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Places in Motion: The Fluid Identities of Temples, Images, and Pilgrims

Jacob N. Kinnard

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Jacob Kinnard offers an in-depth examination of the complex dynamics of religiously charged places. Focusing on several important shared and contested pilgrimage places-Ground Zero and Devils Tower in the United States, Ayodhya and Bodhgaya in India, Karbala in Iraq-he poses a number of crucial questions. What and who has made these sites important, and why? How are they shared, and how and why are they contested? What is at stake in their contestation? How are the particular identities of place and space established? How are individual and collective identity intertwined with space and place?

Challenging long-accepted, clean divisions of the religious world, Kinnard explores specific instances of the vibrant messiness of religious practice, the multivocality of religious objects, the fluid and hybrid dynamics of religious places, and the shifting and tangled identities of religious actors. He contends that sacred space is a constructed idea: places are not sacred in and of themselves, but are sacred because we make them sacred. As such, they are in perpetual motion, transforming themselves from moment to moment and generation to generation.
Places in Motion moves comfortably across and between a variety of historical and cultural settings as well as academic disciplines, providing a deft and sensitive approach to the topic of sacred places, with awareness of political, economic, and social realities as these exist in relation to questions of identity. It is a lively and much needed critical advance in analytical reflections on sacred space and pilgrimage.

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