

Barkan, Elazar and Karen Barkey (ed.) (2015). *Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites: Religion, Politics, and Conflict Resolution*. New York: Columbia University Press. 428 pp. Hb.: \$50.00/£34.50. ISBN: 9780231169943.

Academics who follow, or at least attempt to follow, research and publications about sharing sacred places, at first glance of this volume's title might say, 'Yet another one!' It is true that recently much has been published on similar topics (Bowman 2012; Albera & Couroucli 2012; Hening 2012; Hayden 2013; Katić 2013; Belaj & Martić 2014, to mention a few), but this volume is a valuable addition to the "sharing sacred places collection".

As co-editors, Elazar Barkan and Karen Barkey emphasise 'the aim of this book is to explore the politics of the "choreography of sacred spaces" within the framework of state-society relations, and to examine the position, roles, and agency of various actors and institutions in an attempt to differentiate between the political and the religious features of the shared or contested space. We want to understand whether sharing and contention are politically or religiously motivated' (p. 1). Why, however? Why can these possibilities not be both politically-religious and/or religiously-politically motivated? Can we separate politics and religion? These questions emerge even more since the co-editors themselves outline two "camps" of scholarly explanations of sharing and conflict in which both camps consider their approach as an ideal type and exceptions as something that proves the rule (p. 1).

The editors of the volume have expressed a very demanding goal: '... we hope to delineate the religious and the political factors that suggest the context and causality of conflict in these sites' (p. 2). I am not sure that they have managed to answer this eternal question. However, I am not also sure it is a legitimate question. As their case studies clearly show, it is the local (in this instance local could mean regional or national) political, religious, cultural, etc. context that mostly influences these relations. As they argue: 'historically and in contemporary cases the importance of sacred sites lays both in particular "choreography of daily life" around the site and in the manner in which public authorities frame the context or relations between religious and ethnic groups' (p. 2). They consider that if we want to understand what makes shared sacred sites into sites of contention and violence, we need to explore the movement from peace to conflict, but also post-conflict situations and the return of coexistence (p. 2).

The case studies in this volume have one common denominator: the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. They cover regions of Palestine/Israel, the Balkans and Anatolia. Why so much focus on this region in research on sharing the sacred? Is there similar sharing anywhere else in the world? If there is something characteristic of countries of the Ottoman legacy, is this not an important question for these studies? This question is relevant because of one editor's general hypotheses: that '... the more open a state is to ethnic or religious difference, the more likely it is for coexistence to develop and shared sites to be maintained' (p. 21). However, what happened with 'other stakeholders such as religious institutions and political activists' that the editors mention on page 2? The list of questions could go on. Does this mean that sharing is a top-down process?

As you can see, my review is full of questions. Because of this, I consider

this volume to be a very successful one. To raise so many questions and to open old discussions with fresh ideas, especially for a topic that has recently been well covered, is a characteristic of an interesting and high-quality volume.

Among the contributors, there are numerous well-established names in this topic, but I would like to single out Karen Barkey who makes an important contribution to research on sharing the sacred, with her inspiring chapter. She argues that understanding of the sharing of sacred sites in the Ottoman Empire needs to be observed through a focus on state policies, boundary relations across groups, and the construction of identities. According to her, this will enable us to develop a methodology for historical ethnography which will allow us to understand the manner in which relations change over time and how they manifest themselves in the practical negotiations (p. 36). Among other things, Barkey concludes that the historical circumstances provide the context for the sharing of sacred spaces in the Ottoman Empire (p. 36).

After her chapter, which stands alone and obviously was put at the beginning of the volume to give historical context and a kind of theoretical introduction with emphasis on the need for diachronic and synchronic perspective, the next section of the volume is a set of case studies that bring comparative insight into sharing the sacred. Mete Hatay writes about choreographies of coexistence in Cyprus; Dionigi Albera about Marian sanctuary in Algeria; David Henig about intra-communal and intrareligious disputes and contentions among Muslims in Bosnia. The following four chapters of this section focus on Israeli and Palestinians relations: Wendy Pullan explores how al-Wal Street has become a new arena of conflict in Jerusalem, Glenn Bowman focuses on the Holy Sepulchre of Church the Anastasis, shifting the analytic logic toward institutions that attempt to own or control the sites of sharing, Elazar Barkan explores several political riots in Jerusalem and the West Bank and the role played by the state in these riots, and Rassem Khamaisi using the city of Nazareth illustrates the theoretical and practical implications of ethnoreligious conflict among Arab Palestinians citizens in Israel.

The third and final section of the book consist of two chapters focusing on museums. Yitzhak Reiter writes about the Jerusalem Museum of Tolerance and the Mamilla Muslim Cemetery, while Rabia Harmanash, Tugba Tanyeri-Erdemir and Robert Hayden compare the Haci Bektas and Mevlana Museums in Turkey, which are also shrines to these saints.

Because of limited space, I will not go into a detailed presentation and analysis of the chapters. From a general point of view, the chapters depict interesting local stories of sharing and contention, giving us a spectrum of possible scenarios. Personally, I think that four case studies coming from the Israel-Palestinian context excessive while there are numerous other similar interesting regions of the Ottoman Empire that could have given a broader comparative overview (such as the Balkans), which is the main intention of the volume.

After Albera's and Couricil's *Sharing the Sacra in the Mediterranean*, I was convinced that there would not be another volume about almost the same topic and region for a long time. I was obviously wrong. It seems that this topic remains interesting for scholars and publishers (moreover, there is another book on "Antagonistic Tolerance",

planned for release in April 2016). What is more important is the fact that this volume opens up some new questions and gives us some new fresh perspectives that could be useful for any future research and publishing. It seems that this volume shifts the focus more to the historical background of the sharing of sacred practices and shows one more time the importance of synchronic perspective if we want to understand diachronic processes. Personally, I am very enthusiastic about this kind of work, so I can definitely recommend this volume.

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