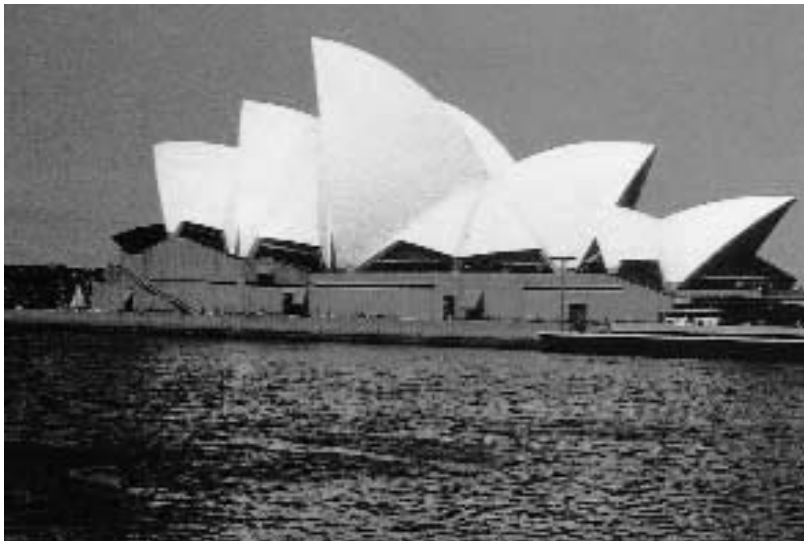

Figure 6.3 Sydney Opera House

Rainaldi's twin churches at the Piazza del Popolo, Rome, for example, are emphatically a gratuitous decoration. As Abercrombie (1914) pointed out: 'Churches are the last thing, ordinarily, to be produced in pairs, like china vases.' Few buildings in the past have had patrons of sufficient social, political or religious significance or influence to create such civic monuments. Consequently where such buildings occur, they are often representative or expressive of the prevailing political, economic or religious structure giving order to the city. Prior to the modern period and the massive expansion of urban scale, these great personal expressions of power also provided a vital visual counterpoint to the surrounding urban fabric, which was usually characterized by a greater degree of uniformity. Within this more commonplace townscape the great civic monuments became a beacon for those occupying or using the city. Despite the changes wrought upon the urban scene by modern developments, the great building from the past still retains its rightful place as both landmark and major civic ornament.

While some great buildings act as the main city landmarks, it is often the setting of such landmarks which determines their decorative effect, enhances civic display and strengthens the imageability of the city. There are two broad types of civic setting for the great building. The first is the vernacular or organic traditions of city building of which Camillo Sitte wrote (1901). The second is the grand civic design scheme of monumental proportions which was anathema to Camillo Sitte. In each of these traditions the building as landmark is related to two other important perceptual structuring elements, the node and path.

A full account of the design of the urban square has been given elsewhere (Moughtin, 1992). This chapter is concerned, however, only with the square as a setting for a building which is also a major urban landmark. Zucker (1959) identified the relationship of such a monumental building and its associated urban space as an archetypal form which he categorized as the 'dominated square'. The dominated square is categorized by one individual structure or a group of buildings towards which the open space is directed and to which all other surrounding structures are related. This dominating building may be a church, palace, town hall, theatre or railway station. Sitte's analysis of urban space included two categories of piazza, similar to the dominated square of Zucker. Sitte (1901) distinguished two types of square, the 'deep' and the 'wide'. Both types were dominated by one building the proportions of which were reflected in the shape of the space: a tall church, for example, would be faced by a deep space receding from the façade while a long palace would be fronted by a long wide space of similar proportions to the main palace façade. The network of narrow picturesque streets of Sitte's ideal urban scene would enter the square at informal but concealed angles, from whence the viewer would be immediately aware of the imposing main building. It is on this building that most of the rich decoration was bestowed. A similar effect is achieved in more formal civic

groupings. Often, as with Mansard's great palace in Versailles, the direction of the main street which opens into the square establishes the axis towards the dominant building. As Zucker (1959) notes, the apparent suction of the dominant structure and the perspective of the surrounding buildings create the spatial tension of the square, compelling the viewer to move towards and to concentrate on the focal architecture. The ornament concentrated on the façade of the main building reinforces this concentration of attention, fully establishing the landmark in the minds of both citizen and visitor.

The landmark that serves the city as a whole and even on occasions the surrounding region dominates the whole skyline. For example, the great cathedral at Lincoln, sited at the highest point in the city, dominates not only the surrounding urban area but also imposes itself upon the surrounding landscape. An account of the importance of skyline for city decoration has been outlined in Chapter 4. For the purpose of this discussion it is worth repeating that the building as landmark impinges upon the skyline and in turn decorates it with a profile that contrasts in size, scale and form with the surrounding structures. In Istanbul mosques not only decorate the skyline but also act as landmarks. The Blue Mosque with its six slender minarets encircling the dome which occupies a quarter of the space defined by them is an imposing monument occupying the centre of the Byzantium hippodrome. The same effect is achieved by the Fatih and Suleymaniye mosques while the Ortakoy mosque is a Rococo gem on the water's edge (Figure 6.4).

A building set at the head of a dominated square may or may not be detached from the surrounding buildings but if it is to be successful connections to flanking buildings must not distract from the landmark's dominance, distinction and apparent visual isolation. It must appear unique and quite separate from the surrounding buildings. The next section will concentrate upon those landmarks which are woven into the fabric of other buildings. Such buildings, or parts of buildings, are frequently

Figure 6.4 Ortakoy Mosque, Istanbul

only of a local significance but they are important for the richness and variety they give to the urban environment. They provide an opportunity for embellishment and fanciful decorative treatment.

The local landmark is usually associated with the network of paths that structure the city image. The street corner, where two paths meet and possibly where a node of social or economic activity has formed, is an obvious place for the development of a landmark. The form of the street corner has been discussed in Chapter 3: it is therefore sufficient here to emphasize that the forms of street corner most likely to lend themselves to the creation of a landmark are those of visually distinctive shape. For this purpose the towered corner with its break in the roofline results in a form which is clearly