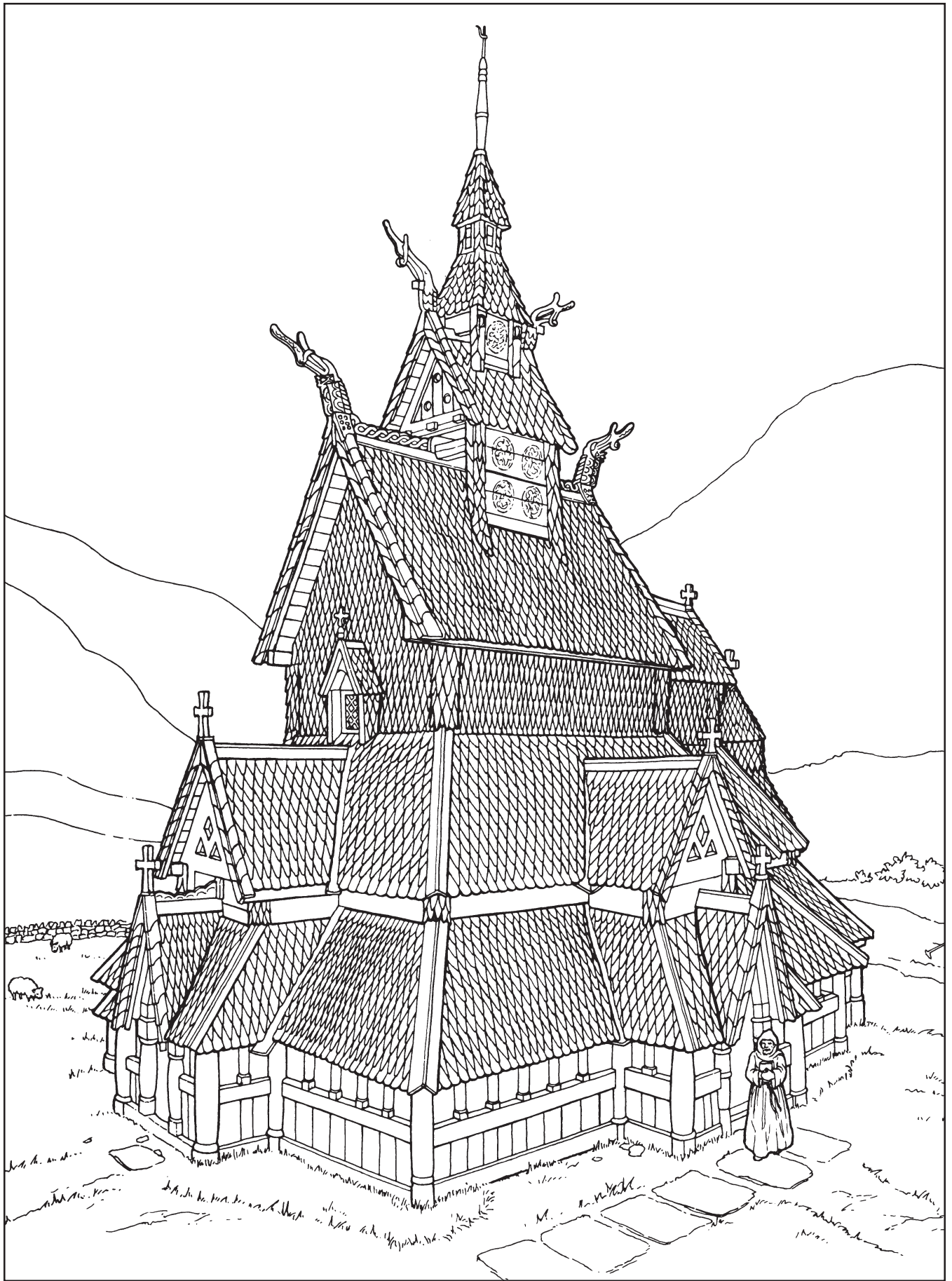
as residences, offices, lesser chapels, treasuries, workshops, and meeting halls.

The central feature of a temple is its sanctum, or adytum — a sacred chamber the form of which is laid down by long tradition, holding some physical object symbolizing the presence of a god, such as an idol (whether gloriously carved by a master artisan or an ancient and mysterious object) or an inscription of the deity's sacred laws. Entry to the interior of such a place is sometimes forbidden or even hidden from view to outsiders or laity, and reserved for ordained priests to perform solemn ceremonies on behalf of the congregation.

After purifying themselves with required abstinences, ablutions, and prayers, lay worshippers generally gather in a large basilica, prayer hall, or public court — often at the steps leading up to the entryway of the temple — where they participate in mass worship before a high altar and in some traditions receive their share of animal sacrifices. Visitors or laity who wish to meet with one of the priests or to take part in ceremonies in one of the other chapels usually enter through a public court or a reception area without intruding on the main temple itself.

Wealthy worshippers like nobles, rulers, or rich guildsmen — particularly those who seek or have received special favor from the deity a temple represents — often endow such places of veneration with offerings like costly vessels and ornaments, statuary, furniture, or even entire extra chapels or expansions to the original temple, such as annexes, courts, halls, or sculpture walks. People of more modest means might also contribute to temples by placing offerings, such as coins or simple pieces of jewelry of prescribed form, into offering-boxes or by casting them into sacred pools, providing such places with immense riches for their treasuries and special projects.

The chief official of a temple might be an ordained member holding significant rank in the hierarchy of his religion, such as a high priest, or might hold a separate but equally high-status position created solely to oversee the temple, such as a provost or keeper of the shrine. Below this hierarch, generally a number of experienced priests (a group sometimes known as a chapter) serve a temple, as well as numerous trainees, acolytes, attendants, musicians, temple-servants, laborers, guards, and agents, who play various roles in elaborate ceremonies or support the place's material and security needs.

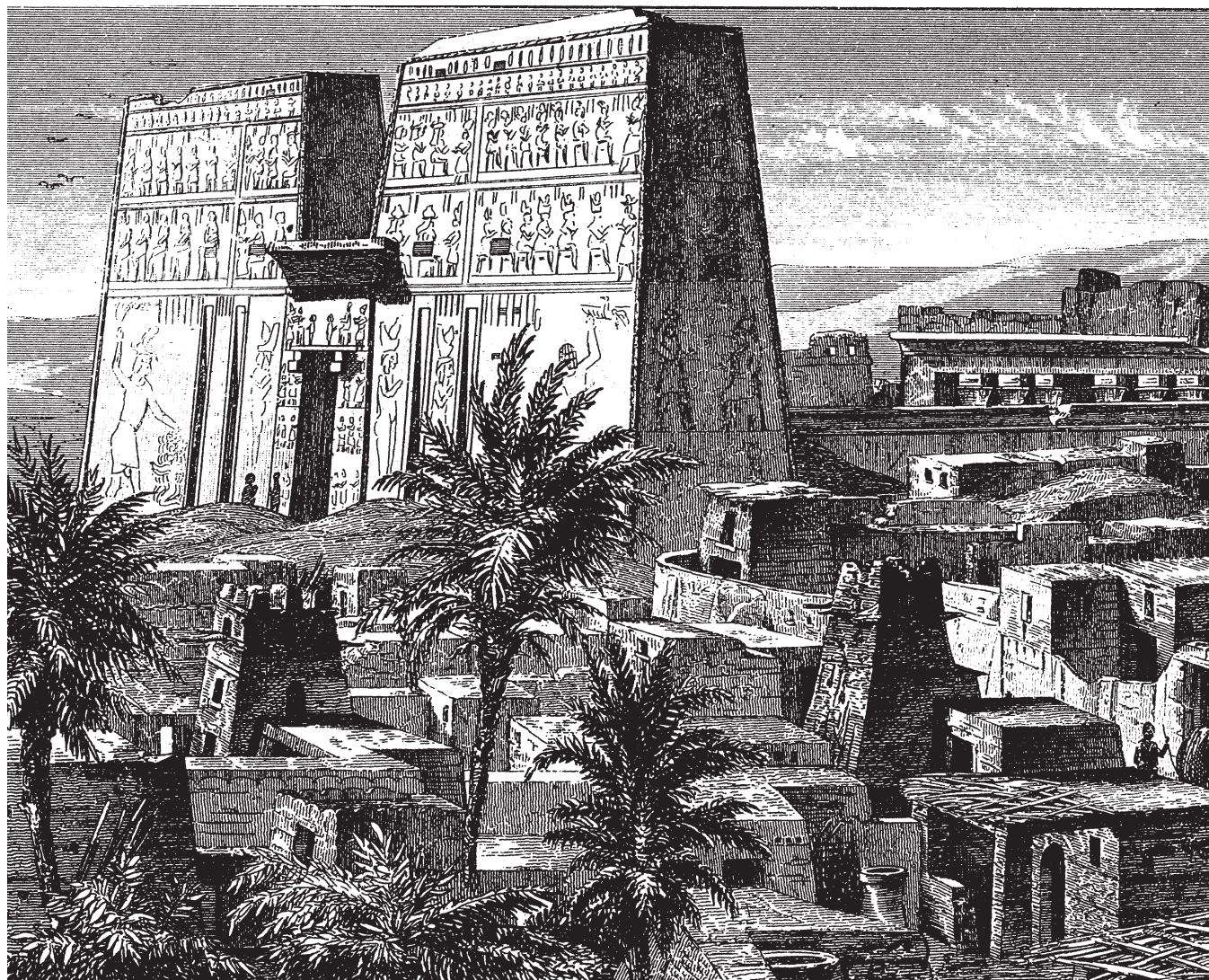


Temple

Adventure Hooks

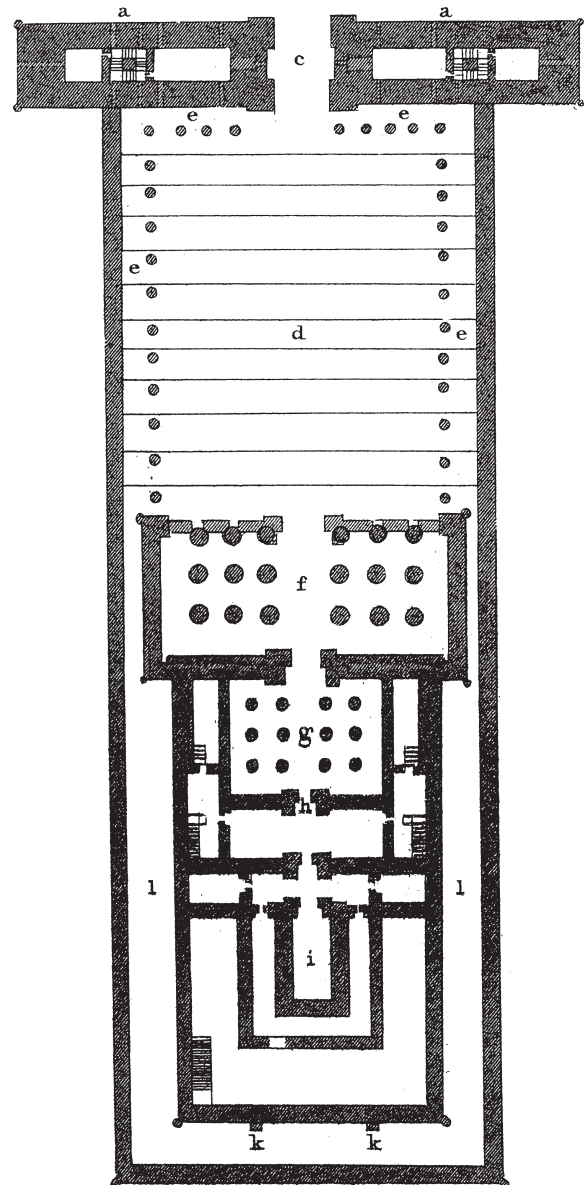
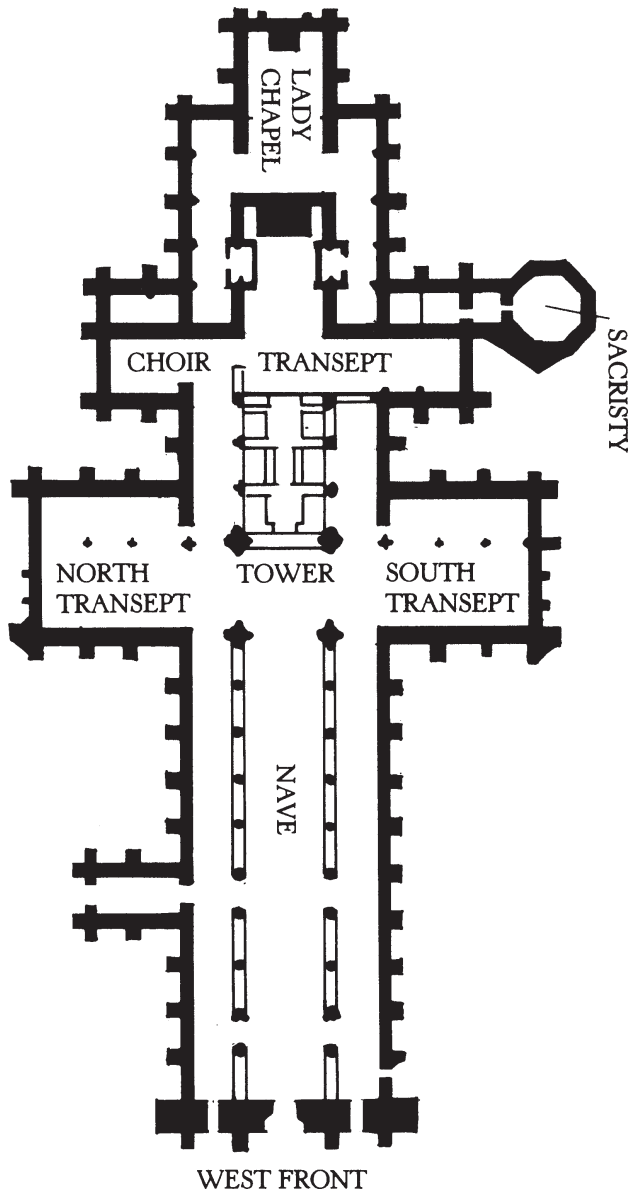
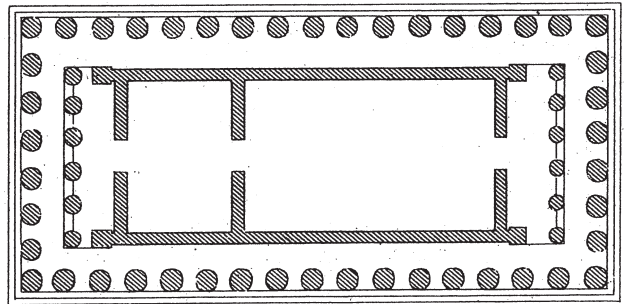
* Although the gods quarrel amongst themselves, it is perilous for their mortal followers to assume license from this to disrespect deities of foreign cities and lands. Abusing the temples and priests even of enemies can lead to dire curses and divine retribution. Player characters who have damaged or looted a fane to a foreign deity might have to undertake an extended pilgrimage to one of the god's temples, make large reparations and sacrifices, perform special favors to serve the divine being's interests — or even do all of these — to avert the ill-luck and troubles laid upon them by the deity.

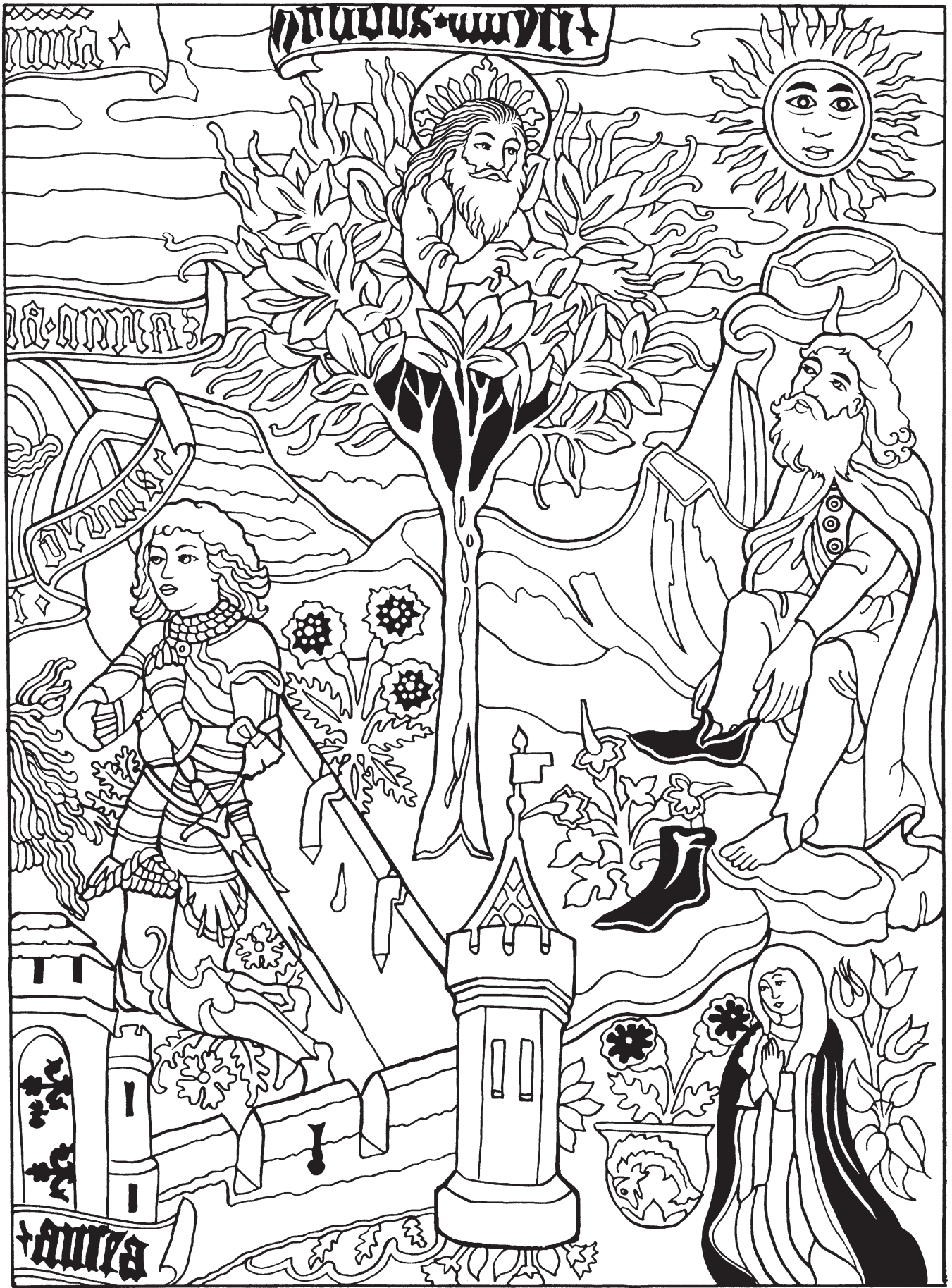
* The architect in charge of building a new temple to a particular deity is grievously behind schedule and has been unable to obtain a slab of special marble required for the altar. If this stone is not obtained by the new moon, it cannot be consecrated in time for inclusion in the temple and its completion and opening will be under a pall. He is thus willing to pay a hefty sum to any adventurers who can find, quarry, and bring to him a suitable slab of the stone in time — but nothing for those who fail to meet the deadline! (This adventure hook is based on one of the adventures presented in the Skirmisher Publishing LLC d20 supplement *Tests of Skill*.)



Sample Temple Floorplans

Shown here are floorplans from three different historic temple-building traditions (not shown to scale in relation to each other). At top is a plan of the Parthenon in Athens, Greece, built of marble in the 5th century B.C., dedicated to the goddess Athena, and about 100 feet wide and 230 feet long. Bottom left is a plan of the Gothic cathedral in Salisbury, England, built during the 13th century A.D., some 200 feet wide at its transept crossing, 500 feet long, and 404 feet high, and dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Bottom right is a plan of the Temple of Edfu in Karnak, Egypt, built of sandstone from the 3rd to the 1st centuries B.C., approximately 260 feet long, 120 feet wide, and 120 feet high, and dedicated to the god Horus (and depicted in the image on page 14).





City Builder Volume 9: *Religious Places* is the ninth of 11 complementary books designed to help guide Game Masters through the process of creating exciting and compelling urban areas and places within them for their campaigns. It is a universal resource that is not specific to any specific game system and is designed to be compatible with the needs of almost any ancient, Dark Ages, Middle Ages, Renaissance, or fantasy milieu. Its contents include:

- * An Introduction that describes the series and how to use the material in this volume;

- * Sections devoted to Cemeteries, Monasteries, Shrines, and Temples.

- * One or more Adventure Hooks tying in with each described sort of place.

