

Pilgrimage to Broken Mountain: Nahua Sacred Journeys in Mexico's Huasteca Veracruzana. By Alan R. Sandstrom and Pamela Effrein Sandstrom. University Press of Colorado, 2022. 478 pages. \$97.00 hardcover; \$34.95 softcover; ebook available.

Over the course of nine years Alan and Pamela Sandstrom participated in, and conducted ethnographic research on, five Nahua pilgrimages in northern Veracruz, Mexico. Two of these pilgrimages, or *nehnemiliztli*, were to Postectli and three more were to other sacred hills in the Nahua religious pantheon. *Pilgrimage to Broken Mountain* both documents these pilgrimages with thick description and beautiful color photos—the ritual practices, preparations, paper figures, myths, and myriad spirit entities—and engages anthropological theory on religion and pilgrimage. It specifically argues that the Nahua have a pantheistic religious system called *el costumbre* (“the custom”) wherein sacred paper figures and altars are not merely symbols of, or metonyms for, spirit beings, but embodiments of both the dynamic Nahua cosmos and its many nonhuman entities.

Pilgrimage to Broken Mountain is a large ethnography with nine chapters and robust appendixes full of stunning photographs. Each appendix is dedicated to one of the five *nehnemiliztli* that the authors observed and participated in and describe in detail throughout the text. There is also a Nahuatl glossary and an appendix with the names of many Nahua spirit entities. In chapter 1 Sandstrom and Sandstrom parse out the preparations for their journey led by Cirilo, “a renowned ritual specialist and an accomplished diviner” (xi). The authors’ trek then begins in Amatlán in the remote southern part of the Huasteca region. Here we also begin to see that Nahua *nehnemiliztli* are both religious and empowering for the Nahua devotees of *el costumbre*, because “to participate in pilgrimages and ritual offerings not only balances the relations between human beings and spirit entities, but it is also a political act that addresses the divide between the rich and the poor, the Hispanic elite and the less powerful villagers” (15).

In chapter 2 the Nahua sacred cosmos is explained, including the myth of the water owner Zahhuan, Nahua belief and ritual practice, notions of divinity, as well as a literature review of nonhuman agency and the ontological turn within anthropology. As Sandstrom and Sandstrom state, “it is our contention that the monistic philosophy of pantheism offers a parsimonious explanation and framework for understanding Mesoamerican systems that is far more fruitful than trying to disentangle the largely unverifiable conceptions of personhood or corpomorphosis” (70). The authors go on to argue that the spirit entities of *el costumbre* cannot be understood through the lens of western dualism precisely because they are composed of several traits that defy the dichotomy of good and evil. They are instead ambiguous in nature.

The ethnographic datum from the five pilgrimages is the focus of chapters 3 and 4. Sandstrom and Sandstrom discuss the different kinds

of rituals taking place—ritual chanting and dancing, tobacco, blood, and flower offerings, cleansings, and more. They describe how skilled the paper cutters are at creating the paper figures, and how deep concern for crops drives people to undertake pilgrimage to Postectli to appease the spirits thereby creating equilibrium. For as the authors observe, “the paper figures are the very heart of the cleansing, curing, and crop-fertility ritual complex . . . and properly arranged paper figures reveal aspects of Totiotzin and thus manifest a living cosmos” (185–87). Chapters 5, 6, and 7 look specifically at Nahua rituals, the spirit entities and paper figurines, how to read them, how each is assigned to a specific location, altar, and ritual practice, and how they are not merely ritual objects, but subjects “best understood as agents that can and do have an impact on human life” (285).

Chapter 8 offers a nuanced definition of pilgrimage in a comparative framework. The authors see pilgrimage as a religious expression where pilgrims leave, travel to a sacred place, but must return to their point of origin. They then juxtapose four different types of Mexican pilgrimages with the five Nahua pilgrimages, pointing out an array of similarities and differences. In chapter 9, the authors summarize and advance their discussion. They argue that pilgrimage is “a non-threatening means to adjusting the social order” and “the sacred journey to Postectli helps individuals militate against capitulation to coercive external forces” (330–31). Also worth noting is the large pull-out table in the back of the text with intricate paper figure iconography called “The Elements Conjoined.”

Pilgrimage to Broken Mountain is a dense, but important ethnography detailing the life world and worldview of the Nahua in a way that would benefit both undergraduates and graduate students alike. Not only is the low cost appealing for a text of this size and scope, especially given the abundance of color photos and images, but religionists and anthropologists alike will find *Pilgrimage to Broken Mountain* to be an essential addition to pilgrimage literature.

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Spirituality and Alternativity in Contemporary Japan: Beyond Religion? By Ioannis Gaitanidis. Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 264 pages. \$115.00 hardcover; \$35.95 softcover; ebook available.

Ioannis Gaitanidis’ *Spirituality and Alternativity in Japan* is a fascinating new contribution to the study of contemporary Japanese religion and religiosity. The work builds primarily on Gaitanidis’ extensive ethnographic work in the spiritual therapy environment in Japan, but he supplements this with an impressive critical engagement with the academic subfield of “spirituality studies,” media usage of “the spiritual,”