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Darius Liutikas *Editor*

Creating the Sacred Landscape

Pilgrimages and Ritual Practices



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Darius Liutikas
Editor

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Pilgrimages and Ritual Practices

Editor

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Contributions to Regional Science

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Introduction to Sacred Landscape, Pilgrimage, and Ritual Practices



Darius Liutikas

Abstract The book *Creating the Sacred Landscape: Pilgrimages and Ritual Practices* offers a profound exploration of the complex relationship between religious practices and the sacred landscape. It focuses on the spatial manifestations of religious beliefs, practices, and rituals, examining how these elements contribute to the creation and affirmation of sacred spaces. Drawing on extensive research, the authors investigate the interplay between sacred spaces, pilgrimage, religious beliefs, and ritual practices. Contributors from diverse regions examine how religious beliefs and practices are both shaped by and influence the physical environment. Through the analysis of global case studies, the book highlights the intricate connections between religious traditions and their spatial expressions, emphasizing their significant impact on cultural landscapes. It demonstrates how pilgrimage journeys and ritual practices influence the creation, use, and transformation of sacred landscapes, including houses of worship and pilgrimage sites. By revealing the role of religion in shaping cultural landscapes, the book underscores the dynamic relationship between the sacred and the spatial. With its comprehensive approach and rich empirical examples, this work serves as an invaluable resource for scholars, students, and the general public seeking a deeper understanding of the intersections between religious geography, sociology, and contemporary religious practices.

Keywords Sacred landscape · Pilgrimage · Rituals · Classification of sacred spaces

1 Introduction

This book explores the construction and reaffirmation of sacred spaces as an ongoing socio-cultural process. Sacred landscapes and sacred space are concepts rooted in the human mind, with different individuals perceiving it in unique ways. Shrines and various religious monuments stand out prominently in the physical environment. In

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Christianity, these include churches, chapels, monasteries, tombs, calvaries, replicas of the Grotto of Lourdes, roadside and yard crosses, religious statues, and small chapels. The religious landscape is dynamic, shaped by natural forces as well as social, political, demographic, and religious factors.

The study of sacred landscapes is a central topic within the geography of religion (Jackowski, 2002; Liutikas, 2023, 2025a, 2025b; Mannion, 2005; Park, 1994, 2005; Stump, 2008). The creation and significance of sacred spaces have been analysed by scholars from various disciplines (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995; Coomans et al. (eds) 2012; Cosgrove, 1984; David & Wilson, 2002; Eliade, 1987 [1957]; Gould, 1966; Häussler & Chia, 2020; Knott, 2005; Knudsen et al. 2008; Lefebvre, 1991; Park, 1994; Preston, 1992; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004; Soja, 1989; Tuan, 1977, 1978, 2009; V. and E. Turner, 1978; Turner, 2011; Urry, 1990). The primary research focus among these scholars has been on defining sacred spaces and places, as well as determining how to select them (Liutikas, 2018).

Sacred landscape and sacred spaces usually are a goal for pilgrimage journeys (Turner & Turner, 1978; Morinis, 1992; Coleman & Elsner, 1995; Nolan & Nolan, 1989; Eade and Sallnow (eds, 2000), Norman, 2011; Liutikas, 2021). However, the sacred landscape is not always a pilgrimage destination. Sometimes, it holds religious, spiritual, or personal significance without being associated with pilgrimage practices. Examples of such places include those connected to personal identity, family, communal or local worship, and religious heritage. While they may not necessarily attract pilgrims, they still hold profound religious or spiritual significance.

The classical approach to analysing sacred landscapes encompasses Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Indian, and Buddhist traditions. While sacred places in these religions vary widely, certain principles and global trends influence all geographical locations, shaping the motivations and experiences of pilgrimage in the context of globalization. The chapters in this book, with the exception of Chapter 15, focus primarily on the Christian understanding of sacred landscapes and sacredness.

The main focus of this book is the contemporary notion of sacred landscape, its visitation, and the rituals performed there. The utilization of religious spaces (Chapter 3) leads to their transformation (Chapters 4, 7, 10, and 11). Different sacred landscapes (Chapters 2, 8, 12, and 14) incorporate established ritualistic elements (Chapter 5). Pilgrimage journeys fulfil the spiritual needs of travellers (Chapters 6, 13, and 15) and influence the sacred places they visit (Chapter 9). The emerging field of sacred landscape research is closely related to burial traditions. Cemetery tourism (Chapters 4 and 10) emphasizes significant burial sites and tombs, while also uncovering a wide range of motivations for visiting cemeteries.

The urban religious landscape is highly complex and multilayered, revealing historical strata and diverse architectural styles of religious buildings over time. Special walks through the city (Chapter 5) can emphasize religious visibility. Churches (Liutikas, 2025a, Chapter 2) and other houses of prayer, constructed at different times, may become cultural and historical landmarks, integral to the urban landscape. Others, however, might be seen as disruptive to traditional urban structures.

2 Sacred Landscape

Religion is deeply embedded in the material world (Arweck and Keenan (eds) 2006; McDannell, 1995; Morgan, 2010, 2014; Ammerman, 2021); it manifests within the sensual, physical domain of this world. Material objects gain significance and power through their association with the authority of institutional traditions and organizations (McDannell, 1995). A key aspect of religious imagination lies in its ability to situate or embody the sacred within the material world, intertwining it with time, space, place, and social interaction. A sacred landscape is shaped by our ideas, intentions, beliefs, actions, and memories. It emerges as the result of past and present interactions between humans, material objects, architecture, and the natural environment. Sacredness is established or embodied through the interplay of ritual actions and place (Dyas, 2021; Eade, 2020; Liutikas, 2025b).

Ivakhiv (2006) observed that people engage in various activities to anchor different notions of landscape, shaping them into centres and peripheries, organizing them into pyramidal hierarchies, or other structures. These actions involve a range of social actors with diverse agendas, making the process inherently complex and multifaceted, while also being shaped and influenced by broader structural forces. The interactions between agents and structures are mediated through signs, symbols, images, narratives, and the circulation of meanings, desires, and power (Ivakhiv, 2001, 2006). This process encompasses practices that engage with spaces, places, and landscapes in ways that distinguish and demarcate, describe and redefine (Ivakhiv, 2006 p. 172).

To understand the creation of sacred spaces, it is essential to mention the opposition of the secular and sacred space (Durkheim (2008 [1912]), revealed as profane space and “hierophany” (Eliade, 1987 [1959]), ideas about contestation of the sacred space (Chidester and Linenthal (1995)) and the concepts of liminality (Turner, 1969; Turner & Turner, 1978), perceived space (Lefebvre, 1991), mental maps (Gould, 1966; Gould & White, 1974; Lynch, 1960), imagined landscape (Eck, 1998), topophilia (Tuan, 1990), geopiety (Wright, 1966), and attachment (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004). Many researchers highlight performance of rituals as the important element to define the sacred space (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995; Kilde, 2022a, 2022b; O’Leary, 1996). As Veilleux (2012, p. 29) observed, “Nothing is sacred in itself, but everything can be sacralized.”

Kilde (2008) categorized religious space as a powerful space, with its power stemming from three distinct sources: divine or supernatural power derived from God, social power rooted in social structures, particularly clerical hierarchies, and personal power, which arises from the spiritual empowerment individuals gain through experiencing the divine. We also could add the symbolic power of the sacred landscape to create social markers, ritual space, and different meanings. Voyé (2012) also highlighted the potential of sacred landscapes as an economic resource for tourism. Indeed, when examining the tourism resources and itineraries of any country, the most visited sites can typically be divided into three categories: cultural objects (such as castles, palaces, mansions, and museums), religious objects (including houses of

worship and other sacred places), and natural objects (such as national parks and specific natural features like mountains, waterfalls, or rivers).

Philosopher G. Vattimo, among others, highlights the aesthetic function of religion (Gołąb, 2022). Some rituals are performed by individuals without delving into their deeper religious meaning, functioning more like a form of art. It is confirmed that aesthetic religious architecture is closely related to spiritual development of an individual (Kulik et. al., 2022). Religious architecture tried to create forms, colours, symbols, and associations that profoundly impact the viewer. This profound impact is achieved through visual interactions and a wide range of multi-sensory effects, enhanced by spatial attributes such as location, composition, scale, rhythm, articulation, shapes, lighting, detailing, interior decoration, acoustics, scents, temperature, and the tactile qualities of materials and textures (Kulik et. al., 2022).

Sacred spaces enter into the existential circle (Liutikas, 2023, 2025b) of interpretation and ritualization. They are transformed by their users and, in turn, can offer transformative experiences (Liutikas & Raj, 2024). The existential circle of sacred spaces consists of five stages: (1) Creation; (2) Affirmation; (3) Preservation; (4) Re-use; and (5) Destruction. Rituals and pilgrimage play a crucial role during the creation and affirmation stages of sacred spaces (Liutikas, 2025b).

An important research question is the in-depth analysis of the reaffirmation of sacred landscapes. While comprehensive works written or edited by Stump (2008), Hopkins, Kong and Olson (eds, 2012), Brunn (ed, 2015), Kong and Woods (2016), Kilde (ed, 2022), Bielo and Ron (eds, 2023), Kong, Woods and Tse (eds, 2025), and Liutikas (ed, 2025b) contribute to the field, they address this issue only partially.

The meanings of places are closely tied to social identity (Cosgrove, 1989). Sacred buildings often serve as symbols of social identity, whether communal, national, regional, or local. Similarly, shrines, religious monuments, and various religious images within the landscape act as markers of religious identity. Many of the most prominent sacred sites have been integrated into the tourism industry. Through destination marketing, these places are presented in ways that appeal to a broad range of visitors. The meanings and narratives associated with sacred sites, along with the rituals performed there, are transformed into cultural tourism products, consumed by mass audiences (Liutikas, 2023).

D. Liutikas (2023) employed various elements of sacred space classification, focusing on the nomination or selection of the space (distinguishing factors: human intervention, narrative, valuistic ideal), its organization (distinguishing factors: position and functionality), and its rank (distinguishing factors: geographical structure and importance) (Table 1.1).

The classification mostly includes physical landscapes, but sacred places also exist in the mindspace, social space, or virtual space (Table 1.1). One of the key distinguishing factors in the formation of sacred spaces is *the narrative*. In this context, the story becomes a crucial element, encompassing historical facts about the location, ancient myths, and legends, as well as testimonies from locals and pilgrims. *The functionality* of a sacred space is closely tied to its operational status. Sacred spaces can serve various roles: they may be consistently used for religious purposes, repurposed from earlier religious sites, utilized as cultural heritage objects with no

Table 1.1 Classification of sacred space

The main distinguishing factors	Elements of classification
Nomination	
Human Intervention	• Mindspace (thoughts, spiritual and metaphorical space, meditation, meaning of life) • Social spaces (symbolic capital in social arena, interpersonal relations, traditions, customs, and social rituals) • Natural physical objects, natural environment (mountains, rivers, springs, groves, trees, rocks, cliffs) • Physical objects created by human (buildings, gardens, parks, cemeteries, bridges, places of cultural interest, places of religious objects) • Other space created by human (virtual and hyper-real reality, combination of virtual and physical activities in a special equipment)
Narrative	• Natural origin (places of life and death of saints, graves, houses of worship and other buildings) • Miraculous origin (healing objects in nature, apparition' places and places of mystical manifestations, places of miraculous images and relics)
Valuistic ideal	Related to: • Religion, God(s), sacred figures, various faith systems • Secular values (nation and homeland, culture and art, sport and other personal or collective ideals)
Religious figures and cult objects	In Catholic tradition relation to: • Christ and the symbol of the Cross (Calvaries—the Way of the Cross, roadside crosses, places of images of Christ) • St. Virgin Mary (places of apparitions, places of miraculous images, replicas of the Grotto of Lourdes) • Saints and spiritual authorities (tombs and relics, places of residence of spiritual authorities, images of saints)
Organization of Space	
Position	• Horizontal directions/axes (east/west axis, north/south axis, the path of the sun, everyday human relations, and relations among different human structures) • Centrality (crossroads, actual centre, the centre of cosmos) • Verticality (seaward/mountainward, humans/deity)
Functionality	• Consistently used permanent places of worship • Recycled earlier religious sites (conversion of pagan sites to Christian use, reuse of churches of different Christian denominations) • Historic non-functional and abandoned shrines • Replicated spaces (Grottos of Lourdes and Calvaries in Catholic tradition, Shikoku pilgrimage route in Japan) • Temporary created event places for religious gatherings
Rank	

(continued)

Table 1.1 (continued)

The main distinguishing factors	Elements of classification
Values and identity	Related to: • Personal values and identity • Communal values and social (collective) identity
Geographical structure	• Micro (images, relics, home altars, roadside chapels, statues, and places of religious symbols in landscape) • Intermediate (shrines, other places of worship) • Macro (large landscape elements as forests, mountains; holy cities as Jerusalem or Rome, sacred area in Japan, pilgrim routes, Ways of the Cross in Christianity)
Importance	• Individual (e.g., sacred places at home environment, place of baptism, place of ordination, shrine of wedding ceremony, shrines visited by fathers or forefathers) • Local and Communal (local shrines) • Regional (shrines visited by pilgrims from the region on special occasions) • National (the main national pilgrim places) • International (international places of pilgrimage) • World (Rome and Vatican, Jerusalem, Mecca, Varanasi, other sacred places included in the UNESCO World Heritage list)
The Main Distinguishing Factors	Elements of Classification
Nomination	
Human intervention	• Mindspace (thoughts, spiritual and metaphorical space, meditation, meaning of life) • Social spaces (symbolic capital in social arena, interpersonal relations, traditions, customs, and social rituals) • Natural physical objects, natural environment (mountains, rivers, springs, groves, trees, rocks, cliffs) • Physical objects created by human (buildings, gardens, parks, cemeteries, bridges, places of cultural interest, places of religious objects) • Other space created by human (virtual and hyper-real reality, combination of virtual and physical activities in a special equipment)
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Position	• Horizontal directions/axes (east/west axis, north/south axis, the path of the sun, everyday human relations, and relations among different human structures) • Centrality (crossroads, actual centre, the centre of cosmos) • Verticality (seaward/mountainward, humans/deity)
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Source D. Liutikas, [2023](#)

active religious function, or exist as abandoned shrines or replicas of original sacred landscapes. Additionally, religious events can transform locations into temporary pilgrimage sites, creating ephemeral sacred spaces.

What is considered sacred evolves over time and varies across regions. For example, in the eastern Baltic countries, particularly in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, natural sacred sites such as trees, groves, lakes, rivers, wetlands, hills, and boulders were prominent before the arrival of Christianity. Over time, the sacred landscape increasingly became associated with Christian structures, such as churches, chapels, and crosses.

Today, it is inevitable to discuss technological development and its impact on the experience of sacred landscapes. Virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI) directly influence how sacred landscapes and the rituals associated with them are perceived and experienced. ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2025) described this influence as either positive or creating entirely new settings for visitors' experiences. The positive impacts of AI on sacred landscapes include the digital preservation and restoration of these sites. Virtual pilgrimages and immersive experiences provided by AR offer users the opportunity to explore sacred landscapes remotely, which is especially beneficial for individuals unable to visit in person due to geographical, physical, or financial constraints. AI can also enhance the physical experience of visiting sacred landscapes by offering personalized tours, guidance, real-time translations, and cultural context to enrich visitors' understanding and connection to these spaces (OpenAI, 2025).

However, these advancements raise challenging ethical questions regarding authenticity, commodification, and the potential loss of personal, communal, and spiritual connections. It is essential to acknowledge that in some cases, AI may begin to play an active role in religious rituals, with AI systems designed to assist in prayer, meditation, or worship. While this could introduce new forms of religious expression, blending technology with spirituality, it may also alter traditional beliefs and rituals, potentially challenging the authenticity of spiritual experiences (OpenAI, 2025). As the example, the global media (Kassam, 2024) announced in November 2024 an art project titled *Deus in Machina* (God in a Machine) at St. Peter's Church in Lucerne. This project, leveraging technological advances, allowed worshippers in Switzerland to "speak" directly to Jesus—more precisely, to an AI-generated version of him. An AI-powered Jesus hologram was designed to take confessions from worshippers.

Another challenge concerns the impact of AI on pilgrimage practices. AI-driven tools, such as navigation apps or route optimization systems, could change the traditional dynamics of pilgrimage. These tools might result in a more structured and organized approach, potentially reducing the spontaneity and introspection often integral to such journeys. In conclusion, the impact of VR, AR, and AI on sacred landscapes is multifaceted, influencing both the physical and experiential dimensions of these spaces (OpenAI, 2025).

2.1 *Rituals at Sacred Places and During Journeys*

The significance of sacred spaces is affirmed through religious rites and their visitation (Liutikas, 2025b). Sacred landscapes serve as venues for personal and communal worship, encompassing practices like devotion, gatherings, pilgrimages, and processions (Liutikas, 2014). Bowie (2006) observed that rituals serve many functions, both for individuals and for groups or societies. They channel and express emotions, guide and reinforce behaviours, support or challenge the status quo, bring about change, or restore harmony and balance (Bowie, 2006, p. 138).

Victor and Edith Turner, in their influential book *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (1978), argued that pilgrimage celebrates the temporary *communitas* among its participants. Pilgrimage is a “liminoid” phenomenon, sharing similarities with “tribal” rites of passage. The Turners’ egalitarian model of normative *communitas* sparked debates about the contested and diverse meanings of pilgrimage (Eade & Sallnow, 2000). Research has also demonstrated how religious and non-religious rituals are constantly invented and transformed (Coleman and Eade (eds), 2004; Eade, 2020). Eade (2020) highlighted the role of institutions and entrepreneurs in establishing the sacrality of particular places and inventing associated rituals. For instance, the traditions at Lourdes were developed by the Roman Catholic Church, whose leaders drew on a rich heritage of ritual-based meaning-making (Eade, 2020).

Bowie (2006) described rituals as performances or cultural dramas. Extending this idea, pilgrimage also incorporates elements of performance and theatre. The journey itself and the sacred landscape become stages for interaction between the pilgrim, sacredness, and environment. Like theatre, pilgrimage encompasses various actions, motivations, symbols, hidden meanings, and an immersion into the inner depths of the individual. Similarly, Kaufman (2005) asserted that authorities, in their efforts to accommodate the growing number of visitors to Lourdes, developed a series of rituals and activities that transformed the site into a modern spectacle. This transformation allowed pilgrims to encounter the sacred through a blend of advanced technologies and commercial exchanges.

Like theatre, pilgrimage involves a special ordering of time, exemplified by the Jubilee Year and specified dates of indulgence feasts in Catholicism (Liutikas, 2016), or Kumbh Mela gatherings during specific years in Hinduism. Some pilgrimages, such as the Hajj, journeys to the Holy Land, or Kumbh Mela events, are once-in-a-lifetime experiences, imbued with special value attached to the environment, objects, and ideas. Rites of passage (Van Gennep, 1960) signify transitions from one life stage, season, or event to another (Bowie, 2006). Similarly, pilgrimage represents a transition from the secular to the sacred, from structure to antistructure (Turner & Turner, 1978). Sacred places and sacred spaces similar to the performance serve as a part of social system, where social interaction and bonding takes place. Finally, sacred landscape could be understood as “emotional territory” (Iso-Ahola, 1980), a special place set aside in which the emotional attachment to the faith, place, or community could be performed and expressed.

Rituals, marked by repetition and symbolic expression, evoke specific feelings. Sacred spaces engage multiple senses: hearing (hymns, bells, instruments), touch (relics, sculptures, images), smell (incense), sight (vivid paintings, frescoes, colours, and architecture in Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism), and taste (sacred water, special foods). Pilgrims affirm the sanctity of these sites through rituals. Catholic traditions and liturgy involve practices such as praying the rosary, singing hymns, attending Mass, confessing sins, and acts of penitence (Liutikas, 2023). Site-specific rituals include lighting candles, offering flowers, kissing statues, participating in processions, and holding family or community gatherings (Liutikas, 2021).

The Jubilee Year in Catholic tradition is renowned for its special rituals, such as the opening of the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica, which in 2024 took place on Christmas Eve. This tradition, dating back to the fifteenth century, involves the Pope ceremonially opening the Holy Door and being the first to cross it. During the Jubilee Year of 2025, approximately 30 million pilgrims from around the world are expected to travel to Rome, seeking plenary indulgence—complete forgiveness of sins. The first Jubilee, established in 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII, was originally celebrated every century. However, the interval was later reduced to every 50 years, and since 1475, it has been observed every 25 years, with occasional extraordinary Jubilees, such as the Holy Year of Redemption in 1933 and the Holy Year of Mercy in 2015–2016.

A mix of secular and religious rituals often accompanies various stages of the pilgrimage journey. These stages begin with the decision-making process, where choosing a destination may sometimes become a ritual or an inseparable tradition, involving revisiting the same place or event. During the preparation phase, spiritual practices such as prayer or confession (in the Catholic tradition) may take place. The journey itself often involves activities like daily prayer, life contemplation, reflection of travel intentions, or walking as a purposeful act to reach the sacred site. At the destination, rituals vary by religious tradition and may include internal reflection, external oral practices (e.g., prayers, singing), physical actions, the use of religious attributes, complex ritual actions, and actions to commemorate the journey (Liutikas, 2014, 2021). Finally, upon returning home, new—sometimes temporary—habits or behaviours may emerge as a result of the pilgrimage experience.

Other religions also have diverse rituals that shape the relationship between sanctuaries and the ways pilgrims approach them. As the example, India is shaped by the intricate interplay of geography and mythology, which has given rise to its vast landscape of sacred places, or *tīrthas*. Among the most popular rituals at any temple is the offering of food to the deity, which is later returned to devotees as *prasada*—a blessed offering. Other common rituals include *darshan*, the auspicious act of beholding the deity, and *pūja*, which involves prayer and worship (Singh & Rana, 2021). Rituals also vary during different festivals (*melas*), such as the Kumbh Mela, the largest bathing festival in the world.

For Muslims, the pilgrimage to Makkah (Hajj) is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and a religious duty that every adult Muslim must perform at least once in their lifetime, provided they are physically and financially able to do so. During this

sacred journey, pilgrims undertake a series of religious and symbolic rites, retracing the footsteps of the prophets Abraham and Muhammad. Pilgrims must enter a state of spiritual purity known as *Ihram* before performing the rituals. These include circling the Kaaba seven times, walking back and forth between the hills of Safa and Marwa seven times, and standing in prayer at the plain of Arafat, a key moment of devotion during the pilgrimage (Idris, 2024).

Buddhist pilgrimages are often associated with special holidays such as Vesak (in the Theravada and Tibetan traditions), which commemorates the Buddha's birth, awakening, and parinirvana. Various processions may be organized during these events, accompanied by recitations of mantras, chanting, meditation, mindfulness practices, and focused concentration. These are common activities at Buddhist pilgrimage centres. A widely practised form of reverence is circumambulating a sacred object, person, or place. Buddhist pilgrimage sites often involve the veneration of relics, Bodhi trees, pillars, and sacred images. A common practice expressing deep respect is prostration, while other embodied rituals, such as dances, are particularly significant among Tibetan Buddhists (Geary & Shinde, 2021). Additional practices include offerings and donations, which are considered meritorious activities. One notable tradition, especially significant in Bodhgaya for Theravada Buddhists, is the dressing of the central gold-gilded image of Buddha Shakyamuni with robes (Geary & Shinde, 2021). In Kandy, Sri Lanka, home to the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, daily rituals (Theva) dedicated to Lord Buddha are conducted. These include three daily services, as well as weekly and annual *poojas* and rituals dedicated to the Sacred Tooth Relic. These ceremonies often involve drumming, flower and food offerings, and the ceremonial opening of the relic's storage chamber (Fig. 1.1).

3 Pilgrimages to a Sacred Landscape

Approaches to pilgrimage and religious tourism are evolving in the context of globalization (Liutikas & Raj, 2024). Early theories ranged from Durkheim's focus on social regeneration and moral unity to the Turners' functionalist perspective, which viewed pilgrimage as a social process involving antistructure, liminality, and rites of passage. However, these approaches have shifted to emphasize the multiplicity and diversity of meanings and motivations in today's technologically advanced society.

Olsen (2024) discussed the evolving nature of pilgrimage, highlighting its shift towards democratization, where pilgrimage becomes accessible to everyone. This shift is accompanied by a transition from unconditional hospitality to conditional and commodified forms of tourism services, as well as the increasing medicalization of pilgrimage, where spirituality is viewed as a therapeutic practice. Furthermore, pilgrims can sometimes be perceived as unwanted guests, labelled as travellers who might carry diseases or contribute to the negative effects of overtourism (Olsen, 2024).

Earlier views of pilgrimage now intersect with contemporary ideas, highlighting issues such as ethnic and religious tensions at sacred sites (e.g., Jerusalem) and within



Fig. 1.1 Inside the temple of the sacred Tooth Relic, Kandy, Sri Lanka. (Authors photo)

pilgrimage practices themselves (e.g., the Hajj) (Eade and Sallnow 1991; Bowie, 2006). Current research has also revealed discrepancies between the outwardly expressed motivations of “pilgrims” and the actual motivations of religiously oriented travellers (Liutikas, 2021). Pilgrimage has transformed into a form of value-driven journey, reflecting a plurality of identities and beliefs (Morinis, 1992). Social facts as pilgrimage journey are now interpreted and textured through multifaceted rather than homogeneous perspectives.

The concept of *valuistic journeys*, introduced by Liutikas (2012, 2021), involves the expression of valuistic ideals and the affirmation and demonstration of identity during the journey. The motivation for choosing a pilgrim journey is rooted in social and personal identity, along with various value orientations related to religion, culture, sport, nationality, other collective ideals, or personal experience. This concept posits that the goal of a valuistic journey is “a clearly expressed geographical destination of the journey, which embodies a certain value” (Liutikas, 2012). A sacred space functions as a valuistic destination, with both being culturally constructed and occupying a central role in the visitor’s identity (Liutikas, 2013).

Sometimes, the concept of pilgrimage can evolve into religious wandering without a clear sacred destination, where the journey itself becomes the focus rather than reaching a specific endpoint. Davidsson Bremborg (2013) provided an example from Sweden, where pilgrimages are organized as group activities, with a strong

emphasis on walking. In this case, the destination of the pilgrimage has lost its traditional significance. Instead, nature, outdoor life, and especially silence have become central to spiritual experiences. The highly valued silent walk creates a sacred space during the pilgrimage, facilitating experiences of spirituality and self-transformation (Davidsson Bremborg, 2013).

Pilgrimage can serve as a means of fostering romanticism by expressing and reinforcing national or regional identity, local history, and culture. Hiking trails designated as pilgrimage routes may also be associated with trekking organizations; in this case, pilgrimage serves as a label for hiking as an outdoor recreational activity (Grau, 2021). Reader (2015), after analysing Japanese sociological studies on pilgrimage, concluded that mass media significantly influence the projection, construction, and public representation of pilgrimages. This, in turn, affects both pilgrimage practices and the demographics of participants. Hilpert and Voth (2024) analysed the evolving motives of pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela, noting a shift from religious to secular motivations. This trend has altered both the composition of travellers and the spirit of the Camino (Hilpert & Voth, 2024). Influencers, in particular, often use the pilgrimage route as a platform for self-promotion, perceiving the Camino as a long-distance trail or a themed tourist route rather than a traditional spiritual journey.

Earlier, my own research also confirmed that the sacred dimension is not exclusive to religious pilgrimages (Liutikas, 2012). The motivations of religious-related travellers vary widely, ranging from entirely secular or even anti-religious values to deeply religious and devotional intentions. Twelve types of travellers can be identified, ranging from religious to secular, and from low levels of religious identity and involvement to high levels of religious identity and involvement (Liutikas, 2021, 2023). The names of these types reflect their main characteristics: committed pilgrims, pure pilgrims, religious visitors, spiritual questors (seekers), ritualists, social pilgrims, purposeful religious tourists, curiosity wanderers, sightseeing cultural tourists, incidental travellers, beneficiais, and anti-pilgrims (Fig. 1.2).

In summary, we can state that the phenomena of pilgrimage and religious tourism are evolving in two distinct directions. The first direction involves the manifestation of values and identity during the journey. This concept encompasses a wide range of religious, cultural, and other motives tied to the traveller's personal or social identity and its expression. The second direction is the use of the term's "pilgrimage" and "religious tourism" to describe various partly religion or spiritual-related travels or as marketing tools for promoting different routes and initiatives.

4 Chapters Outline

Modern religious pilgrimage often overlaps with secular tourism, encompassing personal and social, experiential and institutional dimensions. The pilgrimage experience is influenced by the traveller's motivations and expectations, the mode of travel (e.g., walking, cycling, or visiting a site by plane, bus, or car), the companions in an organized group, level of involvement in rituals, and various other factors.



Fig. 1.2 Pilgrims and tourists paying respect to the miraculous image of the Virgin Mary, Granada, Spain. (Authors photo)

The chapters in this book highlight the importance of pilgrimage, acknowledging the crucial role that religious spaces and practices play in shaping human societies and cultures. By examining the impact of religious rituals and pilgrimages on both the physical environment and local communities, the authors shed light on the significance of the ritualistic dimension in shaping sacred landscapes.

In Chapter 2, Darius Liutikas employs classical phenomenological analysis and a religious geography approach to examine sacred landscapes and buildings in Christianity, with a particular focus on church architecture. This analysis encompasses various important aspects of Christian churches, including their location, functions, titles, architectural styles, building materials, façade colours, and the number of towers or turrets. The author utilizes a comprehensive database he developed, which catalogues Lithuanian Catholic churches, to conduct his analysis. This approach serves as an example of how similar research could be undertaken in other countries.

In Chapter 3, Ruth Dowson reflects on the historical changes and evolving interplay between sacred and profane spaces within the built environment. Many religious sites and sacred spaces have adapted to contemporary cultural expressions, often incorporating commodification and events. These include transformations of disused and deconsecrated spaces, as well as the temporary sacralization of profane spaces. Events present new challenges, particularly in relation to the impacts on the intended religious use of these spaces. The chapter introduces four case studies to explore the dynamics of sacred and secular spaces: Jerusalem, the islands of Malta and Gozo, Istanbul, and local parish churches in England.

In Chapter 4, Antonietta Ivona and Donatella Privitera analyse the role of cultural heritage in Italian cemeteries within the context of contemporary tourism influences. The chapter addresses topics such as the role of cemeteries in the construction of therapeutic landscapes, their function as custodians of tangible heritage, and their significance as sites of tourism, art, architecture, and urban planning. The case study of the Brunico War Cemetery in Italy illustrates how narratives, cultural elements, and tourist attractions can be leveraged to enhance cultural awareness and appreciation of such spaces. Authors suggest that cemeteries, as sacred and emotional places, bear witness to local culture through history and religion, and therefore can also serve a meaningful role in tourism.

In Chapter 5, Elżbieta Bilska-Wodecka examines the concept of walking in the city through the lens of time geography. Sacred time is primarily intended for the performance of religious rites and, secondarily, to providing rest from the demands of daily work and responsibilities. Using the example of Roman Catholic Church, four types of walks motivated by religious or combined religious and sightseeing purposes were identified: (1) walking to a sacred building to participate in collective prayer or for other reasons; (2) walking as part of liturgical or paraliturgical ceremonies; (3) pilgrimages; and (4) sightseeing of sacred buildings and sites of significance to believers. The author suggests that another factor influencing different motivations for walking in the city is the level of individual religiosity.

In Chapter 6, Justyna Liro and Sabrina Meneghello analyse contemporary religious tourism through the framework of the experience economy approach. They present findings from surveys ($n = 3957$) conducted between 2019 and 2023 at twelve of the most popular Roman Catholic pilgrimage centres in Poland. The results highlight differences in perception, motivation, behaviour, and satisfaction based on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. The authors argue that contemporary religious tourism is marked by a strong emphasis on inclusivity, suggesting that pilgrimage centres should be regarded as multifaceted spaces designed to meet the diverse expectations and needs of visitors.

In Chapter 7, Mariateresa Giammetti and Manuela Klauser present examples of the reuse of abandoned religious heritage and their surrounding landscapes in Germany and Italy. The Italian case studies focus on the Miglio Sacro, a mile-long religious route winding through the hilly landscapes' characteristic of Naples. The German examples highlight a spatial network of religious buildings linked to significant pilgrimage sites. By comparing these different geographical regions, the authors explore the differences and similarities in their religious cultural heritage, architectural characteristics, relationships with local communities, and management practices. The Italian case studies demonstrate that revitalization is achieved by networking seemingly distant spaces, while the German case studies illustrate how the hybridization of sacred spaces expands the meaning and use of these places.

In Chapter 8, Franciszek Mróz examines the factors and determinants driving the emergence of new shrines in Poland and the transformation of the country's pilgrimage landscape. He identifies over 300 new shrines established between 2001 and 2024. The author discusses various factors influencing the creation of these shrines, including the cult of miraculous images, the growing veneration of Polish

men and women elevated to the glory of the altars, the expansion of the Divine Mercy devotion, the revival of the cult of saints and blessed, and the development of medieval pilgrimage routes, such as the Way of St. James.

In Chapter 9, A. Vinodan and B. Thomas explore the significance of rituals and community engagement in transforming sacred landscapes, using the example of Velangkanni in South India. Their research highlights the religious inclusion of the Indian Hindu tradition, where the female form of God is venerated as Shakti, and examines how Mary's influence at Velangkanni has drawn non-Christian worshippers to the shrine and its associated religious practices. The authors propose that religious syncretism within the Indian Catholic tradition—where cultural boundaries dissolve and spiritual connections unite diverse faiths—is a hallmark of the pilgrimage experience. Additional factors, such as community solidarity, interfaith interactions, and profound spiritual experiences, further underscore the transformative impact of pilgrimage activities.

In Chapter 10, Christina Welch explores the creation, use, and transformation of West Hill Cemetery in Winchester, UK. Once the primary cemetery for Winchester's residents, the site is now closed to new burials, and the few remaining memorials contrast with the approximately 22,500 bodies once interred there. Today, the cemetery functions as a busy thoroughfare linking the University of Winchester to the city centre and train station. It also serves as a green space, used for activities ranging from prayer or ceremonies to dog walking, and occasionally, drug dealing or alcohol consumption. The chapter examines the geography of this semi-urban graveyard in terms of its original creation, ongoing use, and reuse over the past 180 years.

In Chapter 11, Christian Cebulj and Anna-Lena Jahn highlight how pilgrimage fosters interreligious understanding, using the example of the Benedictine monastery Mariastein, located at the border triangle between Switzerland, France, and Germany. The authors argue that religion and travel are interconnected, sharing common roots in the Western history of ideas. Various statistics reveal that pilgrims visiting the Mariastein monastery come from diverse religious communities, including Hindus and Alevis. The chapter analyses four dimensions related to liminality and *communitas* at the site, drawing on the works of Victor Turner.

In Chapter 12, Harald Schwillus and Markus Brodthage discuss spiritual tourism in monastery gardens. They suggest that visiting monasteries is increasingly linked to cultural tourism motives. The authors aim to gain a deeper understanding of how monastery sites engage with this development, with a focus on their gardens. The central question addressed is whether monastery gardens can be considered separately from the monasteries themselves. This chapter examines this important aspect of spiritual tourism and explores how monasteries present their gardens through both digital and analogue media. While there are limitations in the tourist materials that attempt to showcase monastery gardens, the gardens themselves are significant attractions, often visited as part of the broader monastic landscape.

In Chapter 13, Inês Gusman, Lucrezia Lopez, and Rubén and Camilo Lois González examine the impact of new pilgrimage practices on the landscapes of the Camino de Santiago. They discuss the role of suffering in contemporary pilgrimages, highlighting a significant shift: more pilgrims are now hiring logistics companies to

transport their backpacks. The authors argue that this change alters the traditional pilgrimage mobility paradigm, blurring the lines between pilgrims and tourists, and creating spaces for less physically demanding experience. The authors conclude that these new pilgrimage practices mark a transition from viewing the pilgrimage solely as a religious endeavour to embracing a wider cultural and social context.

In Chapter 14, Mara Popescu examines the pilgrimage site of Csíksomlyó in Romania and its historical significance. Each year, thousands of pilgrims travel to the site on Pentecost to attend a Holy Mass dedicated to the Virgin Mary. This pilgrimage is deeply embedded in the history of the local community. The author concludes that the pilgrimage to Csíksomlyó serves as a powerful reminder of the community's resilience in the face of religious and political pressures over the centuries.

In Chapter 15, Perunjodi Naidoo and Darius Liutikas explore the role of memories and traditions in shaping religious identity and performing rituals, using the Hindu pilgrimage site of Ganga Talao (Sacred Lake) in Mauritius as a case study. The chapter examines the main rituals and traditions performed at Ganga Talao, particularly during Maha Shivaratri festival, through personal observations and accounts from pilgrims. The authors argue that ritual practices, such as *Abhishekam* or carrying *Kanwars*, play a vital role in constructing social and religious identity while reinforcing the connection between individuals, families, and the sacred landscape. The Maha Shivaratri festival itself is presented as an act of collective memory, facilitated by sacred stories, traditions, and rituals.

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