

PILGRIM CHAT

November 18 – 17:00 GMT

Religious Movement(s): Places and Landscapes of Conversion

Johanna A. Pacyga

Session Abstract:

Conversion is a notoriously difficult object for archaeologists to study. Material practices of conversion are not necessarily indicative of internal, personal, changes in belief (i.e., if the neophyte enacts the correct religious practice, does this mean they have truly altered their belief system?). Recent archaeological work on conversion has focused on the landscape, considering the landscape as a potential reservoir of traditional belief (landscape as resistant to conversion), as well as the concept of landscape as a technology of conversion hegemonically deployed by those wishing to effect conversion. What if we trouble these divergent approaches by considering the question of movement in relation to placemaking and broader landscapes of conversion? For example, how might pilgrimage—that is, religious movement across space, landscape, from place to place—trouble this either/or distinction by emphasizing movement as a means of thinking through the constant construction of place in a way that is neither simply a landscape indexing the ritual past nor a hegemonic reordering of (spiritual) life, but a creative ongoing project of spirituality anchored in the material terrain. Along this vein, this session asks: 1), How does specifically religious-minded movement (re)shape the landscape in contexts of conversion (alternatively, how were such movements shaped by the potentially conservative landscape)? 2), In what ways is conversion—as both a personal and communal experience—produced and nurtured through engagements with placemaking (including pilgrimage, community-building, the construction of ritual religious spaces, etc.)? Rather than focusing solely on colonial missionization (although this is a prime context of inquiry), this session is interested in a global scope of the experience, practice, and materiality associated with an experience of true faith, specifically in the context or aftermath of conversion (whether successful or not) in any period or locale.

LIST OF PAPERS (20 minutes each)

- 17:00 // James L. Flexner (University of Sydney), “A walk on the beach, a walk in the woods: hiking as *kastom* methodology in Vanuatu”
- 17:20 // Shelona Klatzow (University of Cape Town), “Conversion, Coersion and Covert Raiding at the Platberg Mission Station, Eastern Free State, South Africa”
- 17:40 // Olanrewaju Lasisi (College of William and Mary), “Political and Religious Landscapes of Conversion: Movements and Ritual Dramas among the Ijebu of South Western Nigeria”
- 18:00 // Johanna A. Pacyga (The University of Chicago), “Taking Root: Catholic Conversion, Movement, and Placemaking in Nineteenth-century Senegal”
- 18:20 // Emma Gilheany (The University of Chicago), “Navigating Icescapes in Nunatsiavut: Missionization and its Wintery Discontents”
- 18:40 // Scotti Norman (Wake Forest University), “Dancing, Trembling, and Chanting: Bodily Movements, Sacred Spaces, and the Enactment of Anti-Catholic Praxis in Sixteenth-Century Highland Peru”
- 19:00 // Alexander Menaker (University of Texas at Austin), “Regionality: Landscapes of History and Power in the Valley of Volcanoes, Southern Peruvian Andes”
- 19:20 // Kaitlin M. Brown (California State University, Channel Islands), “Evaluating the effects of conversion among Native Californians during the Mission period: Relocation programs and the making of new indigenous communities”

PAPER ABSTRACTS

James L. Flexner, University of Sydney

A walk on the beach, a walk in the woods: hiking as *kastom* methodology in Vanuatu

I spent much of my time during the last decade recording, surveying, and excavating the inspired landscapes of the islands in southern Vanuatu. This research has resulted in the documentation of dozens of *kastom* (“traditional”) sites, from the places of dramatic European missionary martyrdoms during the mid-19th century, to the homes of respected and still powerful *atua* (ancestors), *ierehma*, and *natemas* (both terms for spirits in different islands). The integration of this knowledge, transferred intergenerationally from Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VKS) *filwokas* who are my colleagues and interlocutors in field research, has been fundamental for transforming my understanding of the archaeological landscapes of colonialism as well as deeper time. In this paper, I focus on the importance of walking as a means of understanding religious life and transformation through time in the landscapes of southern Vanuatu. Specifically, I consider the dozens if not hundreds of kilometers spent traversing *rods blong nani* (literally “goat trails”) led by my VKS colleagues as a key methodology for understanding island space, and indigenous conceptions of historicity.

Shelona Klatzow, University of Cape Town

Conversion, Coersion and Covert Raiding at the Platberg Mission Station, Eastern Free State, South Africa

The nineteenth century Wesleyan mission station of Platberg on the Caledon was situated in the turbulent frontier zone of the Caledon River Valley, which by the mid-1830s was home to a number of Wesleyan Mission Stations.

Platberg mission was established in 1833 to minister to a group of people known as Bastards, under the leadership of Carolus Baatje. A wide variety of people of different ages, kin groups, languages and political affiliations inhabited Platberg mission during the 33 years of its existence. Within the station, the core group of Bastards was supplemented by their San servants, British traders and artisans, BaSotho servants and converts, and of course the resident British missionary family. It might be expected that the architecture, layout of the village, construction and layout of individual houses would reflect this range of people, but it is not as clear cut as may be expected, going by the extensive mapping of the site as well as the archaeological investigation of the village. The main task of mission stations in southern Africa was the control and conversion of the “heathen” inhabitants into “civilized” Christian converts. This process started in the mission village itself being the centre of colonial and religious power. What must not be underestimated was the Bastards ability to accept, reject and manipulate missionary influence. Although conversion is extremely hard to pinpoint from an archaeological perspective, it is not impossible to pick up clues if we consider the Bastards wider use of the landscape outside of the clearly demarcated mission station boundaries, in conjunction with a careful investigation of the mission station layout and what can be discerned of and from patterns of the Bastards daily life. We may therefore be able to determine how they negotiated and mediated western Christian influence. Using historical texts combined with the archaeological investigation of the village and the surrounding landscape, I hope to build a holistic picture of the Bastards of Plaatberg.

Olanrewaju Lasisi, College of William and Mary

Political and Religious Landscapes of Conversion: Movements and Ritual Dramas among the Ijebus of South Western Nigeria

The Ijebu-Ode Royal Palace complex is located at the center of the Ijebu Kingdom, South-Western Nigeria. Although it has ceased to function as the seat of political power since the late 19th century, this defunct palace ground still performs other functions that include ritual dramas, festival and heritage center, and Political gatherings, all of which are remnants of indigenous practices associated with the palace ground in the past. Recent archaeological surveys, excavations, and participant observations of ritual practice in the palace complex provide empirical data that reveals why the ritual practitioners emphasize following

specific ritual movements during their annual festivals on the palace ground. This presentation reveals the connection between present-day ritual practitioners and those of the past, as revealed by the material signature they left behind. It is concluded here that despite the changes that have occurred on the palace complex over the last 200 years, present-day ritual practitioners rigidly followed the same ritual movements followed by the ancient priests before them.

Johanna A. Pacyga, The University of Chicago

Taking Root: Catholic Conversion, Movement, and Placemaking in Nineteenth-Century Senegal

In 1863, the French Spiritan Fathers founded the Mission of St. Joseph in Ngasobil, Senegal. St. Joseph's was established as a new settlement (rather than located in a pre-existing town or village) in a place identified by missionary scouts as innately well-suited to their project—materially and spiritually. Yet, even though missionaries regarded Ngasobil as previously uninhabited land, the area hosted religious sites important to the local Serer population. The Spiritans quickly initiated a program of Catholic place claiming and making in and around Ngasobil, which was rooted in communal movement through the landscape. By drawing on archival accounts, oral histories, and spatial analysis of Ngasobil, this paper considers how the movements of missionaries and neophytes through and around Ngasobil cultivated conversion and as such contributed to the entrenchment—or taking root—of a nascent Senegalese Catholic community. In colonial Senegal, Catholic conversion—as a communal experience—was produced through specific placemaking practices generated by movement and interaction across the 1,000 hectares of mission property. These included pilgrimages, the construction of religious shrines (and their regular visitation), and repeated processions through the mission landscape associated with annual festivals (e.g., Pentecost) and times of distress (e.g., a cholera outbreak). While these actions sought to erase traditional religious places and to reinscribe those as Christian, anchoring the ethereality of conversion to the material terrain of daily experience, further questions are raised as to the potential overlapping and coexistence of traditional and Catholic religious practices and meanings embedded in that landscape and to what extent that overlap was itself perhaps productive of conversion.

Emma Gilheany, The University of Chicago

Navigating Icescapes in Nunatsiavut: Missionization and its Wintery Discontents

This paper will explore religiously-minded movement and immobility from Moravian Missionaries in Hopedale, Nunatsiavut. From the mid-18th to late-20th century, Missionaries colonized the coast, constructing large Mission complexes and evangelizing Inuit, attempting to convince them to become “settled” and end highly-mobile ways of life. Conversion, then, was partially predicated on immobility. In this paper, I analyze missionary inability to understand

Nunatsiavut as a place-in-motion, a dynamic seasonal landscape—despite an archival obsession with objects-in-motion (mail, goods, the Mission-ship). I trace the unique nature of icescapes as a landscape of fear and dread for visiting Europeans, and consider the ways that weather and climate intersect with place-making in the circumpolar north.

Scotti Norman, Wake Forest University

Dancing, Trembling, and Chanting: Bodily Movements, Sacred Spaces, and the Enactment of Anti-Catholic Praxis in Sixteenth-Century Highland Peru

Participants of the sixteenth-century Andean revitalization movement known as Taki Onqoy (Quechua: dancing/singing sickness) advocated for a rejection of Spanish Catholicism and culture in favor of a return to traditional local deity veneration. In particular, the movement was characterized by ritual drinking, chanting, and frenetic dancing or trembling as takiongos (adherents to the movement) rejected Catholicism through bodily movement. Yet, even as Taki Onqoy spread in the 1560s, some Spanish priests drew analogies between Andean and Catholic practices to make them more comprehensible, mapping onto these practices and incorporating Andean terms, rituals, and materials in evangelization. In considering how religious-minded movement shaped landscapes of conversion, this presentation combines a small-scale approach to movement (the physical, bodily practices and spirit possession of Taki Onqoy participants) and broader themes of landscape (the spatial locations of these practices) to argue that bodily performance as an emplaced activity was central to both conversion and resistance. That is, while procession, chants and dance were seen as “Catholic” practices when in the vicinity of a church, plaza, and Spanish priest, these same activities were utilized by Indigenous actors to thwart European religion when performed in secrecy or at other sacred places in the landscape

Alexander Menaker, University of Texas at Austin

Regionality: Landscapes of History and Power in the Valley of Volcanoes, Southern Peruvian Andes

In the mid-18th century, a six-hundred-page court case recounts how Spanish colonial officials invoked the “extirpation of idolatries” as they surveyed the landscape and burned ancestral mummies in the highland community of Andagua in one of the latest known cases of mummy worshiping in the Andes. Ancestor veneration was a critical locus of social, political and religious power and struggle. Indigenous residents resisted regional colonial authority, while also identifying as subjects of the king of Spain. With this court case as a point of departure and engaging archaeological, historical and ethnographic research, this paper offers a long-term regional perspective examining how states and empires seek to transform local cultural practices and relations with the landscape. The Andagua Valley, also known as the Valley of Volcanoes, in

the Southern Peruvian Andes, is a dynamic landscape composed of lava flows, volcanoes and anthropogenic features (terraces and canals) shaped by long-term human inhabitation that were subject to Inka and Spanish imperial reigns prior to the contemporary Peruvian state. By bringing into relief the formation of regionality and attending to the stubborn materiality of history, Andagua illuminates the effects and limits of state and imperial universal projects.

Kaitlin M. Brown, California State University Channel Islands

Evaluating the effects of conversion among Native Californians during the Mission period: Relocation programs and the making of new indigenous communities.

The indigenous landscape became radically altered due to Spanish relocation programs at the onset of the Mission period in Alta California. Policies such as *reduccion* that reduced numerous Native villages into one centralized town were central to the colonial strategy of converting local peoples through cultural and religious instruction. As ethnically distinct villages merged into one pluralistic community, they formed new social entities tied to the Mission space and a deeper ancestral past. This paper focuses on the materiality of everyday life associated with the aftermath of resettlement among the Chumash at Mission La Purísima Concepción. Theoretical frameworks of placemaking, social transformation, and persistence contribute to understanding the distinct ways local groups both evolved and persevered.