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## Pilgrimage and the Senses

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 displays  
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

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