This issue of *Recreation and Society in Africa, Asia and Latin America* brings together issues of cultural heritage, archeology, and the more intangible characteristics of sacred sites as they relate to tourism. While much has been written on heritage tourism (Bruner 2005; de Jong and Rowlands 2007; Lowenthal 1985; Timothy and Boyd 2003) archaeological tourism (Brodie, Kersel, Luke and Tubb 2006; Jameson 2004; Walker 2009) and sacred spaces (Elsner and Coleman 1995; Badone and Roseman 2004), little attention has been directed to the ways these definitions come together and overlap in real-life situations. For example, the perceived differences between a site’s archaeological value and the sense of sacredness or the religious enthusiasm it inspires are often blurred in the case studies in this journal. Furthermore, as the articles here illustrate, archaeological and sacred sites become the locus for renewed heritage or nationalist agendas by state and government agencies, an interpretation that is often at odds with local conceptions of sacred. In all cases, the themes of archaeological and religious heritage are mediated and scripted by local communities to suit various agendas. The following articles provide case studies of archaeological and sacred sites from Ghana and India, China, Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula, and South America.

In the first case study of the ancient Maya city of Cobá in the Mexican state Quintana Roo, Robey Callahan explores the changing relationships between local residents, the archaeological sites, and their varied meanings. For the residents of Cobá, increased international recognition of the Maya archaeological ruins have resulted in four key changes to village life: economic expansion, religious diversification, educational opportunity and language shifts. These developments have evolved over the last three decades and are inexorably tied to the sites’ archaeological fame and the changes that increased tourism brings.

Elsewhere in Latin America, heritage tourism has taken the form of travel routes celebrating national liberation movements and revolutionary figures. In *Multiple Interpretations of a Single Space*, George McQueen chronicles the inauguration of *Ruta del Libertador* (Route of the Liberator) and the *Ruta Libertadora* (The Liberator Route), two travel routes that celebrate Simón Bolívar’s march through Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela. In this case, all three countries have established tourism routes to promote travel and tourism between these countries and to revive a sense of heritage based on the historical figure of Bolívar. Interestingly, while these travel routes are not explicitly advertised as pilgrimage routes, the governments in question promote a distinctly nationalist agenda, although, as McQueen argues, in different ways.

In the third case study, *Tourism Frames: a Case Study of Magao Caves, China*, Ming-chun Ku provides a detailed analysis of the scripted tours conducted at Magao Caves in Southwest China. While the state sponsored Dunhuang Academy strictly controls access to the
caves (out of 735 caves in the region only a handful are open for tourism) and gives a secular interpretation of the early Buddhist shrines. Some Chinese tourists revere the sites as a sacred pilgrimage, going so far as to touch the clay Buddha figurines and pay homage when guides are not looking. And while religion is officially banned in China, locals still perpetuate an age-old festival celebrating the Buddha’s birthday where the caves are opened for villagers to perform ceremonies. In this case, while government officials celebrate the site as a relic of cultural preservation, visitors’ reverence for Buddhist grottos and clay figurines remains alive and well.

In *Sacred Space, Sacred Water*, by Julia Trapp-Fallon, sacred space takes on a broader dimension. In India, where sacred space is everywhere (Bhardwaj 1973), water is considered particularly sacred, tracing back to the Aryan people of Vedic times. To illustrate the importance of water in Hindu cosmology, Fallon travels to Puri, Orissa, one of the most sacred Hindu sites in India. Here, Fallon describes formal and informal spaces, where tour operatives and busses provide the formal pilgrimage experience, while bathing, immersion, food and water vendors co-exist as informal sectors of the tourism economy. Attempts to capitalize on and formalize water as a sacred space have led to a thriving domestic tourism industry in India. Obvious questions arise from this analysis, namely the role of conservation in India’s sacred tourism and how might climate change and decreasing water levels affect Puri’s tourism? How does pollution factor into this equation? Does a sense of the sacred lead to more effective conservation efforts?

Addressing issues of conservation in *Perceptions of Tourism at Sacred Groves in Ghana and India*, Allison Ormsby notes that while sacred groves have long been a part of both India and Africa’s indigenous religious traditions, the emergence of sacred groves as a tourist attraction has resulted in numerous environmental issues as well as issues of local access and agency. In several cases the groves have become national parks and their maintenance and preservation has shifted away from the local community. In both countries, Ormsby observes that increased tourism has led to issues of pollution, contamination, and the need for stricter management and conservation. The sacred groves in both Ghana and India, while less formally organized than the Magao Caves in China, have become official national parks and been designated as World Heritage Sites. In this case what was once considered sacred has become nationally and internationally revered as cultural heritage.

Two themes emerge from the articles in this issue of the journal: first, that notions of sacred and heritage are often conflated and mediated within the site itself; and also that as the emergence of tourism attracts the attention of foreigners and domestic tourists, state and national governments seek to control and manage the sites. Several examples from the articles in this issue attest to the conflation of sacredness and a sense of heritage based on archaeological findings. This creates a tension between purely ‘secular’ or scientific interpretations of a site, versus local or regional interpretations based on a site’s sacred or spiritual properties. The second theme has to do with control and management. Sacred sites which have been under the protection and management of local communities are suddenly reinterpreted, managed, and controlled by outside agencies creating issues of access, interpretation, and management, as well as environmental concerns. Throughout all these articles lie the multiple stakeholders, or as Goffman would say, “actors” within the tourist frame where the site becomes a contested territory of meaning depending on who is interpreting and to what end. Ultimately, the confluence of archaeological and sacred sites has to do with the meanings people attribute to them as well as what is entailed for their survival. How to sustainably manage increasing tourism and pilgrimages to these sites will be debated and these articles present a range of examples from which to learn. Taken together, they illustrate the need for further research and
more attention by policy makers and stakeholders in order to maintain the preservation and interpretation of archaeological and sacred sites around the world.

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