

EDITORIAL

Diversity, Connectivity and Change

The very nature of this journal fosters and supports a variety of approaches and perspectives in the exploration of disparate geographies, chronologies and cultures. As such, we can often present to you a diverse set of papers. Yet, as diverse as the papers in this volume are, they all demonstrate to us the connectivity of things: of past and present, of human and non-human, of different disciplines and sets of data. They also represent changes: in beliefs, in practices, in the use of places and in interpretations. A myriad of fine, connecting and interconnecting threads thus joins these papers, despite representing wildly differing geographical and temporal contexts. One of the major threads connecting these papers is the changing perceptions and uses of places and landscapes, both sacred and profane, including imagined landscapes that exist in manuscripts, which have implications for how we view and approach them in the present.

We can most clearly see these changes in use and perception, and their very current and future implications, in the paper by Uday Kumar Sen and Ram Kumar Bhakat, who present an ethnobotanical paper on a Santal sacred grove in West Bengal, India. Combining botanical analysis and interviews with the Santal community, they explore how rituals and beliefs about sacred groves act as a conservation measure contributing to continuing biodiversity, but how they are also currently under threat through declining beliefs and various anthropogenic factors. They offer their own – somewhat didactic – solutions to this threat to sacred groves, which we are sure will spark debate, but their main research is an excellent demonstration of the way in which environmental sciences and environmental humanities can work together to address contemporary biodiversity issues going into the future.

Moving to an entirely different religious landscape, William F. Romain explores the fascinating practice of geomantic magic as a means of controlling indigenous demons in Yarlung Dynasty Tibet (AD 620–AD 842), in order to facilitate the introduction and spread of Buddhism. Romain's paper assesses how the siting of Tibetan temples and monasteries contributed to such practices on an architectural and landscape scale.

Natalie M. Susmann's landscape archaeology of sacred places in the south-eastern Peloponnese weaves together excavation and survey results, ancient and historic accounts and ethnographies of modern tourism to trace the sacred and social roles of the mountains of Epidaurus and Nemea. Taking inspiration from the cultural history of Mount Fuji, Japan, she explores the changing use of the Greek mountains as sacred places over time, where ancient worshippers initially worshipped atop mountains, eventually moving downhill to monumental sanctuaries built on flat ground.

We return to an ethnobotanical study in Benjamin Pothier's paper, in which he makes the case for identifying the representation of a plant on the Chu silk manuscript (c. 300 BCE) as depicting the hallucinogenic plant Yun-Shih, used in shamanic rituals. His examination of the potential connection between this plant and the manuscript suggests that such entheogenic plants are sacred, connecting humans with spirits.

Moving from the sacred to the profane, Waled Shehata and colleagues interrogate the conversion of the infamous HM Prison Pentridge in Melbourne, Australia to luxury developments, in a very modern, and common, reuse of such historical monuments. Through an investigation of the troubling life-history of the Prison and its surrounds, juxtaposed with its dramatic overhaul, they consider the cultural, economic, mental and ethical effects of the appropriation of both the fabric and the histories of such places within con- temporary studies of dark or uncomfortable heritage.

Diversity of topics, as well as continuity and change, can also be found in the books reviewed in this volume. Laura Slack assesses new approaches in Atlantic rock art research, and Jenny Wallensten looks at portrayals and the creation of Grecian Thebes. Ronald Hutton examines two scholars' differing approaches to and interpretations of the Livonian werewolf Old Theiss and his cultural history, and Rob Ixer considers the experience of walking in the dark, in a book that shirks the artificial light to which we have become accustomed.

This issue is the first of the new year, and, in a time where we might some- times feel complete stasis, when we look hard, we can see that there are always significant changes occurring, and connections to be made.

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