

THE SHAPE OF RITUALS

A spatial and temporal choreography of sacred thresholds

MAIA, Master of Arts in Interior Architecture

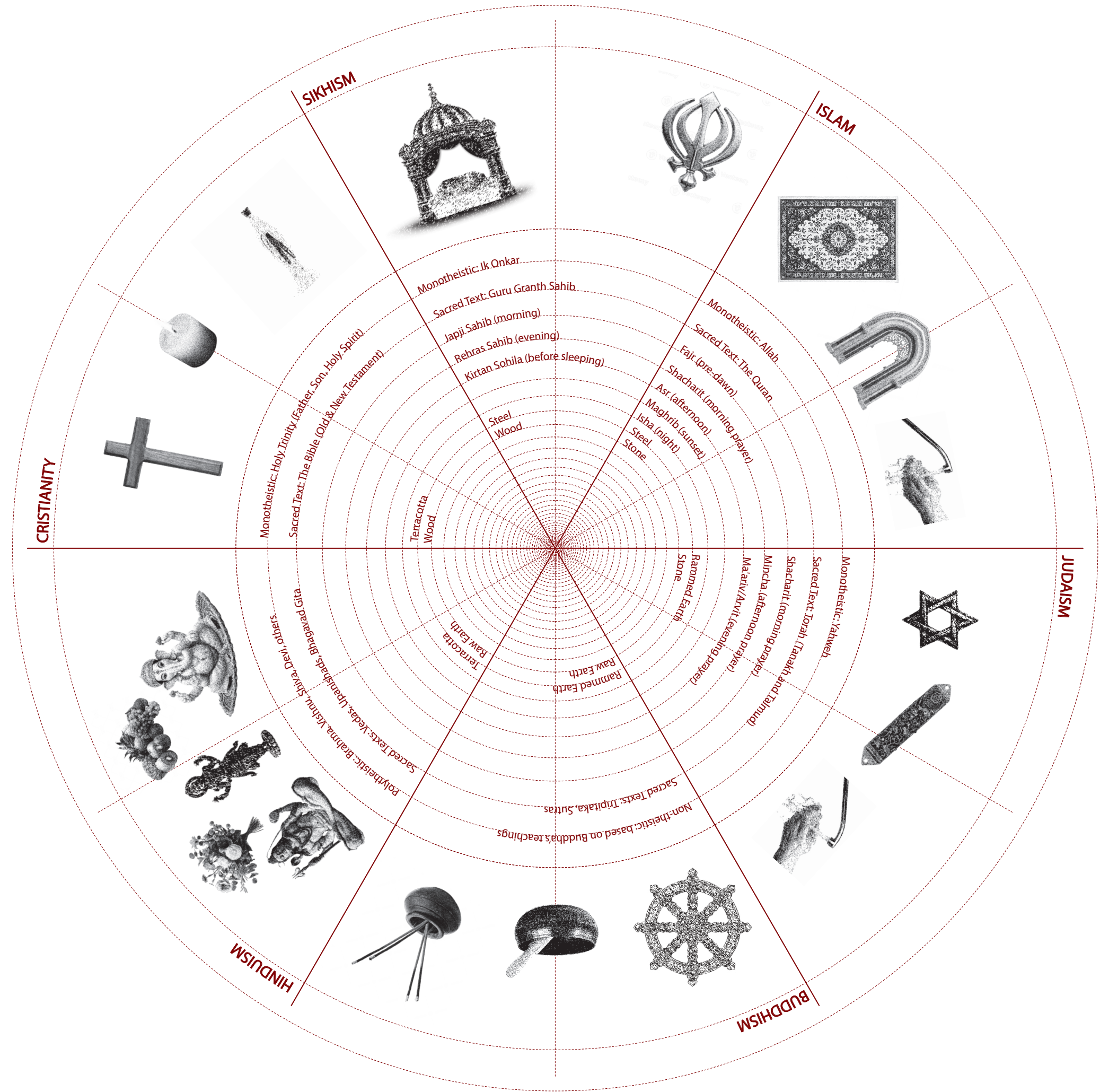
HEAD – Genève

Diploma Project 2025

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Is it possible for multiple religions to coexist in the same space while preserving their unique rituals and identities?



THE SHAPE OF RITUALS

In the heart of airports, hospitals, universities and modern public spaces, 'Multi-Faith Rooms' are born as a universal solution, places designed to accommodate all faiths. Anonymous rooms, stripped of symbols, devoid of orientation, materials, light or gestures that could evoke the sacred. In these neutral places, inclusion seems to translate into erasure: in order not to exclude anyone, one ends up representing no one.

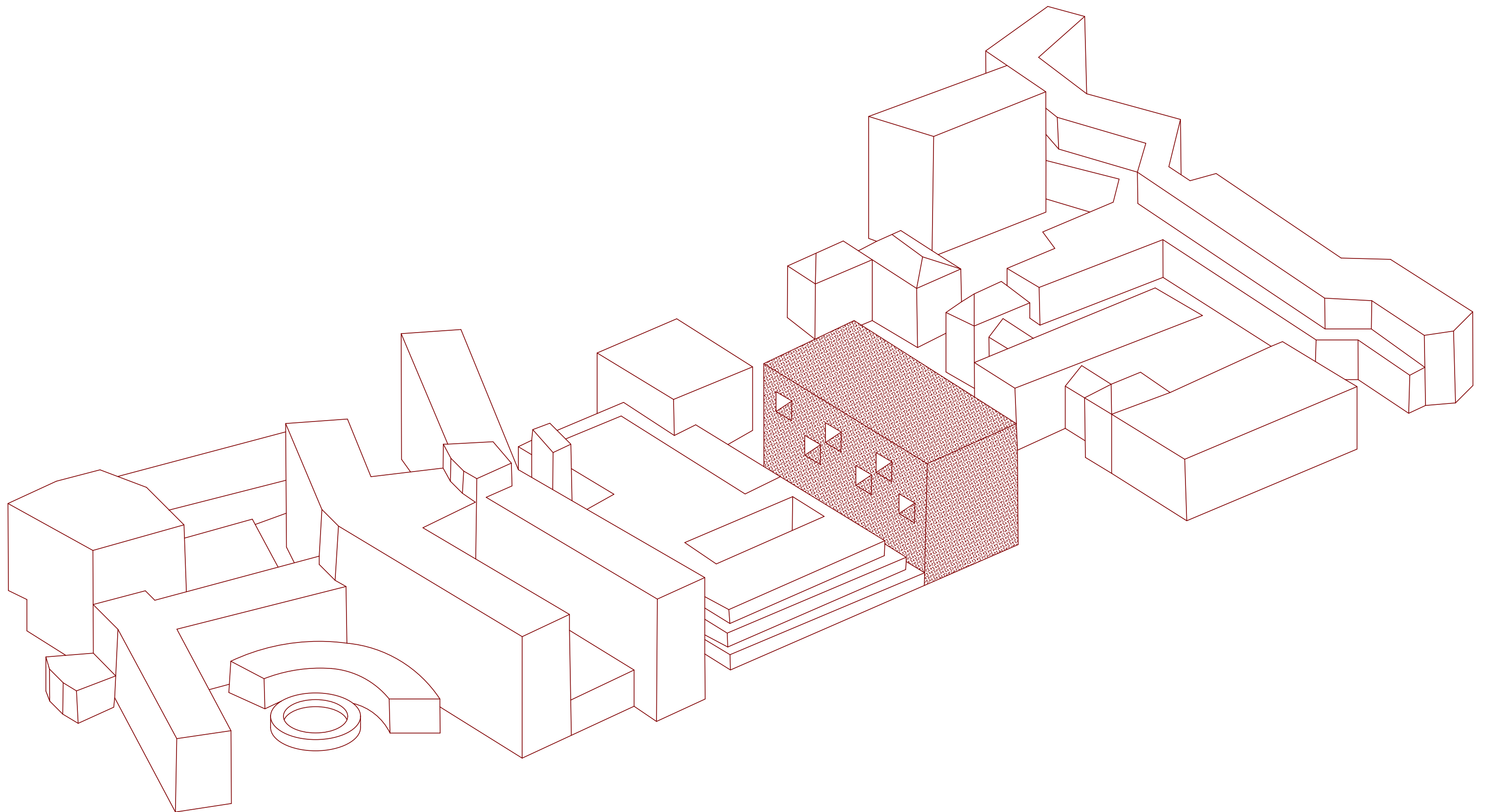
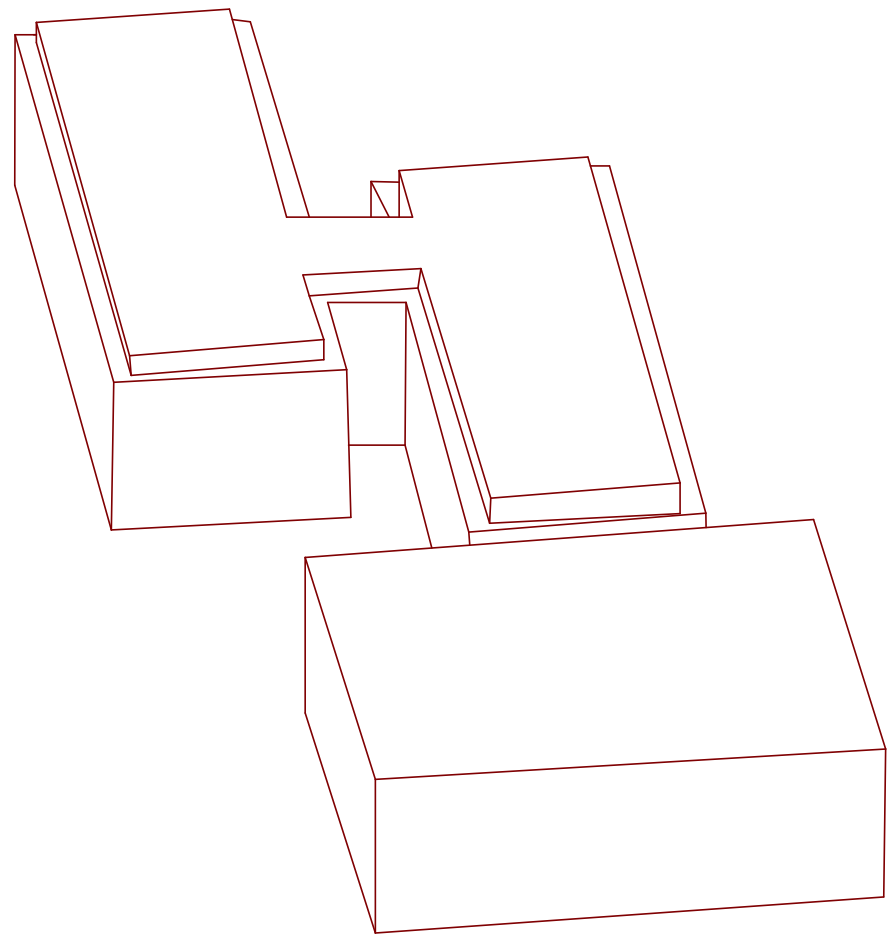
But what happens when spiritual identity is reduced to an empty corner? When the threshold of the sacred becomes confused with a waiting room, and the age-old gestures of purification, prostration, silence or prayer have to adapt to a grey carpet and four white walls?

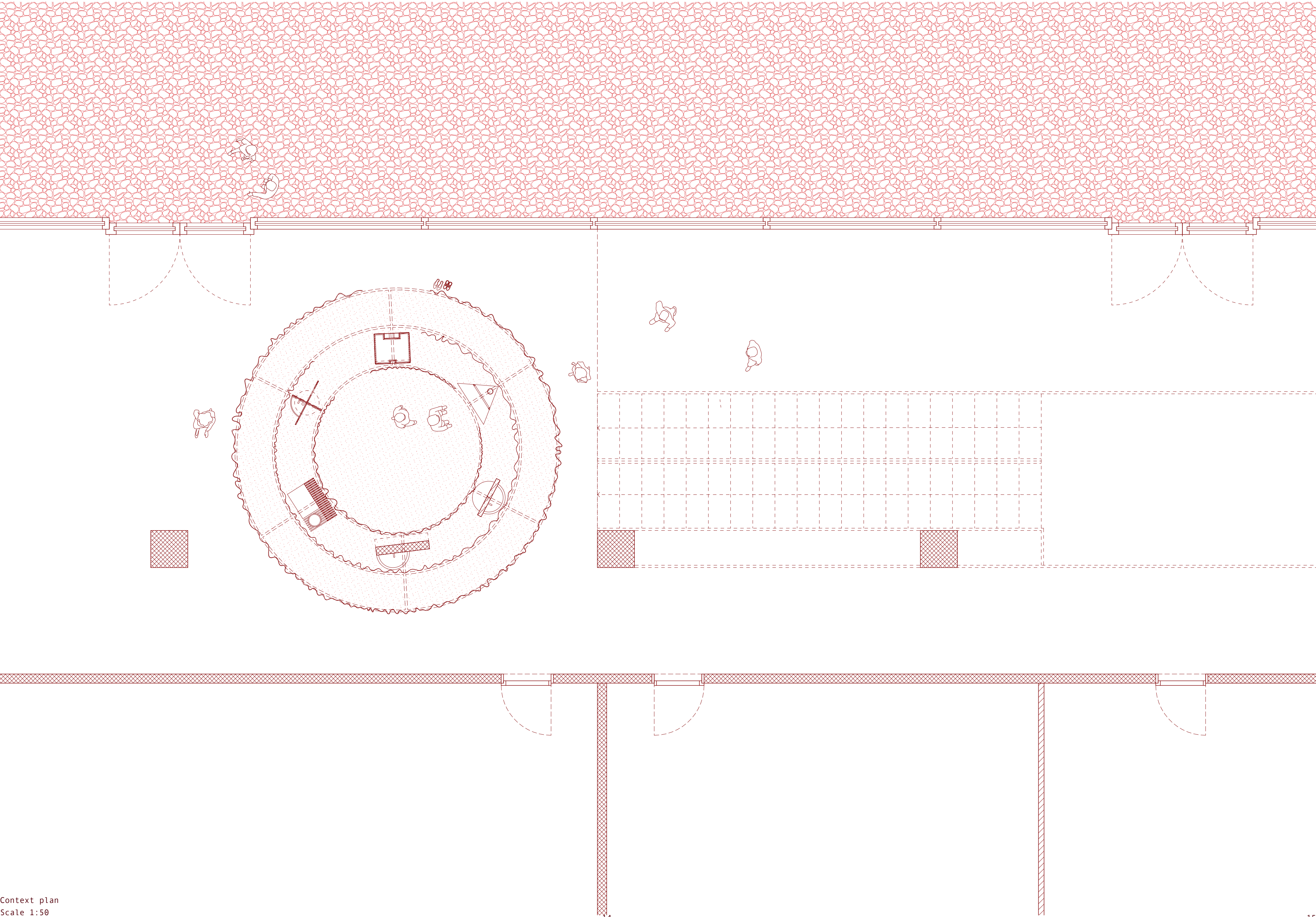
Every religion is made up of rituals, materials, colours, orientations, sounds and scents that construct a space of meaning. Every spiritual gesture is rooted in a body, a time and a place. To erase differences is not a neutral act: it is a subtle form of cultural violence, which flattens the depth of faith into a functional standardisation.

This project stems from a simple yet radical question: is it possible to create a shared space that does not erase identities, but welcomes them in their complexity? Is it possible to design places where the threshold is not a compromise, but a connection? Where every religious presence can express itself through matter, form, rhythm and symbol, without overlapping or renouncing?

This project is an attempt at an answer. An architecture that does not speak with one voice, but with six. That recognises the tension between the common and the distinct, between encounter and respect. That restores prayer to a worthy space, and religious diversity to a place of resonance.







Context plan
Scale 1:50

cyclicality and divine perfection, unity between the human and the sacred.

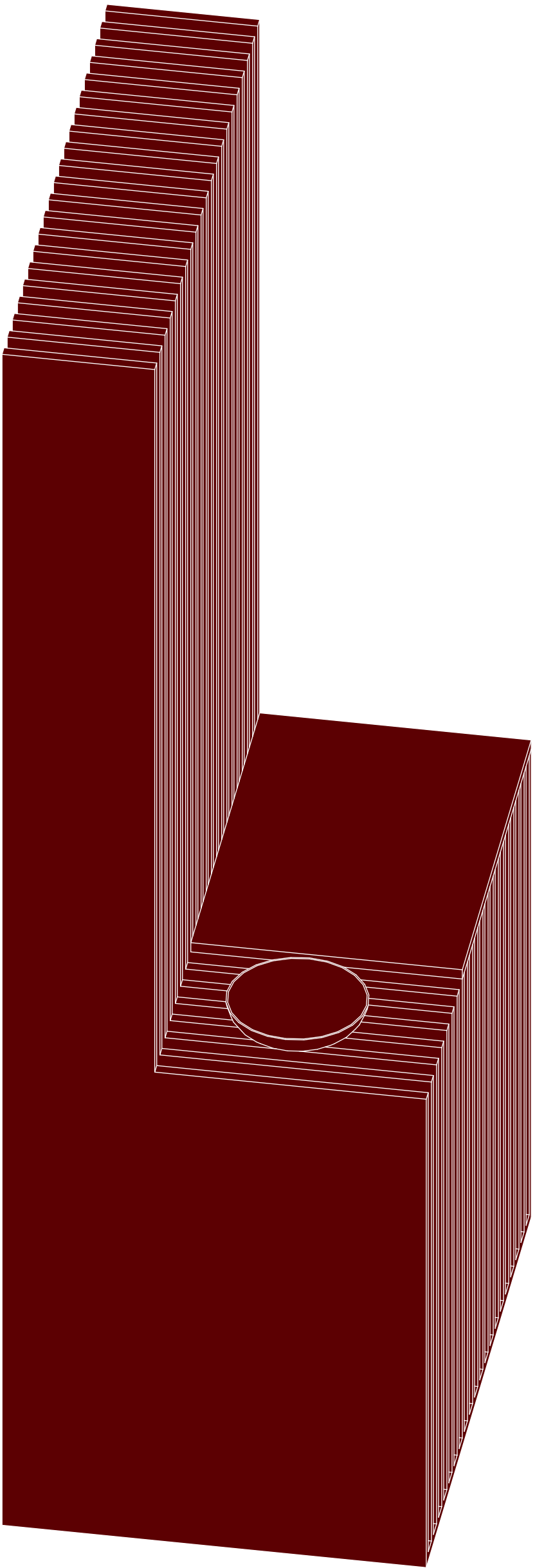
The circle is a shape that runs through many religions, a symbol of eternity,

01
Candles



02
Sikh
Symbol

03
Holy Water



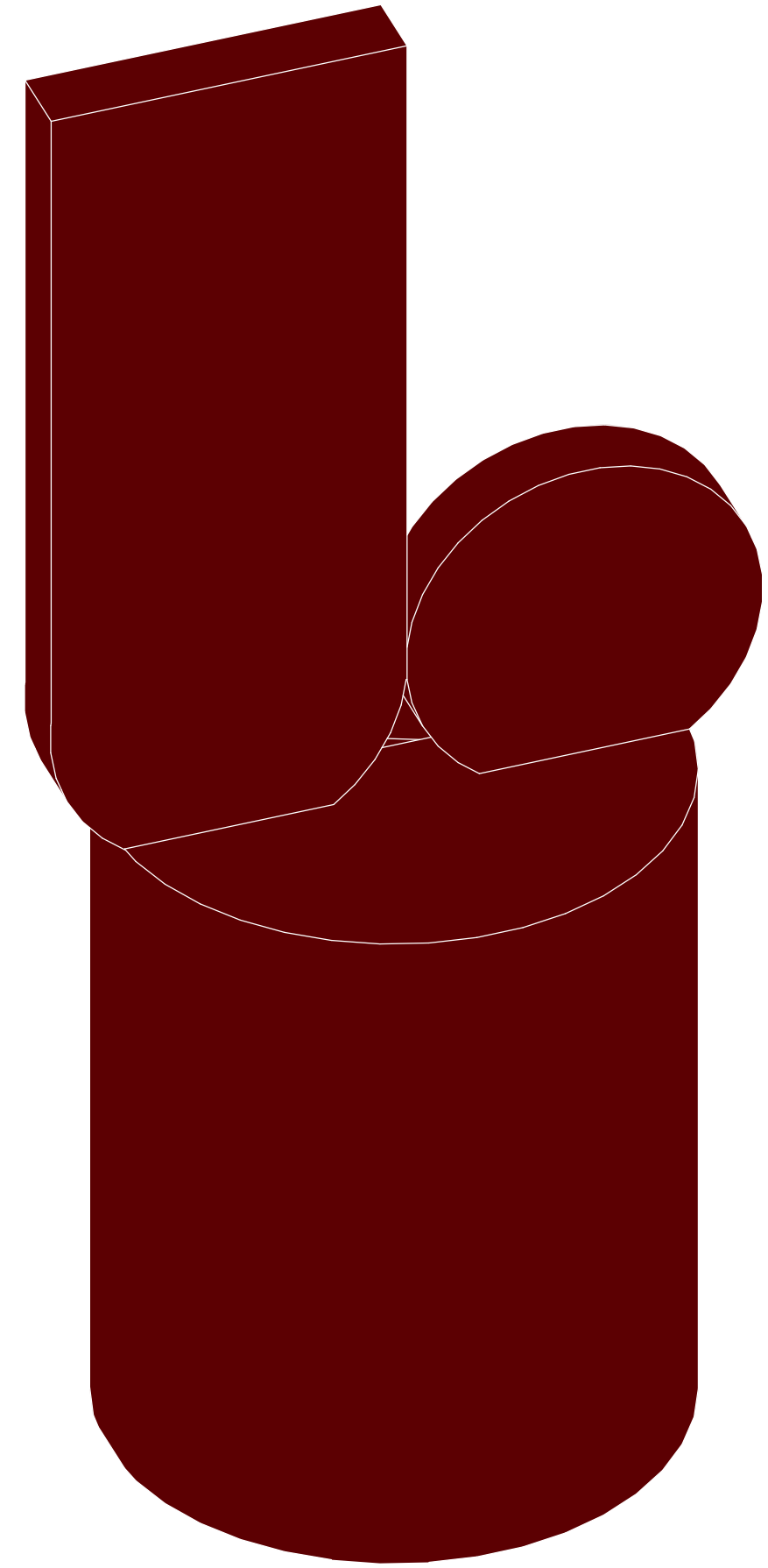
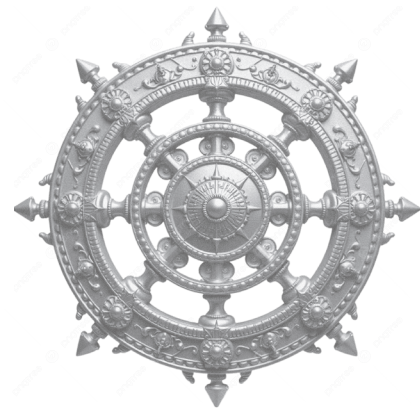
01
Bell



02
Abduction



03
Dharma
Wheel

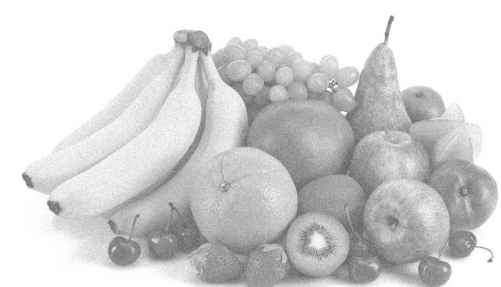


01 —
Shiva

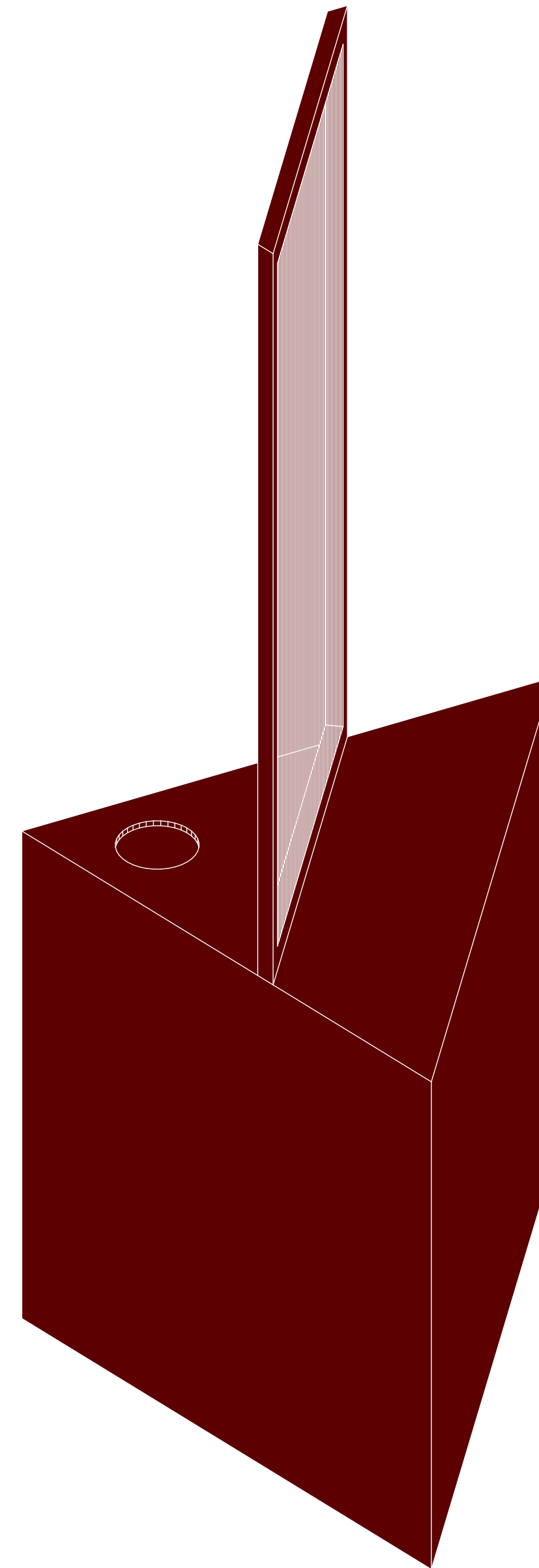


— 02
Incense

03 —
Ganesha



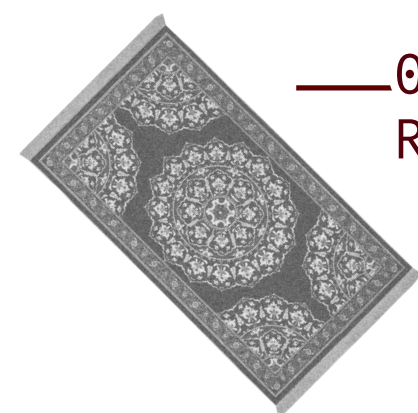
— 04
Puja



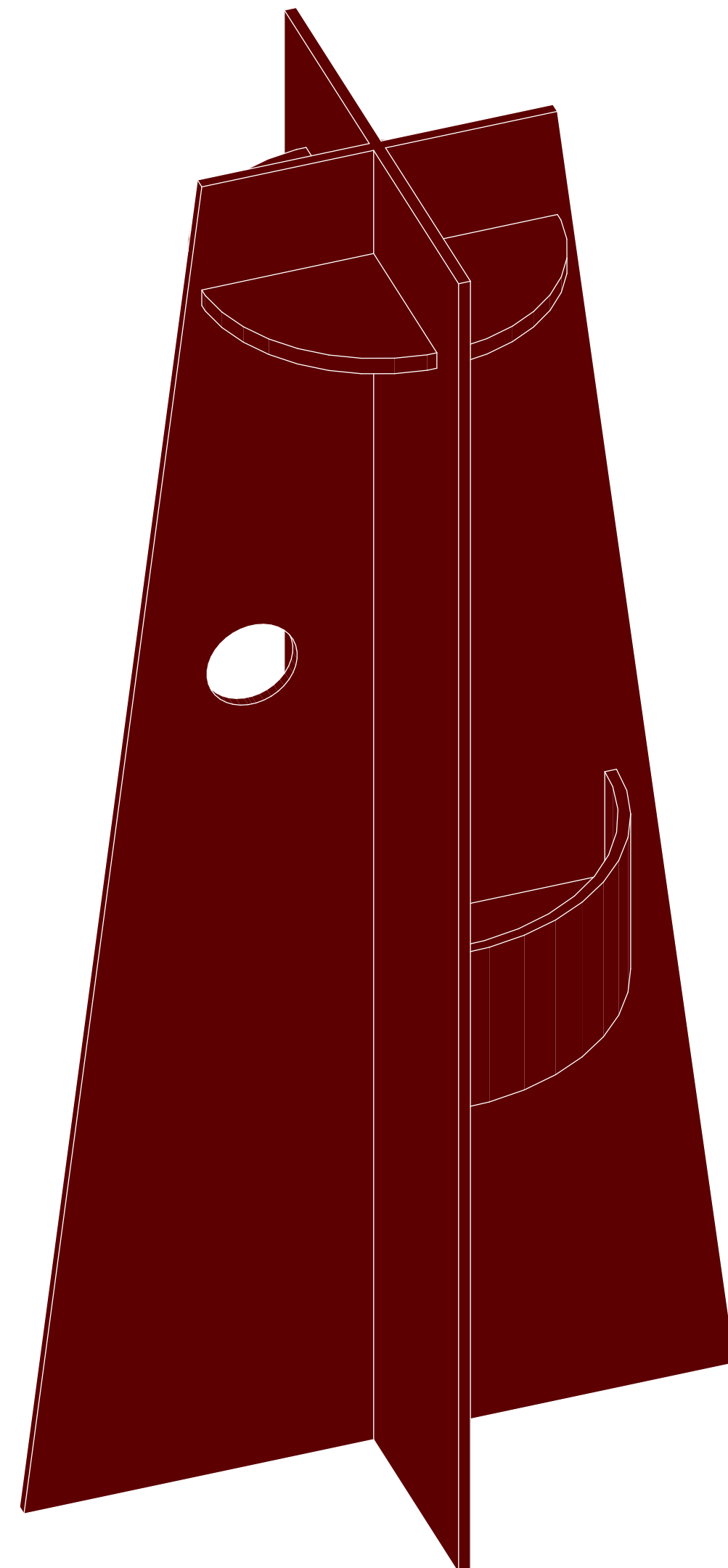


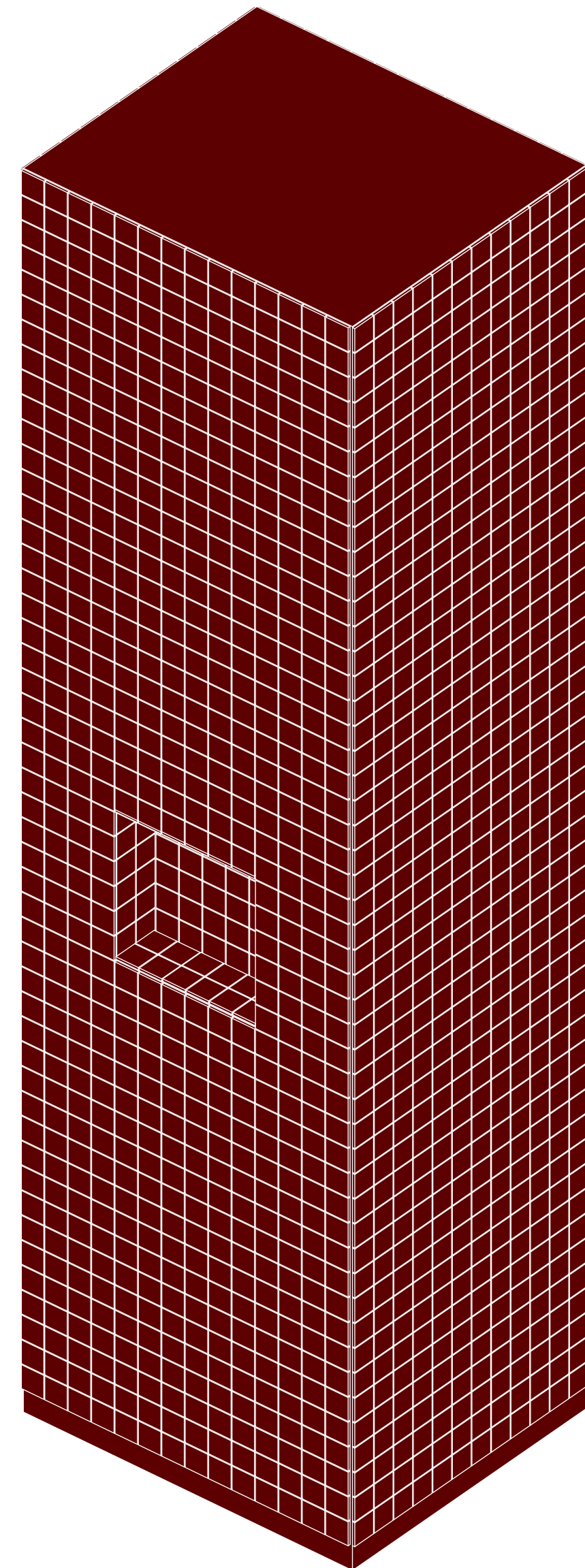
—01
Mihrab

02
Abduction



—03
Rug

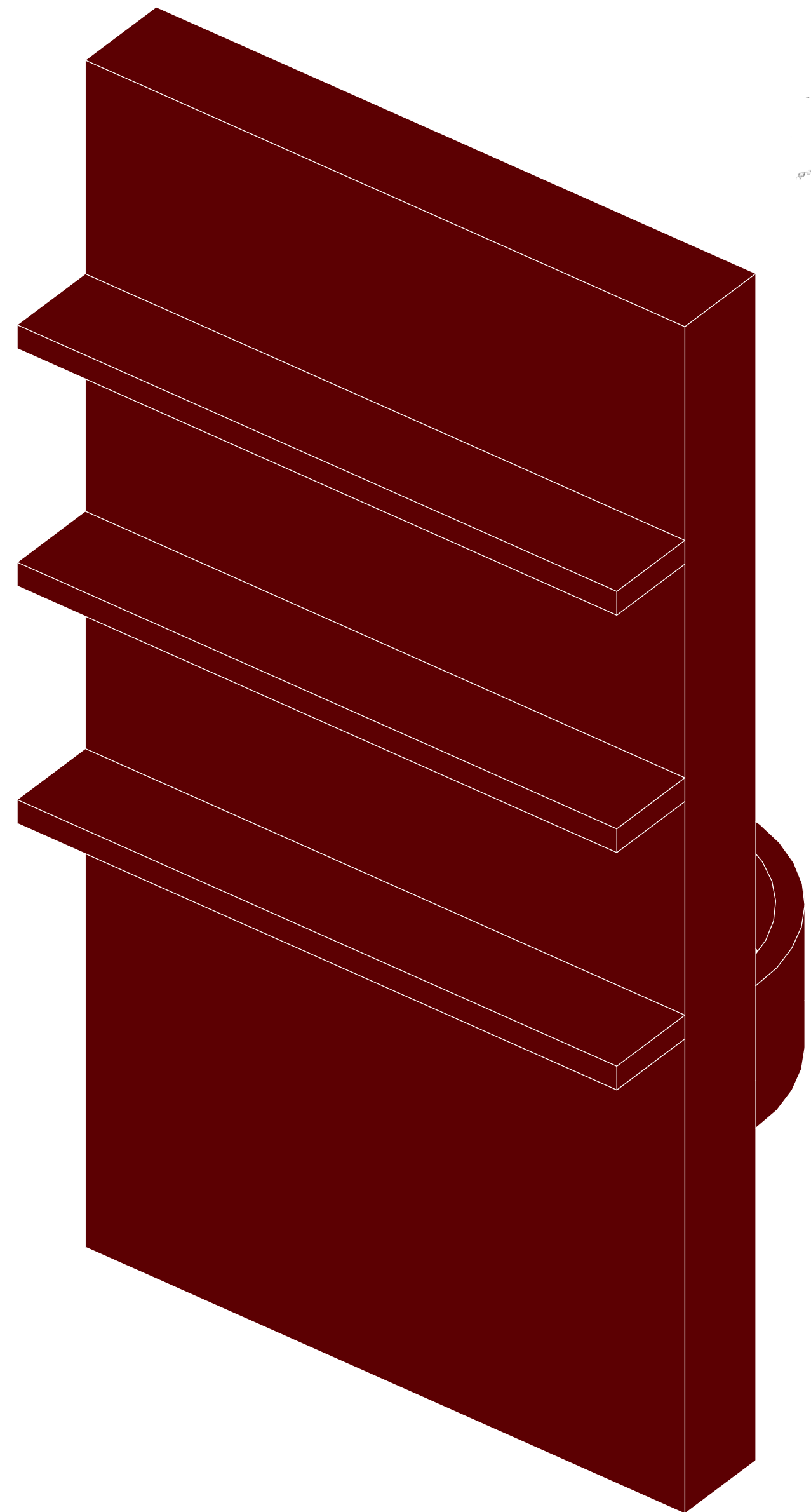


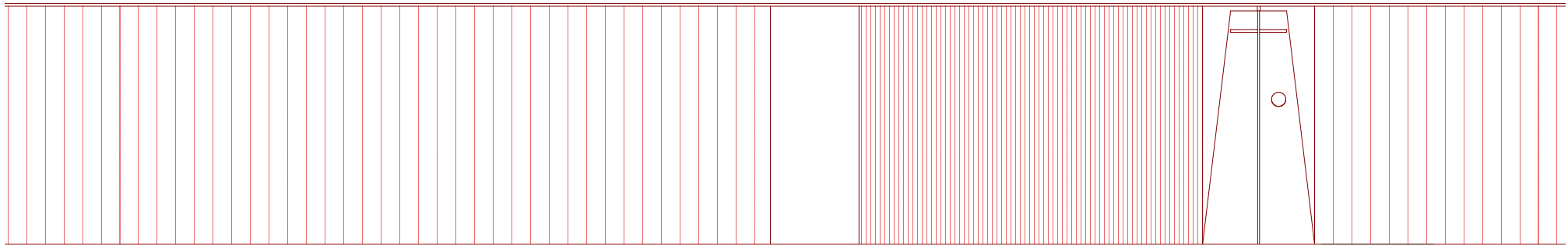
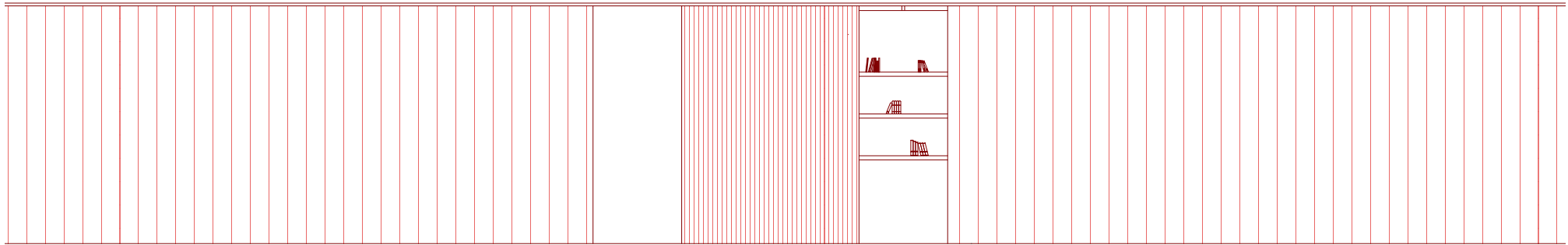
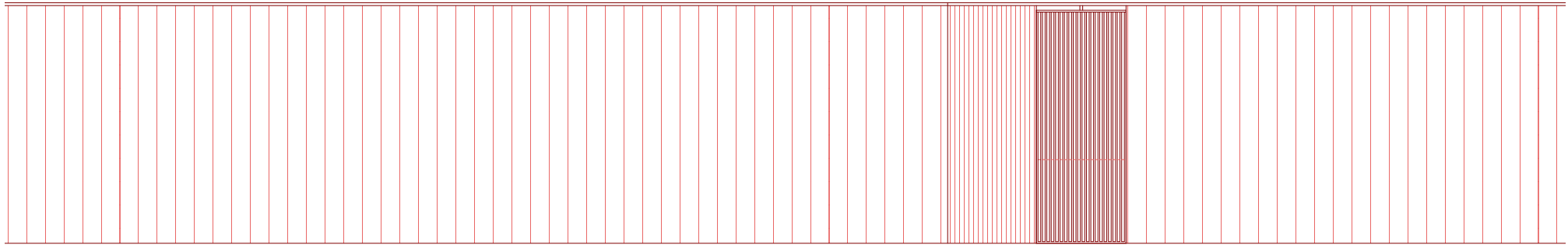
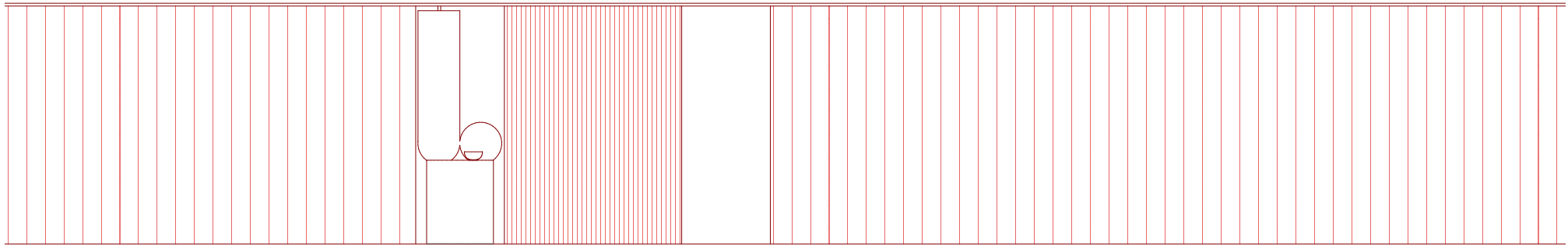
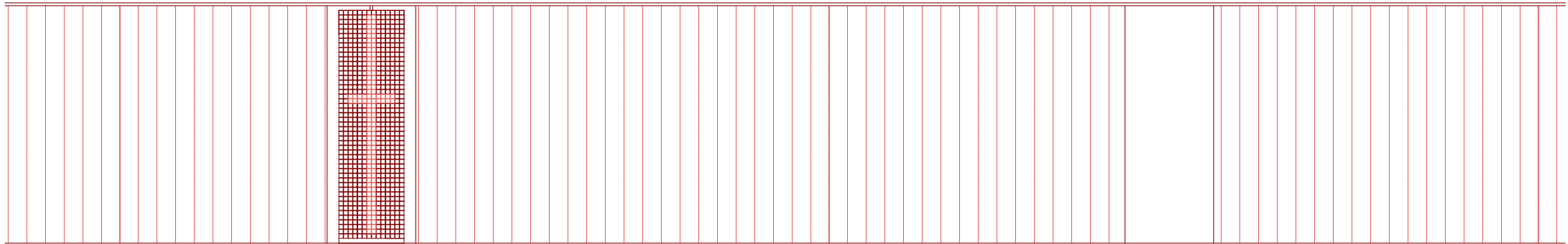
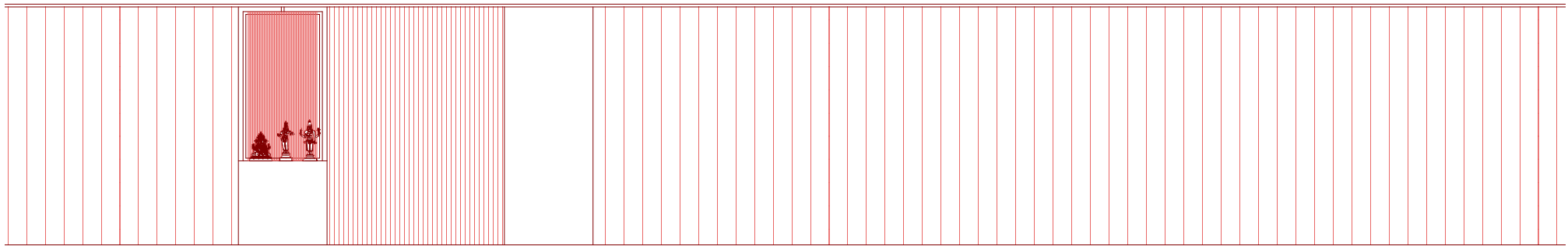


01 —
Wudu



02 —
Koran





07:05 - 07:30 13:05 - 13:30 17:05 - 17:30

08:05 - 07:30 13:35 - 14:00 20:05 - 20:30

06:05 - 06:30 12:00 - 12:30 16:00 - 16:30
09:05 - 09:30 20:35 - 21:00

07:35 - 08:00 14:05 - 14:30 18:05 - 18:30

08:35 - 09:00 14:35 - 15:00 19:35 - 20:00

06:35 - 07:00 12:35 - 13:00 16:35 - 17:00

Buddhism arose in the 5th–6th century BCE with Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, who renounced princely life in search of enlightenment. Rejecting material attachment and caste, he taught the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path—guidelines to end suffering and attain nirvana, the liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

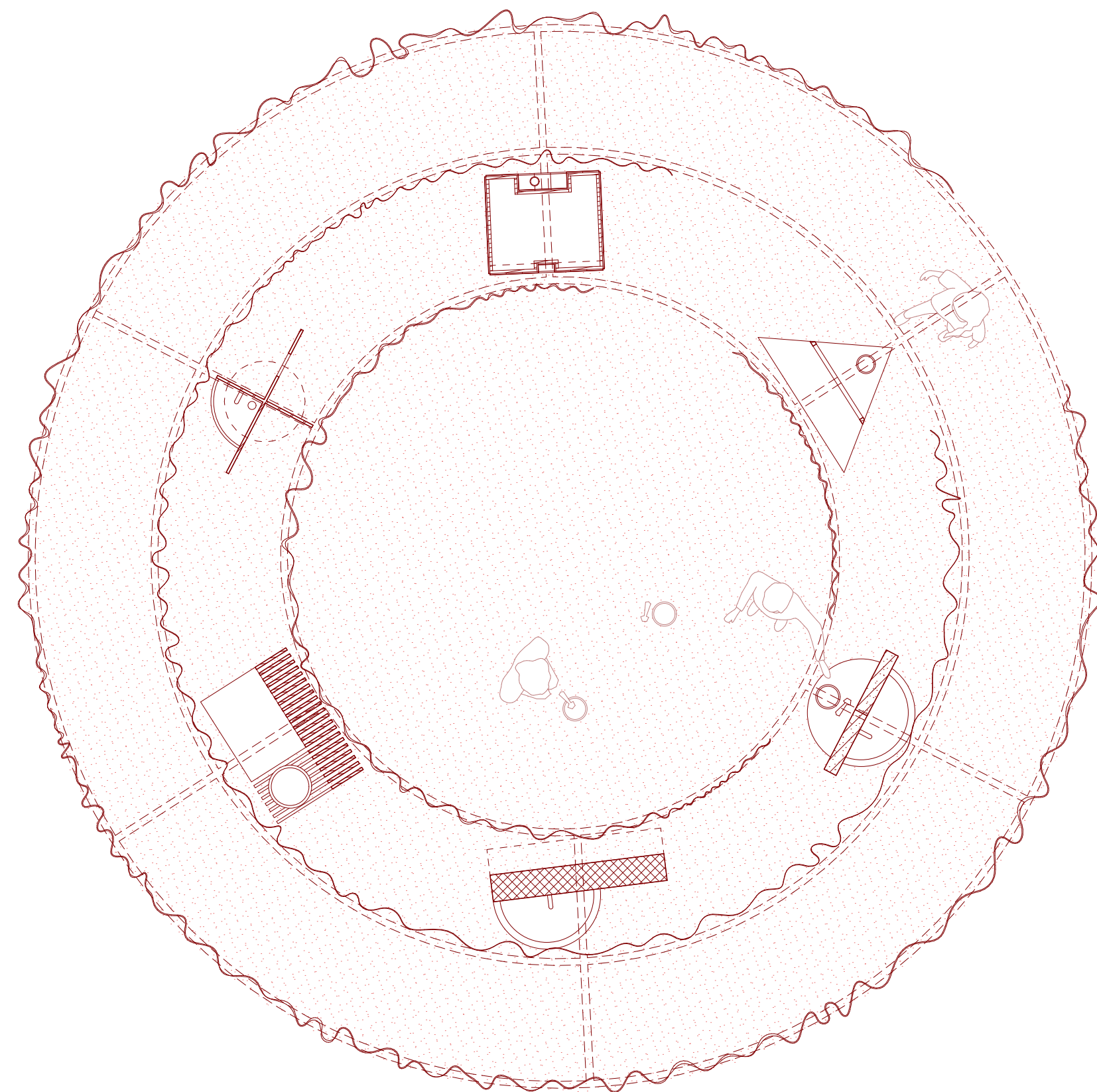
Though diverse in form—Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna—Buddhism emphasizes mindfulness, compassion, and non-attachment. Temples, monasteries, and stupas are designed not to glorify but to calm the mind and align it with the truth of impermanence.

Wood and terracotta convey earthiness, warmth, and simplicity—qualities aligned with Buddhist monastic ideals. Wooden structures often appear in temples and meditation halls, while terracotta adds natural texture and humility.

Color is symbolic but restrained. Saffron or orange robes are worn by monks, symbolizing renunciation. White stands for purity; gold denotes spiritual awakening. Mandalas, bells, and prayer wheels serve not as ornaments but as meditative tools.

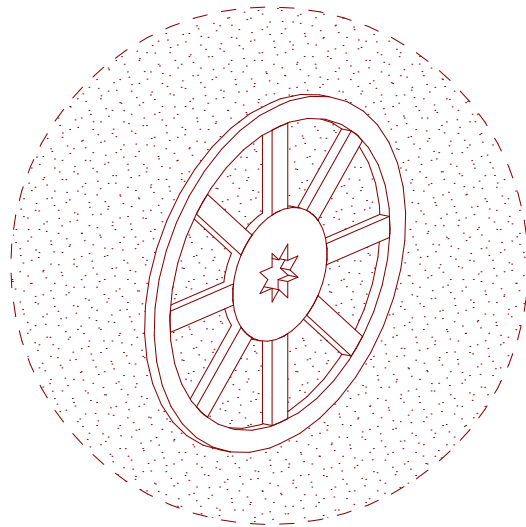
Meditation (samādhi) is the heart of Buddhist practice, often preceded by incense lighting and bell ringing. Chanting of sutras aligns the body and breath with teachings. The Dharma Wheel (Dharmachakra), a key symbol, represents the Buddha’s first teaching and the ongoing cycle of understanding.

Crossing the threshold into a temple, one may bow three times—to the Buddha, the Dharma (teaching), and the Sangha (community). Every act is mindful, every space is a step toward clarity.



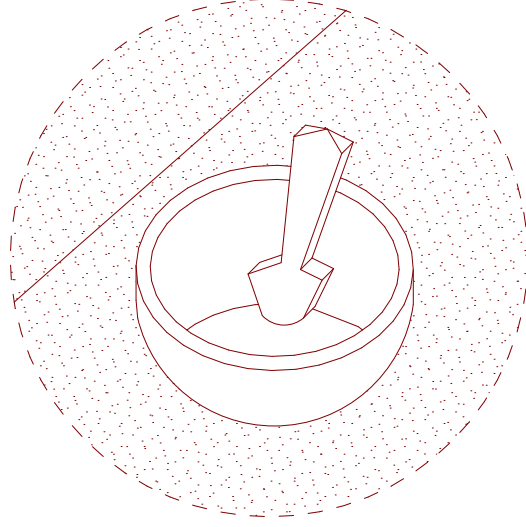
1. Dharma Wheel

The Dharma Wheel symbolizes the Buddha's teachings and the path to enlightenment, often present as a meditative and doctrinal reference in sacred space



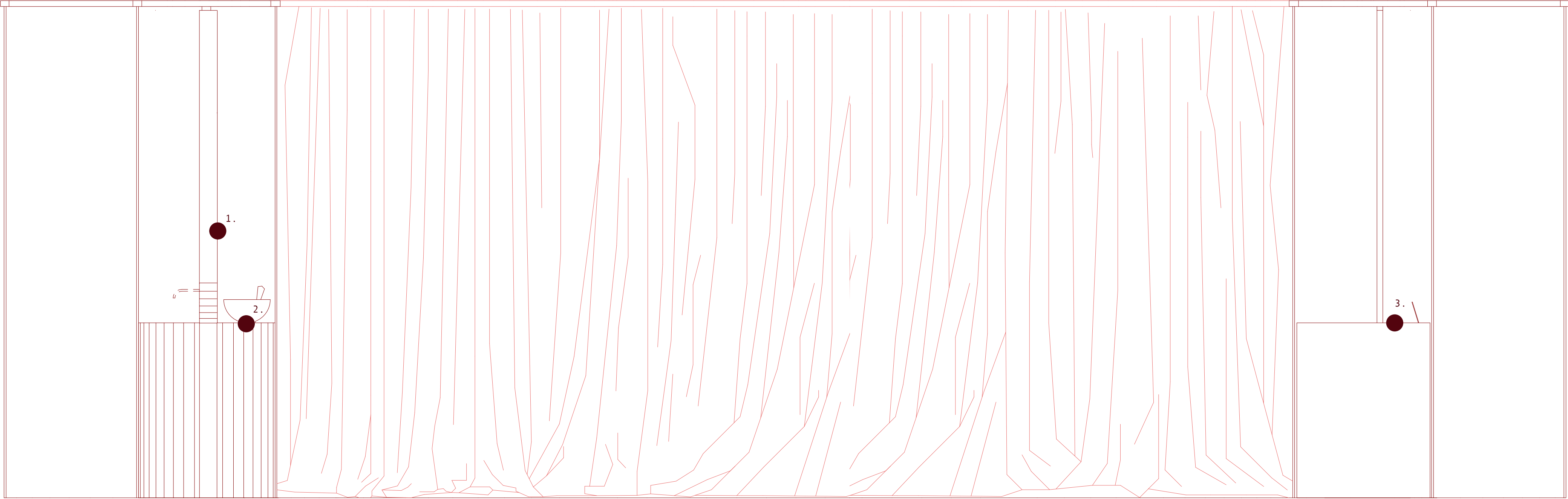
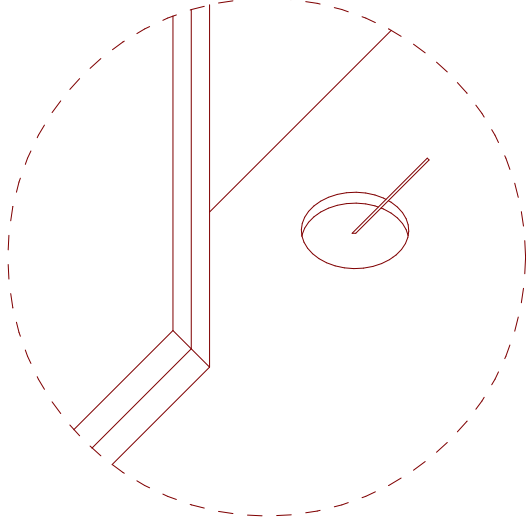
2. Bells

Bells are rung to mark the beginning and end of meditation or ritual practice, creating a sound that invites mindfulness and spiritual awareness.



3. Incense

Burning incense purifies the space and the mind, serving as an offering and aiding in concentration during prayer and meditation.



CHRISTIANITY

Christianity emerged in the 1st century CE in Roman-occupied Palestine, centered on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Proclaiming a message of love, forgiveness, and direct communion with God, Jesus' teachings formed the foundation for a faith that rapidly spread throughout the Roman world. The New Testament, complementing the Hebrew Bible, tells this story of divine incarnation and salvation.

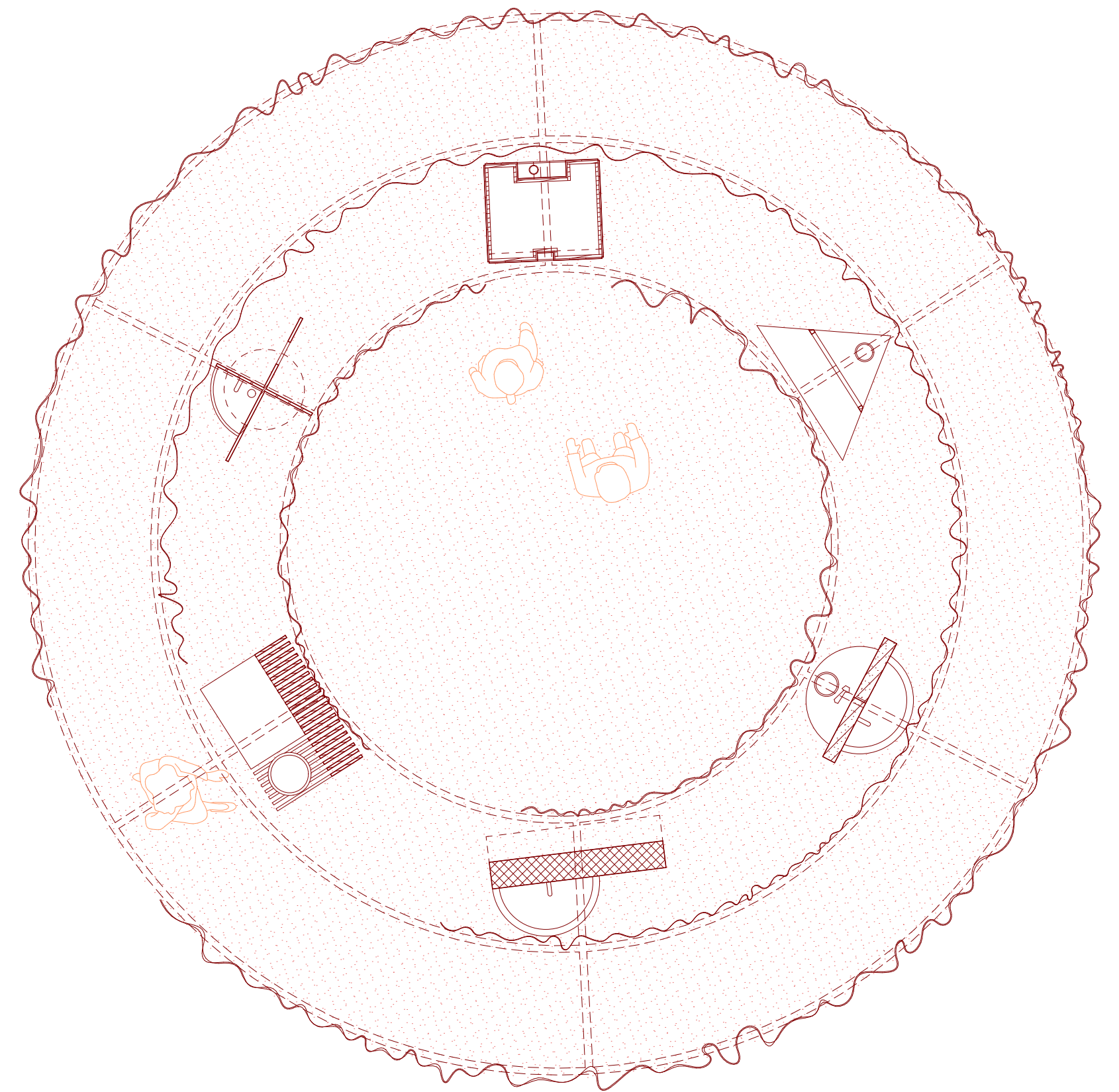
Christianity teaches that salvation is a gift of grace, available to all through faith, and often accessed through sacraments like baptism and Eucharist. Christian communities range from monumental cathedrals to humble house churches, each expressing a vision of divine presence in space.

Wood carries deep symbolic weight—from the wooden manger of Jesus' birth to the wooden cross of his death. Churches often feature wooden pews, pulpits, and crosses, embodying warmth and humility. Ceramic tiles and mosaics, especially in basilicas, narrate biblical stories or create sacred patterns leading toward the altar. Colors follow the liturgical calendar: white for purity and resurrection, red for martyrdom

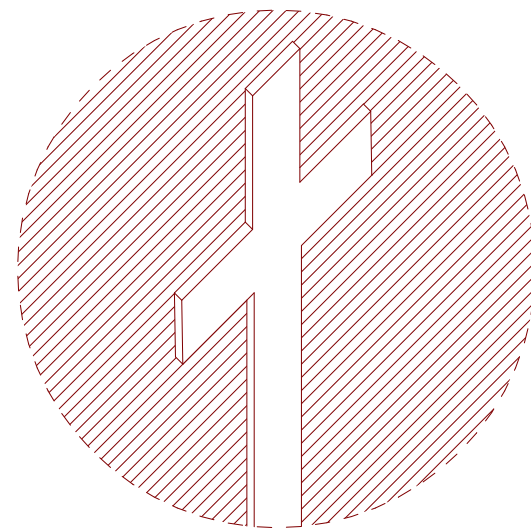
and Pentecost, violet for penance and Advent, and green for spiritual growth. Each hue transforms the atmosphere of sacred space, guiding worshippers through cycles of reflection and celebration.

Upon entering a church, believers often cross themselves with holy water—a gesture recalling baptism. The Mass or service weaves together scripture, prayer, song, and sacrament. Central is the Eucharist, where bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, uniting the faithful with divine mystery.

Candles flicker throughout the liturgy, symbolizing Christ as the light of the world. After worship, quiet prayer continues at side chapels or before statues. Christianity values both communal and solitary devotion—church and home can both become sanctuaries.



Floor plan
Scale 1:20

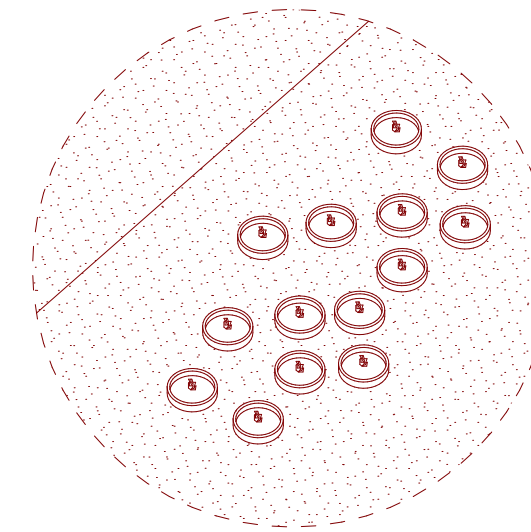
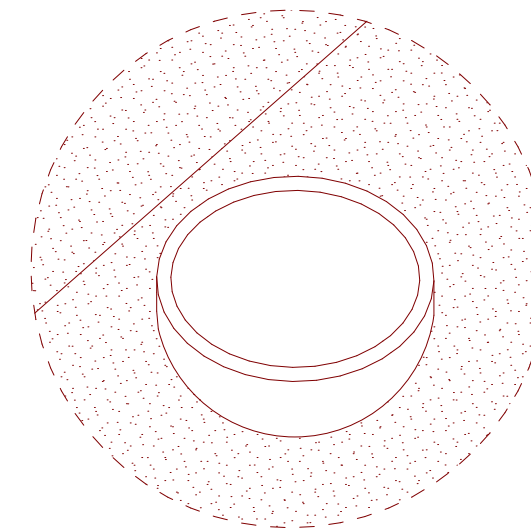


1. Cross

A central symbol of Christian faith, the cross represents the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, often used to mark spaces of devotion.

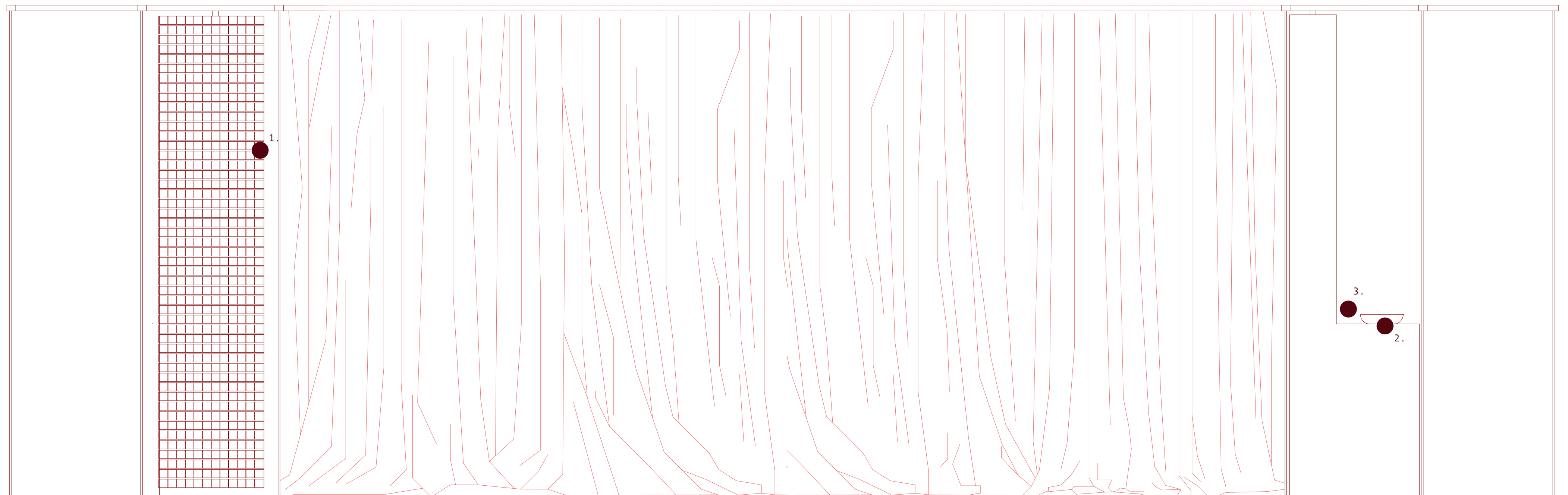
2. Holy Water

Typically placed at the entrance of sacred spaces, holy water is used for making the sign of the cross as an act of purification and blessing.



3. Candles

Lit during prayer and liturgical rituals, candles signify divine presence, spiritual focus, and the light of Christ overcoming darkness.



HINDUISM

One of the world's oldest living religions, Hinduism is not a single doctrine but a diverse collection of philosophies, practices, and traditions rooted in the Indian subcontinent. It centers on the belief in Brahman, the universal soul, manifest in countless forms—among them gods like Vishnu, Shiva, and Devi.

Sacred texts include the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and epic poems like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Cycles of birth, death, and rebirth (samsara) are shaped by karma and ultimately transcended through moksha, spiritual liberation.

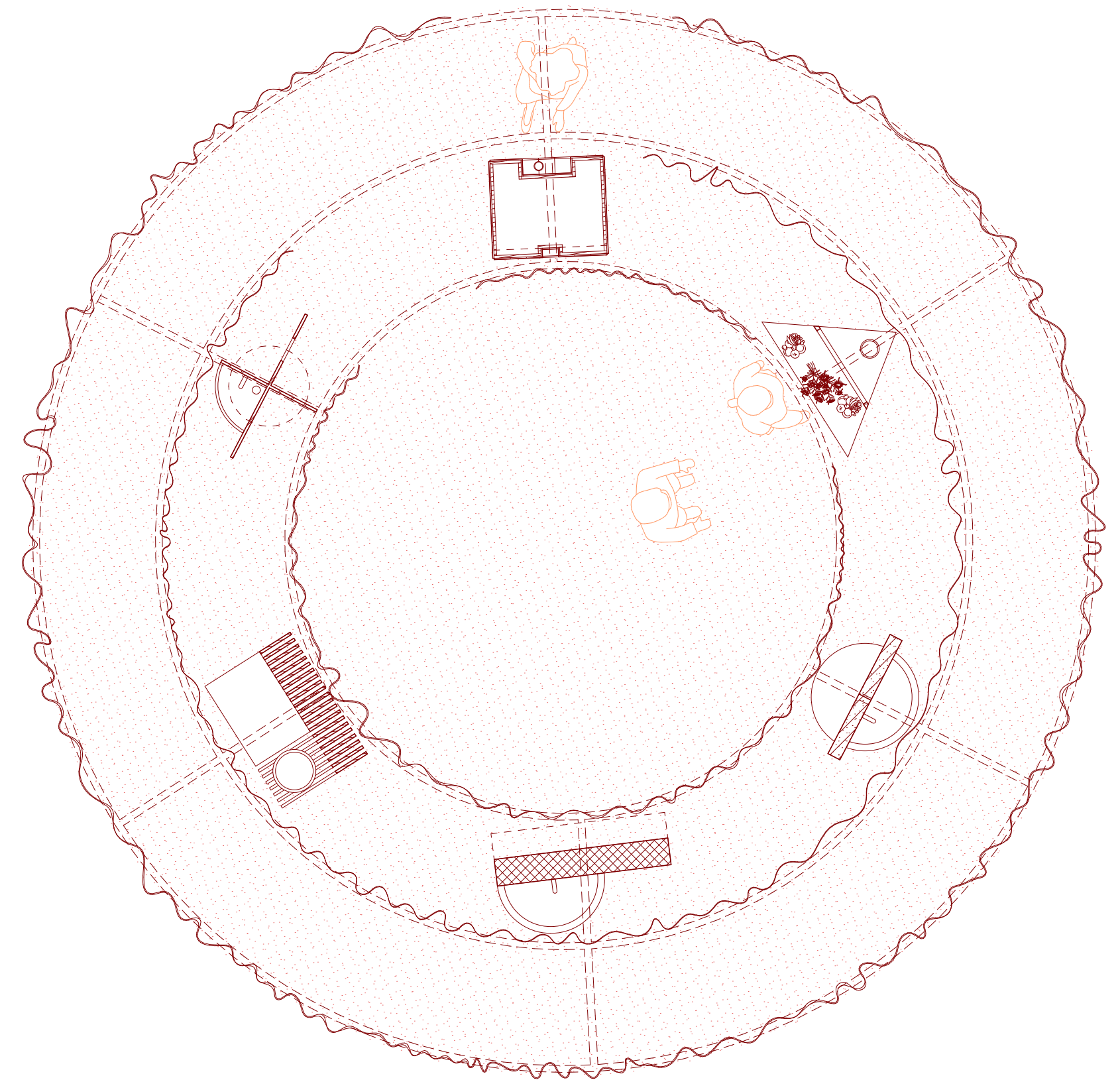
Wood and ceramic tiles often appear in Hindu temples and household shrines, evoking natural beauty and sacred geometry. Tiles allow for vibrant decorative patterns, aligning with Hinduism's emphasis on color, myth, and symbolic complexity.

Colors hold profound meaning: red (power and purity), yellow (learning and auspiciousness), blue (divinity, associated with Krishna), and white (peace and mourning). These hues are not

mere decoration but part of a language that honors gods and sanctifies space.

The daily puja (worship) includes offerings of flowers, food, incense, and light to an image of a deity. Kumkum (red powder) is applied on the forehead to mark divine presence. Incense purifies the air, and bells are rung to awaken the divine and focus the mind.

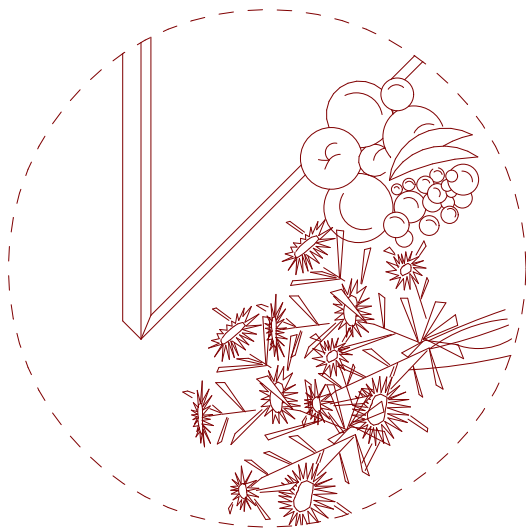
Crossing a threshold into a temple or home shrine often involves stepping over a slightly raised platform—an act of reverence. Devotees may remove shoes, wash feet, and chant mantras as they transition into sacred attention.



Floor plan
Scale 1:20

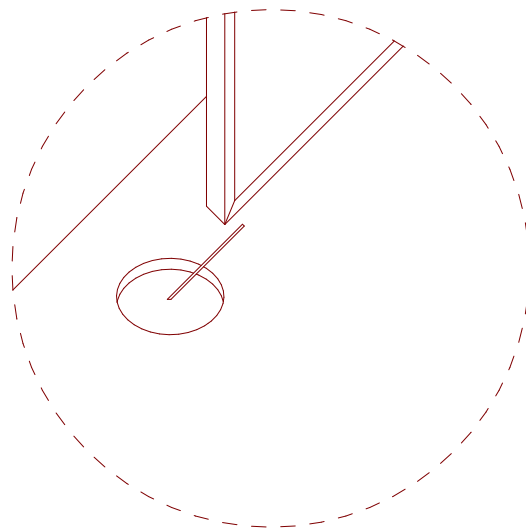
1. Puja

The puja is a central devotional ritual in Hinduism, typically performed daily, involving offerings such as flowers, light, and food placed before an image of the deity.



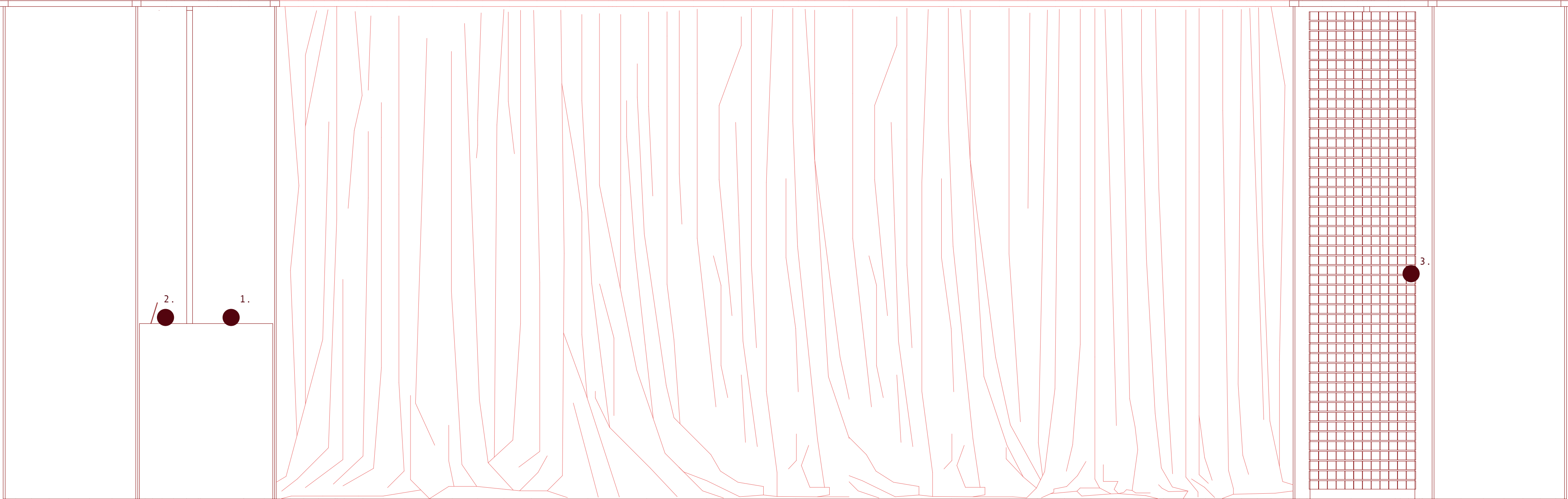
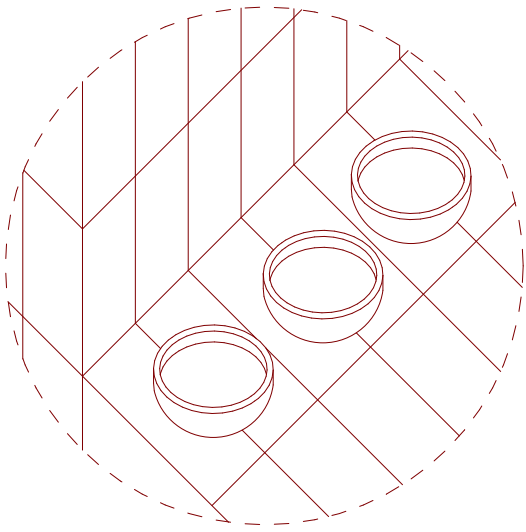
2. Incense

Incense during ritual practice serves both symbolic and functional roles. It purifies the atmosphere and represents the ascent of prayers and intentions toward the divine realm.



4. Kumkum

Kumkum, a red powder made from turmeric and lime, is applied to the forehead or sacred objects during rituals. It signifies protection, blessing, and spiritual focus, often associated with divine presence and inner awakening.



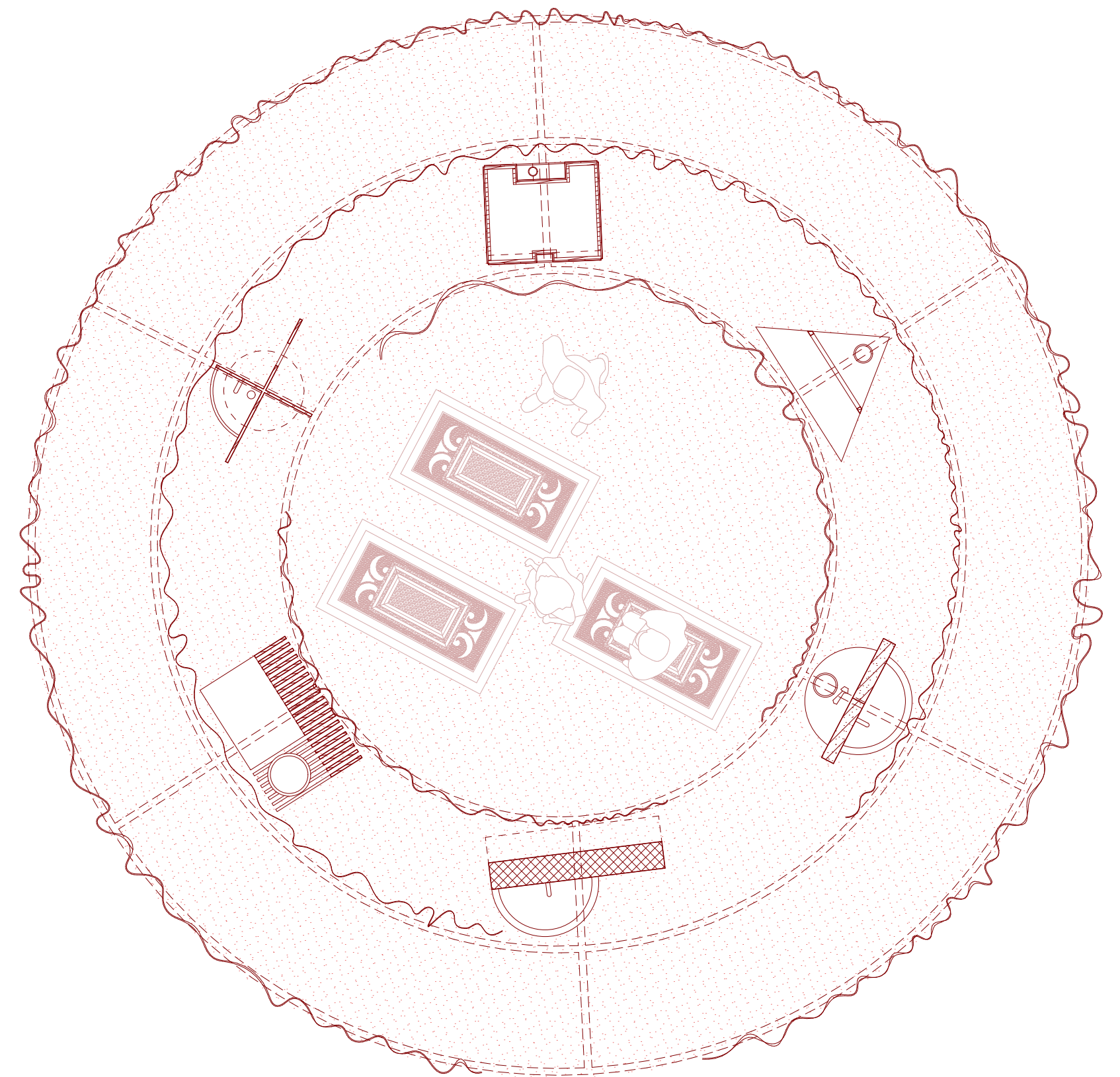
Islam, one of the three great monotheistic religions, traces its roots back to the 7th century CE in the Arabian Peninsula, when the Prophet Muhammad received divine revelations through the angel Jibreel (Gabriel). These revelations were compiled into the Qur'an, regarded by Muslims as the eternal, perfect, and unalterable word of Allah (God). Islam is not only a belief system but a comprehensive way of life, encompassing morality, law, community, and ritual. At its core lies the act of submission (Islam) to the will of God, expressed through the Five Pillars: Shahada (declaration of faith), Salat (five daily prayers), Zakat (almsgiving), Sawm (fasting during Ramadan), and Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). Each of these is a sacred act that anchors the Muslim in time, space, and body—rituals not only practiced but architecturally encoded.

In Islamic sacred architecture, materials are never arbitrary. Cement and metal are particularly significant in contemporary Islamic architecture: cement symbolizes strength and permanence, while metal often conveys precision, reflection, and divine perfection. Traditional materials like glazed ceramics and carved stone

also carry profound spiritual weight. Repeating geometric patterns evoke the infinite nature of God, and the prayer rug, always oriented toward Mecca, becomes a symbolic threshold between the everyday and the divine.

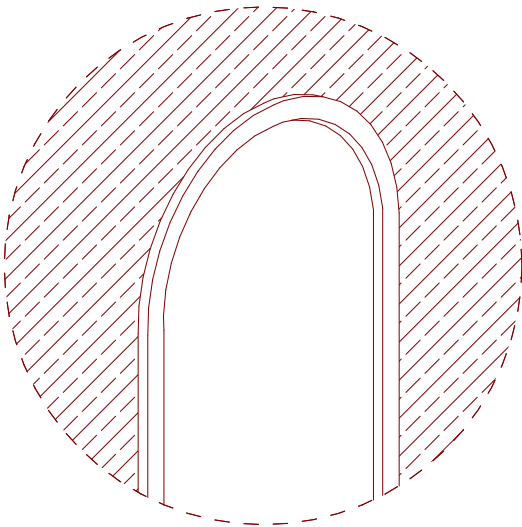
Color symbolism is deeply embedded: green, associated with the Prophet's cloak, evokes paradise; white symbolizes purity, especially during pilgrimage; gold reflects divine light. Human representation is avoided, placing emphasis on calligraphy, geometry, and abstract order.

Muslim daily life is structured by the call to prayer (adhan), resounding five times a day from mosques. Each prayer is preceded by wudu, ritual ablution, which purifies hands, face, and feet. Entering a sacred space involves a choreography of humility: shoes removed, head covered, body aligned toward Mecca. Friday communal prayers (Jumu'ah) unite the community in a sacred weekly rhythm, reinforcing spiritual and social bonds.



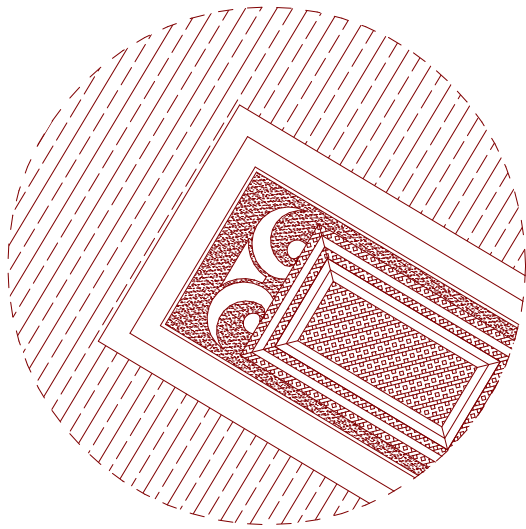
1. Mihrab

An architectural niche in the wall of the prayer space, the mihrab indicates the direction of Mecca, guiding congregants during prayer.



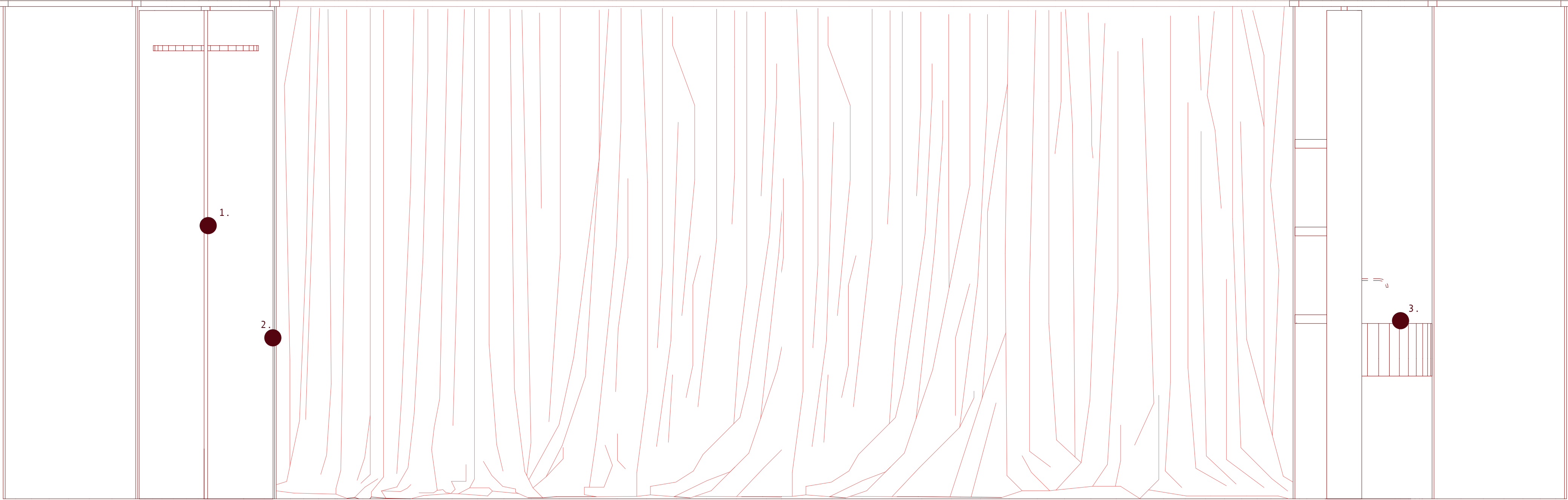
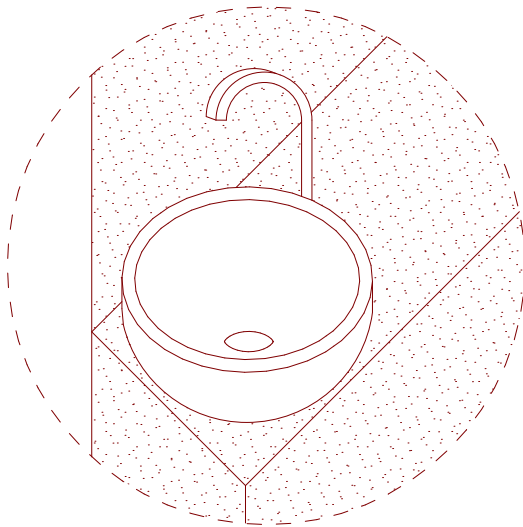
2. Prayer Rug

Used to demarcate a clean and oriented space for worship, the prayer rug often features a directional motif pointing toward the qibla.



3. Wudu

The ritual washing of hands, face, and feet purifies the body and prepares it for devotional practice.



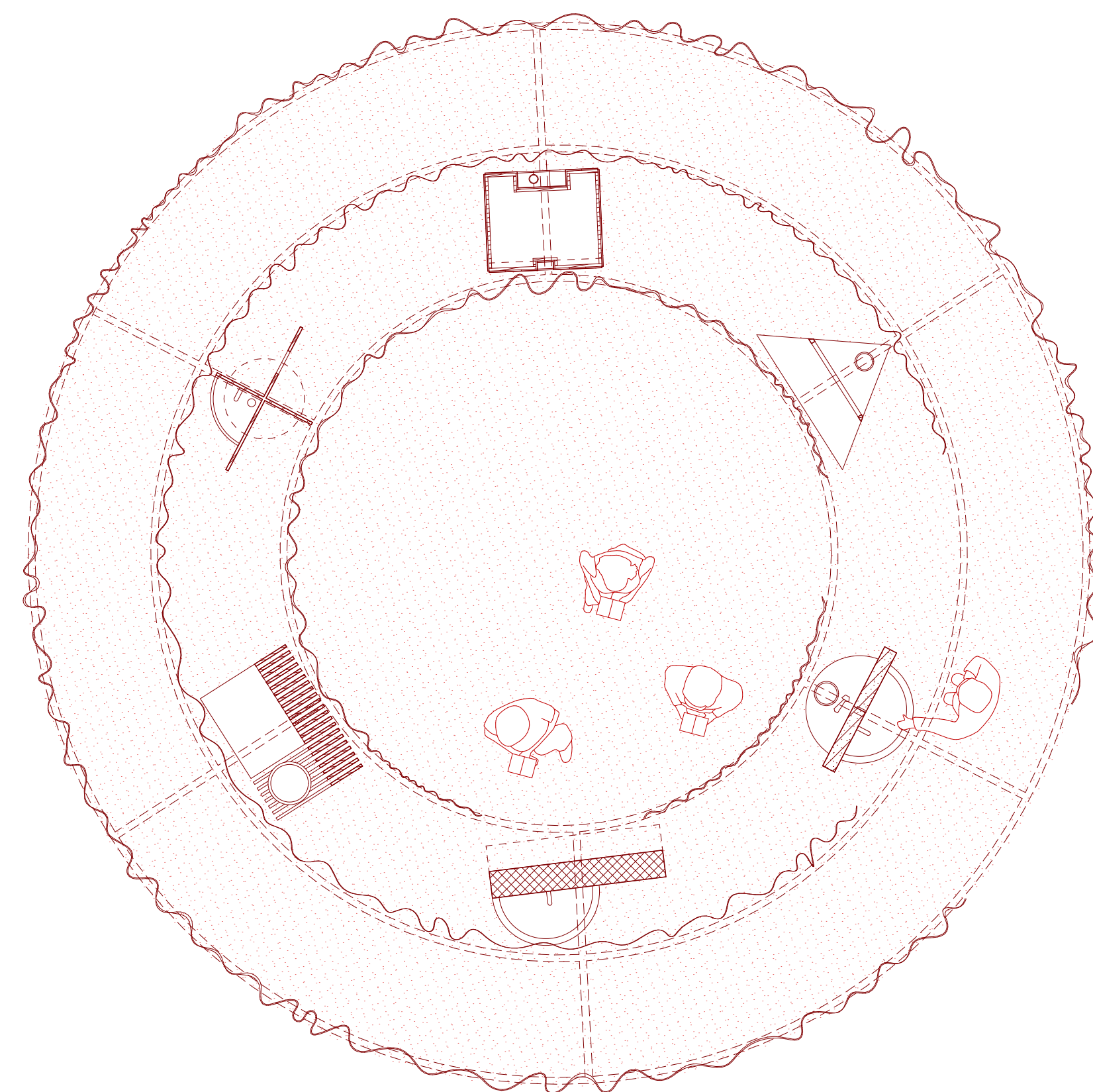
JUDAISM

Judaism, among the oldest monotheistic religions, has more than 3,000 years of continuous tradition. Rooted in the covenant between God (YHWH) and the people of Israel, its foundational text is the Torah, interpreted through centuries of rabbinic scholarship including the Talmud. Judaism sees the divine in everyday life—in eating, speaking, resting, and remembering.

Terracotta, with its earthy warmth and malleability, echoes ancient Jewish dwellings and the land of Israel. Cement, more recent in Jewish architecture, reflects the durability and communal strength of synagogues built in diaspora. These materials often coexist with stained glass and fine textiles, like the tallit (prayer shawl), forming a visual and tactile connection between heritage and modernity.

Color symbolism includes blue, representing divine presence and the sky; white, symbolizing purity; and gold, reflecting holiness. Symbolic objects—like the mezuzah at the doorpost—contain sacred inscriptions and mark the threshold between the mundane and the sacred.

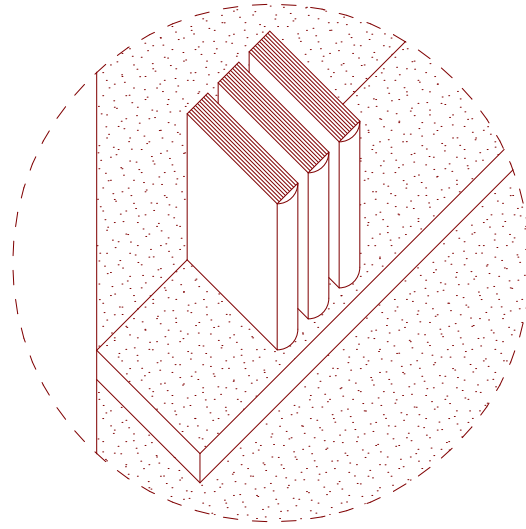
Daily prayers—Shacharit (morning), Mincha (afternoon), and Ma'ariv (evening)—anchor time in devotion. Entering a synagogue, one touches the mezuzah, a parchment inscribed with sacred verses. Ritual hand washing (netilat yadayim) prepares the body for prayer. Shabbat, the weekly day of rest, begins with candle lighting and is marked by silence, shared meals, and study—transforming the home into a sacred space.



Floor plan
Scale 1:20

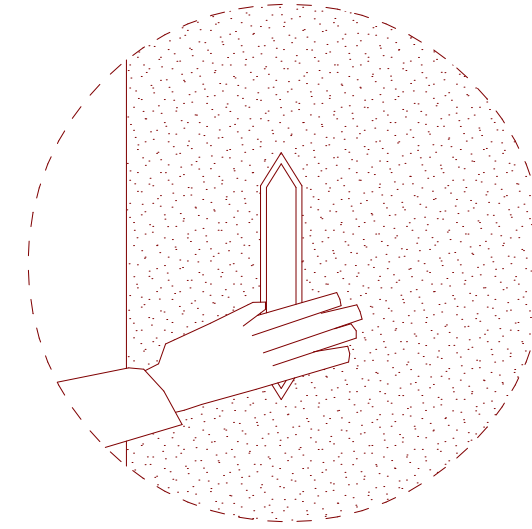
1. Torah Library

A dedicated shelf holds the Torah scrolls or books, treated with great respect. This space reflects the importance of study and sacred knowledge in Jewish life.



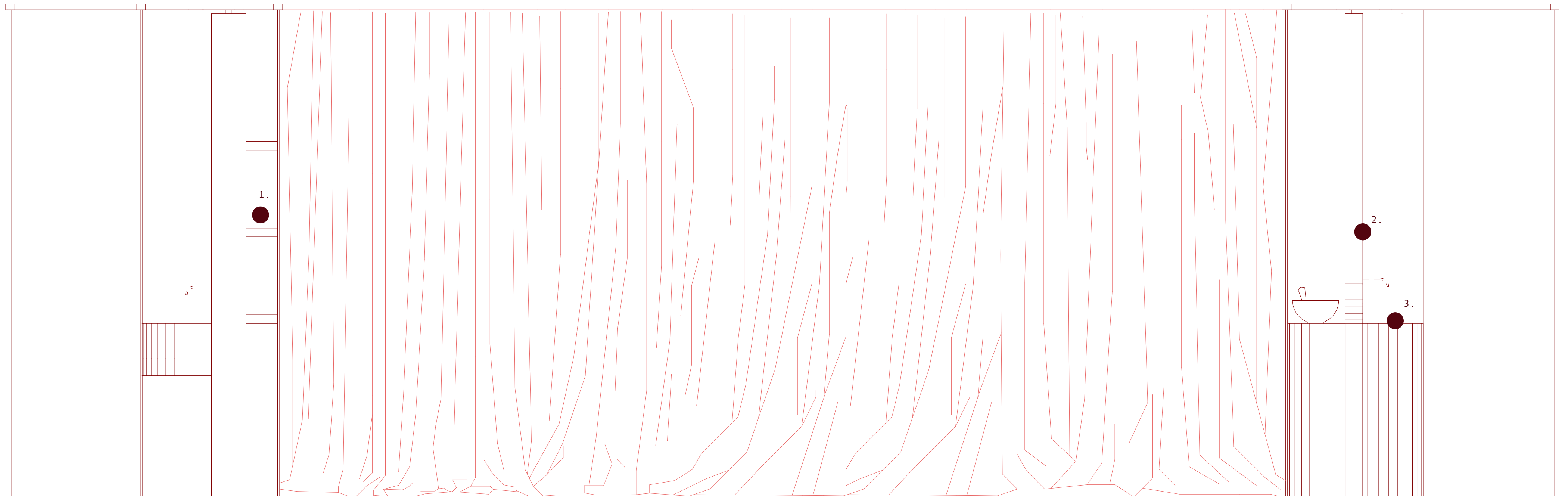
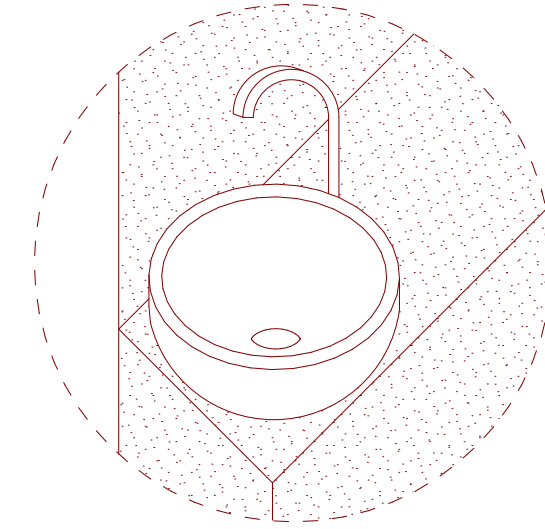
2. Mezuzah

Placed on the doorpost, the mezuzah contains a parchment with the Shema. Touching it when entering or exiting is a daily gesture of faith and remembrance.



3. Ablutions

Before prayer hands are ritually washed using a small vessel, symbolizing spiritual and physical purification.



SIKHISM

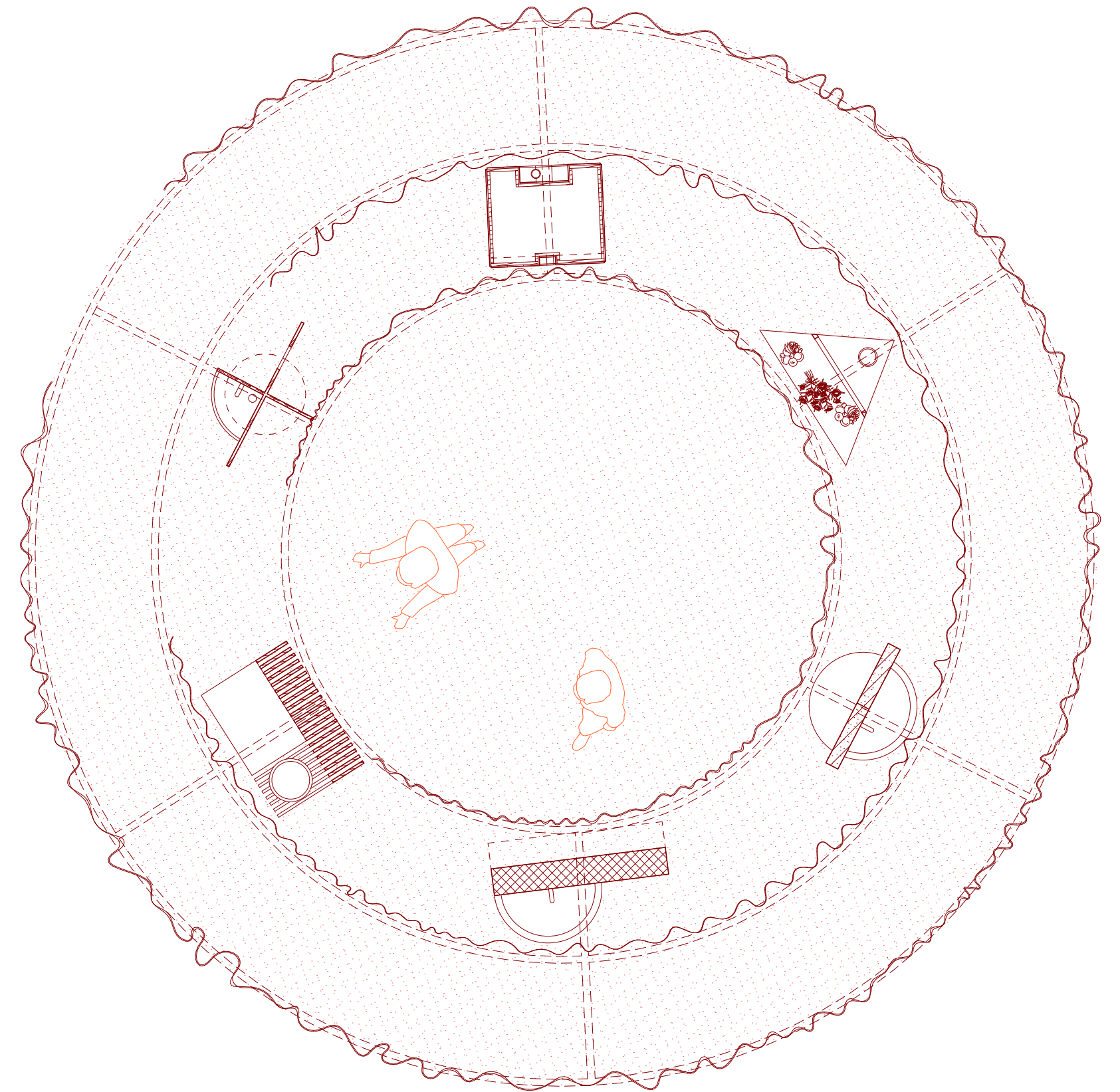
Founded in the Punjab region during the 15th century by Guru Nanak and developed through ten successive Gurus, Sikhism is a monotheistic faith emphasizing equality, service, and devotion to one universal God. Its central text, the Guru Granth Sahib, is treated as the eternal, living Guru and read in melodic recitation (kirtan). Sikhism rejects ritualism and caste, focusing instead on inner spirituality expressed through community and daily practice.

The Gurdwara (Sikh temple) is both a spiritual and social space, where the langar (community kitchen) offers free meals to all, regardless of background. The emphasis is on humility, collective care, and remembrance of God (Naam Simran).

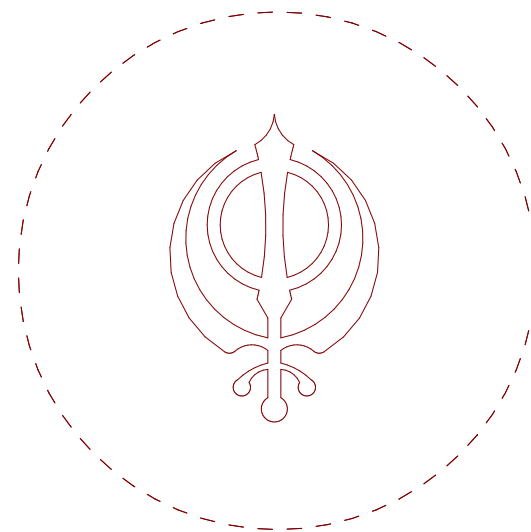
Metal—especially steel—is significant for its strength and resistance: Sikhs carry the kara, a steel bracelet symbolizing restraint and unity. Wood reflects humility, warmth, and craftsmanship often seen in Gurdwara interiors. Together, these materials evoke balance: resilience and accessibility. Colors such as orange (courage and sacrifice) and blue (sovereignty and protection) are cen-

tral, often seen in religious processions and the Nishan Sahib (flag). The Khanda, Sikhism's primary symbol, unites a double-edged sword, a circle (Chakkar), and two single-edged swords (Kirpans), expressing divine knowledge, unity, and temporal-spiritual balance.

Before entering a Gurdwara, Sikhs cover their heads with cloth, remove shoes, and wash hands and feet—gestures of humility and cleanliness. They bow to the Guru Granth Sahib and may offer karah prasad, a sweet sacrament symbolizing equality. Daily prayers (Nitnem) are recited morning, evening, and night.



Floor plan
Scale 1:20

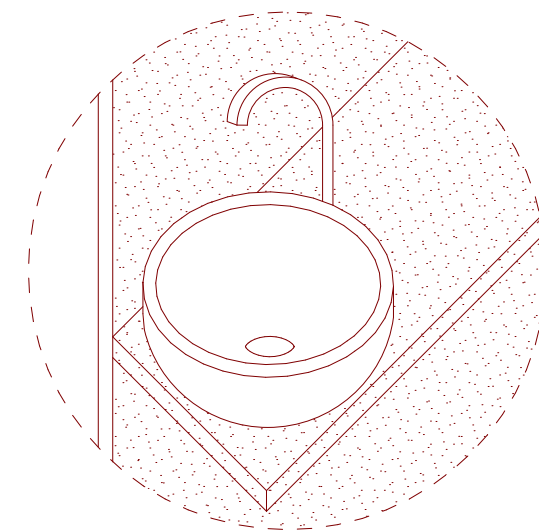
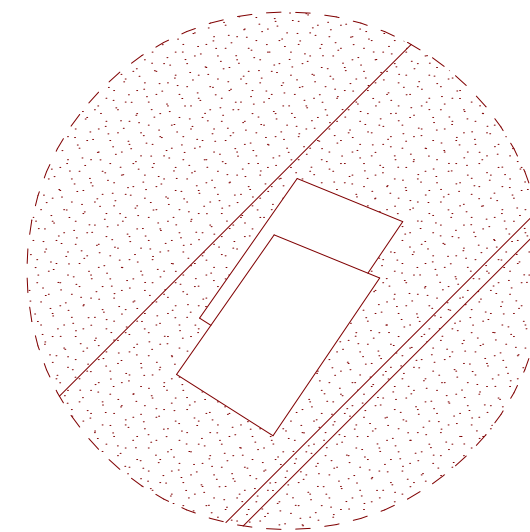


1. Khanda

The symbol of Sikhism, representing divine unity and spiritual justice, is often displayed in sacred spaces as a marker of identity.

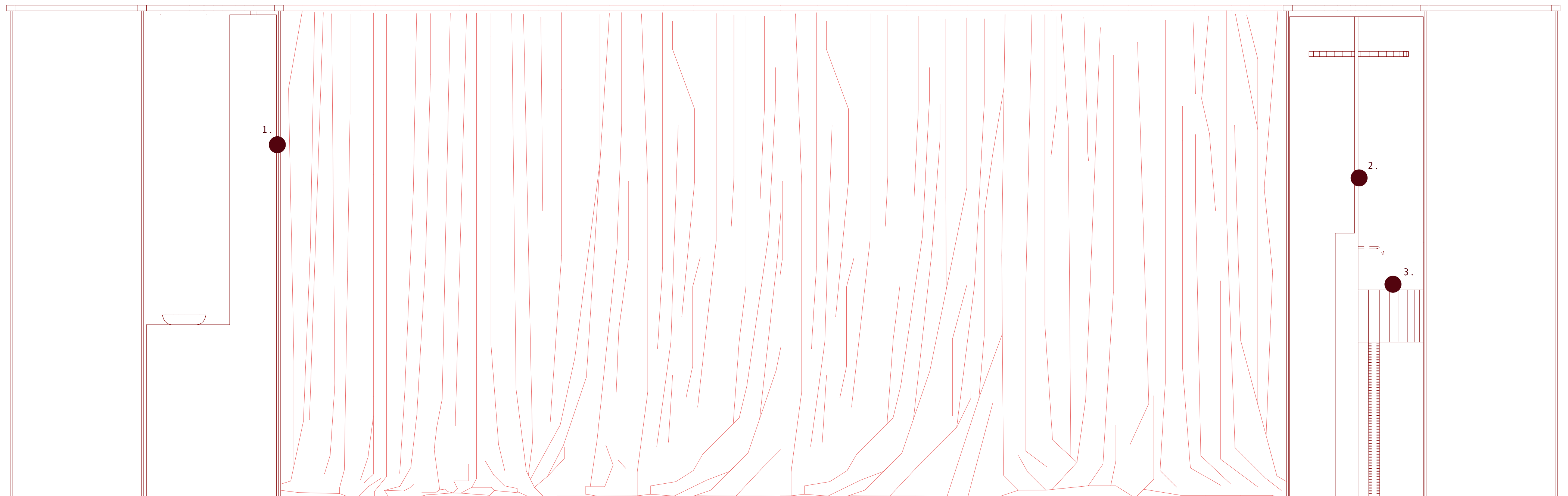
2. Head Covering

Covering the head signifies respect and humility, serving as a prerequisite for entering the prayer space.

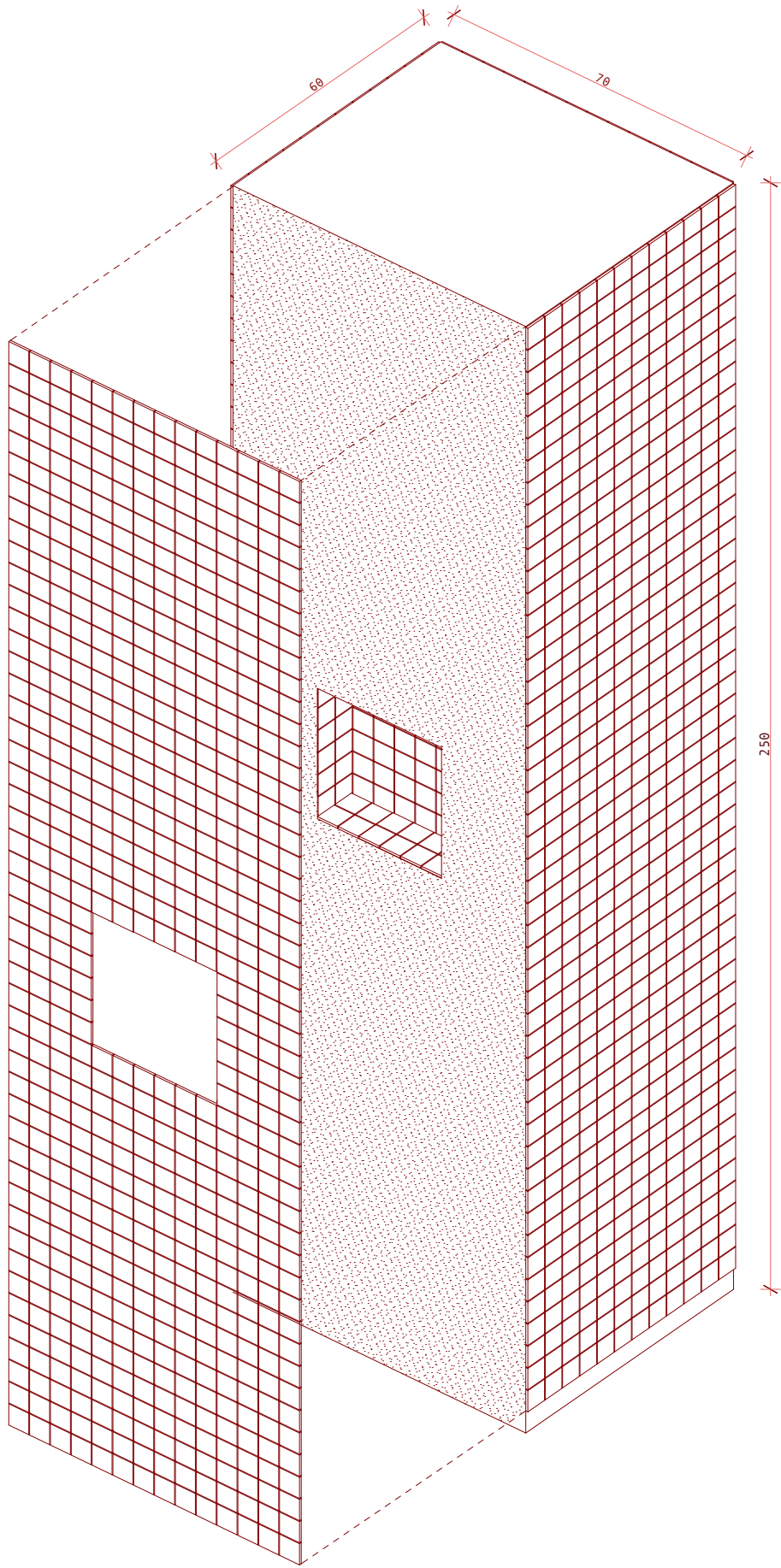


3. Ablutions

The ritual washing of hands, face, and feet purifies the body and prepares it for devotional practice.

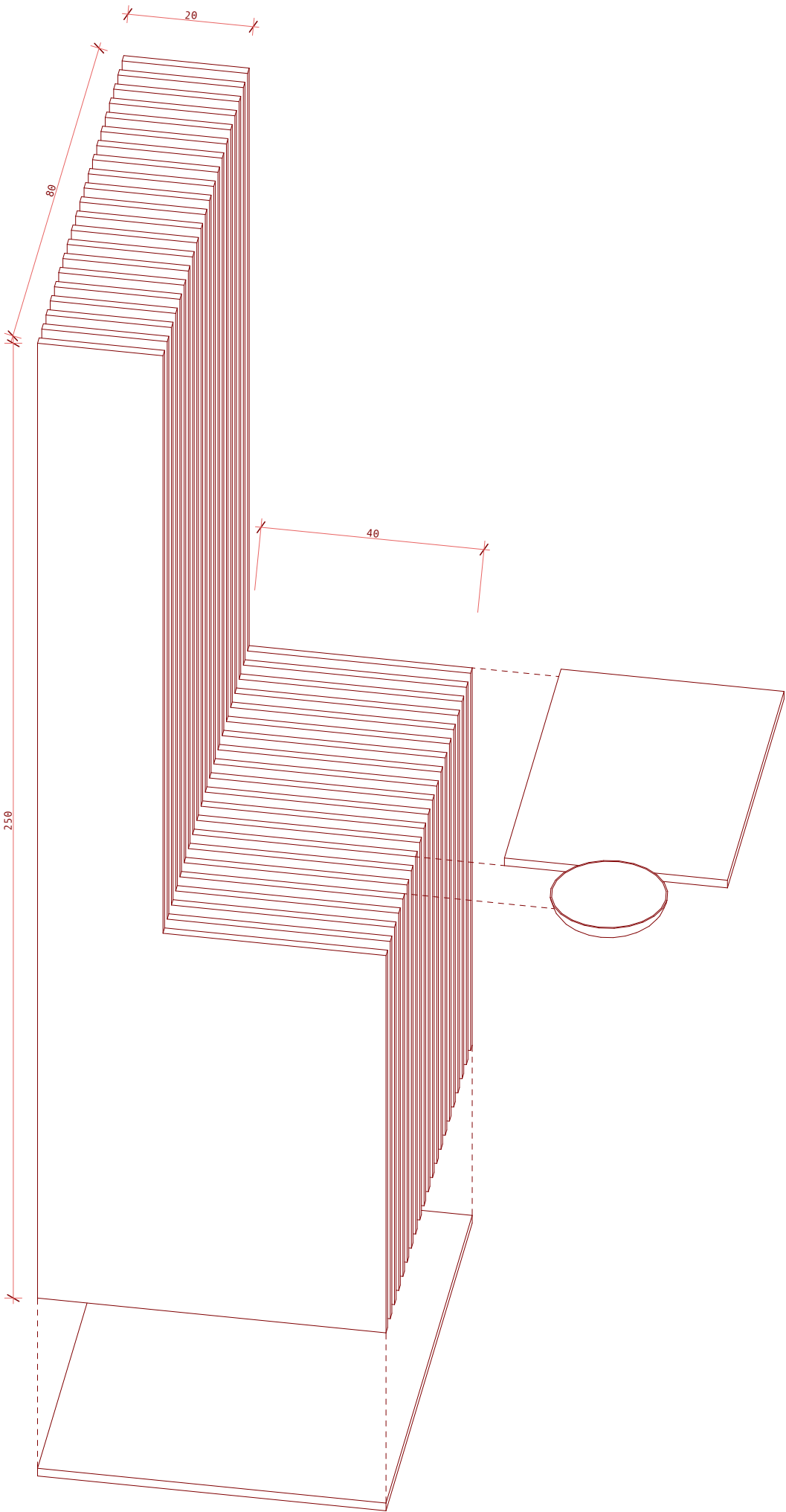


- 1. Wooden structure
- 2. Plaster and ceramic tiles



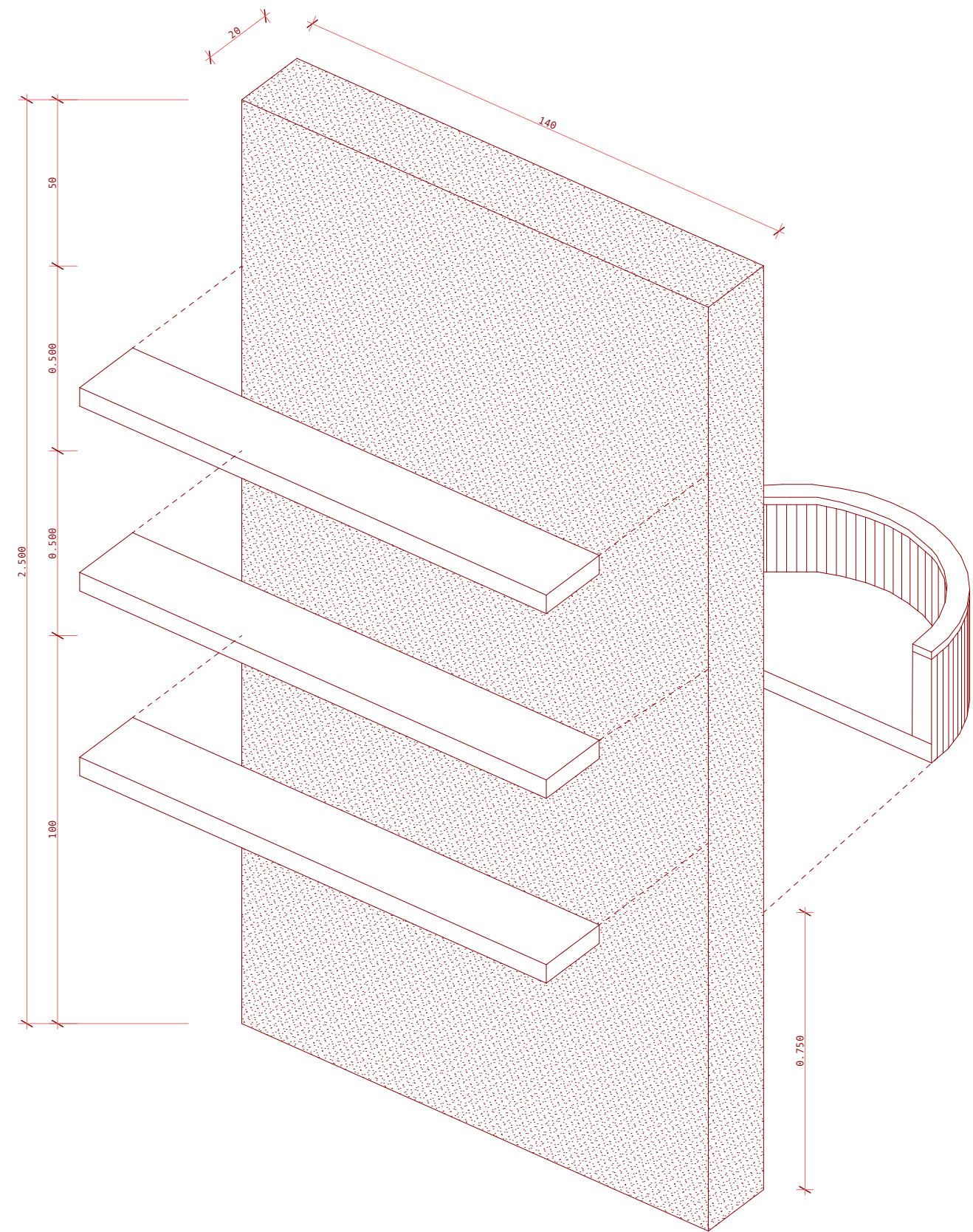
Axonometry
Scale 1:15

- 1. Wooden structure
- 2. Metal screws



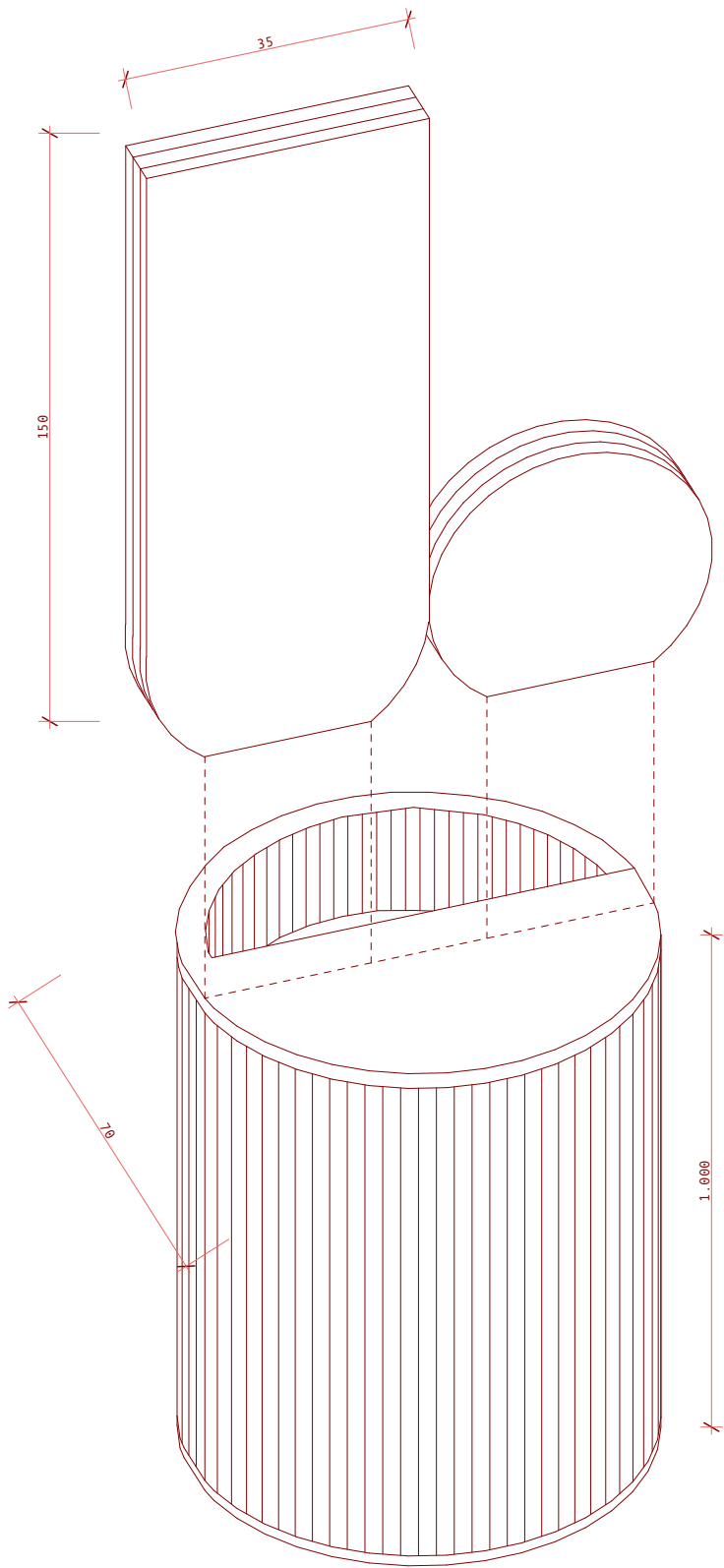
Axonometry
Scale 1:15

- 1. Wooden structure
- 2. Waterproof layer
- 3. Plaster finished concrete



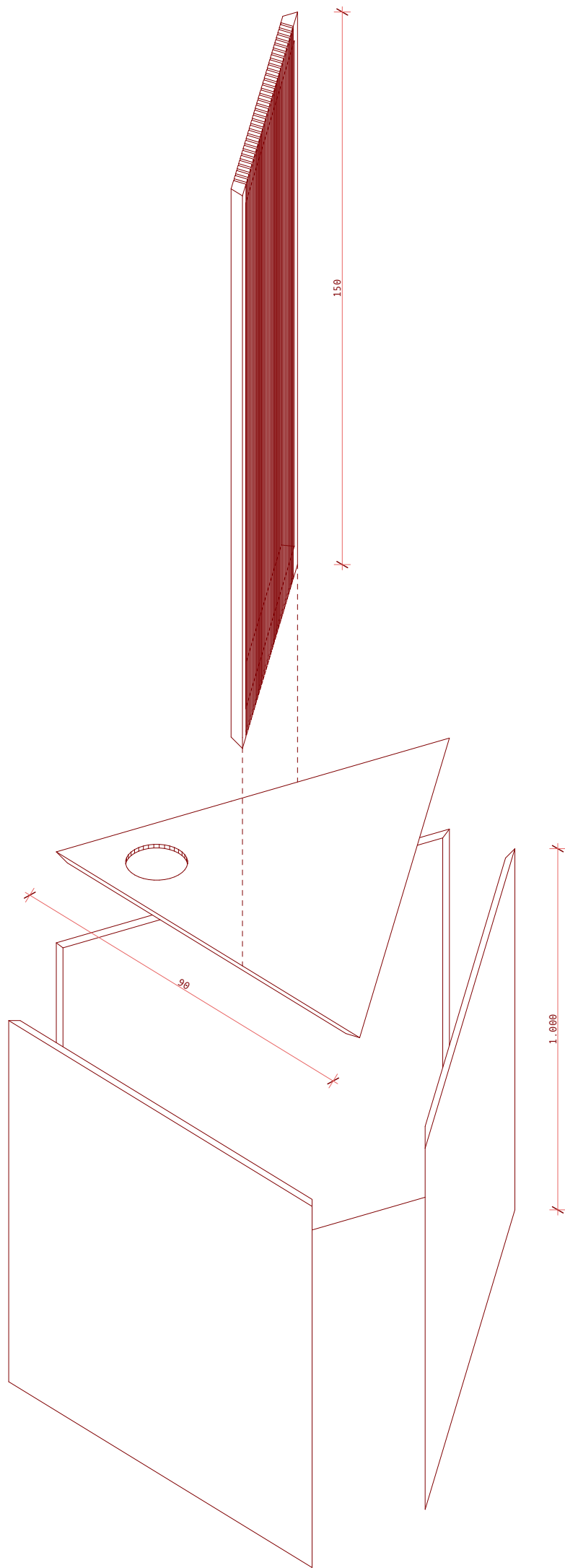
Axonometry
Scale 1:15

- 1. Wooden structure
- 2. Waterproof layer
- 3. Plaster finished terracotta



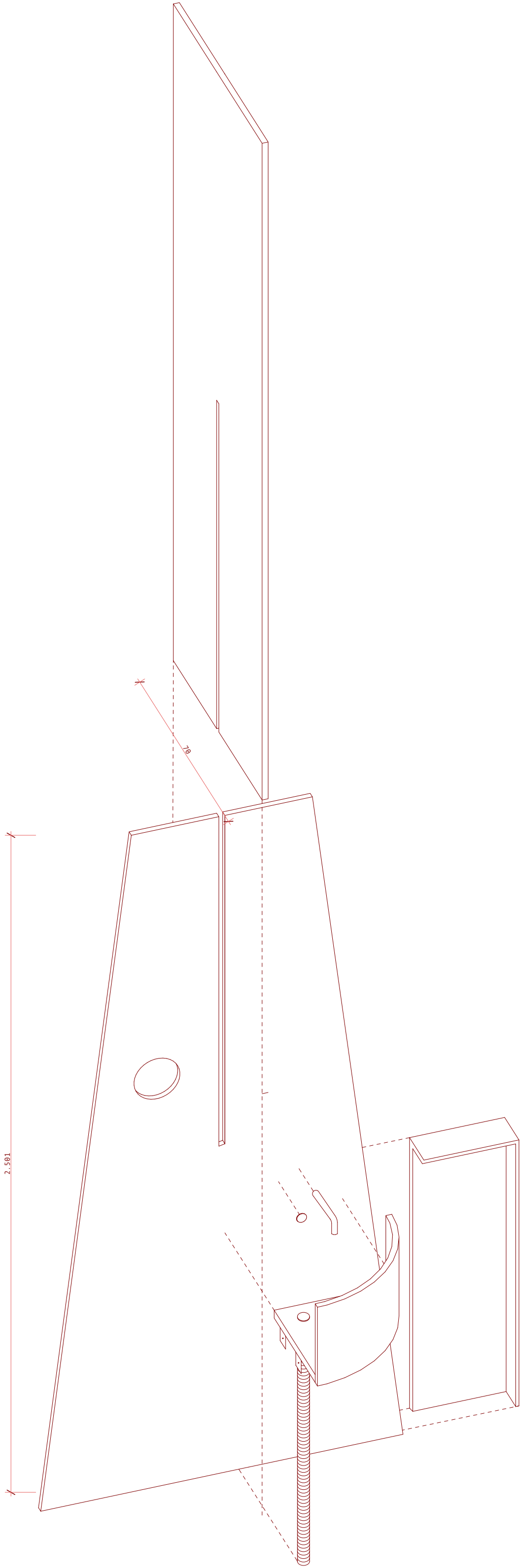
Axonometry
Scale 1:15

- 1. Wooden structure
- 2. Colored wires

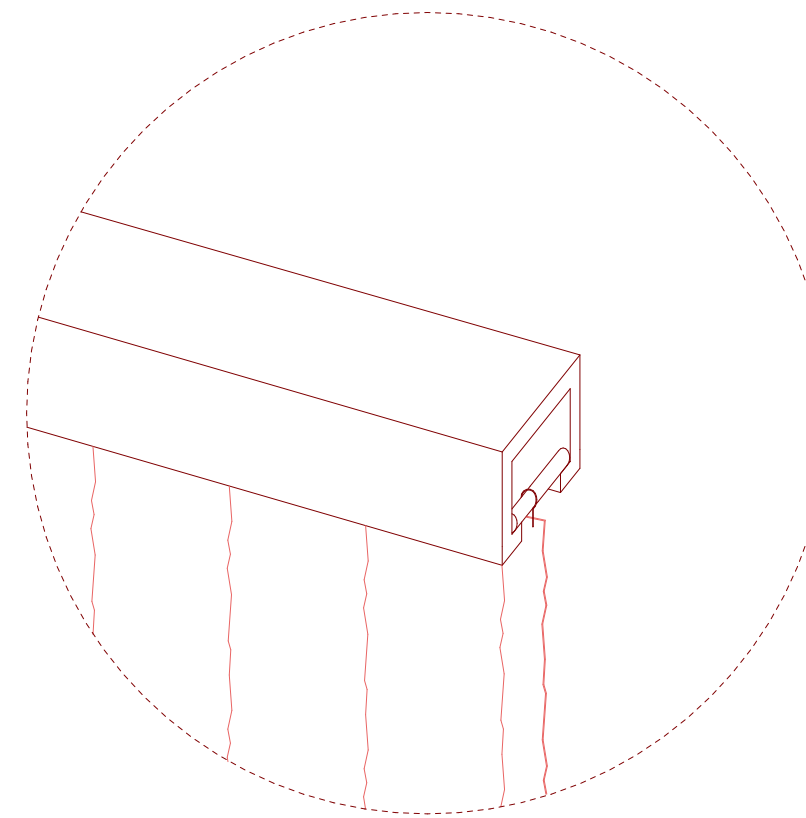
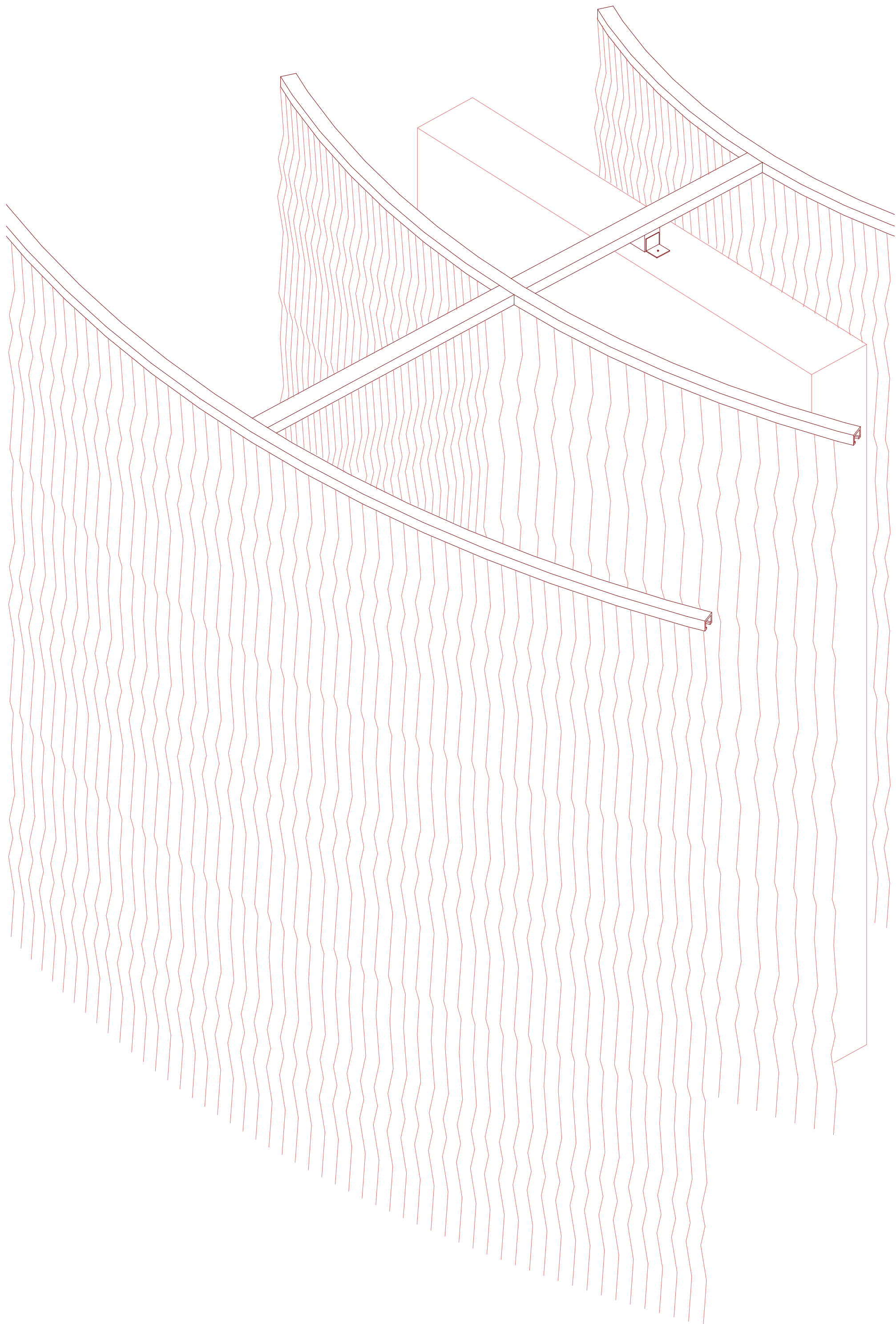


Axonometry
Scale 1:15

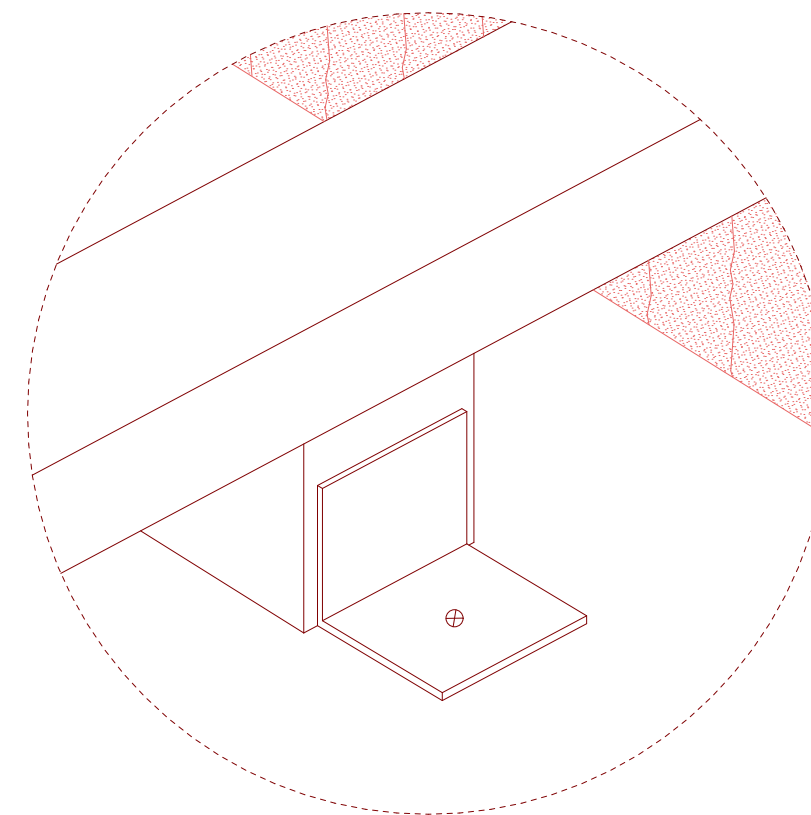
- 1. Metal structure
- 2. Metal plates
- 3. Waterproof layer



Axonometry
Scale 1:15



1. Stainless Steel Rail
2. Metal cylinder
3. Rubber gasket
4. Metal hook for curtains
5. Linen fabric curtains



1. Stainless Steel Rail
2. Metal plate "L" welded to the rail
3. Screw attached to wood