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New Directions in Sacred Journeys Research

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New Directions in Sacred Journeys Research

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In July 2019, the *Sacred Journeys* 6th global conference was convened at historic Maynooth University in Ireland. The conference attracted over 30 international pilgrimage scholars from 14 countries. The range of research topics presented over the two-day gathering was impressive and the papers presented in this issue of the *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* represent a sampling of the new directions that scholars are taking in their examination of the art and practice of pilgrimage.

Ken Wilson asks what kind of experience of place is produced by walking pilgrimages. Specifically, how does the experience resonate with Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*? Three texts about walking that seem to turn space into place—Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain*, Thelma Poirier's *Rock Creek*, and Iain Sinclair's *London Orbital: A Walk Around the M25*—are considered, along with the author's own experience of walking pilgrimage in southwestern Saskatchewan, Canada, and on the Whithorn Way in Scotland.

Maynooth University



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/63/Stpatirckscollegemaynooth.JPG>

With research drawn from archival materials, open and semi-structured interviews and the literature, Mirela Hrovatin questions the anthropological definition of vows as instrumental prayers in the effort to expand it beyond the mere request for a miracle or fulfilment of a pilgrim's or believer's wish. By observing more than 2000 examples of vow prayers in Croatia, mainly connected to the national shrine of the Mother of God of Bistrica and the Blessed Ivan Merz shrine in Zagreb, the reason why vows are inextricably linked to sacred places and pilgrimage is explored.

Rajshree Dhali explores the pilgrimage to Ramdevra in Rajasthan, India, where the main shrine of the folk deity Ramdev is located. Ramdev is a popular folk deity for the erstwhile 'untouchable' communities and is currently considered a Pan Hindu God in Rajasthan. The historical evolution of this deity, in particular the intermixing of the Brahmanical and the non-Brahmanical traditions, as well as a more recent marginalisation of non-orthodox traditions associated with the pilgrimage site in the wake of the resurgence of Hindutva politics, as well as Dalit solidarity, is the topic of discussion.

According to Nanna Natalia Jorgensen, pilgrimage walking is increasingly sought as self-therapy for different mental, physical and spiritual ailments, as well as for sudden life changes or challenges. However, pilgrimage walking as therapy is still largely unexplored in the literature. Through detailed interviews with pilgrims, Jorgensen explores health-related processes, the after-effects of pilgrimage, and the therapeutic mechanisms that bring forth these processes and effects on St. Olav's Way across Norway.

In his paper, John Shultz questions accepted theories and methods of pilgrimage studies by looking at the relativity of time in the context of contemporary journeys to the 88 sacred places on the Japanese island of Shikoku. The *henro*, as it is known, is one of the great pilgrimages of the world, and on the 1400 km

journey Shultz considers a diverse sub-set of pilgrims linked only by their noteworthy tendency to remain pilgrims for a significant portion of their lives and to traverse the circuit of Buddhist temples again and again. He demonstrates that time is a key variable that is inextricably linked to the construction of an entire spectrum of meanings of what is described as 'pilgrimage'.

Pierre Fournié's topic is the Cathars, the "Good-Men" and "Good-Women" of the South of France who were erased as heretics in the Catholic world beginning around 1147 through crusades and the inquisition. For centuries, only traces of the disappeared religion had remained. Recently, "Cathar trails", "Spiritual tours" and "Cathar pilgrimages" have emerged that present their homeland of Montsegur as a holy mountain and Cathars as pure Christians. This article investigates those pilgrimages, and questions the secular or religious motivations of the participants.

In her working paper, Bernice Lamb-Senechal also interrogates the idea of pilgrimage as a journey to a sacred place, of reaching a destination of special meaning for the pilgrim and then returning. In contrast to this contemporary understanding, some Irish Christian monks of late antiquity undertook sacred journeys of an indefinite duration with no express terminus in mind. Furthermore, these monastic sojourners exiled themselves from their homeland vowing never to return to kith and kin. Lamb-Senechal explores the practice of self-exile and ceaseless wandering—called *peregrination*—and pays particular attention to the potential motivations behind the actions of these early Irish pilgrims.

The *Sacred Journeys 7th Global Conference* will be held from June 29-July 1, 2020 at the University of Primorska in Piran, Solvenia, in association with Turistica, the School of Tourism Studies. The 2021 conference will be held at *AALIM*, the Arab-American Language Institute in Mekness in Morocco.