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Epilogue: *Landscapes Reviewed*

In July 1988 an interdisciplinary conference on pilgrimage was held in London. Historians, geographers, anthropologists and theologians gathered in the same room to discuss apparently the same subject. Yet, rather as sacred space can be contested by opposed interest-groups at any pilgrimage site, the theme of pilgrimage found itself transformed into an object of controversy by scholars starting from very different academic assumptions.¹ By coming together to debate the topic, researchers seemed to reinforce rather than dissolve disciplinary boundaries. Eventually, a published volume of papers emerged from the conference. However, instead of reflecting the diversity of viewpoints and religions that had been evident, the editors (both anthropologists) decided to limit the book's purview to a single academic discipline – anthropology – and a single religion – Christianity.²

There are excellent reasons for publishing an edited volume exclusively devoted to the anthropology of contemporary Christian pilgrimage, but the decision to do this in the context of the original conference begs a series of questions. Was the initial idea of encouraging *interdisciplinary* discussion on the theme of pilgrimage flawed from the start? Is pilgrimage in itself a single phenomenon? Can, therefore, the pilgrimage traditions of different cultures and religions be meaningfully compared?

These questions are central to this book. It has been written by collaborators from different academic disciplines, an anthropologist and an art historian. In self-contained chapters, we have presented pilgrimage traditions in divergent religious landscapes. The topographies of each religion have been studied in their own historical and cultural contexts. We have not thus far attempted systematically to compare examples of pilgrimage, nor to fit them into a single interpretative framework. Yet by placing accounts of sacred travel in different religions within the same volume we have encouraged their implicit comparison. The traditions have been forced into dialogue quite simply by being incorporated into a single work.

Our account has, moreover, indicated some initial points of comparison between pilgrimage practices in the brief sections which appear between the main chapters. In many of the religions explored in this book, people have appeared to engage in some strikingly similar activities. Hindus at Benares, Buddhists at Bodhgaya and Muslims at Mecca have all been seen to circumambulate sacred shrines and objects. Hindus, Buddhists and Christians all take objects such as ampullae or tokens back from a sacred site. Yet in what sense are they really doing the



74 Greek Orthodox pilgrim with an icon of the Virgin, Jerusalem, Easter 1984.

same thing? If one were to ask members of different religious traditions to give an account of their actions, each would produce radically different descriptions and interpretations.

Indeed, can we even compare pilgrimages in the *same* religious tradition from different periods in history? Phenomena like the wearing down of the foot of the statue of St Peter at the Vatican or of the black stone embedded in the wall of the Ka'ba, bear testimony to the continuous reverence shown by pilgrims at these sites over many centuries. This sense of continuity is based upon and seemingly reinforces the notion of a

shared faith, transcending time. But the religions of medieval Christendom or the Arab empires are in reality very distant from Christianity or Islam in the twentieth century. Pilgrimage in a context of secularisation or pluralism is a radically different phenomenon from religious travel in an age when atheism was virtually inconceivable.

Perhaps, then, we should limit the focus still further, and ask instead whether fellow pilgrims who attend the same site at the same time undergo similar experiences. On a single day, the crowds gathered for a procession at Lourdes may indeed appear to enact a convincing display of collective and collaborative piety.³ In what sense, however, are the individual experiences of pilgrims from, say, Ireland and Mexico at the Lourdes shrine easily comparable? They may be framed by the same rituals and occasion, but worshippers' perspectives are formed by their position in the crowd, their expectations, their cultural backgrounds.

In this epilogue, we address some of these difficult issues in two ways. First, we shall present a number of the main analytic approaches to pilgrimage, each of which would have been represented at the London conference. We therefore aim to give the reader a theoretical background through which to reconsider the material presented in the body of the book. Second, we wish to suggest which of these theories we find most fruitful, and add some observations of our own. It is crucial, as we have implied, to avoid the trap of setting up spurious generalisations which elide the clear differences between cultures. For instance, pilgrimage is commonly described as a universal quest for the self. But what does the 'self' mean in the context of immeasurably different attitudes to identity and personhood? Nevertheless, it is too glib merely to assert that no possible parallels exist between the traditions of sacred movement which we have explored. We therefore invite the reader to reflect on and argue with our discussion as to how one might seek to understand pilgrimage as a cross-cultural phenomenon.

APPROACHING PILGRIMAGE: ACADEMIC ACCOUNTS

Writing of the London conference, Glenn Bowman characterises one of the academic fault lines in the study of pilgrimage as having emerged between those scholars who attempted largely 'descriptive' accounts of pilgrimage and those who tried to be more 'analytical'.⁴ Historians tended to belong to the former category, accepting the possibility of analysing pilgrimage as a recognisable, bounded phenomenon but focusing on the particularities of and differences between individual sites as a means to reconstruct the past. In effect, such a historical approach, while accepting that general features of the phenomenon of pilgrimage exist, would want to explore the precise nuances and differences of each individual instance of pilgrimage at different moments in its development. The intellectual justifications of this approach are set out in the following uncompromising statement, published elsewhere, concerning the study of pilgrimage and shrines:

[There are] two weaknesses common to many studies. . . . One is a conflation of the evidence, the tendency to use information about different saints' cults

indiscriminately to create a virtually generic 'cult of the saints'; the other is chronological compression, the failure to recognise that particular cults went through phases of prominence and obscurity.⁵

By way of contrast, but again in line with the fundamental assumptions of their particular discipline, anthropologists at the conference attempted to analyse pilgrimages as reflections of broader social processes, such as the formation of particular kinds of group identity, or the operations of the state. In effect, pilgrimage was presented not so much as a distinct phenomenon in itself but instead a variegated activity that could be explained in terms of – almost dissolved into – its social, cultural and political contexts. As Bowman remarks, this emphasis caused a certain degree of friction:

One of the historians succinctly set forth the frustration felt by non-anthropologists with the apparent refusal of the anthropologists to discuss pilgrimage as a bounded entity when he said, after the late Saturday afternoon departure of the most vocal contingent . . . , 'now that the anthropologists are gone we can get down to talking about pilgrimage'.⁶

If the anthropological attempt to dismantle the category of pilgrimage proved intellectually unacceptable to academics from other disciplines, it nevertheless formed the basis of the volume which emerged from the conference. In their introduction the editors, John Eade and Michael Sallnow, saw themselves as setting up a new agenda in pilgrimage studies by asserting that 'pilgrimage is above all an arena for competing religious and secular discourses, . . . for conflict between orthodoxies, sects, and confessional groups . . .'.⁷ These authors invoked the notion of the sacred in their title (*Contesting the Sacred*) only to reveal it – at least in its manifestation in pilgrimages – as a fragmented, ambiguous, ideological battleground. Thus Lourdes was presented in the book as a locus of conflict between lay and élite in the organisation and definition of the site, while the solid walls of Jerusalem melted into the many different holy cities experienced by pilgrims of different confessions – Catholic, Baptist, Orthodox, let alone Jewish or Muslim.⁸

In this anthropological view the idea of the sacred as a transcendent, universal and unified reality, utterly divorced from mundane concerns, is a collective fiction constructed in order to bolster particular social positions. Such a perspective has its distant roots in the work of the highly influential turn-of-the-century sociologist Emile Durkheim.⁹ The latter saw religious belief and practice as emerging from, idealising and reinforcing human concerns and communities, so that the sacred existed not as a spiritual reality but rather as a product of social forces.

Some anthropologists of pilgrimage have explored the Durkheimian legacy by linking the worship of sacred symbols to the formation of group identities, for instance arguing that the Virgin of Guadalupe can be seen not merely as a pilgrimage shrine but also as a unifying symbol for the whole of Mexico.¹⁰ Others have agreed with Durkheim that sacred symbols and ideas are regarded by humans as 'set apart' from the mundane world and unquestionable, but have gone on to note that they can therefore be used to legitimise unequal power relations in society.¹¹

This, after all, is a basis of Marxist critiques of religion which see it as a false friend to the devout – a solace for the needy but also a link in the chain of their oppression.

Eade and Sallnow's analysis of pilgrimage, while opposing the Durkheimian idea of a sacred shrine functioning as a symbol of unchallenged unity and identity, nevertheless reveals its anthropological agenda by arguing that the varied cultural assumptions of pilgrims and the power struggles of society are evident at pilgrimage sites. For them, the sacred embodied in pilgrimage sites becomes 'a religious void' open to conflicting interpretations, 'a vessel into which pilgrims devoutly pour their hopes, prayers and aspirations'.¹² Following the logic of their approach, Eade and Sallnow even speculate whether one should fragment

the very category of 'pilgrimage' into historically and culturally specific behaviours and meanings. For, if one can no longer take for granted the meaning of a pilgrimage for its participants, one can no longer take for granted a uniform definition of the phenomenon of 'pilgrimage' either.¹³

Ironically perhaps, this view echoes that of many historians in its plea for detailed analyses of the unique aspects of sites and the particular cultures of pilgrims rather than the forming of broad and therefore potentially vacuous generalisations. Yet, while most historians of the Middle Ages (say) would not contest the existence of pilgrimage in medieval Christendom, the implications of Eade and Sallnow's position go much further, since they are prepared to contemplate actually abandoning the idea that pilgrimage as a socially discrete phenomenon even exists.

If anthropologists at the conference were opposed to historians (and, one suspects, almost everybody else) in their mistrust of pilgrimage as a meaningful category of behaviour, the proponents of these two disciplines did appear to unite in their relative lack of interest in a third approach evident in London: that of religious functionaries. Professional academics at least agreed to adhere to a principle of neutrality on spiritual matters, but members of the Church were actively concerned to discuss how research could help make pilgrimages more attractive in their drawing-power and more effective as religious guides to the faithful. Pilgrimage here was regarded not so much as an object of study *per se* but as a means to a broader, religiously motivated, end.

The view that pilgrimages are, above all, opportunities to encounter a holy realm that actually does exist – and cannot be explained away by social-scientific theory – expresses a radically different perspective from that of Durkheim. For instance, the historian of comparative religion Mircea Eliade conceived of the sacred as inhabiting a realm transcending time and mundane concerns but accessible through religious experience.¹⁴ While anthropologists, then, seek to define the sacred *through* the filter of society, scholars such as Eliade – and, of course, priests and practitioners actively involved in practising or teaching their faith – have sought to affirm the existence of the sacred *beyond* society.

It is difficult to see how strong adherents of either of these positions

would find it easy to engage in a common debate about any religious phenomenon. Nevertheless, possibly the most influential theory of pilgrimage (and one which was acknowledged if not followed in many of the conference papers) has been produced by two anthropologists, Victor and Edith Turner, whose writings reveal both religious and social scientific sensibilities.¹⁵ The Turners argue that, in embarking on a sacred journey, pilgrims typically leave the demands of conventional social structure far behind and enter a world of 'antistructure'. Everyday norms of social status, hierarchy and interaction are ideally abandoned in favour of the development of spontaneous association and shared experiences. A temporary state of what is termed 'communitas' can be reached, as the pilgrim enters a special time, set apart from the everyday. Pilgrimage sites not only commemorate the lives of deceased holy figures, therefore, they also encourage the temporary 'social deaths' of their visitors.¹⁶

Such a view seems to be supported by the location of many sites on the political or economic periphery of societies: Mecca may be 'the navel of the earth' to Muslims but it is not a centre of secular administration as such, and nor is Benares. We have also seen how pilgrims frequently avoid the overt display of status differences by the wearing of standard clothes – one can think of the black garments of devotees of Lord Ayyappa in India, the staff and scrip of the medieval Christian pilgrim in Europe, or the white robes of Muslims at Mecca – and converge on a sacred site for the common purpose of worship. Victor Turner has even speculated that pilgrimages resurface at periods of rapid social change and consequent removal from conventional ties, such as the waning of the Roman Empire, the end of the Middle Ages, and the contemporary era.¹⁷

The Turners' theory provides, on one level, a neat means of sidestepping conventional anthropological views of religion as a phenomenon embedded in everyday social concerns and structures because it argues that pilgrimages are precisely those occasions when people can, temporarily, escape such constraints (although of course some pilgrimages contain a high level of obligation, such as that to Mecca, those of the early Israelites, or some medieval Christian penitential examples).¹⁸ An element of Eliade's concept of the sacred is present: the notion of transcending the everyday world. Yet, perhaps not surprisingly, the idea of pilgrimage as providing unproblematic access to 'communitas' has been criticised sharply by social scientists who argue that the Turners ignore the secularly inspired divisions between pilgrims. Glenn Bowman, for instance, accuses the theory of separating interpretation 'from the constraints of history and society and [presenting communitas] as a trans-historical and omnipresent archetypal form'.¹⁹ Eade and Sallnow's work also opposes the notion of communitas by replacing it with the idea of sites being arenas not of consensus and sharing but differing interpretations and contestation.

Where, then, does this discussion of varied perspectives leave us in our attempts to understand pilgrimage? Perhaps the first point that we should make is that our book has not been an attempt either to prove the correctness of any one religion, or indeed of any one academic line in the interpretation of pilgrimage, or to suggest how pilgrimage can be used as

an effective means of disseminating any particular religious faith. We have, admittedly, indicated that the Turnerian notion of *communitas* is present as an ideal in many of the traditions we have studied (even if it is not expressed in the jargon of anthropology). Some of the key sites in the sacred geography of religious traditions have indeed been perceived by pilgrims as arenas of potential religious solidarity: Mecca for Muslims, the road to Pandharpur in Irawati Karve's account, the sites of the Buddha's life in northern India, and Jerusalem bring together believers from all backgrounds and social levels.

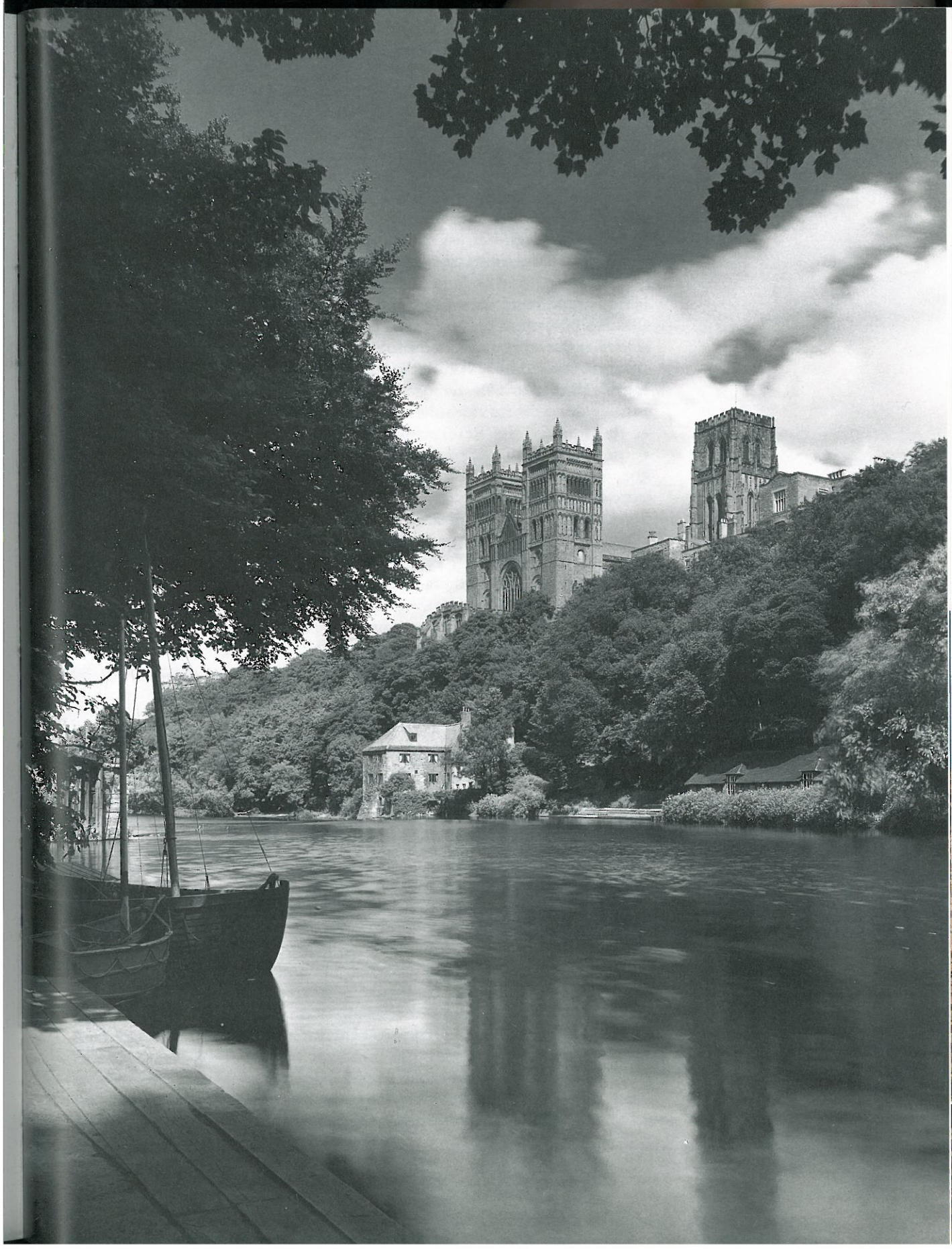
Yet we have also shown that *communitas* is only an ideal. Such sites cannot be regarded as separate from their socio-economic surroundings in their foundation or continued popularity.²⁰ Many pilgrimages not only involve situations of conflict and social division, but are also liable to be controlled by powers more temporal than spiritual. Mecca, Jerusalem and Amritsar have clearly been placed under considerable, often disputed, political authority during their long histories. In our picture section on contested sites (pp. 48–51), we have also suggested how symbolically charged spaces become arenas for architectural as well as ideological conflicts, as the buildings at Benares and Jerusalem indicate.

The arguments put forward by Eade and Sallnow are, therefore, clearly powerful in their assessments of the realities of pilgrimage. One cannot avoid the fact that pilgrims, even those visiting the same place, engage in a multiplicity of frequently incompatible interpretations, even if it is the case that Eade and Sallnow are describing ritual contexts particularly characteristic of contemporary, pluralist, highly mobile societies.²¹ Although a pilgrimage centre is fixed in space it is not fixed in significance. Part of the fascination of studying pilgrimage lies precisely in examining the juxtaposition of varying views, as we have tried to show in our descriptions of varied perspectives on Mecca, or competing definitions of divinity in Andean pilgrimages.

However, while agreeing that *Contesting the Sacred* has set up a fruitful new agenda for study in a post-Turnerian world of analysis, one may also suggest that certain aspects of its arguments need to be modified. Eade and Sallnow have in a sense invoked the idea of pilgrimage only to dismiss it as a meaningful category for study. One can argue, however, that while virtually all social practices are open to contestation, not all have the look of pilgrimage. In other words, the emphasis on the idea of pilgrimage sites being void of intrinsic meaning does tend to ignore the considerable *structural* similarities in pilgrimage practices within and between traditions. There are indeed parallels in behaviour to be found across time and culture, even if the implications and meanings of such behaviour vary enormously. Eade and Sallnow admit this point by noting in their introduction that Christian pilgrimage, and perhaps the pilgrimage practices of all scriptural traditions, can be examined as combining co-ordinates of 'persons', 'texts' and 'places',²² but they do not attempt to follow up this idea in any detail, nor do they discuss the fact that these elements are evident also in many other forms of ritual.

Such lack of comparison is unfortunate, given that the material we have presented indicates that pilgrimages do indeed provide rich possibilities

75 OPPOSITE Durham Cathedral from the west. The tomb of Bede in the Galilee Chapel at the western end of the cathedral serves as a counterpart to that of Cuthbert behind the high altar at the east. The sacred topography of Durham, as the vessel in which these two sets of relics are contained, is delimited by the two tombs at opposite ends of the church.



for analysis of the way in which places interact with, for instance, texts. A sacred text can provide an authoritative charter for spaces or objects, defining them as sacred or as the sites of significant events. According to the Koran, Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina before returning in triumph, while the Suttas state that the Buddha was enlightened under the bodhi tree at Bodhgaya and delivered his first sermon at the deer park in Sarnath. These and other places both physically exist and gain mythological significance from their location in words as well as in a landscape. There are even examples of the guardians of holy sites actually 'generating' sacred texts to justify their sanctity, as we have seen in the Hindu tradition. Likewise, a revelation, such as that of the Virgin at Guadalupe or that of Krishna to Chaitanya at Brindavan in India, may establish the sacredness of a place. (Though sites which are not specifically mentioned in scripture, but are the products of human revelation, may be particularly prone to vagaries of fortune: Walsingham, for example, lay dormant for centuries as a pilgrimage centre after its destruction at the time of the Reformation.) In turn, holy locales can serve as witnesses of the truth of a text or revelatory event: as the pilgrim encounters a holy place, he or she experiences physically what had previously been known only through sacred narrative or its visual illustrations.

An examination of the relationship between persons and places raises further important questions in the comparative analysis of pilgrimage. Sacred sites, such as that of San Giovanni Rotondo associated with Padre Pio, or the tombs of Muslim sufis, often act as permanent reminders of the charisma of a person who has died years, possibly centuries, earlier. At Durham Cathedral in England are the burial-places not only of St Cuthbert but also of the Venerable Bede, the great Saxon historian of the English Church and biographer of Cuthbert. Such tombs and the relics they house represent tangible incarnations of the holy in material form.

Most pilgrims make relatively little impact on a site, except to reinforce its sanctity by their presence: their experience lasts the length of a fallible lifetime's memory. However, actions and responses of powerful pilgrims can leave a permanent mark on the pilgrimage landscape, thus illustrating a further kind of relationship between persons and places. The individual experiences and motivations of such people are transformed into permanent representations and material embodiments which alter irrevocably the journeys of future religious travellers. This is particularly evident in those instances where one person's pilgrimage acquires a special political or religious significance. St Helena transformed forever the nature of travel to the Holy Land by building churches and, according to legend, discovering the True Cross. The Indian emperor Ashoka built roads and stupas in all the holy places associated with the Buddha, and went to them on pilgrimage himself. Muhammad did not create an entirely new pilgrimage tradition at the Ka'ba, but he did transform an already existing practice by appropriating it to Islam. David and Solomon relocated and further centralised the pilgrimages of the Israelites by establishing the Ark and Temple at Jerusalem.

In actual experience (as opposed to analytical abstraction), the elements

of 'person', 'place' and 'text' coincide. The pilgrim to Durham, for instance, would not know that a particular tomb in the cathedral housed the remains of a saint such as Bede or Cuthbert unless he or she were led there by guides, or unless the tomb were marked out as special by an inscription and (before the iconoclasm of the sixteenth century) by images. The cathedral itself can be seen in all its grandeur as an architectural celebration and container for the saint's relics, marking his final resting place in the landscape of northern England. The myth of St Cuthbert, moreover, tells not only how the saint exemplified Christian ideals in his lifetime (as proved by the incorruptibility of his corpse after death), but also how his body was carried on its own posthumous pilgrimage through Northumbria to keep it safe from the Vikings. The body performed a number of miracles en route, before it arrived at its final goal and resting place in Durham.²³ The medieval narratives about the person of St Cuthbert thus provided a charter for the holiness of Durham as a pilgrimage centre through telling the story of the pilgrimage of the relics themselves in their passage to the town.

These general observations indicate how pilgrimage sites act as embodiments of myth-history, allowing adherents to reinvolve elements of their faith in words, images and physical actions. We also see how the idea of pilgrimage consisting of a series of co-ordinates is useful in that we are encouraged to think of it not so much as a static and constant entity but rather as a shifting constellation of features, often familiar from other contexts. We may even regard pilgrimage as made up of a composite of different elements – such as ritual, organised travel, objects of veneration, the construction of temporary 'communities' at special sites, sacrifices of time and effort, requests and offerings directed towards sacred figures – all of which occur in other spheres of life. Precisely because these elements are present elsewhere, pilgrimage is difficult to isolate as a discrete phenomenon. Any given pilgrimage may emphasise one or more of these elements over the others. A pious traveller to Mecca or Jerusalem, for whom the trip is likely to be a spiritual high-point, undergoes a different experience from, say, a Roman merchant who pays a visit to the Vatican as part of religious routine. Yet both these types of activity involve varying degrees of ritual, travel and worship at places of paramount spiritual import.

Mention of travel invokes one of the vital elements of pilgrimage that Eade and Sallnow's co-ordinates do not include: that of movement. Apart from involving travel across the landscape (even in those cases where the journey has no specific goal), pilgrimage practices tend to ritualise motion at a sacred site itself. Circumambulation, for instance, both echoes the broader idea of journeying and also demarcates – one can almost say 'encapsulates' – the sacred image or object which has been the goal of the pilgrimage. Even in contemporary pilgrimages, where the traveller may have arrived by bus, car or even plane, prescribed movement on foot often occurs within the site itself. In addition, and very significantly, pilgrimage in the world religions serves to link geographically dispersed peoples by giving travellers the possibility to perceive a common religious identity which transcends parochial assumptions and concerns. As a

religious practice, pilgrimage has therefore complemented and incorporated other trans-local activities such as trade, exploration and even scholarly exchange.

The experience of pilgrimage, rather than being a static object or representation, involves not only movement through space but also an active process of response as the pilgrim encounters both the journey and the goal. It is the experience of travel and the constant possibility of encountering the new which makes pilgrimage distinct from other forms of ritual in the religions we have examined. An element of implicit comparison is likely to be evident between the pilgrim's home culture and those of the environments through which he or she moves. This tendency to compare indicates one of the primary differences between pilgrimage in the world religions and that in community religions such as those specific to a particular ethnic group or territorially restricted culture. (We have touched on some instances of 'community pilgrimage' in looking at classical antiquity and pre-Diaspora Judaism.) It is undoubtedly the case that small-scale cultures, groups and even nations have pilgrimages (a classic case being Shintoism in Japan, which focuses for instance on the Ise shrine as a sort of national holy of holies). But sacred travel *outside* one's home culture is perhaps a defining characteristic of the way pilgrimage has developed in the world religions.

The pilgrim in a world religion is often faced with an inevitable disjunction between the ideally universal tenets of the faith and the fact that such faith is interpreted and practised variously by members of very different societies. Thus the study of pilgrimages in such contexts consistently raises fascinating questions concerning the relationship between widely applicable tenets of faith and local cultures. To put this another way, universalising cultures of 'belief' are placed in tension with parochial cultures rooted in 'place'.

In returning home, the pilgrim can act as the agent of change, by spreading new ideas gleaned on the journey. Pilgrims may also be prompted to view their domestic environment in novel ways – as Victor Turner puts it, 'going to a far place to understand a familiar place better'.²⁴ Take the case of Felix Fabri, a Dominican friar from Ulm, who twice visited the Holy Land in the 1480s.²⁵ He recorded his travels in his long Latin *Evagatorium* written for his brother monks, as well as in a German version perhaps designed for a different audience. Fabri's first pilgrimage in 1480 did not prove a success: after a long journey from Ulm via Venice,

We did not spend more than nine days in the Holy Land, and in that time we rushed around the usual Holy Places both by day and by night, and were hardly given any time to rest. . . . When we had hurriedly visited the Holy Places . . . we were led out of the Holy City by the same road by which we had come, down to the sea where our galley waited.²⁶

The speed of the journey, the mainly mercenary interests of the Venetians who brought his group of pilgrims to Palestine, and the voyage's general failure to live up to Fabri's ideals of what a pilgrimage should be, were followed by not only a storm and sea-sickness on the way back, but also by a sense of dissatisfaction. Yet far from discouraging him, this negative

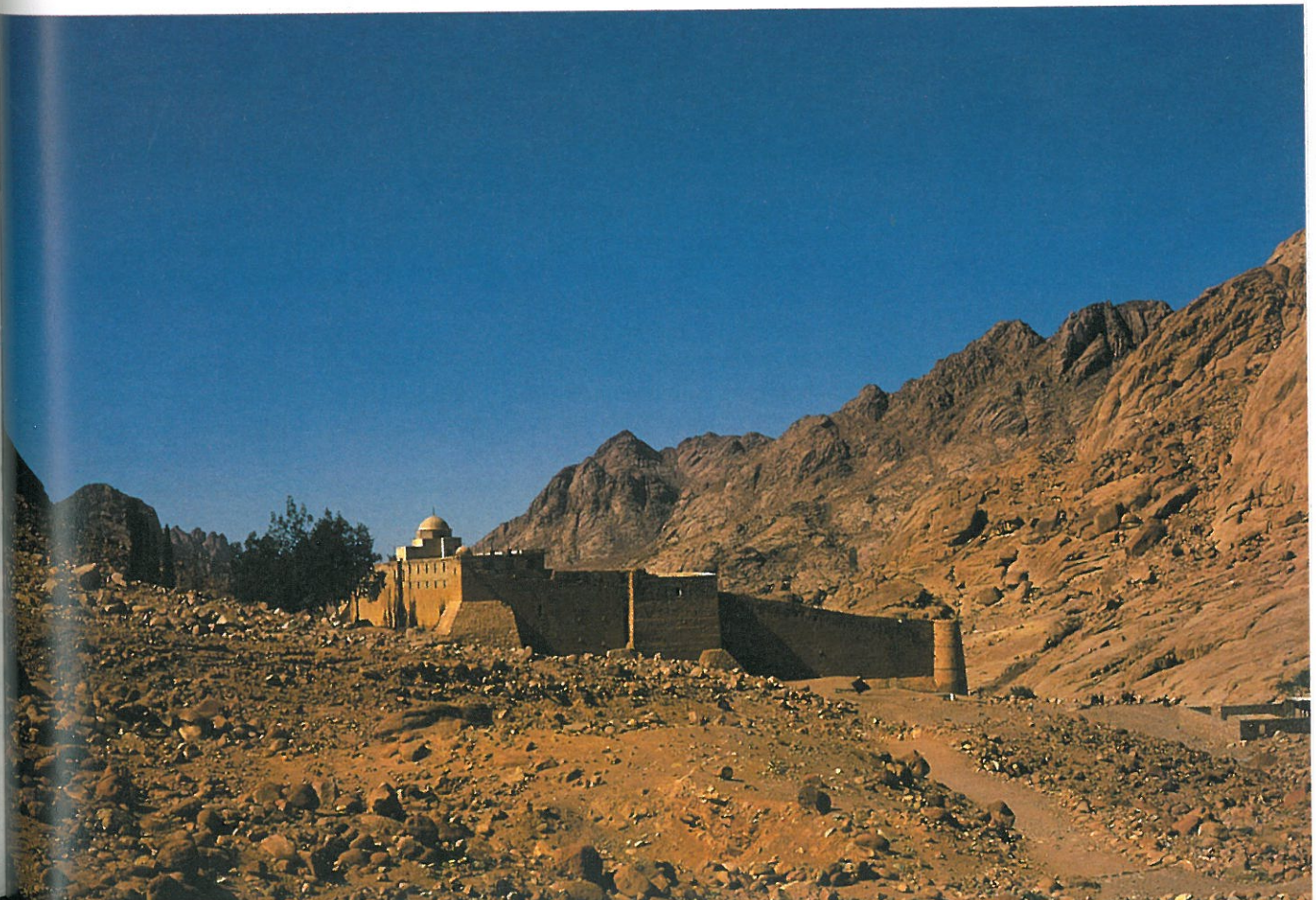
experience increased his desire really to see and know the Holy Land. He made a second, successful, journey in 1483 and returned after nearly a year feeling that he had been transformed. When he wrote a treatise on his home city of Ulm, some six years after his trip to Palestine, Fabri wrote of the city as 'the place from which my wandering began and where it came to an end'. Indeed, Ulm did not appear to be the same city on his return:

I would hardly have recognised the look of the city . . . if the surroundings which could not be changed, had not proved that it was the old Ulm.²⁷

However, the extent to which pilgrimage involves so strong a sense of transformation or indeed an explicit confrontation with the new, either for the traveller or for those to whom he or she returns, is obviously subject to particular circumstances. Pilgrims who travel in a group of like-minded companions may not need to deal directly with the challenge of the exotic. The Turkish Muslims whom we followed on their journey to Mecca certainly faced the trial of meeting a distant holy place as well as pilgrims from other cultures; yet this experience was cushioned by the fact that they travelled in a group of fellow villagers. On returning home, their accounts conformed rather than conflicted with local assumptions.

Because some pilgrimage sites – such as Mecca – attract worshippers from widely dispersed cultural locations, their symbolic resonances must appeal on multiple, even contradictory, levels. Eade and Sallnow state that:

76 The monastery of St Catherine at Mt Sinai, 6th century AD. The monastery, a small walled fortress in the wilderness of Horeb, is here shown from the path taken by pilgrims to the mountain where Moses received the tablets of the Law.



... in the final analysis ... what confers upon a major shrine its essential, universalistic character [is] its capacity to absorb and reflect a multiplicity of religious discourses, to be able to offer a variety of clients what each of them desires.²⁸

The more important a sacred centre, paradoxically, the more flexible and numerous are likely to be the meanings it encompasses. However, the title of Eade and Sallnow's book, which invokes the notion of *contesting* the sacred, rather bypasses the ways in which sites also help to *constitute* the sacred in the eyes of some believers, precisely by absorbing (even casting a discreet veil over) discrepant religious discourses. At Mecca the fact that explicit rules govern the behaviour of all pilgrims prevents, at least to some extent, the expression of idiosyncratic forms of worship. Even pilgrims at Hindu shrines are commonly encouraged to follow traditions and set routes in their passages to and round sacred places.

By being able to accommodate pilgrims from many cultures and social stations, sacred sites make divine powers accessible to far larger and more varied numbers of adherents than is often possible in everyday worship. This 'popular' aspect of much pilgrimage practice is reinforced further by the fact that sites offer religious experiences that do not rely exclusively on textual knowledge: rather, the charisma of place or person is brought 'down to earth' and embodied in tangible, often miracle-working objects, which by appearing to respond to the requests of worshippers heal or renew individual lives while also reinforcing the reputation of the shrine and even religion as a whole. Shrines frequently advertise their own efficacy by retaining records of miracles that have occurred under their auspices: the doorway of the contemporary Anglican shrine at Walsingham or the walls of the ancient Temple of Asclepius at Epidaurus, for instance, boast inscriptions and offerings of thanks from grateful pilgrims. The powers of the place are in turn diffused far and wide in the form of relics, ampullae, images and narratives. Even in a monotheistic, aniconic religion such as Islam – apparently so different from an internally variegated religion such as Hinduism – the sacred landscape consists not merely of Mecca, a textually justified place of pilgrimage, but also of many other sites of local, perhaps culturally specific, significance. Sometimes (rather as relics spread the influence of a person or site) the charisma of a place is even diffused by the 'replication' of that place far from its original location. Benares, for instance, has many smaller counterparts in the Indian subcontinent; Walsingham provides an Anglo-Saxon equivalent of Nazareth; a 'second Mecca' is said by some Muslims to exist in Ajmer.

The important function of pilgrimage in giving religious traditions concrete, tangible referents is indicated, ironically, by the fact that each world religion also contains those who forcibly deny the powers of place in the exercise of proper worship. Such attacks on pilgrimage have been waged on at least two fronts. Some, like the sufis who locate the sanctity of the Ka'ba within the self, Christians who speak of the Cross in the soul, or Hindus who find Benares rising in the heart, deny the importance of travel to an external, material location. They collapse the imagery of place into that of personal experience (in many ways, Bunyan's Puritan vision of the pilgrim's progress is an archetypal example of this tendency).²⁹

Others, like the fourth-century Orthodox theologian Gregory of Nyssa, or Nanak, the first Sikh Guru, emphasise that the sacred cannot be confined or concentrated in any one place, but that it is everywhere.

Thus in our comparative survey of pilgrimages in many cultures we return – even in negative examples – to the significance of space and movement in articulating images of the sacred. Yet Eade and Sallnow's point is that pilgrimage sites have no meaning in themselves:

In the conventional view, the power of a miraculous shrine is seen to derive solely from its inherent capacity to exert a devotional magnetism over pilgrims from far and wide, and to exude of itself potent meanings and significances for its worshippers. The shrine is seen, so to speak, as *sui generis*: its power is internally generated and its meanings are largely predetermined. All the contributors to this symposium implicitly or explicitly contest this view.³⁰

We do not deny that pilgrimage sites accommodate and perhaps even encourage multiple interpretations, and agree that the volume makes this point very persuasively, in well-chosen ethnographic detail. However, Eade and Sallnow's perspective runs the risk of discouraging analysis of how sacred space is orchestrated in pilgrimage sites, and how such organisation can have a considerable impact on the perspectives of pilgrims. Our chapters have shown, for instance, that sites often frame the actions of visitors in significant ways. After all, pilgrims cannot usually approach the Ka'ba at Mecca, Lord Ayyappa at Sabarimalai, or even some Christian shrines in any way they choose: their movements, and therefore their physical orientations in space, are frequently prescribed in ways which encourage outward conformity to religious norms. Sacred architecture and art can, after all, constrain the experience of the pilgrim, not least through giving meaning to the notion of movement itself.

At pilgrimage sites from Mecca to Benares, from ancient Olympia to modern Lourdes, official guides have existed to instruct the pilgrim in the proper sequences, forms and places for the carrying out of rites. At Lourdes, lay helpers direct people not only at the site itself but also at the local station and airport, so that their influence extends far beyond the confines of the shrine. At what for pilgrims is the most significant point of their journey, *brancardiers* (male lay assistants) facilitate and yet control the large numbers who come to bathe in the holy waters. They resist the carnival atmosphere of the bathers by regulating their exuberance through an appeal to ordered and prayerful calm, and by limiting numbers.³¹ Thus the act of proceeding through a pilgrimage centre like Lourdes, which involves a number of rituals within the place, can itself take on a formalised – even a ritualised – quality. Even writing about a pilgrimage site may enshrine some of the patterns of such ritual, as when Pausanias recounts the altars of Zeus at Olympia in the order in which sacrifice was performed at them.

To illustrate and explore this argument concerning the 'constraining' functions of sites further, we shall discuss a pilgrimage centre we have analysed elsewhere in some detail: the sixth-century monastery of St Catherine at Mount Sinai.³² The site marked the spot where Moses



77 The Transfiguration. Apse mosaic from the church of the Monastery of St Catherine at Mt Sinai. The mosaic, donated by the abbot Longinus and the deacon John in the 6th century, shows Christ transfigured between Moses (to his left) and Elijah (to his right). Beneath them are the apostles Peter (centre), James (right) and John (left). The medallion busts around the main image depict prophets and apostles.

received the tablets of the Law, and was also identified with the biblical Horeb, where he had seen the vision of the burning bush. It therefore attracted pilgrims from throughout the early Christian world – from the Latin-speaking west, the Greek north and east, the Coptic south and even from Armenia – and no doubt such a range of visitors would have brought with them very different cultural assumptions. Yet we cannot say that the site merely acted as ‘an empty vessel’, passively reflecting individual experience. Even before the pilgrim reached the monastery, his or her expectations would have been moulded by scripture and by the oral or written accounts of previous pious travellers (such as Egeria in the 380s, whose moving description of Sinai still survives). The monks at the site functioned in part as interpreters of and guides to the holy, using their linguistic abilities to make the site comprehensible to believers of any nationality or provenance. In addition, the layout and architecture of the place itself was significant in defining the pilgrimage experience.

Like the stational liturgies of the great capitals Constantinople and Rome, and also of the centre of Christian pilgrimage at Jerusalem, worship at Sinai involved the movement of groups of believers from sacred site to sacred site. The pilgrim not only visited the monastery, but also undertook a number of other controlled journeys, of less distance but ever increasing theological significance, such as to the rock where Moses struck water, a day’s journey away from the monastery; to the burning

bush, located at the eastern end of the church; to the spring where Moses watered sheep – associated in later tradition with Jethro's well where Moses met his wife Zipporah (see Exodus 2:16–22); to the cave where Elijah fled from king Ahab (I Kings 19:8), and finally to the peak of Mount Sinai, where Moses received the tablets of the Law.

The architecture of the sixth-century monastery delineated a path in its own right. The sixth-century fixtures, images and buildings of the monastery acted both to channel visitors through its sacred places and to locate the process of Sinai pilgrimage in a Christian interpretative frame. The pilgrim would arrive out of the desert into a small oasis, at the heart of which was the monastery. Inside was the church, and at its eastern (most sacred) end was the relic of the burning bush. On entering the building, the pilgrim's first sight would have been the remarkable mosaics at the eastern end which represented a hierarchy of theophanies from Moses' vision of the burning bush to his receiving of the tablets of the Law and to the vision of the Incarnate Christ at the Transfiguration. This journey into ever more interior space, the space of ever more intensive liturgical action, was emphasised by the fact that the site of the bush was the lowest part of the monastery, so that the pilgrim had to descend several steps into the church. Moreover, by completing the series of Old Testament theophanies afforded to Moses (at the burning bush and on the peak of Sinai) with the New Testament vision of Christ's Transfiguration, the arts at Sinai successfully accomplished the Christianisation of what was originally and textually a Jewish holy site.³³

The path into and within the heart of the monastery was set against the ascent of Mount Sinai – the pilgrimage for which the monastery was the starting point. A series of prayer niches were built along the path which led up from the monastery to the summit. These marked significant spots, either places where the path joined another path, or places where pilgrims might glimpse a view of the distant mountain peak – their sacred goal. All such material marks on the local landscape not only recorded where previous believers had been, but also indicated a succession of mini-goals for pilgrims on their way to the summit of Sinai. At the top was a small church which marked the site where Moses had received the tablets of the Law. The final point of this pilgrimage was (like the descent within the monastery to the site of the bush) a descent to the cave where Moses had stood to receive the second lot of tablets and where he had been vouchsafed a vision of God.

The topography, images and architecture of sixth-century Sinai (much of it still surviving) performed a great deal of ideological work at the site. The theme of motion signifying transformation is implicit not only in the act of pilgrimage but also in the mosaic images of the church. Moses is depicted in front of the burning bush, and then again on top of the mountain, receiving the tablets of stone. This movement, expressed through representation, prefigures the actual journey of the pilgrim from the monastery to the peak of the mountain.

The Sinai example indicates further some of the close interactions between texts, places and person in the construction and maintenance of a pilgrimage site. Apart from being the physical embodiment of a place

mentioned in the Bible, the site was moulded by its buildings and images into a context where the pilgrim's movement could be guided and converted into an ordered progression, culminating in the twin dramas of visiting the burning bush at the back of the church and reaching the site of the donation of the law at the mountain top. The art, architecture and narratives associated with the site celebrated, above all, sacred persons – principally Moses and Jesus – but were also presented to pilgrims at least partially through the interpretative filter of religious functionaries permanently located at Sinai.

While the Sinai case is far from, say, the pilgrimage to Lord Ayyappa in culture, geography and history, the sites are comparable in how they illustrate the funnelling of pilgrims through significant points in a sacred geography. Ayyappa does not feature prominently in canonical texts, unlike Moses (although he is present in local legends and folk songs), but images of both sacred figures are reached by a long and arduous journey punctuated by intermediate rituals and goals and culminating in a final ascent and highly charged 'vision'. In neither case is the pilgrim forced into adopting a fixed interpretation of the site or experience, but is rather prompted to move through the respective sites in ritually prescribed ways, so viewing the images and architecture from conventionalised perspectives.

In re-emphasising the importance of the physical layout of pilgrimage sites we are consciously calling to mind the image of landscape mentioned in the subtitle of this book. The word is an obvious choice in the sense that pilgrimage necessarily involves bodily movement through a physical environment. However, the image of landscape can be seen also as a powerful organising metaphor for examining pilgrimage cross-culturally and through time. If we think of pilgrimage as an institution made up of a constellation of features, the 'landscape' of any pilgrimage site consists not only of a physical terrain and architecture, but also of all the myths, traditions and narratives associated with natural and man-made features. Indeed, the word itself refers ambiguously but suggestively both to physical terrain and to the idea of representing nature in art.³⁴ Physical and myth-historical landscapes provide the backdrop to movement, so that in progressing through the physical geography a pilgrim travels and lives through a terrain of culturally constructed symbols.³⁵

Pilgrimage in the world religions is a way of putting cultural assumptions of a given tradition to the test, precisely because it involves bringing the conceptual models belonging to one context (the pilgrim's home) into confrontation with the different conceptual frameworks evident in the cultures through which the pilgrim journeys. The particular features of a landscape partially constrain the physical movements and perceptions of pilgrims, and by retaining some continuity over years and centuries they can act to uphold the claims of transcultural and transhistorical religious traditions, yet they are also vulnerable to changes imposed by pilgrims. Choice landmarks, especially, are both attractions to communal experience and to contestation over ownership, decor and access. Moreover, a second trip through the same environment may prove surprisingly

different from the first and may offer new insights and divergent interpretations.

Landscapes therefore allow for different routes to be taken and can be interpreted variously by those who move through them, but they also orientate travellers in ways which the latter cannot entirely control. The job of the comparative scholar is not only to compare the pilgrimage landscapes of different religions as they exist at any given moment, but also the various features of a 'single' tradition as it changes over time, encountering processes of erosion or accretion, or perhaps theological 'earthquakes' which alter the sacred topography rather more suddenly.³⁶ In arguing this case, then, we hope to defend at least those aspects of the Turnerian approach to pilgrimage which emphasise the importance of analysing pilgrimages as extended case-histories, linking people, places, narratives and cultures in networks of constantly evolving relations.

PILGRIMAGE IN A 'SECULAR' AGE

While the metaphor of moving through a landscape describes any form of travel, our introduction and epilogue refer specifically to landscapes of the *sacred*.³⁷ We have therefore chosen to focus the body of the book on the major world faiths, and our approach fits well with conventional definitions of the religious. As a consequence, the themes we have highlighted in this epilogue, and perhaps even the book as a whole, may seem remote from the everyday lives of most people living in the modern 'secular' culture of the West. Yet there are a number of reasons why pilgrimage should not be seen as an anachronistic phenomenon. We have shown, for instance, that contemporary forms of travel have actually increased the ability of pilgrims to traverse large distances, and many sites are therefore more visited today than ever before.³⁸ As an institution involving the diffusion and intermingling of cultures over large distances, pilgrimage resonates with social processes that are occurring elsewhere in the increasingly globalised, plural societies of the world. Pilgrimages may even be gaining in symbolic significance in some societies, given that they constitute a potential means through which to react against an apparently dehumanised, secular world: one scholar speculates, for instance, that at least in Europe they provide people with the opportunity to explore contemporary forms of subjectivity and individualism that would have appeared distinctly puzzling to medieval travellers.³⁹ One can even argue that modern media of communication such as television and radio permit vicarious participation in pilgrimage for those who would otherwise lack either the will or ability to join in. The Marian pilgrimage to the site of El Rocio in Andalusia, for instance, has been filmed by both state and international television crews,⁴⁰ while the 1993 Mahamastabisheka ceremony, the climax of the twelve-yearly Jain pilgrimage to the colossal statue of Lord Gomateshvara at Shravanabelagola, was broadcast live on Indian television.

A further, more complex, reason exists for asserting the renewed vibrancy of pilgrimage in the present day. If we accept one aspect of a Durkheimian view of the sacred – the notion that the sacred is in some

78 OPPOSITE TOP

The Mausoleum of Lenin, Red Square, Moscow. This photograph was taken in the 1930s at the height of the cult of Lenin by the English photographer, travel-writer and spy, Robert Byron.

respects an embodiment and representation of societal ideals – we can argue that pilgrimage is currently taking on new forms that go far beyond standard religious practices.⁴¹ Western society has been marked, for instance, not just by a decline in institutional support for the traditional religions but also by a notable increase in travel for its own sake. In this situation, tourism has become, itself, a kind of pilgrimage. Its devotees divide up their years between the profane cycle of work, based in their everyday environments, and brief periods of heightened leisure time. A holiday (the very word is derived from 'holy day') acquires a special quality from travel to a distant place. The objects of worship on these occasions may vary according to the tourist cult to which one subscribes. Some choose to honour the sun; others search for exotica in foreign cultures; a third category deliberately undergoes ascetic trials normally denied the inhabitant of a western city (climbing a mountain, trekking through a desert, wind-surfing or sailing). Those who undertake such journeys take as their guides not a conventional holy scripture but *Fodor's Guide to India*, the *Blue Guide to Greece*, or *Mexico on a Shoestring*. While away they prove their presence at the holiday site by sending postcards. On their return, they bring with them objects which retain the charisma of distant places – photographs, souvenirs and passport stamps.

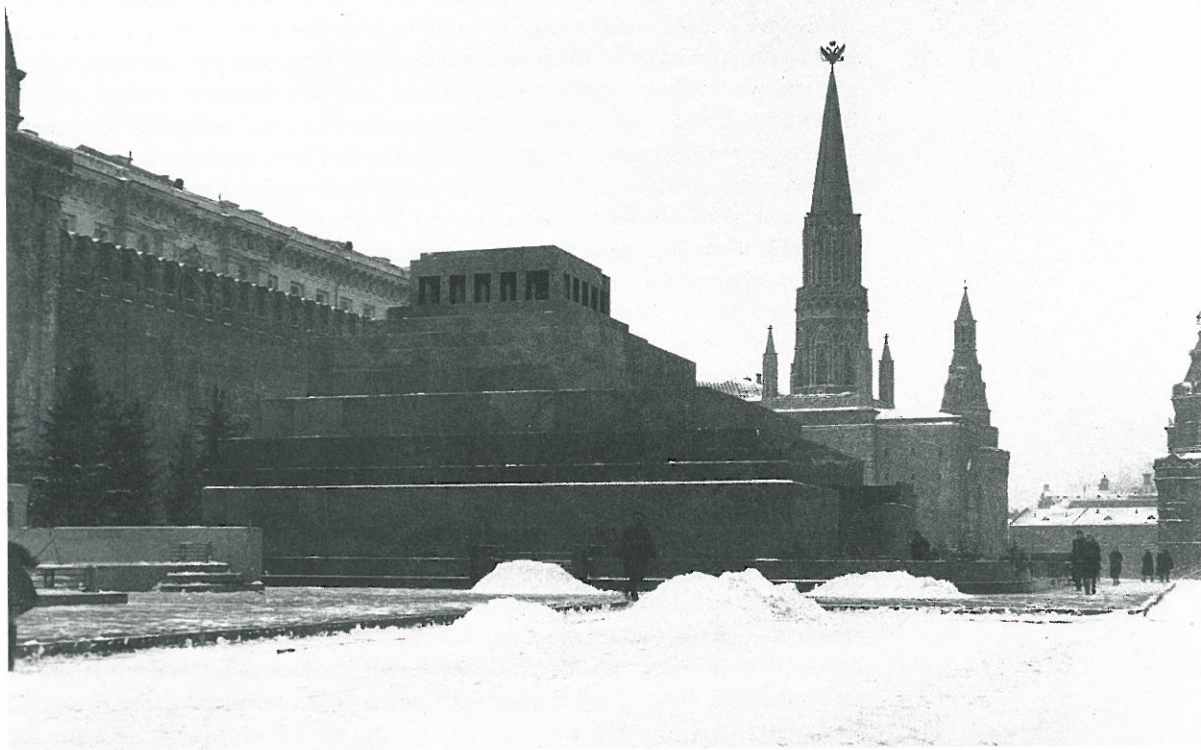
The most famous instigator of mass leisure travel was Thomas Cook, himself a Baptist minister and social reformer, who specialised in arranging morally uplifting tours. Some of these actually involved journeys to the Holy Land itself, making explicit the association between pilgrimage and tourism. Before Cook, wealthy young men undertook the Grand Tour, whose focus was Italy. Like medieval pilgrims before them the grand tourists went to Rome and returned with relics, particularly classical remains for the private collections of stately homes.

One quality of holidays, particularly of going abroad, is the willingness to do things one would not normally do. The space of the exotic may serve as a licence for experiment and even self-discovery. In western Europe, tourism often takes the form of visiting churches or other religious monuments, which the traveller might never go to in his or her ordinary life. Locals rarely visit their churches, by comparison with the sea of foreigners in prestige sites like Notre-Dame, St Peter's, or King's College Chapel in Cambridge. (How many Londoners go to Westminster Abbey in the normal course of events, except when they have a foreign guest to show round?) The Catholic Church in Italy, in an attempt to distinguish between the entirely casual tourist and the more religiously motivated or respectful traveller (even the pilgrim), frequently bans scantily clad and 'improperly dressed' visitors from its great cathedrals. Likewise, churches have sometimes banned large groups taken round by tourist guides, or have ordained that only church-appointed guides may lead tours.

The boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism become blurred further in the case of commemoration of the dead. The mausoleum in Red Square containing the embalmed body of Lenin attracted both devotees of Communism and tourists from western countries, and a visit to the body could even be incorporated into wedding rituals.⁴² The home (appropriately named Graceland) and grave of Elvis Presley have also become

79 OPPOSITE BOTTOM

Graceland, Memphis, USA. Teenage girl at Elvis' grave.



objects of veneration.⁴³ Presley, who flirted with Christianity and other religions in his lifetime, has become more accessible to his devotees in death than in life, and some who now visit the grave are too young to have seen him in his lifetime. Elvis T-shirts and badges can be bought, and an undercover trade in relics has also developed, including the marketing of his sweat, apparently preserved in glass phials. The grave is regularly covered with flowers, pictures and scraps of paper bearing both messages and prayers. Most who visit the site wear Elvis insignia, and some bear Christian symbols. On the anniversary of the star's death, a candlelight vigil is held by fans who progress slowly up a hill, past the house to the grave itself.

A more conventional goal for the secular pilgrim is the museum. Many museums (at least in the Anglo-Saxon world, for instance the British Museum) are traditionally designed as if they were Greek temples, imbued with a classical rather than Christian sanctity, a holiness vested in the distant past.⁴⁴ Like the relics in the treasury of a medieval cathedral, objects in a museum are enclosed within a series of frames which add to their sanctity. The glass museum case is a kind of reliquary; the museum room (labelled 'Egyptian', 'the Angerstein Collection' or 'Herbivorous Quadrupeds') is equivalent to the private chapel in the way it encases and classifies a particular selection of objects in a wider frame; finally, the museum itself proclaims architecturally its special purpose as temple of culture, just as a church's form announces its sacred function.

A medieval church encompasses a temporal as well as spiritual world. It is orientated in relation to all the points of the compass, so that the visitor locates his or her position within a much wider and more inclusive conceptual geography. Its imagery – stained-glass windows, sculpture, misericords – represents and thereby may incorporate the social levels of all the congregation. A church employs the universal Christian symbol of the cross, not only in its altarpiece and images, but also in its very form of nave and transepts. Likewise, the great museums – the Louvre, the 'Museums Island' in Berlin, the Museum complex on the Mall in Washington – are universal 'treasure chests' accumulating in one space prestige emblems of other cultures taken to represent the whole of human experience.⁴⁵ As Mary Beard has remarked of the British Museum,

. . . the Museum . . . is commonly defined by its visitors as the location of *all the world's history* – and its building signifies more than 'just a building'. It is the treasure chest itself, the (mystical) container of that totality, the frame that gives sense and order to the baffling array of the incomplete remains of all the past civilizations that lie inside.⁴⁶

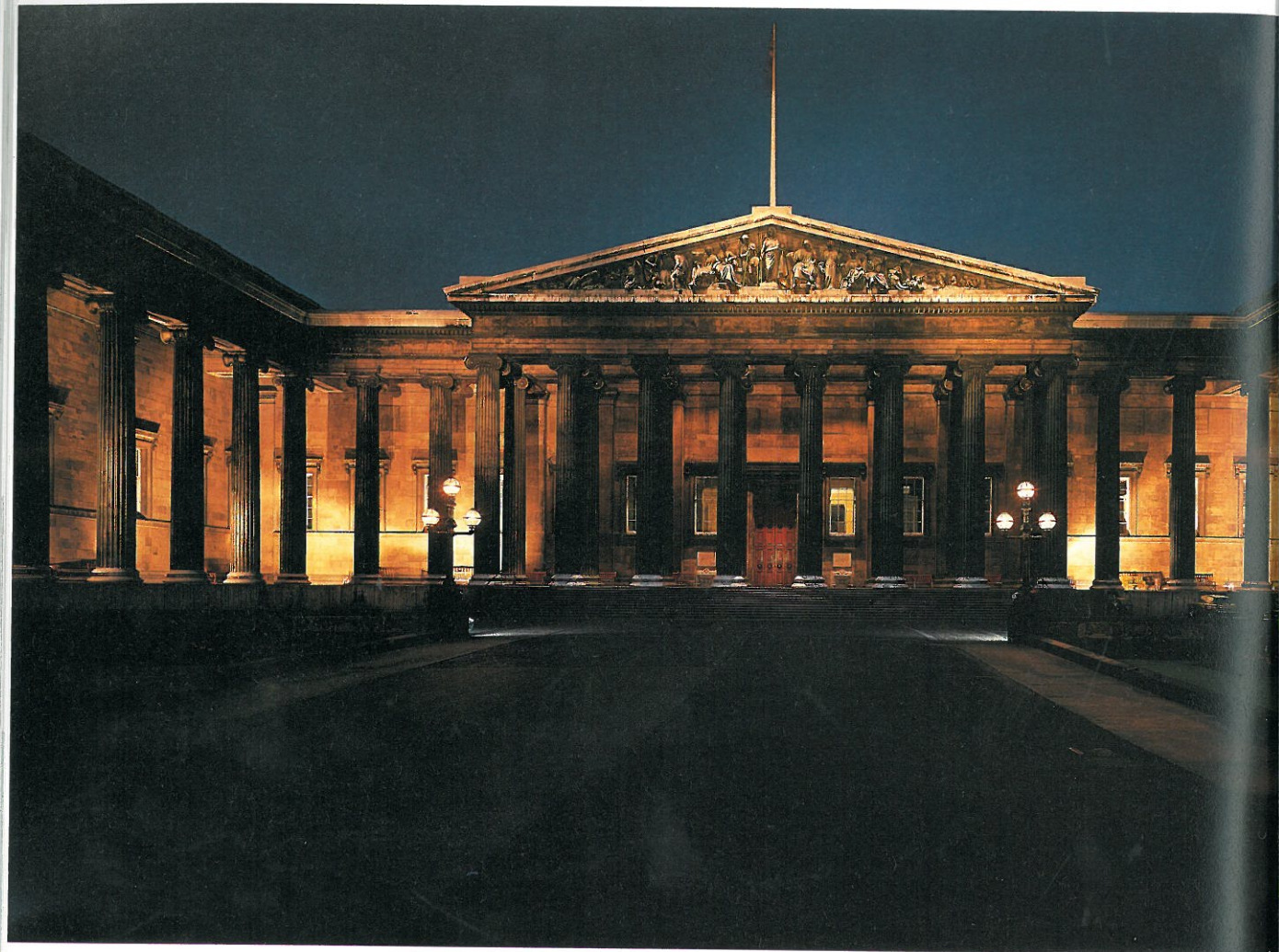
Just as pilgrimage sites include both universal and parochial centres, so museums vary in their appeal, ranging from all-inclusive reliquaries to the local exhibition of village life. While, let us say, the Museums Island in Berlin, with its spectacular architecture and state patronage, was designed as a kind of Jerusalem in its encompassment of cultural riches, so the average folk museum with its mementos of parish life in past times has counterparts in the village *tirtha* in Hindu India or the local saint's tomb in Islam.

In the larger centres of both pilgrimage and museum visiting, it is necessary to appeal to a wide range of possibly conflicting constituencies.⁴⁷ At museums and pilgrimage centres, universal and parochial, the visitor confronts a specially constructed and idealised version of the identity of a community or society. The historical overview provided by the hugely popular National Air and Space Museum in Washington DC incorporated, at least until the early 1980s, galleries on the First and Second World Wars, yet barely mentioned either the Korean or the Vietnam Wars.⁴⁸ While the world wars provided uplifting hero-tales of American triumph, the latter – far more ambiguous in their morality and outcome – constitute some of the deepest traumas in North American culture.

Like the major museums, pilgrimage centres gain from charitable benefactors, but such beneficence is also inevitably a means of control. The often idealised picture of a society presented by a sacred site or a museum corresponds to the particular vision of its powerful donors and its dominant clientele. This picture, in both museums and places of pilgrimage, is defined by its particular construction of a mythical past, a 'squeamish selection of ancestors' as one anthropologist has put it.⁴⁹ While all kinds of cultural artefacts, from newspapers to books, from films to adverts, also construct a mythologised vision of the past, what is special about pilgrimage and museum visiting is that those who come to the site play an active part in recreating the story as they proceed through its topography. The act of movement becomes itself an act of reading.

In both cases, what is read and interpreted are not only texts, but also material objects and remains. Moreover, as we have argued, movement is not usually random, but guided by particular routes, liturgies and tours. Museum guides, labelled plans and the very placement of the cases or displays tell a particular story. As Carol Duncan has put it, 'visitors to a museum follow a route through a programmed narrative'.⁵⁰ Such programmes may adopt very different forms. Many provide a crash-course through 'masterpieces'; take for example the Vatican Museum's four routes labelled A, B, C and D (each with a different colour code) which include more or less famous objects depending on the time visitors have available for their trip. At the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford, objects are deliberately grouped by function rather than cultural origin or artist. At the two opposite ends of the Air and Space Museum in Washington DC, galleries in the 1980s were devoted to air travel (implying the past) and space travel (implying the future) respectively. The viewer, who moved from looking at the Wright brothers' plane to an Apollo space craft, was encouraged to retell a story of evolutionary progress, not entirely distinct from the space race and American triumphs.

Museums do not merely incorporate a 'ritual' structure: often they boast a specific material object which takes an emblematic and resonant quality as apparently defining the essence of the museum. The visitor's actions relating to this object indicate its special nature. Here is a description of the moon stone, the most significant object in the Air and Space Museum:

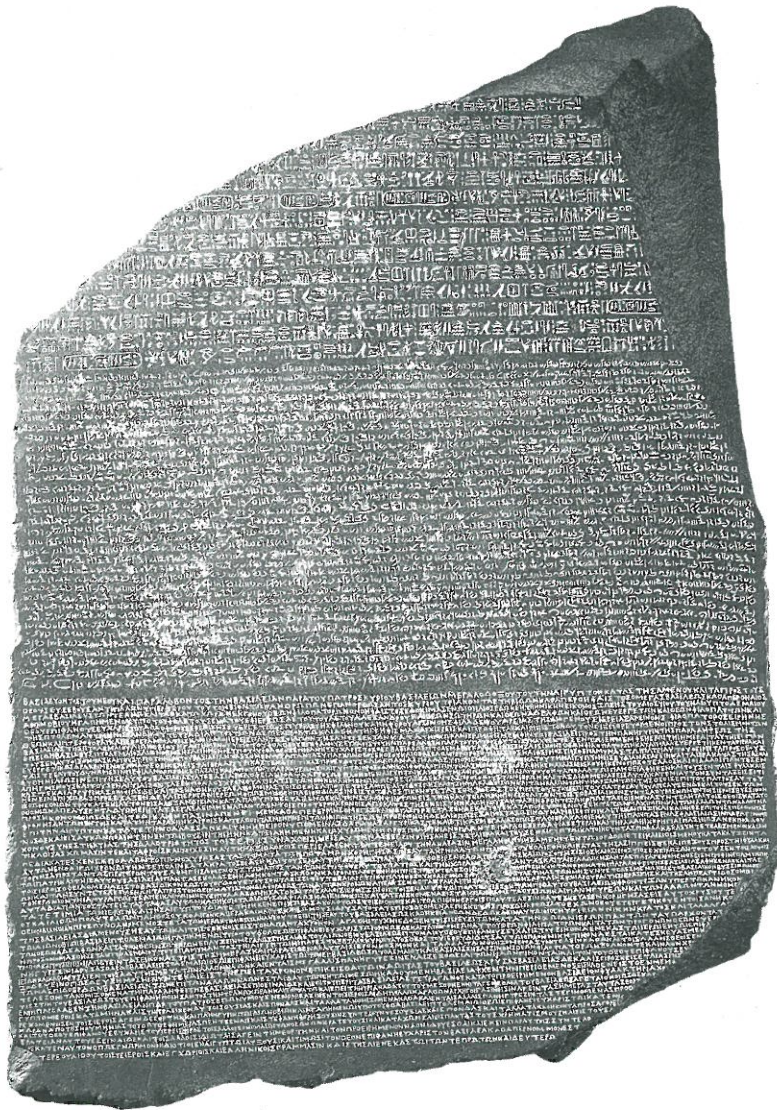


80 The British Museum.

The moon rock is an actual piece of the moon retrieved by the Apollo 17 mission. There is nothing particularly appealing about the rock; it is a rather standard piece of volcanic basalt some 4 million years old. Yet, unlike many other old rocks, this one comes displayed in an altar-like structure, set in glass . . . As the sign says, touch a piece of the moon. Touching the moon rock is an act of sanctification, an act that the visitor does willingly. . . . Touching it is not significantly different from genuflection.⁵¹

In the British Museum, meanwhile, the supreme object is the Rosetta Stone. Set on a base a couple of feet from the floor and surrounded by a rail, the Rosetta Stone stands on a main thoroughfare of the museum, at the entrance to the main gallery of Egyptian sculpture. Few visitors can comprehend the writing on the stone and yet for many its physical presence holds a certain fascination:

. . . [the] visitors' desire to make *contact* with the Stone, combined with the museum's acceptance of that desire, also confirms its talismanic properties within the context of a museum visit. Touch the Stone; touch the Museum.⁵²



81 The Rosetta Stone, British Museum.

Is there any way in which such activity echoes what we have seen in conventional, overtly religious pilgrimage? Is the moon rock equivalent in any sense to the miracle-working Madonna of Czestochowa in Poland or the meteoric rock in the Ka'ba? As we have pointed out, straightforward parallels do not work. But in their particular contexts, as symbolically rich end-points of a journey to a site and controlled movement within that site, they have similar qualities. In front of such relics, a person is confronted – literally put in touch with – a tangible embodiment of all that the place might represent. As David Meltzer says of the moon rock:

*Everyone touches it. Why? Because this object, perhaps more than any other piece of material culture in the Museum, hails you. The moon rock 'marks the most spectacular chapter [of the space adventure] so far' . . . On one level, it is a metaphor for the space programme . . .*⁵³

Or as Mary Beard puts it of the Rosetta Stone:

The Stone itself and the decipherment that it allowed, has come to be constructed as a talisman for the museum, for museum culture and for the past time that that culture claims to embody. . . . The Stone acts as an almost mystical key to the hidden world of history.⁵⁴

Our analogy between museum visits and pilgrimage has yet a further dimension. The final stop in a trip to a museum (and often also its starting point) is frequently the museum shop. The tokens one purchases – postcards, replicas, books – are a way of bringing home something of the charisma of a special location. They are the relics and reproductions of a cultural centre. Like pilgrim tokens, such objects represent a particular selection of that which is most significant about the museum. If Byzantine ampullae from the Holy Land frequently depicted the Holy Sepulchre, and medieval pilgrimage tokens from Rome were impressed with the motto of St Peter's keys, it is revealing that the most popular postcard on sale at the British Museum shop is the Rosetta Stone itself.⁵⁵

It may be that conventionally secular forms of pilgrimage, from tourism to museum visiting, are no more than distant analogies for the phenomenon of sacred travel, despite their rather close structural resemblances and historical links with pilgrimage in the world religions. Certainly, the initiate into a religious system might have trouble recognising the 'sacred centre' at the heart of a trip to the sun or a Sunday afternoon in the Metropolitan Museum. Yet, it is a mark of the power of pilgrimage as a ritual structure in human experience that so many of its qualities should have taken contemporary forms. Despite revolutions in communications technology and cultural identity, pilgrimage has proved remarkably persistent in adapting to and even appropriating the innovations of secular modernity.