



**Pilgrimage and
Sacred Places
in Central and
Eastern Europe**

Place, Politics and Religious Tourism

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University of Zadar

**Department of Tourism and Communication Sciences
Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology**

Pilgrimage and Sacred Places



in Central and Eastern Europe: Place, Politics and Religious Tourism

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pilgrimage, both in its "official" (organized and led by the Armenian Apostolic Church clergymen) and "non-official" forms. In the proposed paper I am going to concentrate on this latter phenomenon and discuss pilgrimage practices in contemporary Armenian vernacular Christianity (or "folk" / "popular" Christianity – the concepts that are much challenged by anthropologists today, and call for reconceptualization), as well as present the most important spatial and symbolic characteristics of the sacred places where pilgrims gather. The paper will include an examination of the role of dreams in establishing new shrines and encouraging engagement in pilgrimage activities, a presentation of the ritual elements of pilgrimages and an analysis of the interconnections between traditional religious culture and various elements of contemporary Armenian social, cultural and political reality. The discussion of the above-mentioned, so far understudied in the context of Armenian Christianity, will be based on the ethnographic data (including rich visual material) collected in the course of my ongoing research in Armenia.

The Armenian Holy Places of Jerusalem

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In the famous city of Jerusalem, which is a holy city for Jews, Christians and Moslems, are many Armenian holy places. Armenians' visits to Jerusalem are mentioned at the beginning of Christianity and already by the 4th century, after adopting Christianity as the State religion in Armenia, they had established churches and monasteries there. Tradition refers

to the construction of the monastery of SS. James' of Jerusalem (4th century) by the two main actors in the adoption of Christianity as the official religion in Armenia, Grigor the Illuminator and Trdat the Great. Although the monastery was destroyed by the occupiers of Jerusalem it has never ceased to be holy for the Armenian nation. Now the monastery of St. James' is the sitting. The second collection of Armenian manuscripts (after Matenadaran in Yerevan) is kept here (about 4000 manuscripts). Other famous Armenian monasteries in Jerusalem are the convent of the Holy Archangels, St. Saviour's monastery and St. Peter. According to tradition the Armenian monastery of the Holy Archangels was built at the place of St Anna and was established by Queen Heghine, the wife of the Armenian king Abgar during the first century. The territory of Armenian patriarchy of Jerusalem established in the 7th century (Armenian district) includes four (Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Armenian). Also it is worth mentioning that three senior protectors of all-Christian main holy places in Jerusalem The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Cathedral of St. Christmas of Bethlehem, Church of the Holy Virgin of Gethsemane and other holy places for Armenian, Greek and Catholic churches with equal rights. Besides the church of the Holy Sepulchre, a holy place for Armenians, Greeks and Catholics, the church of St. Gregory the Illuminator also belongs to the Armenians, as do the churches of Garret of Golgotha, the chapel of the Holy Virgin and the Altar of the Oils, the holy site of the Fainting of the Virgin, the Chapel of Joseph of Arimathea, the chapel of the Parting of the Raiment and the chapel of St. John at the Altar of the Church. Today many Armenian pilgrims from Armenia and other places of the world visit both the all-Christian and national-historic holy places of Jerusalem.