

RECENSIONI

Dionigi ALBERA, Melissa BLANCHARD (a cura di) | *Pellegrini del nuovo millennio: Aspetti economici e politici delle mobilità religiose*, Messina, Mesogea, 2015, pp. 295.

As the title suggests, the volume, written in Italian, explores the economic and political implications of pilgrimage. On the basis of Ian Reader's work (Ian Reader, *Pilgrimage in the marketplace*, London and New York, Routledge 2014), pilgrimage is understood as intrinsically embedded in the logics of promotion and consumption, and deeply affected by the interest groups operating around it. It is affirmed that political actors often appropriate specific shrines and festivals in order to strengthen their image and foster their political goals.

The volume also addresses the issues of identity and of multi-confessional shrines. The editors point out that a pilgrimage can offer a good opportunity to claim and corroborate collective identities. In multi-confessional shrines, different groups converge. André Julliard describes how Catholic and Orthodox pilgrims follow different itineraries while visiting the Church of San Nicola of Bari (Italy) during the main festival dedicated to this saint. By contrast, other papers show how tense the encounter of different faiths in the same shrine can be.

While the range of questions addressed by the authors is wide, the volume has clear geographical boundaries. It concerns the countries of the Mediterranean Sea - although the last chapter is about three editions of the World Youth Day that took place in Rome, Cologne and Sidney.

At the very beginning of their *Introduction*, the editors point out how fast transportation and digital technologies mould contemporary pilgrimage, adding to its complexity. The volume explores the connection between pilgrimage and other forms of mobility, such as migration and the migrants' trips to their original home; it addresses the debated relation between tourism and pilgrimage.

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The eleven contributions of the book explore different stages of the pilgrim's experience: the preparations before the pilgrimage actually starts, the relations that pilgrims entertain with religious specialists and authorities, the peculiar encounter between pilgrims and their guide. The concern of the volume, however, is not restricted to the pilgrims. In several contributions, the focus shifts from the pilgrims to the people who provide for their religious demands and practical needs.

The volume is ambitious, seeking to explore the multiple implications of pilgrimage. It shows that pilgrimage is a multi-faceted phenomenon, intrinsically intertwined with other spheres of human activity (such as politics, market dynamics and tourism).

Perhaps, the volume would have benefited from a more consistent focus. All the issues raised by the editors are equally interesting. However, the editors could have chosen some of these topics to be at the core of the volume, leaving the remaining ones in the background. Limiting one's attention to few issues means that they can undergo a more in-depth analysis.

Each contributor addresses some of the issues raised by the editors: some contributions explore similar issues in different contexts, but this does not happen systematically. A clearer focus, explicitly stated in the Introduction, would have allowed the contributors to converge on that topic and to set up more rigorous comparisons.

However, notwithstanding these points, the significance of this volume is clear. As stated above, it successfully portrays the manifold dimensions of contemporary pilgrimage. A specific merit of this volume is that it does not only relate to very well known, huge pilgrimages (such as the *Hajj* and Santiago de Compostela, for instance) but also considers small-scale, marginal sites, like the shrine in South Albania studied by Antonio Maria Pusceddu.

Most of the papers contain vivid descriptions of the fieldwork they are based on and are written in a way that keeps the reader's attention alive. However, the contributions by Lisa Montmayeur-Deheurles, Giulia Fabbiano and Michael A. Di Giovine are particularly appreciable. These authors make an especially well structured case and offer original conclusions.

Lisa Montmayeur-Deheurles studies the journeys back home of the refugees who were forced to migrate following the exchange of populations effectuated by Greece and Turkey in 1923. The author addresses several related issues, including the role of refugees associations in promoting these journeys and in strengthening collective identities, the transformation of the shrines abandoned by the refugees – many Orthodox churches in Turkey became either mosques or museums – and the refugees' desire to carry out

their traditional rituals in these shrines. As the author shows, attempts to re-vitalize the cult led to peaceful arrangements, as well as to strident tensions with other groups and presiding authorities.

Giulia Fabbiano's contribution too focuses on "roots travels". She considers the journeys to Algeria of the wives and daughters of the *Harkis*, namely those Algerians who fought alongside the colonial army between 1954 and 1962 and were later settled in France. In accord with Lisa Montmayeur-Deheurles, Giulia Fabbiano argues that "roots travels" have both a sacred side and a secular one, as the migrants visits both their relatives and the shrines they left behind. In a similar vein, both authors highlight how the migrants going back home express complex feelings: the pain caused by the trauma they underwent is mixed with excitement and joy, as well as a sense of nostalgia for something that has been lost once and forever.

Michael A. Di Giovine analyses the contrasting discourses regarding the recent exhumation, exhibition and transfer of Padre Pio's body (Italy). The paper describes the various conflicting actors involved in Padre Pio's cult, including religious and secular authorities and different interest groups. The author argues that the struggle they fought was a double-edged one. Clearly, material interests were at stake. The opposing groups, however, were not only concerned about this-world benefits, but also about the sense to be given to the image of Padre Pio and to his cult.

A further remarkable point is by Melissa Blanchard, who studies the Murids of Senegal based in Italy. She shows how starting a new pilgrimage in the host-country can be instrumental in appropriating the territory on the part of the migrating group. The new itineraries allow the migrants to sacralise a land, which, otherwise, would be perceived as alien.

To sum it up, the volume aims to portray the wide complexity of contemporary pilgrimage. This book can be of help for those approaching the various issues related to pilgrimage.

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