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**Special Issue Introduction:  
Mountains and Sacred Landscapes**

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Guest Editors: Evan Berry and Amanda M. Nichols

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'Landscape' is not an objective term: it denotes a range of ways that human beings understand the coherence of particular places and ascribe meaning to their socially enacted relationships to such places. Different cultural traditions understand similar geographic forms in divergent ways, and this range of interpretive possibilities is of fundamental importance for the way places and environments take on moral value. The scholarly literature on sacred places is rich and multifaceted, but also tends to emphasize spaces and sites that are deemed sacred by a particular religious tradition. And while religious traditions are fundamental to the sacralization of landscapes, this special issue brings together an eclectic group of articles that open new perspectives on mountains and sacred landscapes. Across a geographically, historically, and methodologically diverse set of cases, this special issue explores the dynamic relationship between cultures and places, attending not only to

the way that landscapes reflect the systems of social power projected into them, but also to the way that landscapes exert powers of their own.

This special issue on 'Mountains and Sacred Landscapes' presents a number of papers developed from the conference of the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture, co-sponsored and hosted by the India China Institute at the New School in New York City in 2017. The conference brought together 225 participants, representative of 25 different countries, to reflect on the convergence of religion, nature, and sacred landscapes around the world. The four articles included in this special issue explore the various ways that religious and cultural systems construct, inhabit, and reimagine landscapes. Moreover, the articles engage with a number of themes that show the complexities of religious belief and practice, notions of sacredness, and human engagement with the natural world.

The article by Sam Crooks and Caroline Tully entitled 'Power Ranges: Identity and Terrain in Minoan Crete' is an archeological analysis of Minoan Crete in the late Bronze Age. The authors argue that 'Minoans perceived a tripartite cosmological ontology founded in an animate natural world' and that there was an institutionalized cosmological framework 'oriented toward mountains' during the late Bronze Age.

Elsbeth Whitney's article, 'Phlegmatic Landscapes: Perceptions of Wetlands, *Acedia*, and Complexion Theory in Selected Later Medieval Allegorical Pilgrim Narratives', examines the connections between human experiences and the landscapes in which they are embedded. Looking specifically at late medieval allegorical dream visions of pilgrimage, including the works of Dante, de Deguileville, and the *Pearl*-poet or *Gawain*-poet, Whitney analyzes literary descriptions of swamp-like environments and how they are often used by these authors as powerful representations of *acedia*, or spiritual despair.

The article 'Politicizations of a Sacred River: The Story of Gaumukh-Uttarkashi Eco-Sensitive Zone, Uttarakhand, India' by Flore Lafaye de Micheaux analyzes the creation of a highly debated eco-sensitive zone at the headwaters of the Ganga River. Using a hydrosocial perspective, De Micheaux argues that the religious notion that the Ganga river is sacred intervened in the nation's political decision, affecting the 'strategic field of power relations' in India.

Finally, the article by David Pike entitled 'Haunted Mountains, Supershelters and the Afterlives of Cold War Infrastructure' argues that repurposed 'mountain-side bunkers and installations invoke new forms of the sacred as part of their reckoning with the past. Because the nuclear condition works against a progressive sense of history, it permits

previously discredited or marginalized beliefs to begin recirculating in a new context.

There are a number of noteworthy themes that emerge when these four divergent articles are read together. In resonance with other work presented at the Mountains and Sacred Landscapes Conference, these emergent themes include: (1) the covalence of the sacred, that is, the way different forms of intersecting valuation imbue places with multiple, sometimes contradictory layers of cultural significance; (2) the limits of religious tradition as a source of environmental imagination and the need to identify and describe the role of states, economies, and other-than-human beings as sources of symbolic power; and (3) the important role played by sacred landscapes in orienting and legitimating forms of socio-political power. Human being is always emplaced and the articles gathered here advance the scholarly conversation about how such place-making is both constructed by and constitutive of cultural life.

Two book reviews, both focused on the Appalachian mountain landscape of the eastern United States, accompany the special issue: Amanda M. Nichols's review of Andrew R.H. Thompson's book *Sacred Mountains: A Christian Ethical Approach to Mountaintop Removal* and Laura Ammon's review of Joseph D. Witt's *Religion and Resistance in Appalachia: Faith and the Fight against Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining*. Several additional book reviews round out the issue.