

Pilgrimage and the Senses

7 June 2019 | University of Oxford

Call for Papers

With the release of its inaugural issue in 2006, *The Senses and Society* journal proclaimed a "sensual revolution" in the humanities and social sciences. The ensuing decade has seen a boom in sensory studies, resulting in research networks, museum exhibitions, and a wealth of publications. This interdisciplinary conference hosted at the University of Oxford aims to shed light on how sensory perception shapes and is shaped by the experience of pilgrimage across cultures, faith traditions, and throughout history.

Pilgrimages present an intriguing paradox. Grounded in physical experiences—a journey (real or imagined), encounters with sites and/or relics, and commemorative tokens—they also simultaneously demand a devotional focus on the metaphysical. A ubiquitous and long-lasting devotional practice, pilgrimage is a useful lens through which to examine how humans encounter the sacred through the tools of perception available to us. Focusing on the ways in which pilgrimage engages the senses will contribute to our knowledge of how people have historically understood both religious experience and their bodies as vehicles of devotional participation. We call on speakers to grapple with the challenges of understanding the sensory experience of spiritual phenomena, while bearing in mind that understandings of the senses can vary according to specific cultural contexts. While the five senses are a natural starting point, we are open to including papers that deal with "sense" in a more general way, such as senses of time and place.

Sample topics may include (but are not limited to):

- the role of beholding (places, relics, miracles, mementos) in the pilgrimage experience
- haptic encounters with relics
- ways in which pilgrims are seen: wearing specific clothing and/or badges, public acts (or affects) of devotion, how pilgrims are depicted or described
- pilgrims' auditory expressions: wailing/crying, chanting, singing, reciting prayers
- bathing and purification in preparation for devotions
- food as a ritual element or means of experiencing cultures along a pilgrimage route
- the place of music on the pilgrimage route and/or at pilgrimage destinations
- pain as a facet of the pilgrimage journey
- the sensory spectacle—visual, auditory, olfactory—of pilgrimage processions
- devotional objects that require handling, such as prayer beads and prayer wheels
- psychosomatic sensory experiences as a means of engaging with the divine
- the evocation of sensory participation through works of art and/or written accounts

Professor Kathryn Rudy of the University of St. Andrews will deliver a keynote address.

We invite 20-minute papers from any discipline on topics related to the themes outlined above, especially in the fields of anthropology, archaeology, art history, history, literature, musicology, religious studies, sociology, and theology. We welcome submissions relating to aspects of pilgrimage of any faith or historical period. Doctoral students and early career researchers are particularly encouraged to apply.

Please submit a title, abstract (max. 250 words), and brief bio to pilgrimagesenses2019@gmail.com by **January 20th**.

Successful applicants will be notified by **February 5th**.

All submissions and papers must be in English.

