Religiographies

Religiographies 2022 vol.1 n. 1
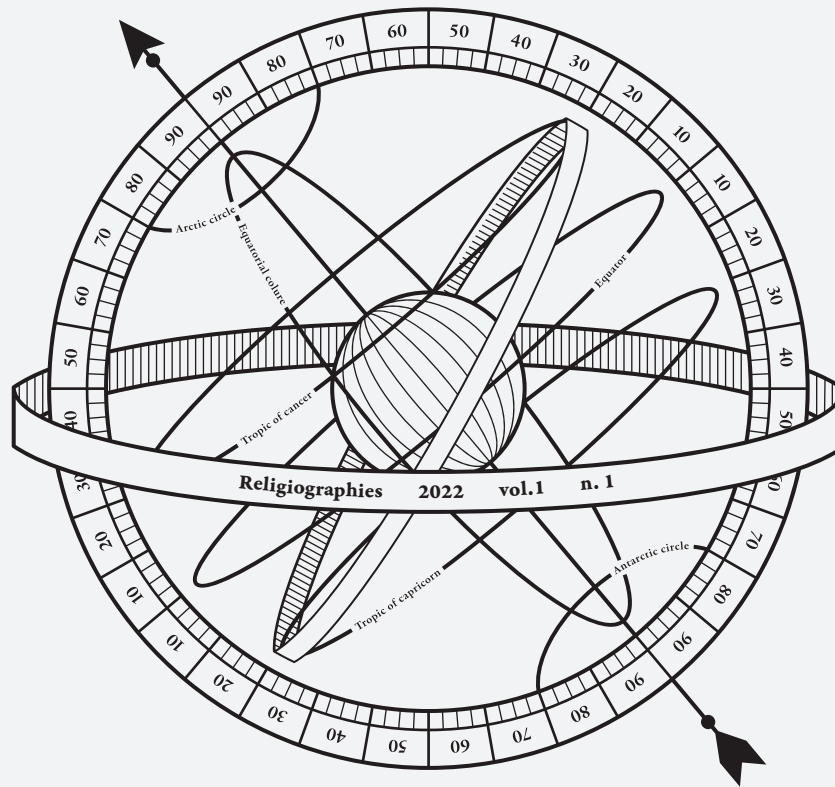
Special Issue
"Holy Sites in the Mediterranean, Sharing and Division"
edited by
Dionigi Albera, Sara Kuehn and Manoël Pénicaud

Editorial board

Table of Contents

Editorial:

Introducing Religiographies
Francesco Piraino

1

In the first two articles of the statute mention is made of "spiritual tradition" and "encounter of different civilisations" https://www.cini.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/statuto.pdf.

2

Vittore Branca, 'Vittorio Cini e l'idea della Fondazione: Continuità di una tradizione,' in *La Fondazione Giorgio Cini. Cinquant'anni di storia*, by Ulrico Agnati (Milano: Electa, 2001), 7–11.

3

Guido Piovene, *Processo dell'Islam alla civiltà occidentale* (Firenze: Giunti, 2018); Stefano Bigliardi, 'Guido Piovene osservatore dell'Islam e del Medio Oriente,' *ArteScienza* V, no. 9 (2018): 51–78.

4

Piovene, *Processo dell'Islam alla civiltà occidentale*, 11.

In this first editorial of *Religiographies*, we will briefly discuss the history of the research centre that sponsors it, the Fondazione Giorgio Cini's Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities, since 1958, and present the journal, describing its aims and scope and why we think it is needed, and finally, we will explain the relevance of this inaugural special issue, "Holy Sites in the Mediterranean, Sharing and Division."

The Institute "Venice and the East"

Describing the Institute for Venice and the East and its development into the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities is a challenging task. In fact, over the years the Institute/Centre has shed its skin several times. This has involved a change not only of name but also of its academic interests, approaches, methods and aims. The directors of this polymorphous Institute/Centre have been experts in Sinology, Byzantinology, Slavistics, the history of religions and, now, social anthropology. Despite this mutability and formal unsettledness, over the more than sixty years of the Institute/Centre's history, we find that its interests have mainly continued to concern spirituality, the encounter with religious and cultural diversity, the search for a humanism, the porosity between the secular and the religious, and the so-called challenges of the contemporary world.

Moreover, even before the creation of the Institute for Venice and the East in 1958, we find these themes in the mission of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini,[1] described by Vittore Branca (1913-2004) as the promotion of "the social and spiritual growth of man, of every man, whom Vittorio felt was a son and a brother."[2] Branca describes a desire for the truth rooted in Christianity but also tending towards an interest in the other, in the search for a living rather than an affected humanism.

The fact that these themes have been rooted in the Foundation right from its beginnings is confirmed by a revolutionary conference held in 1955: "Islam's Judgment on Western Civilisation."[3] Those who attended included the philologist Vittore Branca, the journalist and writer Guido Piovene (1907-1974), the orientalist and historian Giorgio Levi Della Vida (1886-1967), the future father of Italian Islamology, Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988), the jurist Francesco Carnelutti (1879-1965), the mathematician Luigi Fantappiè (1901-1956), the poet Eugenio Montale (1896-1981), the Egyptian intellectual and former minister Taha Husein (1889-1973), the Persian historian and politician Hassan Taqizadeh (1878-1970), the Tunisian historian and former minister Hassan Husni Abdul-Wahab (1884-1968), and Harry St John Bridger Philby (1885-1960), also known as Sheikh Abdullah, a British politician, explorer and Arabist who converted to Islam. The idea at the heart of this conference was very radical for the time but would even be radical today: the Islamic world was asked to criticise the colonial West and question its values, practices and policies. The aim was to lay the foundations for mutual understanding, because as Carnelutti put it, "you have to know each other to love each other, but you also have to love each other to know each other,"[4] and create a path of joint self-criticism in order to find new points of agreement.

I believe it is no exaggeration to claim that the event at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini's home on the Venetian island of San Giorgio was an embryonic form of post-colonial thinking, especially since it called into question Europe's putative moral and social superiority over other peoples. In fact, as Piovene pointed out, the West needed to free itself from its

Conference Islam's Judgment on Western Civilisation (Convegno Processo dell'Islam alla società occidentale), Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 1955. From the left, Hassan Taqizadeh (in light jacket), Hassan Husni Abdul-Wahab (wearing hat), Maria Nallino, Taha Hussein. Archive of the Institute of History of Art, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia.

superiority complex.[5] This awareness does not imply the notion of a return to an ideal bygone tradition, as Montale remarked in describing Piovene's argument.

> The spirit of criticism and research; our secularism, he [Piovene] says, is not irreligious but is a particular aspect of the modern soul. East and West exist in us as two poles of our personality. People from the East speak of us as southern Italians speak of northern Italians. We are also rebelling, brothers from the East, and do not forget this when you return to your homes. We are rebelling against ourselves and we also have the strength to love our and your rebellion.[6]

In 1954, another conference addressed the relationship between East and West: "Venetian Civilisation in Marco Polo's Century." It was followed in 1956 by the second volume of La civiltà dell'Oriente, published under the auspices of the Foundation. The book was edited by Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984), an explorer and leading scholar of Tibet and Buddhism. Again, with the aim of creating new bridges to the East, between 1956 and 1959, the bulletin Informazioni San Giorgio was published, first in Italian, Arabic, English and French, and later in English and French only.

The Fondazione Cini's interest in the East and in exchanges between civilisations and spiritualities culminated in 1958 in the creation of the Institute for Venice and the East as an independent section of the Fondazione's Centre for Culture and Civilisation. The Institute was created in line with UNESCO's "East and West" programme, with Venice being seen as the historical hinge between North and South, and East and West.
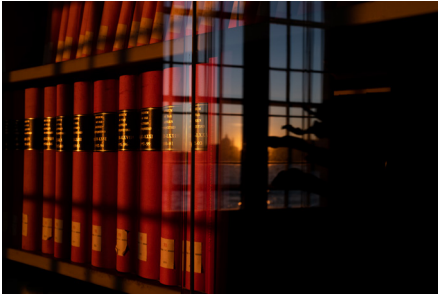
The Institute was endowed with a library that now has over 40,000 books and continues to grow. The most interesting collections include the

5
Bigliardi, 'Guido Piovene osservatore dell'Islam e del Medio Oriente,' 68.

6
Eugenio Montale, "Polemica sulla civiltà musulmana fra un egiziano e un amico di Lawrence," in *Corriere della Sera*, 22 September 1955.

Detail of the library of the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia. Photograph © Francesco Piraino, December 2019.
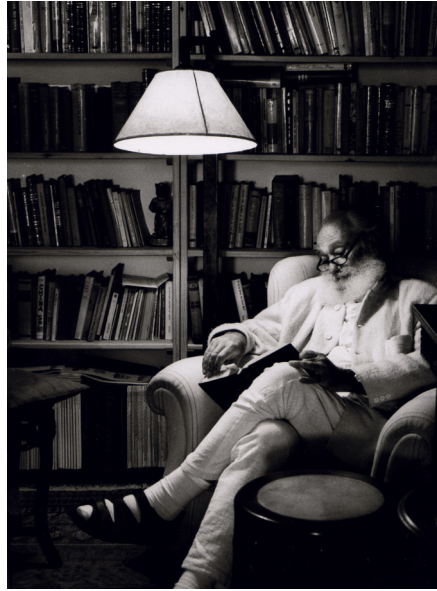
Tiziano Terzani. Archive Tiziano Terzani, Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia.

Manga. Katsushika Hokusai. Library of the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia.

7
Hans Thomas Hakl, Olimpia Niglio, and Yong Joong Lee, 'Octagon: The Quest for Wholeness,' in *Transcultural Diplomacy and International Law in Heritage Conservation* (Singapore: Springer, 2021), 49–62.

8
Etienne Lamotte, *Lo spirito del Buddhismo antico* (Venezia, Roma: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1960).

9
Siegfried Lienhard, *Dal sanscrito all'hindi: il nevari* (Venezia, Roma: Venezia Instituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1962).

10
Annemarie Schimmel, *Aspetti Spirituali Dell'Islam* (Venezia, Roma: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1961).

11
Louis Dumont, *La Civiltà Indiana e Noi Abbozzo Di Sociologia Comparata* (Venezia, Roma: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1965).

valuable acquisition in 1961 of the Beijing Library Rare Books microfilms from the Library of Congress in Washington, the donation by the French Indologist Alain Daniélou of his entire library in 1971, and donations by Ezra Pound-Olga Rudge and Nino Rota in the late 1990s. One more recent major addition is Angela Staude's donation of journalist Tiziano Terzani's library and archive in 2012 and 2014. In 2019, Hans Thomas Hakl signed the deed for the donation of his personal library, consisting of over 40,000 rare books and archival documents in the field of the history of religions and spiritualities. Called "Octagon,"[7] this library will physically arrive in the Foundation after Hakl's death and, combined with the existing collections, will create one of the best-stocked religious studies libraries in the world (the next special issue of *Religiographies*, edited by Marco Pasi, will focus on Hakl's life and library).

Under the direction of the historian, orientalist and diplomat Giuliano Bertuccioli (1923-2001), the Institute for Venice and the East's initial main interests were India, China and Japan, with a special focus on Buddhism. Relevant texts on history, religion and art were purchased; for example, some beautiful mangas by Katsushika Hokusai, the author famed for works such as *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* and *Views of Mount Fuji*. At this time, several magisterial lectures were given and published by leading authorities, such as Etienne Lamotte (University of Leuven), "The Spirit of Ancient Buddhism,"[8] Siegfried Lienhard (University of Stockholm), "From Sanskrit to Hindi: Nevari,"[9] Annemarie Schimmel (University of Frankfurt), "Spiritual Aspects of Islam,"[10] and Louis Dumont, "Indian Civilisation and Us."[11] In addition to its scholarly activities, the Institute also staged exhibitions on subjects such as Indian miniatures (1959), Japanese prints of the Ukiyo-E school (1961, held under the auspices of UNESCO), and Islamic miniatures from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries (1962). The Institute also organised the Foundation's travelling

Conference "The Experience of Prayer" (Convegno *L'esperienza della preghiera*), Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia, 1960. In front Padmanabh Jaini, behind Lama Anagarika Govinda. Photographic archive, Institute of History of Art, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia.

Sante Graciotti. Archive Segreteria Generale, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia.

exhibitions to the East: the Indian miniatures exhibition, for example, went to Tehran, Tokyo and Osaka in 1967.

Right from the early days, the Institute adopted a comparative approach, notably in the 1960 conference on "The Experience of Prayer" in religions, chaired by Francesco Carnelutti. Attended by both religious authorities and scholars, this conference also aimed to promote interreligious dialogue. It was held in fact at a time when the ideals of the Second Vatican Council were being elaborated and spread. The *semina Verbi*, or the idea that truth may be present in other religions besides Christianity, became a topic for discussion, summed up in the *Notiziario di San Giorgio* at the time. The "Conference on Prayer" showed a concern with the changing world and what was perceived as secularisation's challenge to Catholicism's moral, cognitive and political supremacy. During the conference, on this subject, Vittore Branca posed a very revealing question to the Buddhist participants, aimed at determining whether the attack on religion by the Enlightenment and rationalism had also occurred in the Buddhist context. The ongoing dialogue between the religious and the secular was continued in another major conference organised for the millennium of Mount Athos in 1963, attended by both monks and historians.[12]

In 1964 the Institute went through a period of reorganisation. The Foundation felt a need to focus on the Near East (Byzantine, Slavic and Islamic worlds), on the basis of the region's historical relationship with the Serenissima Republic of Venice. The new director, philologist and Byzantinist Agostino Pertusi (1918-1979), organised a series of conferences on the relationship between Venice and Eastern Europe and the Near East. Particularly notable events included two conferences and related publications edited by Pertusi: "Venice and the Levant up to the 15th Century"[13] and "Venice as a Centre of Mediation between East and West (15th-16th Centuries)."[14] In the 1970s and 1980s the focus was on Slavic countries, with conferences and related publications coordinated and edited by Vittore Branca and Sante Graciotti: "Venice and Hungary

12
Irénée Doens, *Manoscritti Ed Edizioni Veneziane Di Opere Liturgiche e Ascetiche Greche e Slave Esposti in Occasione Del Convegno Di Studi Millenario Del Monte Athos* (Venezia: Stamp. di Venezia, 1963).

13
Agostino Pertusi, *Venezia e il Levante fino al secolo XV* (Firenze: LS Olschki, 1974).

14
Hans-Georg Beck, Manousos I Manousakas, e Agostino Pertusi, *Venezia, centro di mediazione tra Oriente e Occidente (secoli XV-XVI): aspetti e problemi* (Firenze: LS Olschki, 1977).

Alfredo Cadonna (on the right), Lionello Lanciotti with his wife, Avv. Stefano Rosso-Mazzinghi (communication manager) and Carla Bonò (librarian and secretary). Archive of Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia.

15
Vittore Branca, *Venezia e Ungheria nel Rinascimento* (Firenze: LS Olschki, 1973).

16
Vittore Branca e Sante Graciotti, *Popolo, nazione e storia nella cultura italiana e ungherese dal 1789 al 1850* (Firenze: LS Olschki, 1985).

17
Vittore Branca and Sante Graciotti, *Italia Venezia e Polonia tra Medio Evo e età moderna* (Firenze: LS Olschki, 1980).

18
Sante Graciotti, *Il battesimo delle terre russe: bilancio di un millennio* (Firenze: LS Olschki, 1991).

19
Sante Graciotti, 'La Fondazione Cini e l'Europa Orientale,' in *La Fondazione Giorgio Cini. Cinquant'anni di Storia*, by Ulrico Agnati (Milano: Electa, 2001), 283.

20
Lionello Lanciotti, *Sviluppi scientifici, prospettive religiose, movimenti rivoluzionari in Cina*, vol. 31 (Firenze: LS Olschki, 1975).

21
Lionello Lanciotti, *La donna nella Cina imperiale e nella Cina repubblicana*, vol. 36 (Firenze: LS Olschki, 1980).

22
Alfredo Cadonna, *Turfan and Tun-huang: the Texts: Encounter of Civilizations on the Silk Route* (Firenze: LS Olschki, 1992).

23
Alfredo Cadonna and Ester Bianchi, *Facets of Tibetan Religious Tradition and Contacts with Neighbouring Cultural Areas* (Firenze: LS Olschki, 2002).

24
https://www.olschki.it/catalogo/collana/ov

25
Zygmunt Bauman, 'On Glocalization: Or Globalization for Some, Localization for Some Others,' *Thesis Eleven* 54, no. 1 (1998): 37–49; Roland Robertson, 'Glocalization,' *The International Encyclopedia of*

in the Renaissance,"[15] "People, Nation and History in Italian and Hungarian Culture from 1789 to 1850,"[16] "Venice and Poland in the Middle Ages and Modern Age,"[17] and "The Baptism of Russian Lands: Surveying a Millennium."[18]

The Institute's focus on the European East (Hungary, Poland, Russia, and Yugoslavia, all still in the Communist sphere) had a political as well as a cultural value. The Foundation and the Institute become a place of exchanges, encounters, and confrontation. In this sense, the director of the Institute, Sante Graciotti, describes relations with the Russian politicians and intellectuals in terms of "a subtle game, balanced between giving and taking, of unexpected attacks, foiled or suffered, of clever ploys successfully for or against."[19] Graciotti describes a game of chess with intellectual exchanges but also attempts to extract information, with each party trying to show their moral and political superiority. In this case, the East as an expression of "otherness" was certainly not the Slavic or Orthodox world but Communism.

As regards the Far East, from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, the Institute organised two series of meetings dedicated to China, coordinated by Lionello Lanciotti: "Scientific Developments, Religious Perspectives, Revolutionary Movements in China from Marco Polo to the Present Day"[20] and "Women in Imperial and Republican China."[21] The interest in China and the East continued under the direction of Alfredo Cadonna in the 1990s and early 2000s. The various publications of this period included his *Turfan and Tun-Huang. The Texts. Encounter of Civilizations on the Silk Route;*[22] and Cadonna and Ester Bianchi (eds), *Facets of Tibetan Religious Tradition and Contacts with Neighbouring Cultural Areas.*[23] These two books were printed in the Institute's series entitled "Orientalia Venetiana," published by Leo S. Olschki (Florence) from 1984 to 2005.[24]

The Institute's activities were then interrupted until 2017, when the founding of the "Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities" gave rise to a new phase, in which many elements were radically changed, while still keeping faith with the humanist ideals characterising the Institute since its inception.

Renaissance: for a Non-Manifesto of Comparative Research

The re-founding of the Institute, summed up in the new name, reflected the need for a rethink in terms of epistemology, methodology, politics and aesthetics. The world had changed radically since the 1950s, when the name "Venice and the East" enjoyed an immediate shared meaning. Firstly, the geopolitical opposition between Communism and the capitalist-liberal world had ceased to exist, giving way to a fast-changing multipolar world. The Foundation no longer needed to provide a haven for dialogue between liberal Western Europe and Communist Eastern Europe. The change was not only geopolitical. It went deeper and developed into the complex set of phenomena called globalisation, characterised by a new increasing circulation of capital, goods and ideas on a global scale, and also by the accelerated worldwide spread of political and cultural forms engendered by the so-called West. In this respect, the expression "glocalisation" is perhaps more fitting, since it describes both the phenomenon of global influence and the related local adaptations and resistances.[25]

These epoch-making changes have intensified our interest in the present and have prompted a reassessment of the past, calling into question the previous ethnocentric outlook. Moreover, a growing need was felt

to adopt new epistemologies and methodologies to deal with an increasingly obvious complexity which has shown up the inadequacy of a dichotomy between a "modern West" and a "traditional East." To underline this global, multi-polar, interdisciplinary and comparative approach, the reference to Venice was removed from the name of the new Centre for Comparative Studies, although it remains implicit. Venice is no longer a yardstick and measure but a starting point, a reference place in an intricate web of historical, political and cultural events. The reference to the East has also disappeared as a term implying the idea of a monolithic East, which, as Edward Said's studies have shown,[26] is inextricably bound up with Eurocentric essentialism, and especially with the moral and political justification of colonialism and thus with the supposedly civilising mission of white Europe over the rest of the world.

The comparative study of religious and cultural phenomena that developed in the early twentieth century[27] and was consolidated in the post-war period[28] was also deeply affected by social, political and epistemological changes due to globalisation. Some scholars, however, associated or even identified the comparative method with the essentialist, evolutionist and/or Eastern studies paradigm.[29] Several of their accusations were well-founded, since for many decades the comparative approach to religion was characterised by the notion that it was necessary to identify universal archetypes, valid in different cultures and historical contexts.[30] This approach straddled the line between mystical/esoteric and academic research and had a "heroic" tenor. For some, it was part of a kind of resistance to mechanical, materialistic and quantitative modernity.[31]

The search for universal archetypes, which still fascinates many intellectuals today and may offer interesting perspectives from the point of view of knowledge, involves several issues that need to be examined closely. First of all, the focus on the universal is often accompanied by a certain disregard for philological and historical accuracy, or in some cases by a downright aversion to systematic historiographic research. Indeed, there has even been talk of "armchair anthropology," a term used to criticise research where the initial preconception determines the results of the research itself, and contact with the subjects/texts studied is minimal. The second problematic aspect concerns the way that the search for the universal may still stray into the misguided attempt to identify an "essence" in religions and peoples, or an element that remains constant in different historical and cultural contexts. This essentialist view has been not only challenged by the social sciences, but rightly condemned, since it can be used to justify various forms of supremacism and nationalism.[32]

While these criticisms of comparativism are well-founded and valuable, other criticisms are flawed and unfounded. I am referring to the idea that any form of comparison is impossible because of the specificity and peculiarity of each religious and cultural phenomenon, which should be studied in its uniqueness. According to this "particularist" point of view, we should create as many anthropologies as there are religions, so there would be anthropologies of Islam, of Judaism, of Taoism, and so on.[33] Moreover, this perspective often conceals a vindication of superiority over other phenomena: comparisons are unacceptable, because "others" are not considered to be worthy of comparison.[34] This view fails to take into account the intersectionality of human beings, the continuity in their differences and the mutual influences that religions and cultures have produced. In fact, the study of any religious and cultural phenomenon

Anthropology, 2018, 1–8.

26
Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

27
Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: Macmillan, 1930); William Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites: First Series; The Fundamental Institutions* (A. and C. Black, 1914).

28
Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012); Steven M Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

29
Carl Gustav Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959).

30
See as the example Henry Corbin: Jean-Claude Basset, 'Henry Corbin : Philosophe de La Religion,' text/html,application/pdf, *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 117 (1985): 17–31, https://doi.org/10.5169/SEALS-381282; Daryush Shayegan, *Henry Corbin: Penseur de l'islam Spirituel* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2011).

31
Wouter J Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Steven M Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctt7pds6

32
Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black sun: Aryan cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: NYU Press, 2003).

33
James V Spickard, 'Tribes and Cities: Towards an Islamic Sociology of Religion,' *Social Compass* 48, no. 1 (2001): 103–16.

34
Robert Segal, 'In Defense of the Comparative Method,' *Numen* 48, no. 3 (2001): 339–73.

35

Naoki Sakai, 'Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism,' in *Postmodernism and Japan*, by Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 93–122.

36

Wouter J Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy : Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

37

Gregory A Lipton, *Rethinking Ibn 'Arabi*, 2018, Chap. 1.

38

Roger Paden, 'Foucault's Anti-Humanism,' *Human Studies* 10 (1987): 123–41.

39

Stephen W Sawyer and Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, *Foucault, Neoliberalism, and Beyond* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

40

Segal, 'In Defense of the Comparative Method.'

41

Egil Asprem, 'Beyond the West: Towards a New Comparativism in the Study of Esotericism,' *Correspondances* 2.1 (2014): 3–33.

42

Thomas Csordas, *Body, Meaning, Healing* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); John Corrigan, *Feeling Religion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

43

Kenneth L. Pike, *Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behavior* (Amsterdam: Mouton & Co., 1967).

always has a comparative component, whether implicit or explicit.

Another criticism of the comparative study of religions often raised by so-called postmodern intellectuals is the impossibility of universalism,[35] a fundamental theme in this field: we only need consider the universalist narratives found in European esotericism, mystical currents, Neoplatonism and contemporary alternative spirituality movements.[36] The putative impossibility of universal thinking is based on the distrust of any humanist ideal. In fact, according to some postmodern authors, humanism or universalism are nothing more than ideologies used to conceal subjective or tribal interests and forms of power.[37] From this point of view, any universalist discourse is simply "false consciousness," a way of imposing one's own thinking on others and mystifying relations of power. The prime example is the civilising mission of colonialism: its narrative of exporting civilisation to "barbarian" countries covers up violence and exploitation.

The postmodernist vision must be credited with revealing the contradictions of some universalist discourses, but at the same time it introduces rigid analytical limits. Firstly, this form of anti-humanism[38] can lead to subjective and individualistic defeatism, whereby it becomes impossible to think positively and constructively about the collective dimension. In fact, society, collectivities and the state become negative players, entities that pursue a biopolitical domination. The underlying danger of this interpretation is that of reducing "caring for self" to the sphere of subjectivity, to a kind of solipsism.[39]

This inevitably reductive brief excursus on the history of comparativism was required to provide the background to the decision to speak in terms of a "non-manifesto." In fact, unlike a manifesto that coherently describes the meaning of doing comparative research, we have chosen to highlight the heterogeneity of the approaches adopted. In this non-manifesto of comparative studies, we wish to emphasise that comparing does not imply seeking an all-embracing synthesis of the phenomena being studied. It is not a question of searching for a metalanguage capable of summarising different phenomena, but rather of finding an infra-language capable of connecting different perspectives. We do not wish to propose a specific methodology or pre-established terms of comparison to be rigidly applied. Comparison is not right or wrong, but it can be "useful or useless," never conclusive, as Segal has argued.[40]

From this perspective, comparing means developing a certain attention and sensitivity to the porosity between different religious and cultural phenomena, to global phenomena, to the relationship/encounter/confrontation with otherness, and to the phenomenology of the human body and emotions. For example, as Egil Asprem has pointed out, there are various ways to make a comparison: by analogy (different phenomena sharing similar forms) and homology (phenomena sharing a common genealogy).[41] Contemporary anthropology pursues a different route by offering new ways of comparing based on the body and emotions.[42] Lastly, the absence of a single term of comparison, of an overarching hypothesis guiding our approach to comparing, leaves room for other voices, for the protagonists of our research: it allows "emic" perspectives to emerge more clearly.[43]

The search for possible universals, strictly in the plural, has not been abandoned, but rather multiplied in its various forms. To avoid the above-mentioned shortcomings of the "old comparativism," the universal can no longer be studied as a set of fixed ideas or archetypes but only as an

ever-imperfect attempt that takes on different forms in different contexts. Studying issues related to universality also means studying how we imagine the other and consequently how we exclude the other: "inclusivism and exclusivism," "universalism and racism," are two sides of the same coin. To broaden this horizon, we need to take into account as many dimensions as possible, such as culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

In the first conference organised in collaboration with Mark Sedgwick (Aarhus University) in 2017, we analysed global influences on contemporary Sufism, in particular regarding so-called New Age spirituality, the relationship between political Islam and national interests, and the convergence of Sufism and new cultural forms, such as rap. The conference gave rise to the book *Global Sufism*.[44]

Our conference on "Common and Comparative Esotericisms: Western, Islamic and Jewish" in 2018 involved a comparative analysis of the mutual influences of different religious phenomena, sometimes the result of practical exchanges or fruit of the other's imagination. For example, in *Esoteric Transfers and Constructions*,[45] published subsequent to the conference, we showed how Yemenite Jewish poetry was influenced by Sufism, and Christian magic by Jewish magic. A further diverse example in this field was provided by a chapter on the occultist Aleister Crowley (1875-1945), who studied, imagined and invented another Islam.

A completely different comparative approach was adopted at the conference "Embodying Scientific Medicine and Religious Healing," organised jointly with Andrea De Antoni (Kyoto University). In this case, the yardstick was not religious ideas or practices, but the body and the emotions. Comparing in this case means focusing on how the body experiences certain things in different religious contexts. Moreover, this conference explored the porosity between the religious and the secular by studying the practices of possession and exorcism alongside biomedical practices adopted for the purposes of physical and mental well-being.

A different approach again was used in the conference "Contesting in the Name of Religion in Secularised Societies: Between Doctrine and Militancy," organised in collaboration with Claude Proeschel (EPHE-CNRS) and David Koussens (University of Sherbrooke). In this case the term of comparison between the various religions was a political instrument, namely, conscientious objection. This conference gave rise to the book *Religion, Law and the Politics of Ethical Diversity*.[46]

A conference on conspiracism, conceived in collaboration with Marco Pasi (University of Amsterdam) and Egil Asprem (University of Stockholm), combined several comparative approaches in the various papers. Firstly, from a historical point of view, some scholars discussed the presence of conspiracy theories in the context of the Roman Empire, questioning a widespread stereotype that conspiracy is a purely modern phenomenon. Others highlighted the spread and mutation of conspiracy theories, as in the case of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," which in the Japanese context has been modified so greatly that Jews are no longer the presumed assassins but possible heroes. Further topics include recurring psychological elements in various conspiracy theories and the connections between conspiracy and the human and social sciences. Although the conference was cancelled due to *acqua alta* (high water) flooding in November 2019, this did not discourage us: we subsequently worked on the book, now due to be published by Routledge in 2022.

Shaykh Khaled Bentounes studying the map of Hacı Ahmet (1599) at the Marciana library.
Bentounes as a guest speaker at the conference "Transnational Sufism in contemporary societies," Venezia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini. Photograph © Francesco Piraino, November 2017.

44
Francesco Piraino and Mark Sedgwick, eds., *Global Sufism. Boundaries, Structures, and Politics* (London: Hurst, 2019).

45
Mark Sedgwick and Francesco Piraino, *Esoteric Transfers and Constructions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (London: Palgrave, 2021).

46
Claude Proeschel, David Koussens, and Francesco Piraino, *Religion, Law and the Politics of Ethical Diversity: Conscientious Objection and Contestation of Civil Norms* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

Workshop of Japanese Shōdo calligraphy, Venezia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini. Photograph © Francesco Piraino, December 2019.

Workshop of Arabic calligraphy with Sadik Haddari, Venezia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini. Photograph © Francesco Piraino, December 2018.

47
Karl R Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Karl Popper, *Congetture e confutazioni. Lo sviluppo della conoscenza scientifica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1972).

48
Kathrin Busch, 'Artistic research and the poetics of knowledge,' *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 2, no. 2 (2009): 1.

49
Juha Varto, 'Forward,' in *Artistic Research: Methodology Narrative, Power and the Public*, by Mikka Hannula, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vadén (Berna: Peter Lang, 2014), x.

50
Julian Klein, 'What Is Artistic Research?', *Journal for Artistic Research* (2010): 6.

51
Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second edition, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 83.

52
Carlo Ginzburg, 25/10/2020, *Treccani online*, https://www.treccani.it/magazine/atlante/cultura/Marino_Ginzburg.html

53
These events have been co-organised with Ca' Foscari university of Venice (with the professors Antonella Ghersetti, Bonaventura Ruperti, Silvia Vesco and Andrea Brigaglia) and with the calligraphers Eyas Alshayeb, Saddik Haddari and Norio Nagayama.

The multi-pronged approach to comparison has only been possible because of a genuinely interdisciplinary stance. Historians, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, literary scholars, jurists and linguists have participated in the events organised by the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities. From this perspective, comparing also means building new bridges between disciplines, in the hope of being able to look through various lenses at the complexity that we are faced with.

Comparison can also take us beyond the confines of scientific research in the narrow Popperian sense, delimited by the principles of falsification and verifiability.[47] Indeed, emotions, perceptions, bodily and aesthetic experiences can have a cognitive value, even though they are difficult to describe in terms of rational coherence. Here I am thinking of art as an aesthetic experience that enables us to feel a "sensory truth,"[48] which is not imposed through the power of argumentation but allows us to "transform the sensible, the reality of sight, taste, touch and smell, which inevitably implies a change in ideas, understanding and vision."[49] Art expressed in words or silence remains a physical, sensual, "bodily" form of consciousness.[50] Thinkers such as Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), on the other hand, are not interested in bodily and emotional dimensions, but have conceptualised artistic experience as a form of ontological augmentation of being.

> Since we meet the artwork in the world and encounter a world in the individual artwork, the work of art is not some alien universe into which we are magically transported for a time. Rather, we learn to understand ourselves in and through it, and this means that we sublate (aufheben) the discontinuity and atomism of isolated experiences in the continuity of our own existence.[51]

Regardless of the different conceptualisations of art, we can argue that artistic experience is undoubtedly a valuable tool for scholarly research, enabling us to enhance our "moral imagination," as Carlo Ginzburg puts it, by allowing us to identify with people who are far removed in space, time, and customs. Art not only broadens our horizons but also challenges our beliefs and stereotypes, creating new openings.

> When reading books of fiction, we may find ourselves in the shoes of a murderer, a puppet, or an insect. Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Collodi's *Pinocchio*, Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*: very distant worlds from our own; but these writings enable us to enter a world that is not our own and this is something that may give us great sustenance.[52]

Although the language of art is not universal, since aesthetic sensibilities are also constructed socially, we can say that it is undoubtedly trans-cultural and trans-historical. Finally, art enables us to make the invisible visible by giving shape to the transcendent dimension. For these reasons, the Centre has promoted hybrid events in which artists and researchers have engaged in open-ended exchanges. For example, in our workshops on Arabic and Japanese calligraphy, an annual event since 2018, students of Eastern but also of other languages have not only furthered their linguistic and calligraphic skills but have also been involved "hands-on" in exploring how calligraphy can become a ritual and a spiritual experience.[53]

Cover image of the project Invisible Lines co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme. David B, 2020.

Photographic Workshop with Jonas Bendiksen (Magnum Photos), Venezia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini. Photograph © Andrea Pirri, November 2019.

Photographic Workshop with Alex Majoli (Magnum Photos), Venezia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini. Photograph © Francesco Piraino, November 2021.

In 2019, with the collaboration of the photographic agency Magnum Photos, the Centre organised a workshop and a magisterial lecture focused on the question of "how to photograph the sacred." Jonas Bendiksen presented his photographic book *The Last Testament*,[54] depicting seven men who claim to be reincarnations of Christ, while anthropologist Manoël Pénicaud (CNRS) described the role of photography in religious anthropology, especially in pilgrimages.[55] The dialogue between photography and research continues with events jointly organised with Magnum, such as a workshop with Alex Majoli (2021) and Sabiha Çimen (2022).

In the "Invisible Lines" project,[56] co-funded by the Creative Europe programme, we were able to explore the artistic language of comics, graphic novels and illustrations, allowing us to communicate with new audiences. This project, which started in 2020 and is due to run for two years, consists of a series of travelling workshops for young artists, who are asked to "draw the invisible," from a spiritual-metaphysical, social and geographical perspective. Together with the project partners (the Hamelin cultural association, Central à Vapeur and Baobab Books), we will produce three books, bringing together the works of the young artists, while exhibitions have been held in Bologna, Strasbourg and Tabor.

Religiographies

Religiographies is an open-access, peer-reviewed, scholarly journal dedicated to the field of religious studies and published under the auspices of the Centre for Comparative Studies and Civilisations of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, based on the Island of San Giorgio, Venice.

Religiographies wishes to foster an interdisciplinary and comparative approach to religious phenomena, promoting dialogue between historians, sociologists, anthropologists, literary scholars, philosophers and psychologists. We aim at promoting an anthropological history and at the same time a socio-anthropology with a strong historical emphasis, intending to avoid both socio-anthropological presentism and history that is only focused on ideas and institutions, ignoring materiality, emotions and everyday lives. We encourage deconstructing and challenging categories (including the very word "religion"), not as a theoretical exercise, a proof of concept,

[54] Jonas Bendiksen, *The Last Testament*, (Aperture: London, 2017).

[55] Dionigi Albera and Manoël Pénicaud, *Coexistences. Lieux Saints Partagés En Europe et En Méditerranée* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2017).

[56] https://invisiblelines.eu

57

Michel de Certeau, *La fable mystique: XVIe-XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 22.

58

Christine Ferguson, 'Beyond Belief: Literature, Esotericism Studies, and the Challenges of Biographical Reading in Arthur Conan Doyle's The Land of Mist,' *Aries* 22, no. 2 (3 August 2021): 205–30, https://doi.org/10.1163/15700593-20211002; Per Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Manon Hedenborg White, *The Eloquent Blood: The Goddess Babalon and the Construction of Femininities in Western Esotericism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

59

Christopher Partridge, 'Occulture Is Ordinary,' in *Contemporary Esotericism*, by Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (London; New York: Routledge, 2014), 123–43.

60

Glenn Hughes, *A More Beautiful Question: The Spiritual in Poetry and Art* (University of Missouri Press, 2011).

61

Malory Nye, 'Religion, Post-Religionism, and Religioning: Religious Studies and Contemporary Cultural Debates1,' *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 12, no. 1–4 (2000): 447–76.

62

Nina Kokkinen, 'Occulture as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Art,' *Aries* 13, no. 1 (1 January 2013): 7–36, https://doi.org/10.1163/15700593-01301003

63

Klein, 'What Is Artistic Research?'; Boeck, 'What is Artistic Research?'', https://between-science-and-art.com/what-is-artistic-research/

64

Klein, 6.

65

Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?* (London: Penguin, 1995), 151.

66

Klein, 'What Is Artistic Research?', 1.

but as a practice, showing with fieldwork data the porosity and frailty of our categories.

We aim to discuss those topics that are often neglected by the social and human sciences, such as mysticism, esotericism and spirituality, which, in the words of Michel de Certeau, "haunt scientific epistemology."[57] Our aim is not to create another journal on alternative spiritualities, but to bring these themes back into mainstream discussions of religious and cultural phenomena. Comparing also means exploring identity and religious boundaries: the relationship with the other. In fact, every religious form has to deal with otherness, thematising the boundary between "us" and "them." How is the other perceived? Who is the infidel? How do these boundaries shift according to the political and social context? We are also interested in exploring the porous boundaries between science and religion, beliefs and non-beliefs, and secular and religious.

The intricate relationship between art and spirituality will be another core element of *Religiographies*. Starting from the 2010s there has been a renewed academic interest in the relationship between art/cultural products and religion/spirituality. Several scholars have showed how art played a crucial role in disseminating new religious beliefs and practices.[58] Some have described an epochal turn, through the concept of "occulture," which implies that esoteric and spiritual narratives and symbols have become ordinary in the cultural production, because of the "spiritual revolution" that began in Western countries in the 1960s.[59] Some authors have pushed this argument further, arguing that art is replacing religion[60] or that art is another form of religion(ing),[61] considering artists as spiritual seekers.[62]

Art will play a pivotal role in *Religiographies*, not only as a research object but also as a research instrument. In fact, within the frame of "heterographies," we intend to give space to other forms of representation, such as photography, literature, comics, video and artwork. These other languages will allow contributors – scholars and artists – to explore dimensions beyond the social sciences frame of objectiveness and coherence. This section, called *Heterographies*, is not strictly scientific: it will not be peer-reviewed, but will receive feedback from the editors and invited commentators.

The "heterographies" will contribute to the growing field of "artistic research" or "art practice-based research."[63] In fact, we think that artistic products can offer meaningful insights to the social and human sciences. Artistic knowledge deals less with discursive rationality and more with emotion, sensitivity and the body, constituting an "embodied" and "felt" knowledge.[64] This embodied and felt knowledge is strictly connected with the capacity of art to produce empathy, transporting the reader to other cultural, historical and ontological realms. As Tolstoy wrote: "The business of art consists precisely in making understandable and accessible that which might be incomprehensible and inaccessible in the form of reasoning."[65] Finally, artistic knowledge, and we hope our *Heterographies,* will help in exploring the "not-yet-knowing,"[66] creating new questions and disrupting our prejudices.

Religiographies represents a novelty in terms of both methodology and epistemology. Finally, it will be an open-access online journal on religious studies. It is also truly open access in that it is not only free to read but also free to publish in: authors do not pay fees, as they must for some other so-called "open access" journals that are in fact open only to readers, as the need to pay fees still limits authors' access to publication. We consider the

free accessibility of research outcomes to be of the utmost importance in a period of growing social, economic and cultural divisions and tensions.

About this special issue

This special issue, "Holy Sites in the Mediterranean, Sharing and Division," edited by Dionig Albera, Manoël Pénicaud and Sara Kuehn, fits particularly well our newly established aims and scope. It is interdisciplinary, gathering scholars from different fields, and concerns the fascinating and challenging topic of shared sacred sites and figures, where the themes of spirituality, alterity and religious and cultural boundaries converge. The authors of this special issue show how the mainstream and opposed narratives of domination versus toleration about shared sacred sites are generally false. In fact, the outcomes of sharing sacred sites are far more complex, implying different strategies, which are often paradoxical in nature, blending oppression and hospitality, rivalry and conviviality.

Introduction:

Religious Sharing, Mixing, and Crossing in the Wider Mediterranean

Dionigi Albera, Sara Kuehn and Manoël Pénicaud

Dionigi Albera
CNRS, Idemec, Aix-Marseille University
dionigi.albera@univ-amu.fr

Sara Kuehn
Department of Islamic Theological Studies,
University of Vienna
sara.kuehn@univie.ac.at

Manoël Pénicaud
CNRS, Idemec, Aix-Marseille University
manoelpenicaud@gmail.com

1

See, for example, www.sharedsacredsites.net. The
exhibitions include *Shared Sacred Sites* (*Lieux saints part-
agés*), first shown in 2015 at the *Museum of European and
Mediterranean Civilisations* (Mucem) in Marseille. These
exhibitions were followed by several other versions
(see below).

2

On this scholar, see *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heri-
tage in the Balkans and Anatolia: The Life and Times of
F.W. Hasluck*, ed. David Shankland (Istanbul: The Isis
Press, 2004–2013), 3 vols.

3

Frederick William Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under
the Sultans*, ed. Margaret Hasluck (Istanbul: The Isis
Press, 2000 [first edition: New York: Clarendon Press,
1929], 2 vols., 65–6.

4

Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans*, 68–9.

5

*Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean. Christians,
Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, eds. Dionigi
Albera and Maria Couroucli (Bloomington: Indiana
University Press, 2012); *Sharing the Sacra. The Politics
and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations around Holy
Places*, ed. Glenn Bowman (Oxford: Berghahn Books,
2012); *Partage du sacré. Transferts, dévotions mixtes, rivalités
interconfessionnelles*, eds. Isabelle Dépret and Guillaume
Dye (Bruxelles: E.M.E., 2012); *Muslims and Others in
Sacred Space*, ed. Margaret Cormack (Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 2013); *Choreographies of Shared Sacred
Sites. Religion and Conflict Resolution*, eds. Elazar Barkan
and Karen Barkey (New York: Columbia University
Press, 2014); *Lieux saint partagés*, eds. Dionigi Albera,
Manoël Pénicaud and Isabelle Marquette (Arles: Actes
Suds-Mucem, 2015); Robert Hayden *et al.*, *Antagonistic
Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites and Spaces*
(London and New York: Routledge, 2016); *Pilgrimages
and Ambiguity: Sharing the Sacred*, eds. Thierry Zarcone
and Angela Hobart (London: Kingston Publishing,
2017); *Shared Sacred Sites*, eds. Dionigi Albera, Karen
Barkey and Manoël Pénicaud (New York: New
York Public Library, City University of New York,
Morgan Library and Museum, 2018); "The Changing
Landscapes of Cross-Faith Places and Practices," ed.
Manfred Sing (special issue of *Entangled Religions* 9,
2019: 1–272, http://doi.org/10.13154/er.v9.2019);

In recent years, numerous authors have studied the joint attendance of shrines by worshippers of different religions or denominations in the Mediterranean region. This topic has become a kind of research sub-field that has produced a multitude of publications, collective research programmes, conferences and seminars. It has also been covered in media other than classical academic production, through exhibitions, films and websites.[1] This first issue of *Religiographies. Representations, Texts and Lives* intends to contribute to this rapidly growing field.

A distinguished ancestor can be identified in the genealogy of this area of research, Frederick William Hasluck, who in the second decade of the 20th century undertook extensive and wide-ranging investigations on the relations between Christians and Muslims in the Ottoman Empire.[2] In these investigations, he assiduously gathered an impressive array of historical information, which he combined with his own observations and information gathered from a network of correspondents. Hasluck was interested in the management of shrines and their transfer from one religion to another. This also led him to study the forms of popular devotion involving a place belonging to a different religion. On this subject, too, he collected extensive documentation.

During this period, Hasluck was affiliated with the British School of Archaeology in Athens. His research was unfortunately hindered by the outbreak of World War I and then by lung disease diagnosed in 1916, which led to his death in 1920 at the age of only 42. His wife, Margaret Hasluck, revised and collected her husband's scattered notes and articles, and finally, through patient editorial work, reorganised them into a book entitled *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, published in 1929. This work documents a wide range of interfaith frequentation of sacred sites, leading Hasluck to remark that, in those days, visiting shrines of another religion was a common phenomenon.[3] He argued that "practically any of the religions of Turkey may share the use of a sanctuary administered by another, if this sanctuary has a sufficient reputation for beneficent miracles, among which miracles of healing play a predominant part."[4]

Christianity and Islam under the Sultans secured a lasting intellectual influence for Hasluck. However, for a long time, the work on the cross-attendance of shrines found only few emulators. It is only in recent decades that an interest in this subject has coagulated, situating itself explicitly in Hasluck's legacy. Some collective volumes have been instrumental in fostering this perspective.[5] It is clearly impossible here to give an overview of and discuss the numerous works that have been published on this topic in recent years. We will therefore limit ourselves to recalling a few points that seem important for a better definition of this field of study.

Interdisciplinarity

Scholars from various disciplines have become interested in the study of shared sacred spaces. An important line of research has been anthropologically oriented work. Many anthropologists have documented the existence of shrines in the Mediterranean today, frequented by worshippers of multiple religions. They have done this mainly through direct observation and participation in visits and pilgrimages. This ethnographic method has also been adopted by scholars from disciplines such as sociology and political science.

Overall, these studies have shown that the decline in forms of sharing since Hasluck's time has not been as sharp as one might expect, taking into

account the socio-economic and political transformations experienced by the southern and eastern sectors of the Mediterranean, where religious sharing was most pronounced in the past. Certainly, the development of ethnoreligious nationalism—generating a succession of wars, population exchanges (*e.g.*, between Greece and Turkey), deportations, and border demarcations—along with urbanisation processes, have profoundly altered the religious landscape of these countries. There is also the impact of political Islam, the growing influence of Salafist currents, not to mention terrorism. But even in this profoundly transformed context, forms of religious interchange continue to exist, sometimes discreetly, sometimes with the participation of substantial numbers of the faithful.

Another important line of research is oriented toward the past. Some anthropologists have given an historical dimension to their research. Above all, there are quite a few historians who have focused on this topic in relation to different periods, from the Middle Ages to the modern age. They have made use of a variety of sources and often adopted a micro-historical approach. What emerges clearly from this body of research is the proliferation of religious sharing, which is an element of strong continuity over the centuries. Even though these two lines of research have often proceeded separately, it should be remarked that there has been considerable mutual acquaintance, as evidenced by the numerous cross-references between books and articles. The task now is to strengthen this cross-fertilisation by emphasising and making more explicit the interdisciplinarity of this field of studies.[6]

Comparison

A comparative approach has proved crucial in establishing a field of studies on shared sacred spaces. Only in this way, by establishing comparative grids, was it possible to extract a general perspective going beyond the local character of many of these phenomena. In short, through their serial arrangement, the dispersed forms of interfaith sharing no longer appeared as small idiosyncrasies or oddities, but as manifestations of far more general trends.

The Mediterranean has probably been the most suitable area for such a comparative exercise. This is amply justified by the geographical and historical characteristics of this emblematic region. Here, the presence of the monotheistic religions was particularly precocious and compact, generating a strong tendency towards exclusivism and purism. At the same time, peoples with different religions have lived in close contact over millennia, leading to frequent influences, borrowings and interactions. It is this paradoxical mixture that gives this region its particular form. This does not mean, however, that there are no other significant comparative horizons, involving for example smaller parts of the Mediterranean region, such as the Balkans.[7]

Similar phenomena certainly are present in other parts of the world and have been the subject of various studies that have documented them well—even if these works have perhaps been less visible, since they are more dispersed and less specialised than the research on shared shrines in the Mediterranean. Extending the comparison, for example to the Indian subcontinent, for which there is an established research tradition on this topic,[8] could allow us to better understand the similarities and differences with respect to the situations observed in the Mediterranean. A more comprehensive comparison[9] could also allow us to reach a more general

"Shared Sacred Space in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean," edited by Jessica Tearney-Pearce and Jan Vandeburie, special issue of *Al-Masāq* 34, no. 2 (2022).

6
See the interesting recent discussion by Benjamin Kedar, "Studying the 'Shared Sacred Spaces' of the Medieval Levant: Where Historians May Meet Anthropologists," *Al-Masāq* 34, no. 2 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1080/09503110.2021.2015934. A useful review of anthropological and historical works is presented in Jessica Tearney-Pearce and Jan Vandeburie, "Sharing Sacred Space in the Medieval Mediterranean: Introduction," *Al-Masāq* 34, no. 2 (2022): 103–10, https://doi.org/10.1080/09503110.2022.2094584.

7
Religion and Boundaries. Studies from the Balkans, Eastern Europe and Turkey, ed. Galia Valtchinova (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2010); Evelyn Reuter, *Die Mehrdeutigkeit geteilter religiöser Orte: Eine ethnographische Fallstudie zum Kloster Sveti Naum in Ohrid (Mazedonien)* (Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, 2021).

8
See, for example, Jackie Assayag, *Au confluent de deux rivières. Musulmans et hindous dans le sud de l'Inde*, (Paris: Presses de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient 1995); *Altérité et identité. Islam et christianisme en Inde* eds. Jackie Assayag and Gilles Tarabout (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 1997); Rohan Bastin, *The Domain of Constant Excess: Plural Worship at the Munnesvaram Temple in Sri Lanka* (New York: Berghahn, 2002); Anna Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred. Practicing Pluralism in Muslim North India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Michel Boivin, "Le pèlerinage de Sehwân Sharif, Sindh (Pakistan): territoires, protagonistes et rituels," in *Les pèlerinages au Moyen-Orient: espaces publics, espaces du public*, eds. Sylvia Chiffoleau and Anna Madoeuf (Institut Français du Proche-Orient: Damas, 2005), 311–45; *Inter-religious Practices and Saint Veneration in the Muslim World. Khidr/Khizr from the Middle East to South Asia*, eds. Michel Boivin and Manoël Pénicaud (London and New York: Routledge, 2023); David Mosse, "Catholic Saints and the Hindu Village Pantheon in Rural Tamil Nadu, India," *Man*, NS 29, no. 2 (1994): 301–32, https://doi.org/10.2307/2804476; Brigitte Sebastia, *Les rondes de Saint Antoine. Culte, affliction et possession en Inde du Sud* (Montreuil: Aux lieux d'être, 2007); Yoginder Sikand, *Sacred Spaces: Exploring Traditions of Shared Faith in India* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2003); Paul Younger, "Velankanni Calling: Hindu Patterns of Pilgrimage at a Christian Shrine," in *Sacred Journeys. The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, ed. Allan Morinis (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992), 89–99.

9
For some attempts in this direction, see *Sharing the Sacra*, ed. Bowman; *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*, ed. Cormack; *Pilgrimages and Ambiguity*, eds. Zarcone and Hobart. See also Dionigi Albera, "La mixité religieuse dans les pèlerinages. Esquisse d'une analyse comparative," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 155 (2011): 109–29, https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.23323.

10

In some ways, the French term "partage" has a wider spectrum of meanings than its English counterpart, as it can also express the idea of division, even though the sense of sharing and participation prevails.

11

Benjamin Z. Kedar, "Convergences of Oriental Christian, Muslim, and Frankish Worshippers: The Case of Saydnaya," in *De Sion exibit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem: Essays on Medieval Law, Liturgy and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder*, ed. Yitzhak Hen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 59–69. These perspectives have been further elaborated by Ora Limor, "Sharing Sacred Space: Holy Places in Jerusalem between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam," in *In laudem Hierosolymitani: Studies in Crusades and Medieval Culture in Honour of Benjamin Z. Kedar*, eds. Iris Shagrir, Ronnie Ellenblum and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 219–32. Recently, Benjamin Kedar has further refined this typology, see "Studying the 'Shared Sacred Spaces' of the Medieval Levant."

12

Robert Hayden, "Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religions Sites in South Asia and Balkans," *Current Anthropology* 43:2 (2002): 205-31, https://doi.org/10.1086/338303. However, in the excellent studies that Hayden and his collaborators produced in the following years, they seemed to favour above all the political and spatial dimensions, as well as the component of antagonism and competition. See, for example, Robert Hayden *et al.*, "The Byzantine Mosque at Trilye: A Processual Analysis of Dominance, Sharing, Transformation and Tolerance," *History & Anthropology* 22, no. 1 (2011): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2011.546851; Robert Hayden and Timothy Walker, "Intersecting Religioscapes: A Comparative Approach to Trajectories of Change, Scale, and Competitive Sharing of Religious Spaces," *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 2 (2013): 399–426, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lft009; Hayden *et al.*, *Antagonistic Tolerance*.

13

Rohan Bastin, *The Domain of Constant Excess*; op. cit; Ron E. Hassner, " 'To Halve and to Hold': Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility," *Security Studies* 12, no. 4 (2003): 1–33, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410390447617; Yitzhak Reiter, *Contested Holy Places in Israel–Palestine: Sharing and Conflict Resolution* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

14

See Dionigi Albera, "Pèlerinages mixtes et sanctuaires 'ambigus' en Méditerranée," in *Les pèlerinages au Maghreb et au Moyen-Orient*, eds. Sylvia Chiffoleau and Anna Madœuf (Beirut: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2005), 347–78; idem, "La mixité religieuse dans les pèlerinages. Esquisse d'une analyse comparative," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 155 (2011): 109–29, https://doi.org/10.4000/assr.23323.

understanding of these phenomena, including the construction and preservation of religious identity, its coherence, and the compactness of religious groups.

Concepts

As we have remarked, the birth of this new field has been facilitated by the compilation of a series of studies under the banner of "sharing," in a series of books and other initiatives that have had an impact outside the academic world. However, the use of this category also poses some problems. In several cases, scholars adopt the term "sharing" somewhat reluctantly, for lack of a better term, in the awareness that if this label works to delimit a field of study, it suffers from a certain inaccuracy from an analytical point of view. The idea of sharing risks over-emphasising the commonalities and peaceful understanding between the faithful of the different religions involved in this phenomenon. It may also obscure the divisions, disagreements, and conflicts that often accompany the sociology of these frontier spaces.[10] The term "sharing" can be applied to a wide range of aspects: the sacred space, its control by religious groups, the practices that are carried out there, and the beliefs that accompany them. In short, this term is endowed with a wealth of references; this is also the reason for its relative inaccuracy. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that this category is certainly not the only one with flaws. Almost every concept that has been devised to describe phenomena of interreligious convergence and superimposition is exposed to some sort of criticism. Take, for example, the term "syncretism": it certainly has a long history behind it, but is fraught with possible misunderstandings, which are particularly evident in cases of joint attendance of sanctuaries. In many instances, especially in the Mediterranean, interreligious frequentations do not in fact generate a new syncretic synthesis; instead, we are generally witnessing a simple juxtaposition of ritual or religious registers, without any form of fusion.

In turn, the notion of "tolerance," with its strong philosophical imprint, often appears far removed from the concrete forms of interreligious cohabitation in sanctuaries. Not even the idea of "hybridisation" seems to be a possible panacea, when one considers its roots in a biological discourse. And terms like "métissage" and "creolisation," with their Caribbean echoes, are perhaps too loose a dress for the phenomena that interest us here.

For better or worse, the term "sharing," with all its imperfections, is probably destined to remain with us. However, it is important to underpin it with an analytical vocabulary that allows us to better discern and describe the phenomena subsumed under this label. It must be added that there is by no means a lack of explorations in this sense, offering a vast conceptual pool. We will limit ourselves here to a few examples. For medieval times, Benjamin Kedar has proposed a typology of shared cults based on three types of convergence: only in the space, in-egalitarian, and egalitarian.[11] On the anthropological side, Robert Hayden, in an oft-cited article published some twenty years ago, coined two suggestive categories: "antagonist tolerance" and "competitive sharing."[12] These oxymorons lend themselves to capturing the complex and contradictory configurations of shared sanctuaries.[13] The term "mixed" seems to be more neutral than "shared," and indeed has been used as an alternative to designate situations where people of more than one religion attend the same shrine.[14] Some authors have suggested that its use may be seen as a possible solution to

some of the terminological dilemmas just mentioned.[15] In his seminal studies, Frederick Hasluck used the category of "ambiguity" to describe shrines attended by multiple religions. Dionigi Albera has more recently sought to broaden the scope of this notion to encompass a wider set of phenomena of religious sharing.[16] Furthermore, Albera has applied the idea of "polytropy" to the Mediterranean region, borrowing it from the anthropologist Michael Carrithers, who coined this concept from the Greek *poly* (many) and *tropos* (turns) to express the eclecticism of religious life in South Asia, where people may turn to many sources for their spiritual life without dwelling inside the borders of one religious group.[17]

Also worth mentioning is the inspiring work by Jens Kreinath on the concept of "interrituality." Based on his observation of pilgrimage centres in Turkey, this author proposes this notion as a tool that refers to all kinds of ritual relations in shared pilgrimages.[18] This conceptualisation is in line with the idea highlighted by Dionigi Albera and Manoël Pénicaud that religiosity and "interreligiosity" are broader, stronger, and more dynamic than normative and established religions. In other words, interfaith sharing often takes place at the margins and/or in the interstices of the sacred.[19] In line with this conceptual reflection, Dionigi Albera has developed a new analytical distinction between "hetero-rituality" and "poly-rituality" in a recent work.[20] On the one hand, the process of hetero-rituality, characterised above all by a silent and spontaneous cohabitation of ritual practices, concerns the borrowing and sharing described in this thematic issue. Most of the time, this rituality is considered heterodox and often condemned by the religious orthodoxies. On the other hand, poly-rituality is characterised by official events, speeches, and gestures that show tolerance and mutual acceptance. This phenomenon occurs in the frame of contemporary inter-religious dialogue. Numerous recent studies have focused on this new kind of religious space, intentionally created, organised and staged to promote so-called "living together" between the faithful of different religions. Among examples of new shared places of worship,[21] let us mention the "House of One" under construction in Berlin, or interreligious pilgrimages, like the Christian-Muslim pilgrimage of the Seven Sleepers, founded in Brittany in the 1950s.[22]

Cultural Crossings

The sharing of sacred places—to stay with this category, probably still useful if a little imprecise—is certainly not an isolated phenomenon. It cannot be seen as a flower blooming in the desert. On the contrary, it is embedded in a propitious landscape, in a much broader web of relations connecting different and often antagonist cultures and religions. There are therefore obvious bridges to scholars who are interested in these broader cultural crossings in the Mediterranean region.[23] Some areas of research appear strictly contiguous. This is the case, for example, of works exploring the sharing of theological contents between religions,[24] or forms of interreligious coexistence at the local level,[25] or transfer of religious buildings from one religion to another.[26] As for the study of the circulation and adaptation of artistic or cultural motifs, it is incontestably relevant.[27] The issue of conversion also has particular significance, and the studies devoted to renegades and "amphibious" personalities are particularly fascinating, as these personalities develop between multiple religious identities.[28]

The topic of shared sacred shrines, moreover, may stimulate a

15
Glenn Bowman, "Orthodox-Muslim Interactions at 'Mixed Shrines' in Macedonia," in *Eastern Christians in Anthropological Perspective*, eds. Chris Hann and Hermann Goltz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 195–219; Robert M. Hayden, "Shared Space, or Mixed?" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Space*, ed. Jeanne Halgren Kilde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 71–84.

16
Dionigi Albera, "Toward a Reappraisal of Ambiguity: In the Footsteps of Frederick W. Hasluck," in *Pilgrimages and Ambiguity: Sharing the Sacred*, eds Thierry Zarcone and Angela Hobart (London: Kingston Publishing, 2017), 23–43.

17
Michael Carrithers, "On Polytropy: Or the Natural Condition of Spiritual Cosmopolitanism in India: The Digambar Jain Case," *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 4 (2000): 831–61, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00003991; Dionigi Albera, "Digressions on Polytropy: An Exploration of Religious Eclecticism in Eurasia," *Entangled Religions* 9, no. 5 (2019): 139–64, https://doi.org/10.13154/er.v9.2019.139-164.

18
Jens Kreinath, "Interrituality as a New Approach for Studying Interreligious Relations and Ritual Dynamics at Shared Pilgrimage Sites in Hatay, Turkey," *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 1, no. 2 (2017): 257–84, https://doi.org/10.1558/isit.33742.

19
Dionigi Albera and Manoël Pénicaud, "Coexistences, Interférences, Interstices," in *Coexistences. Lieux saints partagés en Europe et en Méditerranée*, eds. Dionigi Albera and Manoël Pénicaud (Arles: Actes Sud-MNHI, 2017), 16–23.

20
Dionigi Albera, "Ritual Mixing and Inter-rituality at Marian shrines," in *Crossing Ritual Borders: Opportunities, Limits, and Obstacles*, ed. Marianne Moyaert (New York: Palgrave, 2019), 137–54.

21
See, for instance, *Geographies of Encounter: The Making and Unmaking of Multi-Religious Spaces*, ed. Marian Burchardt and Maria Chiara Giorda (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); *Houses of Religions: Visions, Formats and Experiences*, ed. Martin Rötting (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2021).

22
Marian Burchardt, "Multi-Religious Places by Design: Space, Materiality, and Media in Berlin's House of One," in Geographies of Encounter, 231-252; Manoël Pénicaud, *Le réveil des Sept Dormants. Un pèlerinage isla-mo-chrétien en Bretagne* (Paris: Cerf, 2016).

23
For an overview of this enormous field of research, see, for example, Eric R. Dursteler, "On Bazaars and Battlefields: Recent Scholarship on Mediterranean Cultural Contacts," *Journal of Early Modern History* 15 (2011): 413-34, https://doi.org/10.1163/157006511X590730; Molly Greene, "The Mediterranean Sea," in *Oceanic Histories*, eds.

David Armitage, Alison Bashford and Sujit Sivasundaram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 134–55.

24

For recent publications in this vast field, see *Abraham's Family: A Network of Meaning in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Lukas Bormann (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018); *Interpreting Scriptures in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Overlapping Inquiries*, eds. Mordechai Z. Cohen and Adele Berlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); *Minorities in Contact in the Medieval Mediterranean*, eds. Clara Almagro Vidal, Jessica Tearney-Pearce and Luke Yarbrough (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020).

25

Molly Greene, *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); *Christians, Muslims and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Cultural Change*, eds. Mark D. Meyerson and Edward D. English (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000); Eric Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

26

The Conversion of Spaces and Places of Worship in Anatolia: International Conference 10-11 April 2021, eds. Vanessa R. de Obaldía und Doğan Bermek (Istanbul: Milli Basimnve Yayin, 2021). Several contributions of Elizabeth Key Fowden are relevant. See for example "The Parthenon Mosque, King Solomon and the Greek Sages," in *Ottoman Athens: Archeology, Topography, History*, eds. Maria Georgopoulou and Konstantinos Thanasakis (Athens: The Gennadius Library and Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation, 2019), 67–95; idem, "Shrines and Banners: Paleo-Muslims and their Material Inheritance," in *Encompassing the Sacred in Islamic Art and Architecture*, eds. Lorenz Korn and Çiğdem İvren (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2020), 5–23.

27

Pamela Berger, "Jewish-Muslim Veneration at Pilgrimage Places in the Holy Land," *Religion and the Arts* 15 (2011): 1-60, https://doi.org/10.1163/156852911X547466; Alexandra Cuffel, "'Henceforward All Generations Will Call Me Blessed': Medieval Christian Tales of Non-Christian Marian Veneration", *Mediterranean Studies* 12 (2003): 37–60; Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval 'Hindu-Muslim' Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Sara Kuehn, *The Dragon in Medieval East Christian and Islamic Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

28

Bartolomé Bennassar and Lucile Bennassar, *Les chrétiens d'Allah: l'histoire extraordinaire des renégats, XVIe-XVIIe siècles* (Paris: Perrin, 1989); Lucetta Scaraffia, *Rinnegati: Per una storia dell'identità occidentale* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1993); Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiggers, *A Man of Three Worlds: Samuel Pallache, a Moroccan Jew in Catholic and Protestant Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Eric Dursteler, *Renegade Women; Gender, Identity*

conversation with works on seemingly more distant topics, such as those that have highlighted the complexity of trade networks,[29] the role of intermediaries and the diffusion of a lingua franca.[30] Overall, multiple forms of interaction and exchange emerge and the borders within the Mediterranean region sometimes dissolve into spaces of transition.

Holy Sites in the Mediterranean: Sharing and Division

This special issue has its initial roots in an international conference at the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations (Mucem) in Marseille on 3–5 June 2015. This event, organised by the Mucem, Idemec (Institute of Mediterranean European and Comparative Ethnology), and IMéRA (Institute of Advanced Studies, Aix-Marseille University), took place in parallel with the *Shared Sacred Sites* exhibition (*Lieux saints partagés*) (29 April–31 August 2015) curated by Dionigi Albera, Manoël Pénicaud and Isabelle Marquette.[31] The conference provided an opportunity to take stock of current research in this field, which was rapidly expanding on an international level. And since then, the conference papers that are presented in the first part of this issue have been significantly revised and enriched.

The authors aim to contribute to the ongoing conversation on the formation, adaptation, and negotiation of shared and contested sacred places and devotional practices and to provide a more nuanced picture of the multiplicity of interfaith crossings and their historical transformations. For this purpose, this special first issue of *Religiographies* brings together articles that approach the subject from different angles and disciplinary backgrounds combining (art) history/archaeology, Islamic Studies and anthropology. Paying attention to the wider cultural interminglings, this interdisciplinary perspective opens up new theoretical considerations and points to new research directions on multi-faith sacred centres.

Part I of *Holy Sites in the Mediterranean: Sharing and Division* consists of six chronologically arranged contributions that highlight different synchronic and diachronic approaches to religious sharing, mixing, and crossing in the wider Mediterranean. It opens with two articles investigating the religious crossings of Christian and early Muslim sacred sites. Both illustrate the epistemological problems of using written documents as well as preserved monuments, material remains and archaeological sites. In "Material Looting, New Buildings, and Textual Strategies: Christians and Early Muslims in Lydda and Jerusalem," Mattia Guidetti (University of Bologna) alerts us to the contradictory modalities of early Muslims approaches to the Christian sacred and symbolic landscape. Using the sanctuary of Saint George in Lydda and the Christian complex of buildings east of the Jerusalem city walls as case studies, Guidetti shows that while Muslims continued to pay homage to the great Christian shrines that had attracted pilgrims since late antiquity, they also began to create a new hierarchy in the sacred landscape, a new order with separate Muslim sites as the main attraction. The article that follows, by Susana Calvo Capilla (Complutense University, Madrid), "Early Religious Architecture in al-Andalus and its Islamic Context: Some Reflections," shifts the focus from the Syro-Palestinian region to al-Andalus. Calvo Capilla examines the sparse and ambiguous written sources, surviving monuments, and material remains to gain astounding insights into the religious spaces of the first Islamised communities in the wake of the Arabisation and the Islamisation in the Iberian Peninsula. Her findings

led her to the hypothesis that because neither doctrine nor liturgy were clearly defined, there were not yet any sacred spaces that would make them recognisable as such today. It was not until the "(re)construction" of the mosques in the capitals of Damascus, Jerusalem, Medina and Cairo during the time of the sixth Umayyad caliph al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 705–715) in the first two decades of the 8th century that a permanent model of a place of worship emerged.

The third and fourth articles are related to the broader study of cultural transfers and of circulations of religious beliefs and devotional practices, which are interwoven with the theme of shared sacred centres. The article by Thierry Zarcone (GSRL, CNRS, Paris), "The Seven Sleepers between Christianity and Islam: From Portraits to Talismans," elucidates the unique role played in Islamic saint veneration by the "Companions of the Cave" (*Ashāb al-Kahf*), known in Christianity as the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. Zarcone's study provides telling insight into the Christian and Muslim traditions of depicting images of these saints which take on a prophylactic quality and become talismans. Interestingly, the main difference between Christian and Muslim veneration of the Seven Sleepers and their (talismanic) representation is embodied by the dog Qitmīr who, in the Islamic (but not in the Christian) tradition, occupies a key position. In "Mixed Worship: The Double Cult of Sarı Saltuk and St. Nicholas in the Balkans," Sara Kuehn (University of Vienna) next shifts the focus to the process of cultural intermingling, acts of translating, and mixed worship of two "saints," Saltuk and Nicholas. In five case studies of religio-cultural "accommodation," Kuehn explores the "interactions" and attendant double identity of the two saints from the perspective of mixed places of worship and the interminglings between the Christians and Muslim worlds taking place within these sites in the *longue durée*.

The last two contributions propose an anthropological approach based on ethnographic research devoted to contemporary phenomena. In the fift article, "Miracles and Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Lebanon. The Proof is in the Eyes of the Other," Emma Aubin-Boltanski (CéSOR, CNRS, Paris) describes the emergence of a Christian shared shrine after a Muslim child witnessed a miracle of the Virgin Mary in a Maronite church in Lebanon in 2006. In the context of shared rituals and experiences, Aubin-Boltanski also notes a "dialogue" of natural elements (such as water, soil, stones and trees), emphasised by both Christians and Muslims, which acts as a catalyst for interfaith experiences that is crucial for promoting sustainable peace in the region. In the last article, "A Paradoxical Pilgrimage. The Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba (Tunisia)," Dionigi Albera and Manoël Pénicaud (Idemec, CNRS, Aix-Marseille University) explore the local and global mechanism of the Jewish pilgrimage at the Ghriba synagogue, a dynamic sacred site of interreligious intermingling attended in particular by Muslim women. Albera and Pénicaud explore the potential of the concept of "paradox" (from *para-* "contrary to" and *doxa* "opinion"), which bears two meanings, namely "a tenet contrary to received opinion" or "one (such as a person, situation or action) having seemingly contradictory qualities or phases." Both notions encapsulate crucial aspects of the configurations observable in the often contradictory components at work in shared sacred places. In their study of the annual pilgrimage to the Ghriba synagogue, they focus primarily on the second dimension of the idea of paradox. This conceptualisation, the authors stipulate, could serve as a new analytical tool capable in some ways of

and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranea (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

29
Merchants in the Ottoman Empire, eds. Suraiya Faroqhi and Gilles Veinstein (Paris: Peeters, 2008); Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

30
Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Jocelyne Dakhlia, *Lingua franca: histoire d'une langue métisse en Méditerranée* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2008).

31
After the Mucem exhibition, revisited versions of the exhibition were presented at the *Bardo Museum* in Tunis (2016); the *Museum of Photography,* the *Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art* and *Yeni Cami* in Thessaloniki (2017); the *Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration* in Paris (2017–2018); the *Dar El Bacha-Musée des Confluences* in Marrakesh (2017–2018); the *New York Public Library*, the *City University of New York* (James Gallery) and the *Morgan Library and Museum* (2018); the Depo in Istanbul (2019) and CerModern in Ankara (2021); and the École française de Rome (2022-2023). On these exhibitions, see the article "Writing in Three Dimensions: Heterographies of Shared Sacred Sites" by Dionigi Albera and Manoël Pénicaud at the end of this first issue of *Religiographies*.

replacing more traditional tools such as syncretism or métissage, and could prove useful in defining important elements, along with other concepts, such as ambiguity or polytropy.[32]

The second part of this special issue (*Heterographies*) consists of essays that survey a different way of approaching shared holy spaces than the classical academic articles in the first part. This does not mean that the contributions presented there are non-academic, but they explore other ways of writing. As we understand it, the neologism "heterography" refers to all modes of writing—in the broadest sense—that differ from (or are complementary to) traditional text writing.[33] This broad notion can thus correspond to, among other things, visual, acoustic, musical, physical or digital writings. Social scientists increasingly use these alternative modes of "writing" in their own research practices (photos, films, 3D reconstructions, GIS storymaps, exhibitions, etc.). This is by no means an entirely new trend, but it is important to note the multiplication of these forms that render and narrate research and that are generally aimed at a wider audience than purely academic writing. This generates a "neighbourhood" with various contemporary forms of artistic expression, which in turn gravitate toward the approach of the social sciences. On the whole, a new field of collaboration and discussion with artists is opening up. It provides a space for in-depth conversations about artistic creations and innovations that have important humanitarian and/or social impacts.

In "Rachid Koraïchi's Migratory Aesthetics" Sara Kuehn (University of Vienna) provides insight into one of the most important projects of the world-renowned French-Algerian artist, the newly opened "Le Jardin d'Afrique" / "The Garden of Africa" in southern Tunisia, a paradisical garden cemetery created to honour and commemorate the increasing number of refugees and migrants who have drowned crossing the Mediterranean Sea while attempting to reach asylum in Europe. Finally, the article "Writing in Three Dimensions. Heterographies of Shared Sacred Sites," by Dionigi Albera and Manoël Pénicaud (Idemec, CNRS, Aix-Marseille University), comes full circle by describing their dual experience as researchers and curators of the *Lieux saints partagés* / *Shared Sacred Sites* exhibition, which in its first venue was accompanied by the 2015 conference at the Mucem that helped initiate this thematic issue.

Column Transfers, New Buildings, and Textual Strategies: Christians and Muslims in Early Medieval Lydda and Jerusalem

Mattia Guidetti

Mattia Guidetti
University of Bologna
mattia.guidetti3@unibo.it

Abstract

In the Syro-Palestinian region, Muslims approached the Christian sacred landscape in apparently contradictory modalities. On the one hand, they paid reverence to the great sanctuaries that had attracted pilgrims since late antiquity. On the other hand, they began to strive to create a new hierarchy in the sacred landscape, a new order with separate Muslim sites as the main focus of attraction. This reconfiguration was a long process that involved different strategies, which included the tentative transfer of marble columns, the foundation of new sacred buildings, and the circulation of textual traditions praising Muslim sacred history. This article focuses on the case studies of the Sanctuary of St. George in Lydda and the complex of Christian buildings located east of the city walls of Jerusalem.

1

Mark N. Swanson, "Peter of Bayt Ra's," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History (600-900)*, ed. David Richard Thomas, Barbara Roggema, Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 902-906.

2

Eutychius of Alexandria, *The Book of Demonstration*, 2 vols, trans. W. Montgomery Watt (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1960), vol. 1, 134-62; vol. 2, 166-207.

3

Basema Hamarneh, *Topografia cristiana ed insediamenti rurali nel territorio dell'odierna Giordania nelle epoche bizantina ed omayyade V-IX sec.* (Città del Vaticano: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana, 2003); Pierre-Louis Gatier, "Inscriptions grecques, mosaiques et églises des debuts de l'époque islamique au Proche-Orient (VIIe-VIIIe siècles)," in *Le Proche-Orient de Justinien aux Abbassides: peuplement et dynamiques spatiales*, ed. Antoine Borrut, Muriel Debié, Arietta Papaconstantinou, Dominique Pieri, and Jean-Pierre Sodini, Jean-Pierre (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 7-28; regarding the city of Damascus and its environs only, see Joseph Nasrallah, "Damas et la Damascène: leur églises à l'époque byzantine," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 34-35 (1984-85): 37-58; 264-76.

4

Gérard Troupeau, "Les couvents chrétiens dans la littérature arabe," *La nouvelle revue du Caire* 1 (1975): 265-79.

Introduction

The sacred landscape inherited and inhabited by Muslims in the Syro-Palestinian region was dominated by Christian places of worship, consisting of both sanctuaries that attracted pilgrims and churches that served the local communities. Most ecclesiastical structures were built during late antiquity, in some cases at the direction of imperial authorities and in some other cases thanks to local donors. They were the focus of communities' life and the expression of the magnificence of both local and more distant authorities, offering the best building techniques and the most precious decoration possible. This material aspect, something that was visible and could be experienced by Muslims as well, is a key factor in a full understanding of religious life under the Islamic rule of the early medieval period. Sanctuaries were often built around a chamber containing relics of Christian saints, who, even after having died, maintained their presence, shedding their aura on the sacred place and on pilgrims who paid a visit to them. Peter of Bayt Rās, a ninth-century Melkite churchman from Capitolias (Bayt Rās) in the Transjordan,[1] counts in the Syrian region forty holy places devoted to the memory of Christ ("places of His sanctification") and the commemoration of the prophets. In his text, these are presented as being "in the hands of those who believe in Christ" and they served as pilgrimage destinations in his day.[2] To this list we can add, on the evidence of archaeological remains and written sources, dozens of sanctuaries commemorating saints and martyrs.[3] Furthermore, both in towns and outside towns there were monasteries active during the early medieval period, as attested by both material and written evidence.[4]

The early Islamic landscape, however, was also dotted with living Christian holy persons. There was the case, for instance, of the presence of a monk confined in one room within the premises of the church

destroyed in 705/6 by al-Walīd I in Damascus. The destruction made room for the largest and most lavishly decorated mosque of the time in the capital of the caliphate.[5] Several charismatic Christian figures are attested elsewhere in early Islamic Syria. In the life of St. Stephen Sabaita (725–794), the Melkite saint is said to have received Muslim pilgrims as well, and the experience of his healing power to have converted a Muslim to Christianity.[6] Other places in which stylites isolated themselves from the mundane world attracted Muslim believers as well as Christian ones.[7]

Lydda

It is within this context that the importance of the sanctuary of Lydda (Ludd) devoted to St. George should be appreciated. The church of St. George in Lydda may have existed since the fourth century, but from the sixth century it appears with increasing frequency in the itineraries of pilgrims. It marked the grave of St. George, who was a soldier-saint, a native of Lydda, martyred under Diocletian at the beginning of the fourth century. If the involvement of Emperor Justinian I (525–565) in its reconstruction or embellishment is not mentioned in any primary source, "what is certain is that by the time that Lydda fell to the Muslim Arabs under ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ in 636, an impressive basilica stood over the martyr's grave."[8] The sanctuary remained the focus of a yearly festival, which consisted of religious celebrations for the calendar day dedicated to St. George and a market. Market festivities going on during religious celebrations should not be overlooked. The calendar year and the rotation of the seasons were punctuated by a series of religious festivities related to Christian saints' days. Many of them survived the Arab-Islamic conquest to be eventually paired with Muslim ones over time.[9] The market organized at the sanctuary of St. George in Lydda was attended by Muslims too. Arabic-Islamic sources even report that the Abbasid caliph al-Mahdī paid a visit to the church, and praised the beauty of the building.[10] This should not be surprising, as the duties of caliphs included constant interaction with Christian communities and with minorities in general. However, in the case of Lydda, there was more than a ruler's routine management of communal relations.

The sanctuary was a place where several miracles were said to have occurred, and some of them involved material culture and affected the relations with Muslims. Among the miracles attributed to St. George was the wondrous transportation of a column from the quarry to the church. The column was a beautiful artefact donated for the construction of the sanctuary by a devotee. A collection of miracles attributed to saints reports that an inscription was miraculously engraved on the column by St. George himself.[11] Another column gained popularity because it was tied to a wheel, the instrument of the saint's martyrdom, and thus evoked the body of the saint himself. The materiality of the column was concerned in some miracles: the column bled for three hours on the saint's feast day, while a crack in the shaft reportedly gave signs to pilgrims entering the church by testing their faith.[12] The eighth-century remarks by the monk Epiphanius emphasize the fact that the column stood for the saint. It is probably this very same column that Adomnán describes in the seventh century in his *Loca sancta*.[13] The column, according to Adomnán, had a portrait of St. George engraved on it and an impression in the shape of ten fingers related to a miracle performed by the saint.

It is also worth recalling that among the wonders attributed to St. George, and, more specifically, related to the Palestinian sanctuary of St.

5

Nancy Khalek, *Damascus After the Islamic Conquest. Text and Image in Early Islam* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 47-50.

6

Leontius of Damascus, *The Life of Stephen of Mar Sabas*, ed. and transl. J.C. Lamoreaux (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 81-3.

7

Anonymous Chronicle of 1234, trans. in Andrew Palmer, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 145. On the fortunes and demise of stylite practices after the Islamic conquest, see Simon Pierre, "Le stylite (esṭ sūnōrō) et sa ṣawmaʿa face aux milieux cléricaux islamiques et miaphysites (ier–iie/viie–viiie siècles)," *Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā* 28 (2020): 174-226 and more specifically on the tower of Umm al-Rasas: Basema Hamerneh: "On the Edge of Heaven: The Stylite Tower of Umm er-Rasas in the Byzantine and Early Islamic Period" (forthcoming).

8

Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus: Volume 2, L-Z* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 10.

9

al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsim fī maʿrifat al-aqālim*, ed. M.J. De Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 182-83. Trading fairs organized at religious sanctuaries before and after the Islamic conquest were studied by André Binggeli: "Foires et pèlerinages sur la route du Hajj. À propos se quelques sanctuaires chrétiens et musulmans dans le sud du Bilad al-Šam d'après le Kitab al-azmina d'Ibn Masawayh (9e s.)," *ARAM*, 18-19 (2006-2007): 559-82; "Annual fairs, regional networks, and trade routes in Syria, sixth-tenth centuries," in *Trade and Markets in Byzantium*, ed. Cécile Morrisson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 281-96. Regarding the persistence of pre-Islamic rites related to the cycle of the solar year into the Mamluk period, see Yehoshua Frenkel, "Popular Culture (Islam, Early and Middle Periods)," *Religion Compass* 2.2 (2008): 195-225.

10

al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsim*, 176; Yāqūt al-Hamawī, *Kitāb muʿjam al-buldān*, 6 vols, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Leipzig: In Commission bei F.A. Brockhaus, 1866-73), v. "Ludd."

11

Saint Thècle, Saints Côme et Damien, Saints Cyr et Jean, Saint Georges, transl. A.-J. Festugière (Paris: Éd. Picard, 1971), 273-75.

12

In the same column there is a crack in the marble which gives signs; if you tell the truth you can go through without hindrance, and without difficulty, but if you do not tell the truth you cannot go through. Cf. Epiphanius, *The Holy City and the Holy Places*, trans. in J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades* (Oxford, UK: Oxbow Books, 2002), 210.

13

Adomnán, *The Holy Places*, trans. in Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 203.

14

Saint Thècle, Saints Côme et Damien, Saints Cyr et Jean, Saint Georges, 267-272; 275-276; 294-310.

15

Sidney Griffith, "Jews and Muslims in Christian Syriac and Arabic Texts of the Ninth Century," *Jewish History* 3, n. 1 (1988): 76-80; Sidney Griffith "Crosses, Icons and the Image of Christ in Edessa: The Place of Iconophobia in the Christian-Muslim Controversies of Early Islamic Times," in *Transformations of Late Antiquity: Essays for Peter Brown*, ed. Philip Rousseau (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 63-84.

16

al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 159.

17

Gülru Necipoğlu, "Challenging the Past: Sinan and the Competitive Discourse of Early Modern Islamic Architecture," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993): 169.

18

Al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-wuzarā' wa-l-kuttāb*, ed. Mustafa al-Saqqa, Ibrahim al-Ibyari and 'Abd al-Hafiz Shalabi (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1980), 48; Yāqūt al-Hamawī, *Kitāb mu'jab al-buldān*, v. "al-Ramla."

19

For the foundation of the city of al-Ramla according to the evidence of architectural remains, archaeological finds and written sources, see: Dominique Sourdel, "La fondation Umayyade d'al-Ramla en Palestine," in *Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des vorderen Orients, Festschrift für Bertold Spuler*, ed. Hans R. Roemer and Albrecht Noth (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 385-397.

20

al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-wuzarā' wa-l-kuttāb*, 48-49.

George in Lydda, there were stories of Muslims being converted by the divine powers of the place and the saint's icon.[14] Textual sources reporting early medieval polemics between Christians and Muslims highlight that, while the former praised the miraculous nature of icons, the latter challenged or denied it.[15] The existence of traditions denying the power of icons might suggest that their worship was not limited to Christians and represented a threat to the dogma of the Islamic faith, which was then in the early stage of its formation. The evidence from Lydda and Jerusalem discussed in this chapter shows how columns exemplified another aspect of the ubiquitous veneration of saints during late antiquity and the early medieval period.

The praise of the building articulated by the caliph al-Mahdī was later echoed by al-Muqaddasī. The latter explained the architectural achievements of the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (646–705) and his son al-Walīd (668–715), in Jerusalem and Damascus respectively, in the light of the outstanding architectural context, consisting of monumental churches such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the Church of Saint Sophia in Edessa, and the Church of St. George in Lydda.[16] Al-Muqaddasī applies the "competitive discourse" in order to elucidate the reasons for the extraordinary sums expended by the two Umayyad caliphs in erecting buildings worthy of representing the newly established Islamic regime.[17] The church was therefore replete with miraculous signs embedded in the materiality of its columns, and was widely appreciated by Muslims, who visited it and praised it as an architectural achievement.

It is within this context that a further step in the interaction of Muslims and Christians over the holy locale of the sanctuary of St. George can be fully grasped. Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (674–717), ʿAbd al-Malik's son, was the governor of the province of Palestine before he ascended to the caliph's throne in 715 upon the death of his brother al-Walīd. According to written sources, the decision to make al-Ramla the seat of the governorship followed the failure to obtain a plot of land in the town of Lydda. Sulayman is said to have entrusted his Christian secretary, Ibn Batrik, with the negotiations to obtain a mansion, possibly the bishop's seat, located near the Sanctuary of St. George.[18] The alleged rejection of his request by the local Christian community incited Sulaymān to threaten to raze the church, but a member of his court advised him to model his behaviour instead on the patronage shown by his father and brother. The final decision by Sulaymān was to plan the building of al-Ramla near Lydda and to locate the seat of governorship there.[19]

When it was time to build the great mosque in the provincial capital a similar story occurred again. According to al-Jahshiyārī, the governor tried to transfer some columns from the Christian sanctuary to the mosque. "When Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik decided to build the mosque of al-Ramla, he expressed the desire to have some columns from the Church of St. George [of Lydda] transferred there. He asked the bishop for them and the latter wrote to Byzantium [Bilād al-Rūm]. The answer he received indicated a cave near al-Darwam, where there were still columns of the same type used in the building of the church. The caliph took them, and he built the mosque: so the Church of St. George was saved."[20] Al-Muqaddasī includes in his work a similar anecdote, though with some significant differences. According to the Jerusalemite geographer, it was the caliph Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik (691–743) who requested the columns at the time he decided to add a minaret to the great mosque of al-Ramla. The

site where the columns were allegedly hidden is named al-Baliyya and the columns are described as "thick, tall, and beautiful."[21]

Though not explicitly stated, it is hard not to connect such an interest in the columns in the church of St. George in Lydda to the traditions circulating among Christians linking some of them to the saint himself. This aspect will be explored further in relation to Jerusalem. For the moment, it is worth noticing how the written evidence reveals the appreciation expressed by Muslims for the church of Lydda. Such appreciation was the result of both the practice of attending the church on the occasion of the festival organized for the genethliac of St. George and the attraction that the charisma of St. George's sanctuary exerted on all strata of the population. What emerges from a scrutiny of the sources is the continuity of the church from late antiquity into the early medieval period (namely, from Byzantine rule to Islamic) and the fact that the monumental sanctuary remained a powerful architectural and religious landmark. The two aspects cannot be separated: the religious importance of the church explains the architectural renown and the architectural features helped to strengthen devotional notions.

In the light of the early medieval fortune of the Church, it is worth relating its demise during the medieval period. The building was among those sacked and partially destroyed by the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim (985–1021).[22] Rebuilt under the Crusaders (1099–1187), the sanctuary was eventually looted and destroyed by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (1138–1193). The site was not converted to the Islamic faith but left in ruins. Its construction material – no longer associated with any shared sense of sacredness – was reused for civil engineering projects such as the bridge of Jindas, built by the Mamluk Sultan Baybars (1223–1277) north of Lydda.[23]

Jesus and early Islamic Jerusalem

The text of the Qurʾān includes a specific Christology, to the extent that, starting in the early Islamic period, the profile of a "Muslim Jesus" emerged.[24] The inscription on the interior of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem highlights Jesus as the Word of God and testifies to his centrality for early Islam.[25] It is therefore not surprising that the attendance of Christian churches by Muslims reached its apogee in the Christian sanctuaries commemorating the life of Jesus. The abovementioned Peter of Bayt Rās lists dozens of places related to the sanctification of Christ, stressing their pilgrimage functions. Several were churches in Jerusalem, and some of them attracted Muslims as well. A famous example is the case of the Holy Sepulchre, said to have been visited by the caliph ʿUmar (584–644) shortly after the conquest of Jerusalem (638). Anecdotal as ʿUmar's visit may be, Muslims certainly paid homage to the place commemorating the death of Jesus, and a tiny place of prayer was built in the courtyard of the sanctuary complex.[26] The earliest material evidence for the existence of a Muslim place of prayer there is an inscription dated to the period of Fatimid rule of the city (969–1099). The text refers to a mosque already in existence, ordering that it should be safeguarded and forbidding any person of al-Dhimma (non-Muslim monotheist communities) to enter it.[27]

In Bethlehem material evidence is even scantier than in Jerusalem, but the place commemorating the birth of Jesus was a site that attracted Muslims as well as Christian pilgrims. In Bethlehem, Muslims erected a place of prayer in the vicinity of the Church of the Nativity, as they did in Jerusalem with the Holy Sepulchre. On the one hand, Muslims used to visit

21

al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsim*, 165.

22

Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem*, vol. 2, 9-25; Jennifer Pruitt, "Method in Madness: Recontextualizing the Destruction of Churches in the Fatimid Era," *Muqarnas* 30 (2013): 119-140.

23

Thesaurus d'Épigraphie Islamique, microfiches 2297, 2298 (RCEA, n. 4660, 4661); Charles Clermont-Ganneau, "Notes d'épigraphie et d'histoire arabes. VI. Le pont de Lydda," *Journal Asiatique*, series 8, n. 12 (1888): 305-310; Yehoshua Frenkel, "Baybars and the Sacred Geography of Bilad al-Sham: A Chapter in the Islamization of Syria's Landscape," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 25 (2001): 165.

24

Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Carlos Andrés Segovia, *The Qurʾānic Jesus. A New Interpretation* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019).

25

Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 90-96.

26

Heribert Busse, "The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Church of the Agony, and the Temple. The Reflection of a Christian Belief in Islamic Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9 (1987): 279-89; Heribert Busse, "Die ʿUmar-Moschee im östlichen Atrium der Grabeskirche," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 109 (1993): 73-82.

27

Charles Clermont-Ganneau, *Recueil d'archéologire orientale* (Paris: Éditeur Ernest Leroux, 1896) vol. 2, 308; Max Van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum. Deuxième partie. Syrie du sud. Tome premier. Jerusalem–ville* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1922), 54.

28

Mattia Guidetti, "The Muslim Place of Worship in Bethlehem during the Early Medieval Period," in *Encompassing the Sacred in Islamic Art*, ed. Lorenz Korn and Çiğdem İvren (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2020), 63-77.

29

Suleiman A. Mourad, "Jerusalem in Early Islam. The Making of Muslims' Holy City," in *Routledge Handbook on Jerusalem*, ed. Suleiman A Mourad, Naomi Koltun-Fromm, and Bedross Der Matossian (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 77-89.

and pay homage to the holy site enshrined in the Christian sanctuary. On the other hand, they set up a small place of prayer of their own, probably converting to Muslim worship a minor Christian site located close to the Church of the Nativity. The latter remained in Christian hands.[28]

Back in Jerusalem, the early Muslim development of a nucleus of sanctity with the erection of the Dome of the Rock and the Mosque of al-Aqsa did not preclude Muslims paying homage to Christian complexes.[29] Besides the Holy Sepulchre, the second area of interest was located east of the esplanade built over the remains of the Jewish temple. The area includes locales such as the Garden of Gethsemane, the Valley of Gehenna, and the Mount of Olives, on top of which was the Church of the Ascension (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Virgin's tomb, Mount of Olives, Gethsemane. Photograph © P. Bergheim, between 1860 and 1880. Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, https://www.loc.gov/item/92500668/.

30

Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem Islamic Worship. Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 141-144; Ofer Livne-Kafri, "Jerusalem in Early Islam: The Eschatological Aspect," *Arabica* 53, n. 3 (2006), 382-403; Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 236-40. The identification of the Valley of Jehoshaphat with the place of the Last Judgement also appears in Jewish and Christian eschatological traditions; see, Ora Limor, "Placing an Idea: The Valley of Jehoshaphat in Religious Imagination," in *Between Jerusalem and Europe: Essays in Honour of Bianca Kühnel*, ed. Renana Bartal and Hanna Vorholt (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 283-88.

31

Paul Cobb, "Virtual Sacrality: Making Muslim Syria Sacred Before the Crusades," *Medieval Encounters* 8, n.1 (2002), 35-55; Mourad, "Jerusalem in Early Islam," 84-87.

Early Muslim Figures and Jerusalem

Before mentioning the attraction of Muslims to the Christian sanctuaries located between the eastern wall of the "noble esplanade" (*al-ḥaram al-sharīf*) and the Mount of Olives, it is worth highlighting the Muslim layer of meaning attached to this area. According to the early Islamic eschatological beliefs, the Last Judgment was supposed to take place in Jerusalem. More precisely, *aṣ-ṣirāṭ*, the bridge that, according to the Qurʾān, leads to *as-sāḥira* (the place where humanity will gather on the Last Day), connected the esplanade to the Mount of Olives.[30] In Arabic, these two locales were named Sakhrat Bayt al-Maqdis and the Ṭūr Zaytā, respectively. The works devoted to "the virtues of Jerusalem" (*faḍāʾil al-bayt al-Muqaddas*) collect Muslim traditions on this area of Jerusalem. The *faḍāʾil* were a literary genre that emerged in the early medieval period and became popular in the aftermath of the Crusader period.[31]

Faḍāʾil traditions connect different Muslim figures to this Jerusalemite space: the aforementioned caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb encamped at the Mount of Olives before conquering Jerusalem, while Muḥammad's wife Ṣafiyya bint Ḥuyayy (ca. 610–672), a descendant of a Jewish tribe of Medina, allegedly visited and prayed on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem,

leaving a physical trace (*athar*) of her presence. Traditions also refer to two companions of the Prophet, Shaddād ibn Aws and ʿUbāda ibn al-Ṣāmit (586–655), who were among the first to offer a prayer on the "noble esplanade" (*al-ḥaram al-sharīf*) and were buried in the Bāb al-Raḥma cemetery, a burial ground located along the eastern side of the city walls.[32] The association of early Islamic figures with the area of the Mount of Olives was part of the strategy to Islamize a place that, by then, had acquired strong Christian connotations through the persons of Jesus and Mary. The Muslim figures were, however, an addition to the Christian ones. The Islamic narrative accepted and absorbed the Christian traditions about the Mount of Olives. The *faḍāʾil* text by Ibn Murajjā praises the Mount of Olives first and foremost because it was the place from where Jesus ascended to Heaven and, as such, the best possible site to offer prayer to him.[33]

The Muslim sanctity of the area located east of the wall of the "noble esplanade" was not only added to the Christian holy places and related narratives but depended on it. During late antiquity, three different locales identify the area: the Valley of Jehoshaphat, Gethsemane, and the Mount of Olives. These sites were adorned with many churches, chapels, and shrines, related to the capture and ascension of Jesus, as well as to the places of commemoration of various events of Mary's life, from her burial to her assumption.[34] In the early sixth century, the Mount of Olives alone counted twenty-four Christian sites.[35] The abovementioned Muslim figures authenticated the sanctity of the area for Islam by visiting the Christian sanctuaries that stood in the area.[36] A later (1351) Muslim text presents the contradictory case of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who allegedly first performed two prostrations at the Tomb of Mary but later discouraged others from following his example, purportedly because of the church's location in the Valley of Gehenna.[37] (Fig. 2).

32
For the emergence of commemorative worship of the Companions of the Prophet, including the veneration of physical sites, see: Nancy Khalek, "Medieval Muslim Martyrs to the Plague: Venerating the Companions of Muḥammad in the Jordan Valley," in *Saints and Sacred Matter, The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. Holger Klein and Cynthis Hahn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 83-97.

33
Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍāʾil Bayt al-Maqdis wa-l-Khalīl wa-Faḍāʾil al-Shām*, ed. Ofer Livne-Kafri (Shfaram: Dar al-Mashriq, 1995), n. 67 and 349.

34
Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 305-306; 312; 333-336.

35
Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 335.

36
Sulayman Bashear, "Qibla Musharriqa and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches," *The Muslim World* 81, n. 3/4 (1991), 267-282.

37
Guy Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems. A Description of Syria and the Holy Land from A.D. 650 to 1500* (London: Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1890), 143-44 (I thank Roberta Senatore for directing me to this passage).

Fig. 2. Church of the Ascension. Photograph © Francis Frith, 1862. Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, https://www.loc.gov/item/00652997/.

38
Palmer, *The Seventh Century*, 31.

39
Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy. Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 86-90.

40
Wensinck, A.J. and Hillenbrand, R., "Muṣallā," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 29 June 2021, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0806.

41
Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamadhani, *Mukhtasar kitab al-buldan*, ed. M.J. De Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1885), 101.

42
Hugeburc, "Life of St. Willibald – Extracts," transl. in Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 243-244.

43
Acts, Chapter I: 11.

The disapproval attributed to ʿUmar might have served the later emerging aversion towards Muslim attendance at Christian holy places. In the early period, however, veneration practices were probably different, and, as explained in the case of Lydda, Christian *loca sancta* attracted Muslims as well, without any rigid or strict regulation against this practice.

Regarding the early period, a passage of the "Maronite Chronicle," compiled by a Maronite Christian author living in Syria, probably between 664 and 681, confirms this point.[38] Relating the accession to the caliphate of Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān (603–680) in the year 659/60, the Christian chronicle describes a procession that included a prayer offered at the Holy Sepulchre and another one at the Tomb of Mary. As brilliantly expressed by Andrew Marsham, Muʿāwiya enacted a ritual procession inspired by previous appearances of emperors and rulers in the city of Jerusalem, such as Maurice (539–602) and Heraclius (575–641).[39] The visits of the caliph to the most important Christian holy sites were thus part of the adoption of late antique rituals of accession to power by early Muslim rulers and testify to the shift of imperial rule over Syria and Palestine from Byzantium to Islam.

Sacred Columns in Jerusalem

During the early medieval period, when Muslims started to associate their traditions and venerated figures with this area of Jerusalem, the architectural landscape was largely a Christian one. Writing in the first half of the tenth century, the geographer Ibn al-Faqīh al-Hamadānī (869–941/951) counts only a *muṣallā* for Muslim prayer on top of the Mount of Olives. The *muṣallā* is a vast esplanade serving for open-air collective prayers on the festivity days.[40] Ibn al-Faqīh names it after ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, linking it with the tradition of locating the encampment of ʿUmar before the conquest of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives.[41]

Written in 780 by the nun Hugeburc, the *Life of Willibald* includes an account of the pilgrimage carried out by Saint Willibald, leaving England in the year 720 and sailing from the Syrian coast to Constantinople in the year 726. While in the Holy Land, he visited Jerusalem four times. He made pilgrimages to the Valley of Jehoshaphat and the Tomb of Mary, and then moved up the valley in the direction of the Mount of Olives. He passed by the church at Gethsemane and reached the Church of the Ascension. (Fig. 3, next page).

The latter church is described as roofless, and "against the north and south wall stand two columns, to remind people of the two men who said 'Ye men of Galilee, why gaze ye into the sky?' Anyone who can creep between the wall and the column is freed from his sins."[42] The importance and sacrality of columns in late antique and early medieval Syria have already been mentioned in this article. Here again, two columns, which were presumably placed on the perimeter wall of the ecclesiastical structure, are interpreted as a reminder of the two angelic figures who in the New Testament admonish the apostles who stared at the sky after Jesus' ascension.[43]

Christian tradition concerning columns somehow percolated into Muslim perception of the Church of the Ascension and, more broadly, the entire area located east of the city walls. The traditions reprimanding Muslims who enter Christian sanctuaries in this area of Jerusalem group together the Church of the Ascension, the Tomb of Mary, and the Church

Fig. 3. Tomb of the Virgin and cave of the agony. Photograph by Maison Bonfils, Between 1867 and 1899. Jerusalem, https://www.loc.gov/item/2004669849/.

of Gethsemane. The motives for delegitimizing the Christian churches had two aspects. The first is the connection of these churches with the locale called the Valley of Gehenna, because of the belief that the gate to Hell stood east of the Temple Mount.[44] This identification made it inadvisable for Muslim prayer. The second aspect was the presence of two pillars, those that the Christian traditions locate in the Church of the Ascension and describe as having magic properties. Muslim interpretation identifies them as idols and, subverting their virtues according to the Christian lore, states that the two columns/idols can invalidate the spirit of devotion possessed by the believers once they enter the church.

As investigated by Amikam Elad, the *faḍāʾil* traditions collected by al-Wāsiṭī, in the early eleventh century draw upon earlier material. According to this author, in the late eighth century, reservations about entering these churches started to circulate.[45] The tradition transmitted by the Palestinian Thawr ibn Yazīd (d. 770) alerts Muslims: "Do not come to the Church of Mary or approach the two pillars, for they are idols. Whoever goes to them, his prayers will be as naught . . . Cursed be the Christians . . . they could not find a place in which to build a church except the Valley of Jahannam [Gehenna]."[46] Here the Church of the Ascension is not explicitly mentioned but named "*ʿamūdayn*" (the two columns/pillars),[47] and conflated into the same locale as the Tomb of Mary. A variant of the abovementioned tradition inserts a reference to the Church

[44] Nasser Rabbat, "The Meaning of Umayyad Dome of the Rock," *Muqarnas* 6 (1989), footnote 58.

[45] Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 139.

[46] Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 139-140.

[47] Rabbat, "The Meaning of Umayyad Dome of the Rock," 16.

48

Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 140.

49

Mattia Guidetti, *In the Shadow of the Church. The Building of Mosques in Early Medieval Syria* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 144-157.

50

Mattia Guidetti, "Churches and Mosques. Aesthetics and Transfer of Marble in Early Islam," in *The Aesthetics of Marble from Late Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Dario Gamboni, Gerhard Wolf and Jessica Richardson (Munich: Hirmer Publishers, 2021): 62-75; Finbarr B. Flood, " 'God's Wonder': Marble as Medium and the Natural Image in Mosques and Modernism," *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 23, n. 2 (2016): 168-219; Julia Gonnella, "Columns and Hieroglyphs: Magic Spolia in Medieval Islamic Architecture of Northern Syria," *Muqarnas* 27 (2010), 103-20; Finbarr B. Flood, "Image Against Nature: Spolia as Apotropaia in Byzantium and the Dar al-Islam," *The Medieval History Journal* 9, n. 1 (2006): 143-66.

51

Theophilus of Edessa, *Theophilus of Edessa's Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam*, trans. R. Hoyland (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 187; Theophanes Confessor, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, transl. C. Mango and R. Scott (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1997), 510 (Greek year 6183).

52

The traveller Nāṣir-i Khusraw (1004–1072/1088) refers to a similar (perhaps the same) movement of columns from Syria toward Mecca: Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Safarnāma (Books of Travels)*, ed. and trans. W.M. Thackston (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2001), 94.

53

"Sergius, son of Manṣoūr" is discussed in Ahmad Shboul and Alan Walmsley, "Identity and Self Image in Syria-Palestine in the Transition from Byzantine to Early Islamic Rule: Arabian Christians and Muslims," *Mediterranean Archaeology* 11 (1998), 269.

of Gethsemane and associates the two columns with the church of the Mount of Olives: "Do not come to the Tomb of Mary which is named so after al-Jismaniyya Church, nor go in to the two pillars in the church of the Mount of Olives, for they are both idols and whoever enters there in a spirit of devotion, his act shall be annulled."[48]

It is worth remembering the ambiguous value of marble columns. As already observed in the discussion on Lydda, since late antiquity, columns had sometimes been associated with persons, often saints.[49] Marble had marks and veining patterns that were sometimes identified as signs impressed by "important figures" or even interpreted as figural drawings related to holy figures. It was nature, namely the creative act of God, that produced indentations and veining. Some columns were, therefore, aniconic objects imbued with distinctive properties. These varied from religious associations to magical qualities, to talismanic virtues, to commemorative functions.[50] Their aniconic nature made them acceptable to Muslims. Marble columns represented a successful strategy to incorporate into mosques and religious places objects efficacious in commemorating exceptional persons and marking important spots while avoiding explicitly figural images. Furthermore, the factual and alleged transfer of columns from churches to mosques allowed the connection of the latter to the most sacred churches inherited from late antiquity.

The transfer of columns to mosques created a bridge between Christian holy sites and the new places of worship built by Muslim rulers. The importance of the cluster of Christian holy places in the early Islamic period, for both Christian and Muslim devotion, is somehow reflected in a further tradition involving material culture that paralleled what was discussed above regarding Lydda. The passage deals with a request by the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik to move the "columns of Gethsemane" to the Kaʿba in Mecca: " 'Abd al-Malik gave instructions for the rebuilding of the temple of Mecca and wanted to remove the columns of Gethsemane. Now Sergius, son of Manṣoūr, a good Christian, who was treasurer and stood on close terms with ʿAbd al-Malik, as well as his peer, Patricius surnamed Klausys, who was prominent among the Christians of Palestine, begged him not to do this, but to persuade Justinian, through their supplication, to send other columns instead of those; which, indeed, was done."[51]

The passage comes from the Chronicle of Theophilus of Edessa (d. 785), handed down in Greek by Theophanes Confessor (760–818). It is impossible to assess all the information contained in this quotation.[52] It is more productive to note a few aspects reminiscent of the case in Lydda. Muslims targeted some columns attributed to the "Gethsemane." It is unclear to what building the Chronicle refers, though the passage refers to an area in which renowned churches stood. Within these churches, some columns retained a special status among Christians, a role that did not pass unnoticed among Muslims. The relocation of the columns failed thanks to the negotiation of local Christian authorities, who redirected Muslims elsewhere, saving the precious material and the integrity of the buildings.[53] The failure of the transfer, in both Lydda and Jerusalem, invites a reassessment of the triumphal value of the spoliation of Christian buildings by Muslim rulers. Material spolia were certainly an index of the military overturn of the Byzantine rule in Syria and Palestine, but they also helped to increase the symbolic capital of the new mosques. Through the real and alleged removal of columns from churches to mosques, the latter acquired

(or claimed to do so) the aura of renowned churches piece by piece.[54]

The abovementioned growth of a certain discomfort within Islamic circles with the practice of attending churches complemented the promotion of a network of Islamic religious sites and the circulation of traditions that associated Muslim figures with the area of Jerusalem. The disapproval of praying in churches, for instance, was paralleled by the recommendation to pray at the *miḥrāb Dāwud* (a site commemorating the Prophet David and the Qurʾānic verses III: 21–22).[55] Al-Muqaddasī, writing in the second half of the tenth century, describes a sacred landscape in which Islamic-related sites started to be recognizable and contributed to populating the valley and the hill:

"The Mount of Olives overlooks the Great Mosque from the eastern side of the Valley of Gehenna. On its top, there is a mosque built in commemoration of ʿUmar, who encamped there for a few days before receiving the capitulation of the Holy City. There is also a church on the place from where Christ ascended into heaven and, furthermore, nearby is also a place called *as-sāḥira*, which I have been told on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās will be the site of the resurrection. The ground is white, as blood has never been spilt in this area. The Valley of Gehenna runs from the south-east angle of *al-ḥaram al-sharīf* to the furthest point along the east side. In this valley there are gardens and vineyards, churches, caverns and cells of anchorites, tombs and other remarkable spots, including cultivated fields. In the middle of it there is the church that covers the Tomb of Mary, and just above it, overlooking the Valley, are many tombs, among which are those of Shaddād ibn Aws and ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit."[56]

The area was replete with Christian structures, but Muslims had succeeded in making themselves visible in the sacred landscape of Jerusalem. Confronted with the majesty of Christian buildings and the attendance of early Muslims (some of them converted from Christianity) at Christian holy sites, Muslim authorities developed different strategies. They built Islamic places of worship as magnificent as late antique buildings and circulated traditions about early Islamic figures that, without negating the validity of Christian narratives, offered a Muslim explanation of the holiness of some sites. At the same time, they discouraged some religious practices that breached Islamic idiosyncrasies and allegedly moved columns from churches to mosques to link the latter to the former. It was a multifaceted process, consisting of both material and rhetorical choices, aimed at establishing the primacy of the new mosques promoted by the new rulers and at redirecting veneration practices to Muslim buildings.

The Medieval Period

Despite being beyond the scope of this chapter, a few lines devoted to the modifications of the abovementioned buildings in the medieval period are useful to demonstrate the profound changes in the area. As elsewhere in the Syro-Palestinian region, for instance in Lydda, the Crusader period and its aftermath reconfigured Jerusalemite sacred landscape. The Tomb of Mary and the Church of the Ascension were heavily reconstructed, to the extent that no trace was left of the early Christian foundations. The *Commemoratorium*, an early ninth-century memorandum of the churches and their personnel in the Holy Land ordered by Charlemagne and made possible by his good diplomatic relations with the Abbasids, states that the upper church of the Tomb of Mary was in ruins because of an earthquake.[57] Under Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (1137–1193), the

54
Günter Bandmann, *Early Medieval Architecture as a Bearer of Meaning*, trans. K. Wallis, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 146-147 (Mittelaltlicher Architektur als Bedeutungsträger, Berlin: Gebrüder Mann Verlag, 1951).

55
Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, 131-134.

56
al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsim*, 171-72.

57
Michael McCormick, *Charlemagne's Survey of the Holy Land. Wealth, Personnel, and Buildings of a Mediterranean Church between Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2011), 203; cfr. Bernard the Monk, *A Journey to the Holy Places and Babylon*, trans. in Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 266-267.

58

Augustine Arce, "Culte islamique au Tombeau de la Vierge," in *Atti del Congresso Assunzionistico Orientale* (Gerusalemme: Tipografia dei Francescani, 1951), 177-193.

59

Mariëtte Verhoeven, "Jerusalem as Palimpsest. The Architectural Footprint of the Crusaders in the Contemporary City," in *The Imagined and Real Jerusalem in Art and Architecture*, ed. Jeroen Goudeau, Mariëtte Verhoeven, and Wouter Weijers (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 114-135.

60

In the same cave on the Mount of Olives Muslim pilgrims venerated the tomb of Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (a female Sufi saint who died in the year 801), Jewish ones the prophetess Huldah, and Christians the place of repentance of Saint Pelagia: see Lucia Rostagno, "Note su una devozione praticata da cristiani e musulmani a Betlemme: il culto della Madonna del latte," *Rivista degli studi orientali* 71 (1997): 163. Regarding burials in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, see Limor, "Placing an Idea," 288-290.

61

Guidetti, *In the Shadow of the Church*, 13-35.

church fell into ruins again, and the Tomb of Mary became a Muslim property, with at least two mihrabs being added during the Ottoman period. Christians were allowed to visit the holy site, and the interreligious practices related to the figure of Mary scrutinized by Augustine Arce date from the Mamluk period onwards, confirming that the site was accessible to both Christian and Muslim worshippers.[58] On the Mount of Olives, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's intervention included the conversion of a monastery that adjoined the site of the Ascension into a mosque, while the Crusader church fell into ruin in the fifteenth century. During the seventeenth century, under the Ottomans, the building took the configuration still visible today, with a small domed aedicule provided with a mihrab.[59] Within the same area, as remarked by Rostagno in relation to a cave located on the Mount of Olives, different groups of worshippers attended a single locale but associated the site with distinct holy figures.[60]

Conclusion

The scrutiny of two Christian sites, or more precisely of a site in Lydda and a cluster of places within one specific area of Jerusalem, allows greater understanding of how early Muslims perceived holy places inherited from the late antique period. Such places exerted attraction. They were not used for performing collective Muslim prayers, or, at least, this was not their primary function. On the one hand, the growing network of congregational mosques that was available to Muslims made unnecessary the use of existing churches. There is little evidence for the conversion of churches into mosques in the early Islamic period.[61] Selected places were attended by Muslims probably because of the attraction exerted by the religious practice taking place in these sanctuaries. The power of holy men and the miracle-performing quality attributed to the places of their commemoration were the focus of worshipping activity. Furthermore, the places devoted to the commemoration of Christ, though left in Christian hands, were visited by Muslims as well because of the Islamic veneration of Jesus stressed in the Qurʾān and made explicit in the Dome of the Rock of Jerusalem.

The magnetic power of some of the great Christian sanctuaries extended to their material qualities. Objects, for example marble columns, contributed to the commemorative and miraculous properties of Christian buildings. This factor is a likely explanation for the obsessive search for columns among Muslim circles. The foundation of new places of worship was part of the strategy to create a plausible network of Muslim holy places, alternative to the Christian one. At the same time, however, to redirect Muslim worshippers out of Christian holy places, normative Islamic texts tried to neutralize the latter's miraculous/magical properties. By inverting their value, the very same features of Christian sites that attracted Muslims received a negative connotation. The gradual reconfiguration of the late antique sacred landscape made room for Islam in the Syrian region. Later, the abrupt changes of the Middle Ages obliterated the efforts to find a delicate balance between different communities that characterized the early Islamic period.

Early Religious Architecture in al-Andalus and its Islamic Context: some Reflections

Susana Calvo Capilla

CENTRO STUDI
DI CIVILTÀ E SPIRITUALITÀ
COMPARATE

fondazione ONLUS
GIORGIO CINI

Susana Calvo Capilla
Universidad complutense de Madrid
This article has been carried out within the framework
of the I+D+i research project "Retos investigación"
of the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and
Universities, number RTI2018-093880-B-I00, called
"Al-Andalus, art, science and contexts in an open
Mediterranean. From the West to Egypt and Syria."
susana.calvo@ghis.ucm.es

Abstract

This article reflects on what we know today about religious spaces during "Early Islam." In the context of the latest studies about this period, and its cultural and religious reality, there are some basic questions worth asking, though still with no sure answer. Likewise, we must review the paradigms used so far to approach the subject, assuming what historians have defined as a long phase of transition. Faced with the scarcity and ambiguity of contemporary written sources, the remaining monuments and materials become the main and most reliable historical sources. The lack of references in the texts does not mean those works did not exist, nor that we could not make an approximation of the reasons behind their creation. Similarly, the absence of material support for certain information in the narratives is highly significant, especially if that absence is generalised, geographically speaking. Therefore, it is interesting to ask how and where did the first Islamised communities pray, both in the Mediterranean and in al-Andalus? And do we know what we are looking for when we speak of the first *masājid* or places of prostration?

1

Susana Calvo Capilla, "Las primeras mezquitas de al-Andalus a través de las fuentes árabes (92/711–170/785)," *Al-Qanṭara,* 28 no. 1 (2007): 143-179. Susana Calvo Capilla "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des sanctuaires wisigothiques (92H/711-170H/785)," *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez,* 41 no. 2 (2011): 131-163.

It is interesting to return to the subject of the first *masājid* (literally, places of prostration) erected in al-Andalus, because, although new material finds are scarce, the study of the first period of Islam (known as Early Islam) has been enriched with publications about various places in the Islamic Mediterranean and about the onset of Islam. This provides a broader perspective and confirms that what happened in the Iberian Peninsula was not too far removed from what happened in other areas of the *Dār al-Islām*. We first tackled this study in 2007 and, four years later, the work was updated and published in French.[1] In the 2011 article, we insisted that the model of urban Islamisation in the Iberian Peninsula reproduced the patterns documented in the eastern Mediterranean area (*Mashriq*) and that the written traditions were also imitated. Quite often, the first mosques documented in the *Mashriq* were built in central urban spaces, but neither on the site of churches nor by reusing the Christian building itself. Churches usually remained open for Christian worship for some time after the arrival of a new doctrine: in Palmyra, Bosra, Tiberias, Jerash or Jerusalem, for example. "Believers" often improvised places of worship in areas or buildings adjacent to the commercial or political area of the city and, sometimes, to churches. Our tentative conclusions, then, that there was no material evidence to support the literary traditions concerning the mass destruction of "polytheistic temples," their transformation into mosques or their shared use with Christians, have been confirmed elsewhere in Syria, Palestine, and North Africa.

The Arab authors who construct the story of the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula, when they deal with the religiousness of the conquerors, compose a narrative seasoned with edifying and apologetic *topoi*, analogous to those of the East. The supposedly historical traditions are embellished with legends and anecdotes that allow them to create a series of

founding myths of great symbolic significance, such as the construction of the "Mosque of the Banners" in Algeciras or the first great mosques (*al-masjid al-jāmiʿ*) in Zaragoza and Cordoba. In general, they insist on two fundamental aspects: the first is that the churches were systematically destroyed and that, in urban centres of a certain importance, the mosques were built on their ruins.[2] However, the material remains and archaeological finds have not supported this account so far. Many churches remained in use until they were progressively abandoned; centuries later, Christians restored some of these buildings and consecrated them anew. In the Iberian Peninsula, the cases of Zaragoza and Seville are also examples of such processes, given that the excavations under the precincts of their early Friday mosques (all dating from the 9th century) have found the remains of Roman and Late Antiquity buildings, respectively.[3] The Muslims also broke, if necessary, with the orientation of the previous structures (and therefore of the ancient city's streets) to direct their *qibla* approximately to the axis between the sunrise at the summer solstice and the sunset at the winter solstice.

The second recurring theme in the Arabic texts narrating the conquests (*futūḥāt*) was to attribute these foundations to characters of great religious prestige such as the *tābiʿūn*, the "Successors of the Companions of the Prophet," just as, in North Africa, the layout of the first *qiblas*, i.e. the orientation of the mosques, was attributed to the *ṣaḥāba* or "Companions of the Prophet" who were the first transmitters of his words (hadiths).[4] Their alleged existence and presence in the conquests allowed the traditionalists to establish a guarantee, ex post, of the religious purity of the conquerors, of their impeccable behaviour in the distribution of the booty and of the orthodoxy of the process of Islamisation of the territory. They thus created the founding myths that were necessary to consolidate, in the case of al-Andalus, Umayyad power and piety, a parallel phenomenon to what had happened in East and North Africa.[5] In the same way as Mūsā b. Nuṣayr in the Iberian Peninsula, according to literary tradition, the conqueror of Egypt, ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ, and the eighty *ṣaḥāba* who went with him, established, around 22H/643, the orientation of the great mosque of the capital, *al-Fusṭāṭ*, and supervised the distribution of the land plots.[6] In Ifriqiya, ʿUqba b. Nāfiʿ founded Qayrawān in 50H/670 and ordered the construction of its great mosque, in the layout of which, he himself and the *ṣaḥāba* and *tābiʿūn* who accompanied him, who were also charged with spreading Islam in those lands, participated.

They also echoed the Eastern *topos* about the shared use of places of prayer by Christians and Muslims, which in the case of Damascus was the traditionalists' explanation for the contradictions in the narratives circulating about the conquest of the city. Archaeology has so far been unable to prove this either in the *Mashriq* or in the Maghreb.[7] However, it has found that in the cities of both the Levant and North Africa some of the oldest known mosques were built next to the main churches, and both buildings were used for worship by their respective communities at the same time for years. Initially, when the population was largely Christian, churches dominated the urban landscape. From the 8th century onwards, or later depending on the region, conversions to Islam and population growth meant that the Friday mosques were enlarged and became the visual and functional focus of urban life.

2

Calvo, "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des sanctuaires," 140-142.

3

Susana Calvo Capilla, *Las mezquitas de al-Andalus* (Almería: Fundación Ibn Tufayl de Estudios Árabes, 2014), 28-39.

4

Calvo, *Las mezquitas de al-Andalus*, 33-35. Manuela Marín, "Ṣaḥāba et tābiʿūn dans al-Andalus: histoire et légende," *Studia Islami*ca LIV (1981): 5-49. This author analyse their biographies and shows the dubious veracity of accounts of their ubiquity.

5

See the historical limits and the apologetic character of what is transmitted by the "tradition savante musulmane" about the formative stage of Islam: Cf. Christian Julien Robin, "L'Arabie à la veille de l'Islam dans l'ouvrage de Aziz al-Azmeh, The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity," *Topoi*, no. 21 (2017): 293-297; Albrecht Noth and Lawrence I. Conrad, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition. A Source-Critical Study* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1994) and Calvo, "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des sanctuaires," 135-136.

6

The date of the Hegira will be indicated with an H. We will also use here, for ease of reading, the terms "Muslim" (more correct at this time would be *mu'minūn*, believers) and "mosque" (instead of the more generic *masjid*, place of prostration).

7

Mattia Guidetti, *In the Shadow of the Church: The Building of Mosques in Early Medieval Syria* (Leiden: Brill, Series Arts and Archaeology of the Islamic World, Vol. 8, 2016), 20-30; Thallein Antun, *The Architectural Form of the Mosque in the Central Arab Lands, from the Hijra to the End of the Umayyad Period, 1/622–133/750* (Oxford: Bar Publishing 2016). For Andalusi accounts of the conquest see, Nicola Clarke, *The Muslim Conquest of Iberia: Medieval Arabic Narratives* (London, New York: Routledge, 2012); Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999).

8

Robert Devresse, "Le Christianisme dans le Sud palestinien," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 20 no. 3-4 (1940): 250. Peter Pentz, *The Invisible Conquest: The Ontogenesis of Sixth and Seventh Century Syria* (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, 1992). All of them insist on the idea of a transition within a Late Antiquity context.

9

Gideon Avni, *The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine. An Archaeological Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 344-353 and p. VII.

10

Avni, *The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine*, 225-227, 238; 242-43; and 254-256, respectively.

11

Avni, *The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine*, 268, 284-285, 271, 458-59. The fact that many of the settlements studied date from pre-Islamic (and pagan) times and that their open-air mosques date from the 8th century would prove that the process of transformation of religion and worship took place very slowly in the region.

12

Bilha Moor, "Mosque and Church: Arabic inscriptions at Shivta in the Early Islamic Period," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 40 (2013): 73-141. Avni, *The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine*, 264-266, 458-459. Devreesse, "Le Christianisme".

13

Katia Cytryn-Silverman, "Tiberias' Houses of Prayer in Context," in *Arise, walk through the land. Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Land of Israel,* ed. Joseph Patrich (Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society, 2016), 235-248, Katia Cytryn-Silverman, "The Umayyad mosque of Tiberias," *Muqarnas,* 26 (2009): 37–61; and Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 63-64.

What happened outside the Iberian Peninsula?

Bilād al-Shām. Palestine and Syria

Gideon Avni collected in 2014 in his book "The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine" the wealth of information available on the gradual process of Islamisation of the entire region of Palestine, both in the large urban centres and the rural and Bedouin areas. Numerous examples of the coexistence of places of worship (churches, synagogues, and mosques) have been documented during the early Islamic period. As previous work by Devreese and Pentz had already pointed out,[8] Avni's conclusion from numerous archaeological finds is that the transformation of local societies in Palestine and Jordan between the 6th and 7th centuries shows a complex but accurate picture of slow and gradual transition, which contradicts with the previous paradigm of a hostile "smoke and fire" scenario of violent conquest followed by a rapid change.[9]

In the area studied by Avni, which includes Palestine and Jordan, the oldest mosques found in pre-Islamic cities, in *quṣūr* and *ribāṭ* types of settlements (Islamic-founded establishments), as well as in rural areas, have been dated to no earlier than the late 7th or early 8th century. The *quṣūr* had simple quadrangular mosques with a fairly deep semi-circular *miḥrāb*, often separated from the palatine structure. Well-known examples include the Jordanian complexes of Qasr Hallabat, Umm al-Walīd, al-Qastal (with the oldest known circular minaret) and Humayma. At the imposing *ribāṭ* of Qal'at al-Mina, dating from the same period, the mosque was within the enclosure. The transition from Christianity to Islam in the region is difficult to detect and, according to Avni, in many places actual Islamisation did not even occur until the Crusader period. The cases of re-use of a Jewish or Christian building for worship are exceptional and always occurred later and after the space had been abandoned, as in Khirbet Susiya and Eshtamo'a.[10]

In the Negev area several mosques of rural or Bedouin character have been found within a variety of Byzantine and early Islamic settlements. In places like Be'er Ora or Sede Boqer, the mosques are of small dimensions and in the open air, with walls no more than a metre high.[11] In large urban centres, such as Sbaïta-Shivta, a city that emerged in the 5th century, the mosque was built in a space adjacent to the baptistery of one of its three churches, which bears witness to the penetration of Islam into the mainly Christian local population and the simultaneous use of the church and mosque during the early Islamic period (inscriptions date it to between the 8th and 10th centuries).[12] All of them would date from the late 7th to the early 8th century and there is no reason to think that they were earlier. As far as large cities are concerned, Tiberias also shows the survival of churches, open for worship at least until the 10th century, and the construction of a great mosque next to the main temple, so that both buildings functioned simultaneously, a "multi-religious" centre according to Cytryn-Silverman.[13]

In Jerusalem, the testimony of Bishop Arculf, who supposedly visited Damascus and Jerusalem (conquered in 14/635 and 17/638, respectively) around 670, has served to explain the early presence of a place of prayer on the esplanade of the ancient Temple of Jerusalem, the *ḥaram al-sharīf*, in the area where the al-Aqṣā Mosque was later built in the early 8th century. However, archaeology has not found any clearly datable remains from the 7th century beneath the al-Aqṣā Mosque. Other sources concerning

Jerusalem refer to an early oratory established by the Caliph 'Umar (d. 23/644) at the time of the conquest of the city, or by the first Umayyad Caliph Mu'āwīya (41/661-60/680), who held his *bay'a* there. In many cases, historiography has hastily assumed that those early supposed oratories in Jerusalem and Damascus, the latter installed in the Roman temenos where the church of St. John the Baptist stood, were already in the form of a hypostyle hall, the canonical model documented in the early Kūfa, Wāsiṭ, Bosra, al-Aqṣā of Jerusalem or Fusṭāṭ.[14] Although these were flimsy constructions, with reused materials and a wooden roof, it is assumed that such a model had already emerged by the mid-7th century, at the time of 'Umar and Mu'āwīya.

The debate over the first "mosque" in Jerusalem is still relevant today, due to several publications questioning the meaning of the texts and the few remains found from the 7th century, as well as the Dome of the Rock (dated by an inscription to 72H/691-692).[15] Lawrence Nees has performed a new analysis of the known sources, both Arabic and non-Arabic, and concludes that there is a lack of evidence to confirm the 7th-century construction of a mosque (understood as a building with several naves, precise orientation and identifying features) or its exact location within the *ḥaram al-sharīf*.[16] Nees suggests that the first Islamic oratory in Jerusalem may have been the entire open-air enclosure of the *ḥaram al-sharīf*. Furthermore, after studying the monument itself, a document as valid as the written sources, he sets out the hypothesis that the so-called *qubbat al-silsila* or Dome of the Chain may have been built in the time of Mu'āwīya ibn Abī Sufyān (661-680) as his *minbar* or maqsūra in that kind of *musalla*.

Other authors such as Beatrice St. Laurent and Isam Awwad put forward a less convincing theory in 2014, which consists of identifying a part of some ancient structures in the southeast corner of the Ḥaram, known as *Istablat Suleiman*, Solomon's stables, as the remains of the first mosque in Jerusalem seen by Arculf (built by ʿUmar or Muʿāwīya), the southern wall of the enclosure being the one used as the *qibla*.[17] Di Cesare, for his part, proposes to reinterpret the earliest archaeological remains found by Hamilton under the mosque of al-Aqṣā (Aqṣā I) as an early oratory built by Muʿāwīya, but facing east and not south, with naves that are parallel and not perpendicular to the *qibla* and lacking a *miḥrāb*.[18]

Syria

In a book published in 2016, Mattia Guidetti acknowledges the difficulty of identifying the oratories of the earliest stage of Islam. Very few written sources (some non-Arabic and rarely contemporary) describe the building activities of the conquerors. In general, the historical account of many of the buildings that eventually became part of the sacred monumental landscape of Islam, replacing the Christian one, was written after the fact, at a time when it was necessary to construct foundational myths of these buildings, in order to anchor the Islamic tradition to the territory.[19] Guidetti noted the same phenomenon that we had documented in al-Andalus, namely that the traditionalists invented a completely different scenario from the one revealed by archaeology, a partisan version where the churches were replaced by mosques, destroyed, or Islamised.[20]

Several of those early Islamic prayer spaces were built next to or "in dialogue" with the churches, so that both buildings were used simultaneously for a long time, something that may have been interpreted by later

14
Antun, *The Architectural Form,* 6-49.

15
Marcus Milwright, *The Dome of the Rock and Its Umayyad Mosaic Inscriptions* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

16
Lawrence Nees, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Art in Jerusalem* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 5-57 and 58-99.

17
Beatrice St. Laurent and Isam Awwad, "Archaeology & Preservation of Early Islamic Jerusalem: Revealing the 7th Century Mosque on the Haram Al-Sharif," in *Proceedings of the 9th International Congress of the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East, Islamic Session,* ed. Denis Genequand (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag 2016), 469-478. Clearing and renovation works in the southeast corner of the enclosure began around 1996. For more information, see Jon Seligman, "Solomon's Stables, the Temple Mount, Jerusalem: The Events Concerning the Destruction of Antiquities 1999–2001," *Atiqot,* 56 (2007): 33-53.

18
Di Cesare, M. "A qibla mušarriqa for the First al-Aqṣā Mosque? A New Stratigraphic, Planimetric, and Chronological Reading of Hamilton's Excavation, and Some Considerations on the Introduction of the Concave miḥrāb," *Annali dell'Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale". Sezione Orientale,* 77(1-2), 2017, 66-96.

19
Guidetti, *In the Shadow,* 20-30, 68 and 174; Suliman Bashear, "Qibla musharriqa and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches," *The Muslim World,* LXXXI no. 2-3 (1991): 267-282.

20
Guidetti, *In the Shadow,* 13-35; Calvo, "Las primeras mezquitas de al-Andalus" and "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des sanctuaires."

21

Calvo, "Analogies" and "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des sanctuaires," 152-54; Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 37-41.

22

On the meaning of the *masājid* in passages of the Qurʾān, as in 72:18-19, it could be understood as places of prayer in general, including polytheistic ones, see Guillaume Dye and Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Sourate 72. al-Jinn (les djinns)," in *Le Coran des historiens: Volume 2b*, ed. Guillaume Dye and Mohammed Amir-Moezzi (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2019), 1853-1867.

23

Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the believers. At the origins of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010),115. This author discusses about "believers" in the origins of Islam, a religious reform movement within monotheism initiated by Prophet Muhammad. In its early years the believers' movement included righteous Christians and Jews, who agreed to live righteously in obedience to the law revealed to Muhammad. The realisation that they constituted a separate religious community, distinct from Christians and Jews, emerged a century later, when they assumed that the Qurʾān was the final revelation of the One God, superseding the Gospel and the Torah, and that Muhammad was the prophet. Also, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

24

Bashear, "Qibla," 268; Susana Calvo Capilla, "Justicia, misericordia y cristianismo: una relectura de las inscripciones coránicas de la Mezquita de Córdoba en el siglo X," *Al-Qanṭara* 31 no. 1 (2010): 149-187. Calvo, *Las mezquitas de al-Andalus*, 49-50.

25

Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 68. Avner's theory of the shared use by Christians and Muslims of the Kathisma church near Jerusalem is neither confirmed nor accepted by all researchers; the author argues that a miḥrāb was built around 700, although it is not attested that the sanctuary continued to be used by Christians after that. Cf. Oleg Grabar, *The Dome of the Rock* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2006), 89-119; Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 68-69; Rina Avner, "The Dome of the Rock in light of the development of concentric Martyria in Jerusalem: Architecture and Architectural Iconography," *Muqarnas*, 27 (2010): 31-50.

26

Dorothy Sack, *Resafa IV, Die Grosse Moschee von Resafa-Rusafat Hisam* (Mainz: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, 1996).

27

Denis Genequand, "Al-Bakhra' (Avatha), from the Tetrarchic fort to the Umayyad castle," *Levant*, 36 (2004): 225-242. However, no evidence of the *miḥrāb* was found.

28

Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 36-70.

29

Studied by M. Ocaña Jiménez; cfr. Calvo, "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des

sources as shared spaces. The authors who write about the conquests refer contradictorily to the sharing of property and the shared use of the churches by both religious communities, a formula that has not been demonstrated in Damascus, Diyarbakir, Homs or Aleppo.[21] Bashear gathered the news' pieces where the traditionalists attributed to the early Caliphs and to the Companions, Successors, or religious men of prestige the custom of directing their prayers to the East in sanctuaries of special significance for the Christian community in the newly conquered Holy Land. These were not cases of shared churches or converted mosques, but occasional events and exceptional characters who were accorded special significance.[22] It does not seem wrong to consider that the accounts about the attraction that some churches had for early believers (*mu'minūn*) were a literary and historiographical elaboration, taking place several centuries after the conquest, the purpose of which would be to extol their triumph over Christianity.[23] In any case, such actions were soon included by the exegetes among the reprehensible practices because they implied the imitation of the idolaters and prayer towards a wrong orientation. In fact, orientation was a recurrent issue in the polemical literature of both Christians and Muslims, as we shall see later on.[24] Guidetti, for his part, concludes that such actions, if they existed, must have been ephemeral and limited to the early days of the conquest since they have left no recognisable material trace.[25]

The cathedral and the mosque were adjacent or contiguous buildings in cities such as Aleppo, Homs, Mosul, Mardin, or Diyarbakir. In some cases, a part of the enclosure or area surrounding the church was confiscated, as was the case in al-Ruṣāfa, where the Umayyad mosque was attached to the northern atrium of the St. Sergius Byzantine basilica complex.[26] In al-Bakhraʾ, also in present-day Syria, a Byzantine fortress reoccupied in Umayyad times, Genequand identified as a mosque a hypostyle hall attached to the north wall of the church;[27] and finally, in Amman, the Great Mosque was built in Umayyad times next to the cathedral, both of which have now disappeared but were still visible at the end of the 19th century.[28] These examples may also serve to suggest the model applied in Cordoba, where perhaps the Great Mosque was also built in a space adjacent to or close to the basilica, something suggested by the written traditions.[29]

There does not seem to have been a single model, and in several cities, a different part of the city from the Christian (Byzantine) religious centre was chosen to erect the oratory, as in Bosra, Jerash or Palmyra, with phases of occupation from the end of the 7th century. In all three sites, the mosque was built in Umayyad times, reusing abandoned Late Antiquity buildings located in the city centre (Roman *tetrakionion* in Jerash, Fig. 1 next page, and Palmyra, a main road in Bosra) and in the commercial area, revitalised by the Marwānids.[30] In these cities the churches were kept open for worship.[31] That location, next to the markets, was repeated in ʿAnjar (Lebanon), Amman and Ayla-Aqaba (Jordan), new Umayyad cities that followed the classical urban model.

To quote Walmsley and Damgaard, control (and tax collection) in the urban areas of this region was exercised by the Church from the end of the 6th century until it was progressively replaced by a new Muslim administration after the reforms of ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 65-86H/685-705). From that time, and until 750, there is evidence of intense building activity that provided the provincial centres with mosques, while at the same time the

Fig. 1. Jerash Mosque, general view, plan and miḥrāb, 8th century. Photograph © Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza.

activity and number of churches in use decreased, with the consequent weakening of the power of the ecclesiastical authorities.[32]

North of Africa: Maghreb and Ifriqiya

In the research about the transition from Late Antiquity to Islam in North Africa, mainly in Ifriqiya (present-day Tunisia), Pentz's work in 2002 was an important milestone in beginning to question the traditional paradigm of the traumatic and radical change of ancient and Byzantine cities after the arrival of Islam.[33] Recently, a number of archaeological contributions have furthered the thesis of continuity (Baratte, Bockmann, Fenwick, Leone, or Mahfoudh, among others). Although much remains to be known about the places of prayer (especially in the westernmost area), a similar scenario to Levant can be discerned. According to Fenwick (2018), the mosques continued to be the dominant element of the urban landscape during the 8th century. Some churches continued in use until the 10th-11th centuries, as at Sbeïtla; others were converted to secular functions or were dismantled to make use of the materials. New churches were also built in Qayrawan in the 8th century.

As for the churches transformed into mosques, the historical-religious traditions mention some examples where either the change has not been confirmed by material evidence, as is the case with the al-Zaytuna mosque in Tunis, or it took place centuries later, as with the mosque of Le Kef,

sanctuaires," 152. See a summary of the readings done to this date of the archaeological remains in the cities by Isabel Toral-Niehoff and Alberto León Muñoz. "Ornament of the World: Urban Change in Early Islamic Qurṭuba," in *The Power of Cities*, ed. Sabine Panzram (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 107-60 and 114-15.

30
Guidetti, *In the Shadow*, 63-64, 103; Calvo, "Les premières mosquées et la transformation des sanctuaires," 138-139; Denis Genequand. "An Early Islamic Mosque in Palmyra. Une mosquée du début de l'époque islamique à Palmyre," *Levant*, 40 (2008): 3-15.

31
Rune Rattenborg and Louise Blanke, "Jarash in the Islamic Ages (c. 700–1200 CE): a critical review," *Levant*, 49 no. 3 (2017): 312-332.

32
Allan Walmsley and Kristoffer Damgaard, "The Umayyad congregational mosque of Jarash in Jordan and its relationship to early mosques," *Antiquity*, 79 (2005): 362–378.

33
Pter Pentz, *From Roman Proconsularis to Islamic Ifriqiyah* (Goteborg: Göteborgs universitet, 2002).

34

Faouzi Mahfoudh, "Commerce de Marbre et Remploi dans les Monuments de L'Ifriqiya Médiévale," in *Perspektiven der Spolienforschung 2. Zentren und Konjunkturen der Spoliierung*, ed. Stefan Altekamp, Carmen Marcks-Jacobs and Peter Seiler (Berlin: Topoi, 2017), 15-42; Anis Mkacher, "Construire, récupérer et inventer. Les mosquées en Afrique du Nord au VIIᵉ siècle d'après les sources arabes," in *AFRICA - IFRIQIYA. Continuity and Change in North Africa from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic Age*, ed. Ralf Bockmann, Anna Leone, and Philipp von Rummel, (Wiesbaden: Palilia 34, 2019),157-168 and 162-165.

35

Like Belalis Maior, Bagaï or Tobna. About Haïdra: François Baratte, "Recherches franco-tunisiennes sur la citadelle byzantine d'Ammaedara (Haïdra)," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 140, no. 1 (1996): 153; Taher Ghalia and Faouzi Mahfoudh, "Aïn Tebournouk-Tubernuc et sa région de l'Antiquité tardive au Moyen Âge," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité*, 115, no. 2 (2003): 794-795; François Baratte, "Les villes du nord de l'Afrique entre Antiquité tardive et conquête arabe. Historiographie récente et nouvelles perspectives," in *Entre civitas y madina el mundo de las ciudades en la Península Ibérica y en el norte de África (siglos IV-IX)*, ed. Sabine Panzram and Laurant Callegarin (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2018), 198-199.

36

Corisande Fenwick, "Early Medieval Urbanism in Ifriqiya and the Emergence of the Islamic City," in *Entre civitas y madina el mundo de las ciudades en la Península Ibérica y en el norte de África (siglos IV-IX)*, ed. Sabine Panzram and Laurant Callegarin (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2018), 218-219.

37

Virginie Prevost, "Des églises byzantines converties à l'islam? Quelques mosquées ibadites du djebel Nafûsa (Libye)," *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 3 (2012): 325-347. Certain mosques bear a name reminiscent of Christianity or are qualified as "apostolic" (in 16th century sources) such as *masjid al-ḥawāriyyin*.

38

On the debates surrounding the survival of Late Antiquity, see also Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza and Alexandra Uscatescu, "El 'occidentalismo' de Hispania y la koiné artística mediterránea (siglos VII-VIII)," *Goya: Revista de arte*, 347 (2014): 95-115. A review of the state of archaeological knowledge in Julián Ortega Ortega, *La conquista islámica de la península ibérica: una perspectiva arqueológica* (Madrid: La Ergástula, 2018).

39

Santiago Macias, Maria da Conceiçao Lopes, "O território de Beja entre a Antigüedade Tardia e a islamizaçao," in *Visigodos y omeyas: el territorio,* ed. Luis Caballero Zoreda, Pedro Mateos Cruz, Tomás Cordero Ruiz (Merida: Instituto de Arqueología de Mérida, 2012), 305-328.

40

Joachim Henning et al. "Reccopolis revealed: the first geomagnetic mapping of the early medieval Visigothic royal town," *Antiquity*, 93, nº 369 (2019): 735-751 (742).

ancient Sicca Veneria.[34] Nor has it been possible to document any oratory erected in the early Islamic period, only later in Byzantine citadels.[35] Most of these mosques date from the Aghlabid period (11th century), including those of the capitals, and, for the moment, there are no earlier archaeological records.[36]

In Jebel Nefūsa (Libya), Virginie Prevost has studied some interesting cases of late conversions or replacements of Byzantine churches. Until the disappearance of the Christian communities with the gradual progress of Islamisation in the region (which started in 643-644), the churches remained open. Once they were abandoned, the Muslims (*Ibadis* in the region) reoccupied the sites, sometimes reusing the Christian building, and in other cases building the mosque on its site. Here too, the conversions did not take place in the transitional period but much later.[37]

Al-Andalus

In the last decade there has been no evidence found of Islamic places of prayer built during the first century of Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula, although progress has been made in the study of the process of Islamisation and Arabisation thanks to excavations such as those at Tolmo de Minateda (Albacete), Cordoba and Pamplona, among others.[38] In southern Portugal, several Andalusi enclaves have also been excavated, although the oratories found cannot be clearly dated to the early 8th or early 9th century.[39]

At Reccopolis (Guadalajara), the city founded by Leovigild in 578, recent geomagnetic studies have shown the great extent of the Hispano-Gothic royal city and have made it possible to identify a large building with a different orientation to the rest of the city's structures, including the palatine hall and the church. The rectangular building (ca. 20×40m) has one of its long sides facing southeast, an orientation that has led archaeologists to consider the possibility of it being an early mosque,[40] which shall be investigated by the excavation.

At the site of Tolmo de Minateda (Hellín, Albacete) the only documented transformations reveal the progressive Islamisation and Arabisation of the population from the end of the 8th century onwards. Although the Friday Mosque of the site has not yet been found, in 2014 a "bottle" from the Visigothic period was found with an inscription in Arabic that reads *Ibn Nabdak went to the mosque,*" which would confirm that the conquerors erected an oratory in a different area from where the episcopal complex is located, together with the church and the palace.[41]

The doubts that were raised about the Roman mausoleum of Las Vegas de La Pueblanueva (Toledo) and its subsequent conversion into a mosque, according to the study published by Hauschild in 1978, are now even more irresolvable because the small apse identified as a possible *miḥrāb* was destroyed, shortly after that publication, when the site was abandoned. A recent archaeological study of the building maintains the doubts about the chronology of the surroundings of that element and, therefore, about its identification as a *miḥrāb*.[42]

Another case that has been identified as a possible conversion is at Los Hitos, Arisgotas (Toledo). The complex, built from the 6th century onwards, was a fortified *villa* for the high Hispano-Visigothic aristocracy of Toledo.[43] In addition to the imposing aulic pavilion, a church and a tripartite building with a courtyard have been excavated. The complex, dated between the end of the 6th and the 7th centuries, was abandoned
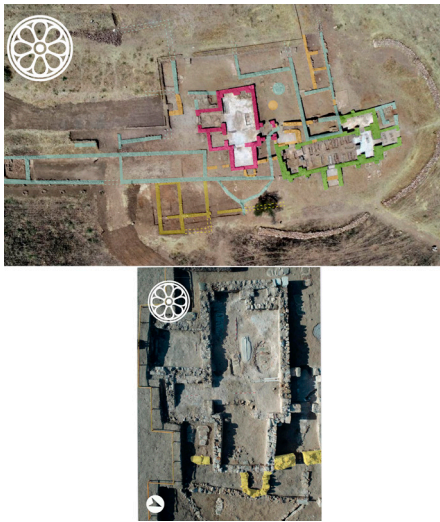
Fig. 2. Los Hitos, general aerial photography and detail of the church, 6th to 10th centuries, Arisgotas, Toledo. Photograph © Jorge Morín.

Fig. 3. Great Mosque of Cordoba, access to the Western nave of the prayer hall corresponding to the 8th mosque. Photograph © Susana Calvo.

in the 8th century, and reoccupied during the 10th and 11th centuries, according to Jorge Morín. The church, excavated in the 2017 campaign,[44] was a building with a single vaulted nave, richly decorated with marble slabs on the plinths, the doorways and on the floor. The discovery of a rectangular niche added to the east wall of the chancel suggests that the church was converted into a mosque, although its northeast orientation and the fact that it is off-centre raises some doubts about its identification as a *miḥrāb* (Fig. 2).

The structures on which the great mosque of Cordoba was built are still not well known.[45] The 1930s' excavations uncovered remains of Late Antique and Hispano-Visigothic buildings that indicate a major occupation. In the excavations that Marfil directed between 1996 and 1997 in its courtyard, next to the doors of the westernmost naves of the prayer hall (the area corresponding to the first mosque) (Fig. 3), an exterior pavement was found and, in it, a numismatic collection of *fulus* dating from before 143/760, and hence preceding the construction of the mosque. Structures dating to the 6th and 7th centuries were also found.[46] In 2017, another eighteen *fulus* of the same date were found in the access area to the third nave from the western façade. The building horizon and earlier structures could not be clearly documented; what could be documented was the gravel and river pebble pavement in the courtyard of the foundational mosque, as well as the clay pavement inside the prayer hall.[47] These findings report an urban area with buildings of some importance and their detailed analysis may provide interesting information about the site on which the great mosque, attributed to ʿAbd al-Rahman I, was built.

Having visited all these places, a question arises, paradoxically: how and where did the first Islamised communities pray, both in the Mediterranean and in al-Andalus? What did the first *masājid* or places of prostration consist of? Given that, as we have seen, the material remains of the first oratories are scarce, it seems necessary to address the question of "how did they pray?", or even "what did they pray?"

41

Blanca Gamo Parras and Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret, "El Tolmo de Minateda entre la Tardía Antigüedad y la Alta Edad Media: nuevos retos en nuevos tiempos," in *La Meseta Sur entre la Tardía Antigüedad y la Alta Edad Media*, ed. María Perlines Benito and Patricia Hevia Gómez (Castilla: Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha, 2017), 47-74 (63). Maria Antonia Martínez Núñez, Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret, and Victoria Amorós Ruiz, "Un mensaje en la botella: escritura árabe en contexto. Un ejemplo de El Tolmo de Minateda," *Debates de Arqueología Medieval*, 6 (2016): 11-39.

42

Sergio de la Llave Muñoz and Ana Escobar Requena, "Redescubriendo el mausoleo tardorromano de Las Vegas (La Pueblanueva, Toledo)," *Urbs Regia*, nº 2 (2017): 26-45 (40).

43

Rafael Barroso Cabrera, Jesús Carrobles Santos, Jorge Morín de Pablos, Isabel Sánchez Ramos, "Toletum. Configuración y evolución urbana de la capital visigoda y su territorio," in *Territorio, topografía y arquitectura de poder durante la Antigüedad Tardía*. ed. Isabel Sánchez Ramos and Pedro Mateos Cruz (Merdia: Instituto Archeologia Merida, 2018), 195-236 (220-25). I thank J. Morín for all the data he provided me with.

44

Jorge Morín, "Excepcional hallazgo arqueológico en Toledo: descubren una iglesia 'privada,'" *El Digital CLM- EFE*, 11/12/2017. Jorge Morín, "Las excavaciones en Los Hitos revelan una villa fortificada única," *La Tribuna*, Domingo 18/08/2019.

45

Calvo, *Las mezquitas de al-Andalus*, 55-56.

46

Rafael Frochoso Sánchez, "Las monedas encontradas en las Excavaciones de la Catedral de Córdoba," *Arte, arqueología e historia*, 16 (2009): 195-204. Pedro Marfil, "Intervención arqueológica en el Patio de los Naranjos de la Catedral de Córdoba, antigua Mezquita Aljama," *Qurtuba*, 2 (1997): 333-335.

47

Daniel Fernández Cabrera, Enrique León Pastor, and Raimundo Ortiz Urbano, *Actividad Arqueológica Preventiva. Control Arqueológico. Puerta-Celosía Nave 17 Conjunto Monumental Mezquita-Catedral de Córdoba. Memoria preliminar*, Córdoba, September 2017, available at: https://mezquita-catedraldecordoba.es/investigacion/otros-proyectos/ [Accessed on 28/09/2019] p. 74-76.

48

Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Aux origines du Coran, questions d'hier, approches d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Téraèdre, 2004), 97.

49

François Déroche, *Le Coran, une histoire plurielle. Essai sur la formation du texte coranique* (Paris: Seuil, 2019), chap. 2 and 3. More controversial interpretations of the formation of Islam and the Qurʾānic text have been published in recent decades, such as the work of Patricia Crone and Christoph Luxenberg. It is also interesting to recall C. J. Robin's studies on the context in which it arose, a Late Antiquity that also permeated the Arabian Peninsula, Christian J. Robin, "La péninsule Arabique à la veille de la prédication muhammadienne," in *Les débuts du monde musulman (VIIe–Xe siècle). De Muhammad aux dynasties autonomes,* ed. Thierry Bianquis, Pierre Guichard, Mathieu Tillier (Paris: PUF, 2012), 5-33; and Christian J. Robin, "L'Arabie préislamique," in *Le Coran des historiens : Volume 1. Etudes sur le contexte et la genèse du texte coranique,* ed. Guillaume Dye and Mohammed Amir-Moezzi (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2019), 51-154 (137).

50

Guillaume Dye, "Le corpus coranique : contexte et composition," in *Le Coran des historiens : Volume 1. Etudes sur le contexte et la genèse du texte coranique,* ed. Guillaume Dye and Mohammed Amir-Moezzi (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2019), 733-918 (822-23).

51

Estelle Whelan, "Forgotten witness: Evidence for the early codification of the Qurʾān," *The Journal of the American Oriental Society. American Oriental Society,* 118 (1998): 1-14 (10-13); Oleg Grabar, *The shape of the Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 63-68; Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and His People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 460. Christoph Luxenberg, "A New Interpretation of the Arabic Inscription in Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock," in *The Hidden Origins of Islam,* ed. Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-R. Puin (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2010), 125-151. Other contributions on the Dome of the Rock inscriptions: George Alain, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy* (London: Saqi Books, 2010), 60-68; and Milwright, *The Dome of the Rock*, 160-171, where he analyses the form and chronology of the two inscriptions in the ambulatory. On the use of the Arabic language at this early stage and its non-religious motivations, see Nees, *Perspectives on Early Islamic Art in Jerusalem*, 153. This author argued for two processes converging in the formation of Islam as a religious movement: the Islamisation of the Arab political (movement) and the Arabisation of the new religion. Cf. Suliman Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam* (Princeton: Gerlach Press, 1997), 53 and 116.

Definition of the Canonical Text, the Religious Ritual and the Space of Prayer

Studies of the oldest Qurʾānic manuscripts, as well as of the inscriptions and other pre-Islamic or early Islamic texts found in the Near East and the Arabian Peninsula, written in different Semitic languages, have enabled the scholars, in recent years, to assess both the date and the process by which the canonical version of the Qurʾān was established. Exegetes and traditionalists also provide evidence that suggests a long and slow transition from oral transmission to the written text. De Prémare summarised this transition well by indicating that in the first half of the 8th century (2nd century of the Hegira), the canonical version we know today had not yet been established.[48] Déroche, following the religious tradition, places at the time of caliph ʿUthmān (23-35 AH/644-656) the first attempt at compilation, in order to put an end to the divergent versions circulating among the community of believers. This caliph would send copies to the major cities, as was done in the time of ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Walīd, when there was a new impetus to fix the written Qurʾān. At the same time, there was also an attempt to fix the canonical way of reading or reciting it (*qirāʾa*).[49] But the questions of the chronology of the Qurʾān and of the "authors" of the Qurʾānic corpus are far from being resolved and need to go beyond the traditional approaches, as Dye has recently pointed out.[50]

The "Qurʾānic" inscriptions in the ambulatory of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (that give the date of 72H/691-692) are often mentioned in studies dedicated to the chronology of the sacred text to document the process of its canonisation. Nor should it be forgotten that this is the oldest known building where Arabic epigraphy is used with this monumental decorative character. For Whelan, although the verses in the Dome of the Rock do not match the "Vulgate," the complex political and religious discourse fabricated by quoting excerpts from the Qurʾānic context suggests, in her opinion, "*a broad familiarity with them and with the implications that they had for the early Islamic community*" of ʿAbd al-Malik's time. Grabar adds something important: the selection must have been conditioned by the oral tradition of the environment, given its rhetorical and prayer-like character. For al-Azmeh, "*we would be dealing with the circulation of material of a canonical character, and, therefore, completely Qurʾānic, before the establishment of a formally sealed literary canon, which required a long process of elaboration.*"[51]

Next to the Qurʾān, the second religious and legal source of Islam is the *sunna* or tradition of the Prophet. The hadith (*ḥadīth*), transmitted orally, seem to have begun to be systematised at the time of Caliph ʿUmar (II) b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (99-101H/717-719), in an attempt to compile the traditions that had a guaranteed chain of transmission and thus put an end to the great discordances that existed. The process of textualization of tradition took place throughout the 3rd century of the Hegira (9th century) in the form of hadith collections, such as that of al-Bukhārī (d. 256H/870), or of biographies of Muhammad (*Sīra*). Hadiths' literature, or sayings of the Prophet, began to reach al-Andalus at the end of the 2nd century of the Hegira (early 9th century), partly due to the dissemination of the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* written by Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795), founder of the Mālikī law school, which would become dominant in al-Andalus. This book was not only a legal work, but, above all, a manual of ritual and religious practice (in accordance with the consensus of the Medina community) and a compilation of hadiths. One of the canonical forms of reading the Qurʾān (*qirāʾa*), that of the al-muqriʾ Nāfiʿ of Medina, also came to al-Andalus through tradition. The 9th century also saw the

development of Andalusi hadiths' studies, with ʿAbd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb (c. 174-238H/790-853) as a leading figure.[52]

As we have shown, the writing in Arabic and the formation of the corpus of canonical texts[53] were basically initiated and directed by the Umayyads, to whom can be attributed two other aspects related to our subject: the establishment of liturgical practices (ʿibādāt), starting with the number of daily prayers and the ritual of Friday prayer (ṣalāt al-jumuʿa),[54] as well as the definition of a basic typology of oratory (masjid), with its most identifying elements (the courtyard, the minaret, the qibla and the miḥrāb). We will focus on three of these elements: the ṣalāt or ritual prayer, the orientation of the prayer, i.e. the qibla, and the niche opened in that wall, the miḥrāb.

The Qurʾān mentions the Friday prayer, the five daily prayers, fasting and pilgrimage, but does not give precise details or characteristics as established later, which would indicate that the liturgy was developed over an extended period. Invocation, prayer and prostration, performed in precise forms and cycles (rakʾa) and preceded by a ritual of calling (adhān) and purification (wuḍūʾ), evolved from Arabic, Jewish and Christian practices.[55] It is significant that the terms ṣalāt and miḥrāb are not of Arabic origin.[56] Several Arab authors indicate that, in the beginning, believers only had to pray twice a day, at dawn and at sunset.[57] Although the action of prayer often appears in the Qurʾān, it was the later Islamic tradition which, going back to the life of the Prophet through the hadiths,[58] elaborated a whole liturgical corpus.[59] The development of its own ritual gave the new monotheism an identity factor with respect to other doctrines.[60] However, in that turning back, as Robin points out, the Muslim traditionalists of the eighth century showed a very precarious knowledge of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, also as far as ritual was concerned.[61]

Thus, Islamic tradition places the consolidation of the liturgical practice of prayer just after the change of the qibla or the direction of prayer. The first believers did not pray towards Mecca, according to the Qurʾān itself (2:142-145), but towards a place identified as Jerusalem by the prophetic tradition.[62] The change of direction, to the south, took place, according to exegetes, while Muhammad was still alive; but it possibly dates from the same time as the Qurʾān was being written down.[63] In any case, as King warns, the important point is not whether an orientation is correct today, but to define which direction or directions were considered appropriate for the qiblas in the period when the first monumental mosques began to be built. Generally, these did not face towards Mecca, but reproduced the astronomical axes of the Kaʿba, an astronomically aligned rectangular structure.[64] Later, for the Islamic society, the Kaʿba was at the centre of the sacred geography and the qiblas of the different regions around it.

In reference to the earliest places of prayer, the sources indicate that there was a first qibla, called qibla musharriqa, facing east, which Bashear identified with the orientation of the churches. In his opinion, that one was abandoned for the "true qibla of Islam" before the great Umayyad constructions that defined the spaces for prayer.[65]

For Di Cesare, the qibla musharriqa would have another meaning, which is explained in her recent reinterpretation of the first phase of the al-Aqṣā mosque in Jerusalem, which construction she places in the years 40-60H/660-680. The author analyses older mosques, such as the one founded by ʿAmr in Fusṭāṭ, which, according to the sources, had an

52
Joseph Schacht, "Mālik b. Anas," in Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, ed. Peri Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 262-65; Isabel Fierro, "The introduction of hadith in al-Andalus (2nd/8th-3rd/9th centuries)," Der Islam, LXVI (1989): 68-93. The khutba or sermon, one of the most prominent elements of the Muslim ritual, along with the Friday prayer, is derived from the prophetic traditions and the Qurʾān: see Linda G. Jones, The Power of Oratory in the Medieval Muslim World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 21-23.

53
Arabic calligraphy and the Arabic language itself were also in "training", see Prémare, Aux origines du Coran, and Rizwi Faizer, "The Dome of the Rock and the Qurʾān," in Coming to terms with the Qurʾān, ed. Khaleel Mohammed and Andrew Rippin (Riyadh: Islamic Publications International, 2008).

54
Gerald Hawting, "Introduction. The Development of Islamic Ritual," in The Development of Islamic Ritual, ed. Gerald Hawting (London: Routledge, 2006), xiii-xxxix. Guy Monnot, "Ṣalāt," in Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, ed. Peri Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 925-34 (927-28); Josef W. Meri, "Ritual and the Qurʾān," in Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 488-90.

55
Donner, Muhammad and the believers, 214-216. Carl Heinrich Becker, "On the History of early Muslim Worship," in The Development of Islamic Ritual, ed. Gerald Hawting (London: Routledge, 2006), 72-73. Patrick D Gaffney, "Friday Prayer," in Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 271-72. Robert G. Hoyland, In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 228-29. Guillaume Dye, "Jewish Christianity, the Qurʾān, and Early Islam: Some methodological caveats," in Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam, ed. Francisco Río Sánchez (Turnhot: Brepols Publishers, 2018), 11-29.

56
Marion Holmes Katz, Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 11-14. In Yemeni poetry, miḥrāb meant building, palace, place of the prince or audience hall, Robin, "L'Arabie préislamique," 90.

57
Uri Rubin, "Morning and Evening Prayers in Early Islam," Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam, 10 (1987): 40-64.

58
Monnot, "Ṣalāt," 926.

59
Katz, Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice, 18-19.

60
Hawting, "Introduction. The Development of Islamic Ritual," xxxi-xxxiv.

Fig. 4. Umayyad Mosque, current miḥrāb, Damascus. Photograph © Susana Calvo.

61
Robin, "L'Arabie," 295-96.

62
Calvo, "Justicia, misericordia y cristianismo," 176-77.

63
Donner, *Muhammad and the believers,* 214-24.

64
David King, "The enigmatic orientation of the Great Mosque of Córdoba," *Suhayl. International Journal for the History of the Exact and Natural Sciences in Islamic Civilisation*, 16-17 (2018-2019): 33-111 (35 and 44).

65
Bashear, "Qibla musharriqa," 281-82.

66
Di Cesare, "A qibla mušarriqa," 89-91.

67
Michael E. Bonine "Romans, astronomy and the qibla: urban form and orientation of Islamic cities of Tunisia," in *African Cultural Astronomy – Current Archaeoastronomy and Ethnoastronomy Research in Africa,* ed. Jarita C. Holbrook, R. Thebe Medupe, Johnson O. Urama, (Berlin: Springer Nature, 2008), 145-178; King, "The enigmatic," 35-48; and Alfonso Jiménez Martín, "La qibla extraviada," *Cuadernos de Madinat al-Zahra* 3 (1991): 189-209.

68
King, "The enigmatic," 35-37; 81. Calvo, "Las primeras mezquitas de al-Andalus," 166-170.

69
Faouzi Mahfoudh, "La Grande Mosquée de Kairouan: textes et contexte archéologique," in *The Aghlabids and Their Neighbours,* ed. Glaire D. Anderson, Corisande Fenwick, and Mariam Rosser-Owen (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 166-68.

70
Monica Rius, *La alqibla en al-Andalus y al-Magrib al-Aqṣā* (Barcelona: Institut "Millás Vallicrosa" d'Història de la Ciència Àrab, 2000), 174-188. It is also interesting to note at this point that the east façade of the Alcázar had a different orientation to this supposed Roman urban layout: Murillo Redondo, Juan Francisco et al. "Investigaciones arqueológicas en la Muralla de la Huerta del Alcázar (Córdoba)," *Anejos de anales de arqueología cordobesa,* 2 (2009-2010): 183-230 (218-19).

orientation "too far east" (*musharriqa jiddan*), and concludes that these orientations (90° to the direction of the ortho of Canopus) also coincided with the astronomical alignment of the Kaʿba, which is why they were considered valid, and this is consistent with King's explanation. Her second conclusion, however, is more debatable: that these mosques of al-Aqṣā and Fusṭāṭ, being built in a "more complex" and solid manner, preserved "the previous orientation" (towards the east) of the "earliest mosques" which they replaced, assuming, without material evidence, that there were earlier mosques and that they were also oriented towards the east.[66]

In his latest publication, King picks up the hypothesis, already put forward by other researchers, that the qibla of the Mosque of Cordoba, like others in North Africa, faces south because the building was aligned with the main streets of the Colonia Patricia of the Roman city, aligned, in turn, with the solstitial axes, i.e. the same as the Kaʿba.[67] Although the orientation of the axis of the Kaʿba was very important, King suggests that the mosque was adapted to the Roman urban layout and that only later was it realised that it coincided with the alignment of the Kaʿba, giving the qibla a "sacred cover" or religious justification.[68] All this was reinforced by the alleged presence of the *tābiʾūn* alongside the conquerors who laid out the first *qibla*, something very similar to what happened with the qibla of Qayrawān, attributed to ʿUqba.[69]

Although the coincidence seems evident in Cordoba (and in Damascus), I do not agree that the alignment of the streets of the Roman city was decisive in establishing the orientation of the *qibla*. When this urban layout did not suit the needs of the believers, the walls of the mosque were turned to orient it in the way they thought was correct, as happened in Zaragoza, which mosque's orientation is almost identical to that of Cordoba and Qayrawān, that is, perpendicular to the solstitial axis that joins the sunrise in summer and sunset in winter.[70] It does not seem that the orientation of the qibla was left to chance, neither in Zaragoza, nor in other places such as Jerash or Palmyra, where the mosques were also rotated with respect to the previous urban layout.[71]

Ultimately, from what has been said, we cannot conclude with absolute certainty in which direction the first Muslims on the Peninsula prayed before the construction of these mosques in Cordoba and Zaragoza at the end of the 8th century.

Di Cesare has recently linked the appearance of the *miḥrāb mujawwaf*, in the form of a deep niche, to the establishment of the south-facing qibla, which occurred at the beginning of the 8th century, with the construction of large mosques by order of the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd b. ʿAbd al-Malik. It is generally accepted that the earliest examples of *miḥrāb* were precisely those erected in the mosques of Medina and Damascus by order of al-Walīd between 87/706 and 96/714-15 (Fig. 4).[72] In this sense, we must consider the allusions to the concave *miḥrāb* of the mosques founded by the conquerors to be an anachronism of the Arab authors.[73] Although some researchers have proposed the earlier existence of painted *miḥrāb* or arches carved in monolithic blocks of stone, there are no architectural remains. This is the reason why both the Qurʾān from Sana'a (Yemen), with two illustrations of mosque-like architecture, and the "*miḥrāb*" type coinage with a spear (ʿanaza) inside it, from the time of ʿAbd al-Malik, both of which date to around the time of al-Walīd's religious constructions, are so important.[74] We can also add the monolithic scallop niche

found in the subsoil of the first mosque of Cordoba (Fig. 5) and the mural paintings of the *miḥrāb* in the mosque of Qayrawān, dated to the reign of Ziyadat Allāh, around 221-836.[75]

Conclusions

The absence of information about the first oratories in al-Andalus forced the Umayyad chroniclers to invent founding myths, to imagine some facts and give them an explanation that would allow them to lay a solid and true foundation for Islam and the orthodoxy of Andalusi religious practice.[76]

Why is there no trace of the first mosques in the lands conquered by Islam? Are we looking for places of worship of an anachronistic model and orientation? Ultimately, do we know what we are looking for when we speak of "early mosques?"

It seems necessary, as we said, to address the issue of the degree of Islamisation of the conquerors.[77] It is significant that the coins minted by the new rulers in 93H/711-12, at the time of the conquest of the Hispano-Visigothic kingdom, as was the case in Carthage and Qayrawān, were in Latin and introduced a monotheistic formula such as "*In the name of God, there is no god but God,*" without allusions to any prophet but with the date of the Hegira.[78] These coins were legible to the local population with a message that proclaimed the existence of one God. When the conquerors began to mint bilingual *solidus* (in Latin and Arabic), in 98H/716, they kept the monotheistic formula in Latin and introduced, in Arabic, the names of the prophet and the territory: Muḥammad and al-Andalus,[79] translation of *Spania*. This was a message that only the Arab conquerors could read, and that would constitute proof of their political and military action towards Damascus, just like the lead seals were proofs of their control over fiscal and commercial activity, as well as the administrative organisation in the new territory. It is not until 101H/720 that the dinar appears entirely epigraphic in Arabic, and the star disappears from the front,[80] and until 145H/763 we do not have the first known monetary issue of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I.[81] It is worth remembering that what mattered about the coins in circulation at the time was not the language in which they were written, but their value, which is why Umayyad or Abbasid dinars were used, and even imitated, as far away as the far north of Europe.[82] Both the Arabisation and the Islamisation would begin to take their first steps in the 8th century, but at a slow pace and with varying results.

One possible conclusion in light of all that has been exposed is that everything seems provisional and changeable for almost sixty years in the Iberian Peninsula. The mints of the new Umayyad emir in 763 could be evidence of effective administrative and fiscal control of the territory and the establishment of an Umayyad state. It is only from that moment onwards that it seems possible that the foundations of the Islamisation of the territory began to be laid, by bringing together the necessary instruments: texts, rites and spaces. As we have seen, all of these were in the process of formation in the Islamic heartlands in 711. In the '80s, the construction of the great mosque in the capital, Cordoba, and in other cities would begin as a way of consolidating power and encouraging the sedentarisation and unity of the community of believers.[83] Until then, one would have to think of places of prayer of an equally provisional and improvised nature, while the churches remained open to the majority Christian population. Only at the end of the 8th century did a certain

Fig. 5. Great Mosque of Cordoba, monolithic scallop niche, 8th-9th century. Photograph © Susana Calvo.

71
The direction of qibla was still a concern in Almohad times: Susana Calvo Capilla, "Peregrination and ceremonial in the Almohad mosque of Tinmal," in *Encompassing the sacred in Islamic Art,* ed. Lorenz Korn and Cigdem Ivren, (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2020), 81-106.

72
Keppel Archibald Cameron Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, Revised and Supplemented by James W. Allan (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1989), 43-46. Finbarr Barry Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus* (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2001), 47-56. Calvo, *Las mezquitas de al-Andalus*, 57-59.

73
Whelan, "Forgotten witness," 205-223.

74
For the Quran: George, *The Rise,* 79-86. Luke Treadwell "Miḥrāb and ʿAnaza or 'Sacrum and Spear'? A Reconsideration of an Early Marwanid Silver Drachm," *Muqarnas*, 22 (2005): 1-28 (19-22).

75
Mahfoudh, "La Grande Mosquée," 180.

76
The analysis of burials in the Iberian Peninsula, during the 8th and 9th centuries, also allows us to observe the lack of definition and the slow homogenisation of rituals, only evident in terms of orientation, at the beginning of the 9th century (Ortega Ortega, *La conquista,* 300-328).

77
Similar conclusions about the weak Islamisation of the Berber population are reached in Ifrīqiya: Chris Wickham, "Synthesis: Africa – Ifrīqiya Conclusions," in *AFRICA - IFRĪQIYA. Continuity and Change in North Africa from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic Age,* ed. Ralf Bockmann, Anna Leone, and Philipp von Rummel, (Wiesbaden: Palilia 34, 2019), 317-322 (319).

78
IN Nomine Dei Non Deus NiSi Deus SoLuS Non Similis. On the reverse side, the mint of *Spania* is mentioned: Novus SoLiDus FeRiTus In SPaNia ANNo XCIII – INDiCción XI ("New solid made in Hispania year 93 – Indiction XI" = year 93 H = 711-12). Mohamed Ghodhbane, "L'Africa à l'époque transitoire (Ier siècle H./VIIe siècle) Contribution à l'étude du toponyme, son évolution et de ses significations à la lumière des

données in *AFRICA - IFRĪQIYA,"* in *Continuity and Change in North Africa from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic Age,* ed. Ralf Bockmann, Anna Leone, and Philipp von Rummel, (Wiesbaden: Palilia 34, 2019), 35-53 (41-42).

79
Muḥammad rasūl allāh (Muḥammad is God's envoy).

80
Alberto Canto, "Precintos," *711, Arqueología e historia entre dos mundos,* ed. García Moreno Luis (Madrid: Museo Arqueológico Regional de Madrid, 2011), 159-165. In the period of transition (711-720) from Latin to Arabic, the coins bear a star that could allude to al-Andalus, synonymous with *Spania* (Hispania) and *Hesperis*, according to Ramírez del Río, "Acerca del origen del topónimo al-Andalus," *eHumanista/IVITRA*, 12 (2017): 124-161 (138-9); a theory not shared by Ortega Ortega (*La conquista*, 121), because stars appear on coins from other parts of the Mediterranean at similar dates.

81
Alberto Canto, "Las monedas y la conquista," in *711, Arqueología e historia entre dos mundos. Zona Arqueológica,* ed. Luis A García Moreno and Alfonso Vigil-Escalera (Madrid: Museo Arqueológico Regional de Madrid, 2012), 133-144. Jere L. Bacharach, "Signs of Sovereignty: The *Shahāda*, Qurʾānic Verses, and the Coinage of ʿAbd al-Malik," *Muqarnas* 27 (2010): 1-30. Regarding the *nafaqa fī sabīl Allāh* legend on the fils minted in Ifrīqiya and al-Andalus, there are not enough reasons to affirm that the concept of *jihād* was already present among the conquerors at that time (Ortega Ortega, *La conquista,* 56-57, 333).

82
A gold coin of 774, minted by King Offa of Mercia (England), in imitation of the contemporary Abbasid dinar. James Allan, "Offa's imitation of an Arab dinar," *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society*, 14 (1914): 77–89. See also Alfonso VIII's Arabic coinage.

83
Calvo, *Las mezquitas de al-Andalus*, 62-74.

84
Robin, "L'Arabie," Donner, *Muhammad and the believers*; Ahmez, *The Emergence*. In contrast, other researchers believe in the fully Islamic and Qurʾānic roots of the Arabic epigraphs (especially the mention of Muhammad) on both coins and commercial lead seals from the time of the Arab governors, and consider these materials to indicate that the conquerors were "true" Muslims. Cf. Alejandro García, *La Conquista islámica de la península ibérica y la tergiversación del pasado* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Ediciones de Historia, 2013), 310.

85
Antun, *The Architectural Form,* 96-98. With the exception of the very poorly known mosques of Basra and Kufa, whose construction is supposed to date from the 7th century.

86
I dedicate this article to two great art historians who recently left us: Javier Docampo Capilla and Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza.

balance between the two communities become evident, with Muslims becoming more and more numerous and Christians less and less, and the churches beginning to be abandoned and reused.

Ultimately, minting coins with the name of the prophet in 716 does not mean that, at that time, both the dogma (Qurʾān and *Sunna*) and the liturgy were fully defined, much less consolidated, as mentioned above. We must wonder about the degree of Islamisation of the Arab and Berber troops who settled in the Iberian Peninsula at the beginning of the 8th century. The need for later chroniclers, from the late 9th and 10th centuries, to insist on the presence of mythical *tābiʿūn* embedded in the troops that arrived in 711, and to attribute to them the layout of the first qiblas in al-Andalus, would explain, in our opinion, the limited religious burden of the conquest and the scarce witnesses it left behind. The lack of material remains, mainly of places of worship in the first phases of development of Islam in all regions (in the 7th century in the Levant, in the 8th century in the Maghreb), would confirm this conclusion: it must be that neither the doctrine nor the liturgy had been fully defined, and thus neither had the need for specific spaces with specific components which would make them recognisable today.[84] It was with the construction (according to Arab sources, the reconstruction[85]) of the mosques in the capital cities of Damascus, Jerusalem, Medina or Cairo, at the time of al-Walīd, in the first two decades of the 8th century, that a lasting model of a place for worship was established, a model that was to spread massively thereafter.[86]

The Seven Sleepers between Christianity and Islam: from Portraits to Talismans
Thierry Zarcone

Thierry Zarcone
CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique)
GSRL (Groupe Sociétés Religions Laïcité)
thzarcone@wanadoo.fr

Abstract

This article deals with the particular role played by the "Companions of the Cave" (*Ashāb al-Kahf*) in saint veneration, considering that they were among the first figures in Islam to be regarded as "friends of God" (*walī, awliyā*). Particularly interesting is the case of the dog Qitmīr who protects them and was regarded by some authors as a manifestation of some great figures, such as the Prophet Khidr, ʿAlī ibn Abū Tālib, or Salmān. This study also explains why the portraits (drawings, paintings, miniatures) of these saints were so attractive, to the extent that they became protective objects or talismans. Though these talismans are geometrical figures (with a focus on circle and/or hexagon), and more precisely "geometric portraits," they take shape in a variety of ways, especially in the form of ships or trees, all being explained by the Qurʾānic story of the Companions or by the Muslim tradition about them. No wonder that Qitmīr is given a key position in this talismanic art.

1

François Jourdan, *La Tradition des sept dormants* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1983), 58-68.

2

Sidney Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qurʾān. The 'Companions of the Cave' in *Sūrat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian Tradition," in Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed. *The Qurʾān in its Historical Context* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 122-124.

3

Manoël Pénicaud, "Réflexions sur la diffusion géographique des Sept Dormants," *Aurora*, annexe to the *Cahiers d'Orient et d'Occident* 4, part 6 (Spring 2008): 2-13 (http://www.moncelon.fr/index.htm; accessed June 2009).

According to some Christian hagiographies of the Seven Sleepers, of which the earliest version was written by the Syrian bishop Jacob of Sarug (ca. 451-521), seven young people living in Ephesus (on the Aegean coast of Anatolia) fell asleep and were walled up in the cave where they had hidden in order to escape the persecution of the pagan king Decius (third century). Then, at the time of the Christian emperor Theodosius II (fifth century), the Sleepers returned to life, in order to confirm the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body and the victory of monotheism over idolatry.[1] Christian in origin, this legend – through the Christian Jacobites of the Arabian peninsula – strongly inspired the Prophet of Islam and many Muslim writers. A sura of the Qurʾān (sura al-Kahf, 18:8-26) deals with this event, wherein the Sleepers are called the "Companions of the Cave" (*Ashāb al-Kahf*). However, the legend is reinterpreted in a way that goes against the very foundations of Christianity, that is, against the divine filiation of Christ and his messianic mission. The Qurʾān gives also a prominent role to a dog – named Qitmīr according to tradition – who accompanied the Companions and who stayed at the door of the cave to protect their sleep.[2] The miracle of the resurrection of the body within the monotheist faith shared by both Christians and Muslims is the central element of the narrative.

In the fifth century, a Christian shrine was built in front of a cave near Ephesus where the perfectly preserved bodies of seven young men were discovered. This shrine inspired the Muslims, who in turn built mausoleums near sacred caves on many sites in the Muslim world, all allegedly being the genuine cave of the Sleepers.[3] One of the earliest sites in Andalusia (Loja, north of Malaga), in a remote place named "Los Siete Durmientes" (The Seven Sleepers), was abandoned by the Muslims when they left Spain. Nowadays, the most active sites, with sanctuaries open to

devotion and visits by pilgrimage groups, dedicated to the Seven Sleepers are situated in Asia: two in Turkey (Afşin, Tarsus) and the others in the Nakhichevan province of Azerbaijan, in Afghanistan and in the Xinjiang province of China. Many sites in Northern Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) and in the Middle East were frequented by both Christians and Muslims, and some in Morocco by Muslims and Jews. Some sites in Turkey (Afsin, Tarsus) have replaced old churches and were up to the beginning of the 20th century visited by both Christians and Muslims.[4] This was also the case at a similar sanctuary in Amman, Jordan.[5]

Furthermore, for several reasons explained below, the legend of the Seven Sleepers has considerably inspired Christian and Muslim art, miniatures, icons, and the visual representation in general, not in the Mediterranean only but in places as far away as Africa, the Silk Road and the Malay Archipelago. It is still very influential upon the Muslim mind today.

The purpose of this article is to explain, on the one hand, why the portraits of the Seven Sleepers/Companions of the Cave were so attractive in Islam and praised by all, to the extent that they came to be represented upon talismans. On the other hand, I will analyse the close link existing between the pictorial representations of the Companions of the Cave and the talismanic art, in order to demonstrate that the high sanctity of the Companions and of their holy dog was transferred to these talismans, making such apotropaic objects and drawings the most efficacious amulets in the field of magical healing and protective art. This study aims also to emphasise the pictorial strategy adopted by the Muslim artists who have elaborated particular geometrical figures to represent the Companions (particularly in the talismanic art), and brought to birth an unexpected kind of portrait of these seven saints and of their dog, that I would like to label "geometric portrait."

The reasons for the success of the narrative of the Seven Sleepers and its adoption by the Qurʾān are well known. The French orientalist Louis Massignon, in several seminal studies of this legend and the cult of the Seven Sleepers, has demonstrated that the sura of the Cave should be depicted as the "Sura of the Apocalypse," and that its reading every Friday in mosques, as suggested in several hadiths, delays the coming of the last days and permits the hearers to avoid the trap set by the Antichrist.[6] From this we must understand that the high virtue of protection of the sura, and consequently of the names of the Companions, has been universally recognised by Muslims. This is only one of the reasons, and there are some others.

The link of this legend with the cult of saints is especially noticeable, since the Companions of the Cave have occupied and still occupy nowadays a major place in saint veneration in the Muslim world. They were, for example, clearly and very early depicted as saints (*walī, awliyā*), that is, people doing miracles (*karāmat*), in the *Kash al-Mahjūb* of al-Hujwirī (11th century), the oldest Persian treatise on Sufism.[7] The Companions are also the prototypes of the knights of the spiritual chivalry (*Futuwwa*),[8] and the model of the "perfect man" (*insān-i kāmil*) for the Gnostics and Sufis. Finally, due to the celebrity of the Companions, many pilgrimage sanctuaries with a cave, from Northern Africa to Chinese Turkestan, were dedicated to the Companions. In addition, we find images, miniatures and paintings representing their story, and also many amulets and talismans bearing their names.

4

Ahmet Eyicil, "Afşin Ashab-ı Kehf," *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 14 (2005): 269-287.

5

Roger Lescot, "Un sanctuaire des Dormants en Jordanie," *Revue des Études Islamiques* 1 (1968): 3-9.

6

Hadith mentioned by Ibn Mardwiyya, Abū Saʾīd al-Khudrī, al-Nasāʾī, al-Baihaqī etc. The text related by Ibn Mardwiyya and attributed to Ibn ʿUmar is the following: "Whoever recites the sura al-Kahf on Friday will be blessed with a light that will rise from underneath his feet to the peak of the sky. This will be a light for him on the day of resurrection, and he will be forgiven for what is between the Friday and the next Friday." On this hadith, see also Louis Massignon, "Les Sept Dormants, Apocalypse de l'Islam," *Écrits Mémorables* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2009 [1950]), I, 321-33.

7

Al-Hujwirī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb* (edited by Reynold A. Nicholson, London: Luzac and Company LTD, 1976), 230.

8

According to two treatises on the Futuwwa written in the 14th century; see Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, "İslam ve Türk illerinde Fütüvvet teşkilatı ve kaynakları," [Organisation and Sources of the Futuwwa in Islam and in the Turkish regions] *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası* XI (1949-50), 315 (1-354) and Ayhan Pala, "Türk kültür tarihinin bir kaynağı olarak Burgazi Fütüvvetnamesi," *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Velī Araştırma Dergisi* 44 (2007): 201-2 (183-238.) See also Ö. Sert, *Yedi Uyurlar Efsanesi*, 75-8, 88-90 and Asadullāh Wāhid, "Tatbīq-i Awliyāʾullāh ba Ashāb-i Kahf dar mutūn-i ʿirfānī farsī," [A comparison of the saints of God with the Companions of the Cave in Persian mystical texts] *Zabān va ādab-i farsī*, Tabriz, 53:220 (2010): 123-4 (119-7.)

9

Both are in the 'Maqāmāt of Abū Muhammad al-Qāsim ibn 'Alī al-Harīrī', Ms n° 3929, f. 66v, and Ms 5847, f. 89 (the painter is Yahyā ibn Mahmūd ibn Yahyā ibn Abū'l-Hasan ibn Kuwarriha al-Wasitī), Bibliothèque nationale de France, section of oriental manuscripts, Paris.

10

The miniatures and paintings analysed in this article come from the following manuscripts: "Rawdha al-Safā"; "Zubda al-tawārikh"; "Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh" of Rashīd al-Dīn; a picture from a collection attributed to Siyāh Qalam (Museum of Topkapı, Istanbul); several exemplars of the "Qisas al-anbiyā" of Ishāq bin Ibrāhīm bin Mansūr bin Halīf al-Nishābūrī. They are reproduced in M. S. Dimand, "Persian and Indian miniature paintings," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 30:12 (December 1935): 248-50; Sarwat Okasha, *The Muslim Painter and the Divine* (London: Park Lane, 1981): 91-3; *The St. Petersburg Muraqqa'. Album of Indian and Persian Miniatures from the 16th Through the 18th Century and Specimens of Persian Calligraphy by 'Imād al-Hasanī* (Lugano-Milano: Leonardo Arte, 1996); Metin And, *Minyatürlerler Osmanlı-İslâm Mitologiyası* [The Ottoman-Islamic Mythology in Miniatures] (Istanbul: Yapıkredi Y., 2007), 232-7.

11

Jalāl Sitārī, *Pazhūhish dar Qissa-yi Ashāb-i Kahf* [Research on the narrative of the Companions of the Cave] (Tehran: Nashr-i Markaz, 1931), 27.

12

Carl Gustav Mannerheim, *Across Asia from West to East in 1906-1908* (Helsinki: 1940, reprinted Oosterhout - The Netherlands: Anthropological Publications, 1969), 360-1.

13

Giovanni Canova, "Animals in Islamic paradise and hell," in *Proceedings of the Colloquium on Paradise and Hell in Islam, Keszthely, 7-14 July 2002*, eds Kinga Dévényi and Alexander Fodor (Budapest: The Arabist, 2008), 63 (55-81).

14

Shams al-Dīn Ahmad-e Aflākī, *The Feats of the Knowers of God (Manaqib al-'Arifīn)*, trans. John O'Kane (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 658. See also 112.

15

Ibid., 658-9.

How to represent the miracle of the Seven Sleepers

Muslim painters and miniaturists have particularly enjoyed the theme of the Ashāb al-Kahf, at least since the 13th and particularly after the 14th century in the Turco-Persian area. The artists were influenced by the 18th sura of the Qur'ān and by a long and rich tradition of hagiography and commentaries (*tafsīr*) on this sura. The principal episode of the Ashāb al-Kahf narrative, which has inspired many artists, is the miraculous sleep in the cave, where the Companions were nestling against each other, under the protection of the dog Qitmīr. This episode hints particularly, more than the rest of the story, at the main message of the legend, the miracle of the resurrection. There are two old images in Arabic manuscripts, dated 1250 and 1236-37, which show the seven youths sleeping all together; in the first image, the Sleepers are not located in a well-defined place, unlike the second illustration where they are situated in front of an edifice, a church, monastery, or palace.[9] More interesting are some Turkish and Persian miniatures produced after the 14th century, since the youths are represented inside the cave, which is represented in the form of a circular figure or a great jar model.[10] Perspective was unknown to the artists and the circle was the best way to suggest a cave.

The dog is a . . . saint

It is also especially noteworthy that the dog, generally called Qitmīr, who plays a prominent role in the legend, is far from absent in the iconographies. According to the Qur'ān, the dog of the Companions "stretched out its two forelegs on the threshold of the cave" (18:17), and so it is in the images. From other sources, it is believed that the dog, speaking like a human, offered to protect the Companions against their enemies.[11] This role gave Qitmīr a predominant role in the narrative and it was reflected in the architecture of some sanctuaries of the Companions. As a protector of the Companions and the keeper of the shrine, Qitmīr used to stand at the entrance of the cave. At the sanctuary of Tuyuq, in Xinjiang (China), as observed by a western traveller: "The entrance to the cave in which they [the Companions] lie is said to be guarded by a dog wrapped, as they are, in eternal sleep [. . .] You see the dog in the shape of an elevation in the floor covered with glazed tiles."[12] It is no wonder that Qitmīr is believed to be one of the few animals who have entered Paradise, although the behaviour of the prophet Muhammad towards dogs was reportedly not benevolent.[13]

Qitmīr is venerated in the Islamic world, and especially in the Gnostic and Sufi movements. We could mention the Mevlevī Ahmad-i Aflāqī, who writes in his biography of Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī that the dog of a Sufi shaykh possessed "friendship with God" and that he was "the very same dog as the dog of the Companions of the Cave."[14] In addition, Aflāqī writes that this dog performed the dance of the Mevlevī dervishes, "entering the circle of the companions and turning with the noble disciples," and that dogs may be "spiritual guides."[15] It is worth noting here that "friendship with God" is no more than the usually accepted translation of the term for a Muslim saint, *walī* or *awliyā*. Hence, the dog is a saint. And in many cases, he was and is still more venerated than the Companions themselves. (This is what is shown by the talismanic art, as explained below.)

The veneration of Qitmīr is reflected in a poem written by a Uyghur who authored a booklet on the sanctuary of the Companions of the Cave at Tuyuq, oasis of Turfan, Xinjiang (China):

You came here, one thousand years before, my Qitmīr,
You are living in one hundred thousand hearts, my Qitmīr,
Your name spread all over the world, my Qitmīr,
I came here to venerate your track, my Qitmīr.

Abdulqadir, 2006[16]

This is one of the reasons why many Sufis and dervishes have loved to be accompanied by a dog.[17] This fact is illustrated by several miniatures and drawings of wandering Qalandar dervishes travelling with this animal – the animal is kept on the leash, which is very unusual in Islamic culture.[18] Without any doubt, their dogs remind them of Qitmīr. This is confirmed, for instance, by the Central Asian Qalandar Bābā Rāhim Mashrab (17th century) who met a shepherd going without a spiritual guide and offered to reveal the names of spiritual guides to him if he agreed to hand over his dog. Then Mashrab enumerated the names of the Seven Companions of the Cave and told the dog to travel with him. In a poem, Mashrab said to the animal that they would go together everywhere, in desert, in cities, and that they will share pain and happiness, and will remain always faithful to God.[19] In addition, according to a hagiography collected at the end of the 19th century in Chinese Turkistan, Qitmīr is depicted as a creature able to speak, like a human, and to have a religious life. Qitmīr is, for example, like the Seven Sleepers, in search of God.[20]

From all this, we can understand that sainthood is not embodied by humans only, but by animals as well, and the portraits of saints are not only those of men. This is, I suggest, the way we can interpret the Muslim drawings and miniatures that show dogs in the company of holy men or dervishes. Actually, both can be regarded as saints, as the Companions of the Cave and their dog were.

This view is strengthened by the fact that Qitmīr was also identified with some prominent and saintly figures of the Qurʾān and the Islamic tradition. According to an Ismāʿīlī writer at the beginning of the 19th century, the dog of the Companions is none other than the Imām ʿAlī, and even the Prophet Khidr himself: "the dog of the Companions of al-Kahf was an impersonation of ʿAlī ibn Abū Tālib; he [ʿAlī] appeared to the seven youths who had fled from the emperor Decian, in the form of a dog (*ba-sura kalb*), in order to prove them and to try their faith. . . ."[21] The Druze tradition argues that Qitmīr is an impersonation of Salmān who is, in their view, the same as Khidr.[22] Meanwhile, the Companions are seen as the seven Ismāʿīlī imams or as seven prophets (Moses, Jesus, Noah, etc.). The importance of Qitmīr is exaggerated in these Ismāʿīlī and Druze trends, since to him is attributed a quasi-divine nature; prophets and saints can be then portrayed in the form of a dog.

However, in the Sunni tradition, Qitmīr is a dog with a saintly nature and not a saint or a prophet who transformed himself into an animal, as is the case in numerous hagiographies. A saint and a protector of the Companions, Qitmīr plays in a sense the leading role in the legend, and appeared hence worthy of more veneration than the Sleepers. The amulet-makers were fully aware of this particularity and they gave, as demonstrated below, a key position to this animal in their talismans. Moreover, in the Malay world, in Iran, in the Caucasus, and in the Hijaz, writing the name of Qitmīr on an envelope would ensure the safe arrival of a letter.[23]

16

Abdulqadir, *Junggo Musulmanlirining Äshabul Kähf ghari* [The cave of the Companions of the Cave among the Muslims of China] (n.p. [Tuyuq/Turfan], n.d.), 2.r.

17

See Alexandre Papas, "Dog of God, animality and wildness among dervishes," in *Islamic Alternative. Non Mainstream Religions in Persianate Society*, Raei Shahrukh, ed. (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2017), 131-132 (121-138). On dogs and Sufism see also Süleyman Uludağ, "Tasavvuf Kültüründe Köpek" [Dogs in the culture of Sufism], *Dergah* 101 (July 1998): 17-20.

18

See two miniatures from the end of the 16th century in the Musée du Louvre (Inv. MAO 1219 and Inv. 3619, G, b), published in *L'Etrange et le merveilleux en terre d'islam* (Paris: Musée du Louvre - Réunion des musées nationaux, 2001), 240-2. Another miniature from the 18th century (British Museum) is published in Javad Nurbakhsh, *Sufi Women* (London: Khaniqa-hi-Nimatullahi Nurbakhsh, 1990), 234.

19

Qissai Mashrab (Tashkent: Yazuchi Nashriyati, 1992), 25. On Mashrab's life and ideas see A. Papas, *Mystiques et vagabonds en islam. Portraits de trois soufis qalandar* (Paris: Cerf, 2010), chapter 1.

20

V.I. Roborovskii, *Puteshestvie v Vostochnyi Tyan'-Shan' i v Nan'-Shan'. Trudy ekspeditsii russkogo geograficheskogo Obshchestva po Tsentralnoi Azii v 1893-1895 gg.* [Travels in the Eastern Tian-Chan and in the Nan'-Shan'. Works of the Expedition of the Russian Geographical Society in Central Asia in the Years 1893-1895] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo geograficheskoi Literatury, 1949), 395-6.

21

Edward E. Salisbury, "Notice of the Book of Sulaimān's first ripe fruit, disclosing the mysteries of the Nusairian religion," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 8 (1866): 303 (227-308); L. Massignon, "Les 'Sept Dormants,' apocalypse de l'Islam," 109-10.

22

L. Massignon, "Les 'Sept Dormants,' apocalypse de l'Islam," 110.

23

Tewfik Canaan, "The decipherment of Arabic talismans," in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. E. Savage-Smith (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Canaan, 2004), 146 (125-77); Annabel Gallop, "The amuletic cult of Maʿrūf al-Karkhi in the Malay world," in *Writings and Writings from Another World and Another Area. Investigations in Islamic Text and Script in Honour of Dr Januarius Justus Witkam, professor of Codicology and Paleography of the Islamic World at Leyden University*, ed. Robert M. Kerr and Thomas Millo (Cambridge: Archetype, 2010), 176-7, 183-5, 191-2 (167-96).

24

Museum of Topkapı, Istanbul, Ms 2160, f. 83. I want to thank here Manoel Pénicaud for giving me some pictures preserved in the Louis Massignon Archives in Paris.

25

Emel Esin, "'Eren,' les derviches hétérodoxes turcs d'Asie centrale et le peintre surnommé 'Siyāh'Kalam,'" *Turcica* 17 (1985), 37 (7-49).

26

See Jean-Paul Loubes and Thierry Zarcone, *Uygur Islam. The Seven Sleepers in the Silk Road* (in preparation).

27

David Talbot Rice, *The Illustrations to the 'Word History' of Rashīd al-Dīn* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1976), 87; Faruk Sümer, *Eshabü'l-Kehf. Yedi Uyurlar* [Companions of the Cave. Seven Sleepers] (Istanbul: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı, 1989).

28

Topkapi Saray, Istanbul, Ms 2654, fo 32a.

The saints and the cave

One of the more fascinating circular representations of the cave, with its occupants depicted with Turco-Mongol faces (15th century), is attributed to the Central Asian painter Siyāh Qalam (or to a painter of this school deeply influenced by Chinese art and nomadic themes) (Fig. 1).[24] Emel Esin, an art historian, considers that the Sleepers, in this drawing, are dressed in Qalandar/dervish garments.[25] In my opinion, there is no evidence to support her assertion, although the Seven Companions have sometimes been associated with the "Seven Qalandars" in Eastern Turkistan. This is the case for instance at the sanctuary of the Ashāb al-Kahf at Tuyuq in the Turfan oasis (Xinjiang, China).[26] There is an earlier image of the Sleepers in the *Jāmiʿal-tawārīkh* of Rashīd al-Dīn (13th century), which shows the Companions in a Central Asian environment. About this picture, David Talbot Rice writes that the Seven Sleepers here "wear Mongol dress, with gold embroidered panels on their chests." The king Dākyanūs (Decius), persecutor of the Companions, is present in this picture, mounted on a Mongol pony, and also the dog, which "lies sleeping in a more natural position." The landscape is inspired by Chinese painting style.[27] There exists a very similar painting, from another manuscript of the *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh*, that is more marked by the Chinese influence (Fig. 2).[28] In summary, the theme of the Companions of the Cave has obviously fascinated the Muslim painters as a consequence of the popularity of the legend. But the legend has also left its mark upon the writers who produced a great number of hagiographies with several variants and in several languages.

Fig. 1. Siyāh Qalam. Ms 2160, f. 83, Museum of Topkapı, Istanbul. L. Massignon Archives, BNF, Paris.

Fig. 2. *Jāmiʿ al-tawārīkh*. Rashīd al-Dīn, Ms 2654, Topkapi Saray Library, Istanbul. L. Massignon Archives, Paris.

We would like now to point to two details in the story of the Companions of the Cave which have influenced the pictorial representations. The first one is the number of the Companions, which varied already in the Christian versions of the legend and is not established with precision in the Qurʾān:

> "They will say, 'Three, and their dog was the fourth of them'. They will say, 'Five, and their dog was the sixth of them', guessing at the Unseen. They will say, 'Seven, and their dog was the eighth of them'. Say: 'My Lord knows very well their number, and none knows them, except a few' (Q. 18:21)."

And yet, the iconographies show either seven or five Companions.

Fig. 4. The five companions and their dog sitting in front of Jesus/Isā. Tarjama-i miftāh jifr al-jāmi', in M. And, *Minyatürlerler Osmanlı-İslâm Mitologiyası*, 234–5.

Fig. 3. *Majma' al-gharā'ib*. Muhammad al-Muftī, f. 64 v°, in *L'Etrange et le merveilleux en terre d'islam*, 57.

The second point is the colour of the dog, which is at the centre of a debate among the commentators on the sura. The divergences are reflected in the images and we have found pictures of dogs with different colours (brown, white, yellow). In some cases, the choice could have come from the symbolism attached to the colour. For instance, Mawlānā (Rūmī) wrote that the dog was yellow because "it was a lover, and the colour (complexion) of lovers is always yellow (pale) like my colour."[29] Furthermore, in another image from Afghanistan in the 17th century, the representation of the "dog of the Companions of the Cave" (*sang-i Ashāb al-Kahf*) appears isolated and its colours are, surprisingly, three: red for the head, the back black and the belly white (Fig. 3).[30]

We can mention another episode concerning the Companions of the Cave, which appeared in one hadith and inspired a painter. This hadith, transmitted by al-Abbās, says that the Companions will waken and leave their cave when Jesus and the Mahdī will come to Earth in the End Times and that they will help them fight the Antichrist or Dajjal.[31] Surprisingly, one miniature, the lone example to my knowledge, refers to this event and shows five companions and their dog sitting in front of Jesus/Isā (Fig. 4).[32]

Concerning the images of the youths stretched out in the cave, the most common of the representations of the Companions, the likelihood is that the model for these images, and particularly the circular model for the cave, comes from the Byzantine world, where the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus were widely present in the Christian art of the icons (Fig. 5, next page).

Such images existed at least since the ninth century and continued to occur frequently in miniatures, sculpture and stained glass in the 13th and 14th centuries. Particularly striking is the resemblance between the circular representations of the cave in the Christian and Muslim iconography. The only difference is the presence of one or several bowls and sticks in the Christian images (usually one for each of the Sleepers), and of a dog in the Muslim images (Fig. 6, next page).

Although the dog is very rare in the Christian hagiographies and

29
Shams al-Dīn Ahmad-e Aflākī, *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, 202.

30
Muhammad al-Muftī, *Majma'al-gharā'ib*, manuscript Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, 17th century, ms 9, f. 64 v°. This document is published in *L'Etrange et le merveilleux en terre d'islam*, 57.

31
Samuela Pagani, *Il Rinnovamento mistico dell'Islam. Un commento di 'Abd al-Gani al-Nābulusi a Ahmad Sirhindī* (Napoli: Università degli Studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale,' 2003), 102 footnote 80.

32
Tarjama-i miftāh jifr al-jāmi', Istanbul Üniversite Kütüphanesi, Ms T. 6624; published by M. And, *Minyatürlerler Osmanlı-İslâm Mitologiyası*, 234-5.

Fig. 6. *Zubdat al-tawārikh*. Ms 1973, Türk ve Islam Eserleri Müzesi, Istanbul. In M. And, *Minyatürlerler Osmanlı-İslâm Mitologiyası*.

Fig. 5. Menologue of Basile II. Ms 11th century, Vatican Apostolic Library, Rome. L. Massignon Archives, Paris.

33
On this name see Gianroberto Scarcia, *Nelle terre dei (Sette) Dormienti. Sopraluoghi, appunti, spunti* (Perugia: Graphe.It Edizioni, 2018), 29-76.

34
See Isidore Lévy, "Le Chien des Sept Dormants," in *Mélanges Bidez, Annuaire de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientale* (1934), 579-584.

35
Özlem Sert, *Yedi Uyurlar Efsanesi* [The Legend of the Seven Sleepers] (Ankara: Phoenix, 2009), 97-8; Halil Virit, *Sufilerin Gözünde Ashāb-i Kehf* [The Companions of the Cave as seen by the Sufis] (Istanbul: Buhara Yay., 2018), 119-22.

36
See footnote 8.

37
Serge de Laugier de Beaurecueil, "A l'Ecole des Sept Dormants. La Futuwwa chez 'A. A. Ansārī de Herat (1006-1089)," in *En Hommage au Père Jacques Jomier*, ed. Marie-Thérèse Urvoy (Paris: Cerf, 2002), 49-60.

visual representations, not to say completely absent, it appears in one of the oldest narratives about the Seven Sleepers by Theodosius (mid-sixth century) and was named Viricanus (man-dog).[33] There is a great likelihood that it was under Indian influences that the dog was introduced into the story of the Companions of the Cave. There is a similar story in the *Mahabharata* about several members of the Pandava royal family who renounced the world and went to remote areas, accompanied by a dog, in search of the Absolute. It is revealed later that the dog was actually the god Dharma or Yama. This story probably reached the Mediterranean through Sassanid Iran.[34]

There are also mystical interpretations of the sleep of the Companions in the cave. One interpretation reflects a Sufi idea cultivated in the brotherhoods milieu, according to which the world is divided between the inner, secret (*bāṭin*), that is symbolised by the cave, and the outer, the apparent (*ẓāhir*), which is the material world. While sleeping in the material world, the Companions are actually awakened to the spiritual world.[35] In addition, the Companions play an essential role in the spiritual chivalry, the *Futuwwa*, since they represent the spiritual model for the valorous young men (*fityān, javanmard*) who resisted the persecutions of the pagan king Decius, and then endeavoured to "sleep" and close their eyes to the world of ignorance and illusion.[36] As mentioned by the Sufi 'Abdallāh Ansārī, in the 11th century, the Companions are the embodiment of the generosity (*muruwwa*) of the heart, showing indulgence to everybody and seeking God without getting lost.[37]

When the image becomes a talisman

The iconography of the Companions is an attempt to express artistically one aspect of sainthood which is without doubt one of the most important: that is, the miracle of Resurrection. Unsurprisingly, as in Byzantine Christianity, the images and the names of the Companions have undergone a process through which they were made into an object with prophylactic qualities. This process

has been well studied in the Christian West. Dominique Rigaux, for example, discusses the shift from the holy image to a drawing that one can carry with him like a talisman or an amulet, and he writes: "this is a borderline case where the use of the image gives the image the role of an object."[38] We know many examples of Christian talismans bearing the names of the Sleepers and used in various charms against diseases (Fig. 7).[39] Actually, the protective virtue of the Seven Sleepers and of the (or their) dog – and this is a rare mention of this animal in the Christian legend – is quite ancient. It is mentioned in a fifth- or sixth-century Egyptian amulet against illness that is written on papyrus.[40]

Fig. 7. A 13th-century cameo with the Seven Sleepers in low relief. Venice. British Museum, OA.835.

However, in the Muslim world, the talisman or "image-object" dedicated to the Companions of the Cave is non-representative and does not bear any portrait of the saints lying side by side in the cave, as in Christian talismanic art. On the contrary, the image is replaced by their seven names in a circular fashion, which is reminiscent – and this is my interpretation – of the circular form of the cave.[41] This is probably one explanation of the choice of the circle instead of the quadrangle, which is the shape usually adopted by the amulet-makers.[42] Actually, the circle is, in a sense, a portrait, but composed with the letters of their names. Although the circle is the shape usually adopted for amulets and talismans, the circle composed by the names of the Sleepers must be viewed as another circle in the talisman or, in other words, as a symbolic circle inside a circle.[43]

The sacred power of letters in Islam has given a peculiar place to the names of the Companions and especially to sura 18, to its weekly reading and, furthermore, to its use as an image-object, actually an inscription/talisman to be hung on the walls of a house or a mosque. For example, a treatise on magic states that:

> "It is told that the Prophet said: 'teach your children the names of *ahlu'l-Kahf*, for if they are written on the door of a house that

38
Dominique Rigaux, "Réflexions sur les usages apotropaïques de l'image peinte. Autour de quelques peintures murales novaraises du Quattrocento," in *L'Image. Fonctions et usages des images dans l'Occident médiéval*, eds. J. Baschet and J.-C. Schmitt (Paris: Le Léopard d'or, 1996), 162 (155-77).

39
W. Bonser, "The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Anglo-Saxon and later recipes," *Folklore* 56:2 (June 1945), 254-6; Ö. Sert, *Yedi Uyurlar Efsanesi*, 44-9.

40
Ove Ullestad, "Sources chrétiennes de la légende des Sept Dormants," in *Les Sept Dormants ou les gens de la Caverne. Héritage spirituel commun aux chrétiens et aux musulmans*, eds Jean-François Bour and Marie-Laure Morbieu (Le Coudray-Macouart: Saint-Léger Editions, 2018), 85 (75-100).

41
See some examples of these talismans in S. Seligmann, "Das Siebenschläfer-Amulett," *Der Islam* 5 (1914), 370-88, and Venetia Porter, "Amulets inscribed with the names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in the British Museum," in *Word of God, Art of Man. The Qurʾān and its Creative Expressions*, ed. Fahmida Suleman (London: Oxford University Press - the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2007), 123-34.

42
Based on the symbolism of the number four that hints at the Four Angels, Jabrāʾīl, Azrāʾī, Mikāʾīl and Isrāfil.

43
About the circle as a model universally adopted by the amulet-makers see Constant Hamès, "Mandalas et sceaux talismaniques musulmans," in *De l'Arabie à l'Himalaya. Chemins croisés en hommage à Marc Gaborieau*, eds Véronique Bouillier and Catherine Servan-Schreiber (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2004), 145-59.

44

Muhammad Ḥaqqī al-Nāzilī, *Ḥazīnat al-asrār jalīlat al-adhkār*, quoted by T. Canaan, "The decipherment of Arabic talismans," 90.

45

Ja'far Sharif, *Islam in India. The Qanun-i-Islam. The Customs of the Musalmāns of India*, [1921], (reprinted Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 242. The names of the Companions are also found on bracelets, see S. Seligmann, "Das Siebenschläfer-Amulett," 375.

46

M. Aksel, *Türklerde Dini Resimler* (Istanbul: Elif, 1967; reprinted, Istanbul; Kapı, 2010), 68; Ö. Sert, *Yedi Uyurlar Efsanesi*, 123.

47

Qurbān 'Alī Wālid-i Khālid Hājjī Ayaghūzī, *Tārīkh-i jarīda-yi jadīda* (Kazan: Qazān Univīrsītī, 1889), 34; M. S. Andreev, "Chil'tany v Sredne-aziatskikh verovani-yakh," [The chil'tan in Central-Asian belief] in *Iz rabot Vostochnogo Fakul'teta Sredne-Aziatskogo Gos. Universiteta* (Tashkent: Izdanie Obshchestva dlja izuchenija Tadzhikistana i iranskih narodnostej za ego predelami, 1927), 342 (334-48).

48

A section is dedicated to these seals in the catalogue of Halûk Perk, a Turkish collector, see Halûk Perk, *Osmanlı Tılsım Mühürleri. Halûk Perk Koleksiyonu* (Istanbul: Halûk Perk Müzesi, 2010), 92-103.

house will not be burned, or on an object, this object will not be stolen, or on a ship, this ship will not be drowned.' "[44]

Precisely, it is known that in India, the names of the Companions with that of their dog are written and pasted on house walls.[45] The virtues of these talismans as a protection against fire, or during a journey on a ship, or against evil spirits are mentioned in many places, in Turkey,[46] and as far as in the oasis of the Silk Road.[47] Over time, the talismans with the names of the Companions of the Cave have become one of the most efficacious and widespread amulets in the entire Muslim world, from Morocco to the Malay archipelago.

The "image-object": letters-portraits and geometric-portraits

As an image-object, the Companions of the Cave have been represented through different motifs and shapes, each highlighting in various ways their seven names: Yamlikhā, Maksilīnā, Maslīnā, Marnūsh, Dabarnūsh, Shazanūsh and Kafashtatayūsh. I would distinguish two categories that combine them: "calligraphic models" and "geometric models." The first category is divided into two sub-categories: "the Companions in the form of a ship" and "the Companions in the form of a tree." The second category is also divided in two sub-categories: "the Companions in a hexagonal fashion" and "the Companions in a circular fashion." Actually, all these calligraphic and geometrical representations of the Sleepers are no more than symbolic equivalents of the portrait of these saints gathering in the cave and rising from the dead, and more precisely a symbolic projection of the resurrection. However, the most interesting category, for our purpose here, is the second, since the hexagon and the circle are more evocative than the first one of the image of the Sleepers.

Moreover, the hexagonal and circular talismans of the Companions have circulated all over the Muslim world, not only in manuscripts, but also in the form of prints on separate paper leaves. This is demonstrated by the fact that many seals bearing these hexagonal and circular motifs exist in several museums and in private collections.[48] These prints were reproduced by the thousand and increased consequently the popularity of the Companions.

Calligraphic models

The Companions in the form of a ship

The fact that God, in the Qur'ān, turns the youths sleeping in the cave to the right and then to the left reminds us of the movement of the waves in the sea, and links the Companions of the Cave with everything or every people concerned with sea and water: "Thou wouldst have thought them awake, as they lay sleeping, while We turn them now to the right, now to the left . . ." (Qur'ān 18:17). Their names are consequently protective for the sailors and for their ships. A particular genre of drawing and calligraphy called "Ship of the Companions of the Cave" (in Turkish, *Eshāb ül-Kahf gemisi*) emerged among the Ottomans. The names of the Companions are written in the form of different kinds of ships, rowing or sailing boats, written on their hulls or sails.[49] Some representations are quite simple but many others very sophisticated (Fig. 8 and 9, next page). In addition, this type of talisman is sometimes associated with many other talismanic motifs and printed in wide paper sheets (Fig. 10, next page).

49

M. Aksel, *Türklerde Dini Resimler*, 66-70; *Cam Altında Yirmi bin Fersah. Geleneksel Halk Resim Sanatından 'Camaltı Resimleri'* [Twenty thousand Parasang under Glass. Glass Pictures in Traditional Popular Pictural Art] (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Kültür Sanat Yay., 1997), 36-7; Jürgen W. Frembgen, "The symbolism of the boat in Sufi and Shi'ia imagery: some examples from the visual culture of Pakistan and Iran," *Journal of the History of Sufism*, 6 (2013), 58-9 (85-100).

Fig. 9. Ottoman calligraphy of the names of the Companions of the Cave in the form of a ship. Private collection, Istanbul.

Fig. 8. Ottoman calligraphy of the names of the Companions of the Cave in the form of a ship. Eshāb ül-Kahf gemisi, private collection, Istanbul.
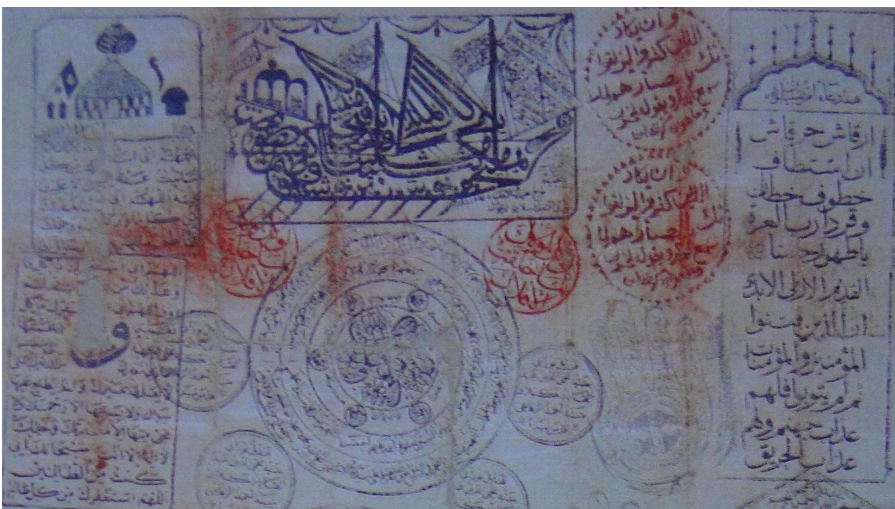.

Fig. 10. Sheet with the ship of the Companions and several other talismanic images. No date, private collection, Istanbul.

Fig. 11. Ottoman calligraphy of the names of the Companions of the Cave in the form of a tree. Collection of the Eṣrefzāde Qādirī Dergāh, Bursa.

The Companions in the form of a tree

The names of the Companions are also written in the form of a tree with several leaves, each name being inside a leaf, and composed in mirror script. The meaning of this symbol is, according to Louis Massignon, that the Companions during their sleep were interlaced, as clearly shown in the miniatures and drawings, like the leaves of a tree.[50] Thus, the "tree of the Companions" is another way to remind us of the episode in the cave. In one Ottoman glass painting (19th century), the position of Qitmīr is notable since his name appears in two leaves situated at the bottom of the tree, near the earth. Obviously, Qitmīr is protecting access to the tree, as it was guarding the entrance of the cave in the legend and in the hagiographies (Fig. 11 and Fig. 12 in the next page).[51] Furthermore, the Islamic model for this tree might be the "tree of life" of which several versions exist. This tree hints in general at the Sidra tree that one can see only in Paradise.[52]

The calligraphic models (ship, tree) of the Companions of the Cave are usually used as apotropaic inscriptions to decorate and protect mosques, civil edifices, and private houses. Both hint at the movement or

[50]
Manoël Pénicaud, *Le Réveil des Sept Dormants. Anthropologie d'un pèlerinage islamo-chrétien en Bretagne* (PhD, Université d'Aix-en-Provence-Marseille, 2010), 538 (edited as *Le Réveil des Sept Dormants. Un pèlerinage islamo-chrétien en Bretagne* (Paris: Cerf, 2014).

[51]
See another example, dated 1897-98, of this drawing of the Companions in the form of a tree in J. W. Frembgen, "Harmony of lines. Islamic calligraphies from Ottoman dervish lodges," in *The Aura of Alif. The Art of Writing in Islam,* ed. J. W. Frembgen (Munich: Prestel, 2010), 86 (79-89).

[52]
B. Aminov, "La Symbolique musulmane," *Oriente Moderno*, 26:1 (2007), 29-30 (21-33).

the spatial position of the Companions in the cave during their miraculous sleep; for this reason they may help the bearer of a talisman with such a motif to memorise these saints. Let us conclude this paragraph by mentioning that the calligraphies of the Sleepers in the form of a ship have particularly inspired the artists; some of their creations are marvellous and unique pieces sought by collectors and sold in the art markets.[53] Moreover, this calligraphy, together with that of the Companions in the form of a tree, has nowadays become popular to the extent that we find copies in many religious shops in Turkey, and even in tourist shops.

Geometric models

The Companions in a hexagonal fashion

The portrait and the images of the Companions when sleeping in the cave have close links with the talismans, amulets and inscriptions composed of geometric patterns, particularly the hexagon and the circle (Fig. 13 and 14). These two geometric figures are actually executed in arabesque with the Arabic letters of the names of the Companions and of Qiṭmīr. Both figures hint actually at the circular model of the cave.

Fig. 12. Ottoman calligraphy of the names of the Companions of the Cave in the form of a tree. Private collection, Istanbul.

Fig. 13. Ottoman calligraphy of the names of the Companions of the Cave in the form of a circle. Private collection, Istanbul.

Fig. 14. Ottoman calligraphy of the names of the Companions of the Cave in the form of a hexagon. Auctions, Istanbul, 2013.

Concerning the hexagon, the circular writing made with six names surrounds the name of God either in the form "*Yā Ḥāfiẓ*" ("O Preserver") or that of "Allah," or, more frequently, the name of Qiṭmīr. Here, also, the dog occupies the first place.[54] No wonder that the choice of six points for the geometric model (hexagon), though the Companions are in general seven, is intended to favour an association with the seal of Solomon, which has six stars. Thus, there are some talismans with the letters of the hexagon and the Solomon seal overlapping (Fig. 15, next page). In fact, this hexagonal form is highly respected among both Jews and Muslims as the "seal of King Solomon" (*khatm- Sulaymān*). This form is known also as the "star hexagon" (*musaddas*).[55] This form gives actually to the talisman of the Companions a double protective virtue, due to the well-known apotropaic quality of the seal of Solomon. We observe that in this case, only six names of the Companions are mentioned with that of Qiṭmīr, corresponding to the six points of the Solomon star (Fig. 16 and 17, next page).

We do know another example of an amulet in which the names of

Fig. 17. Ottoman seal bearing the names of the Companions of the Cave; the inverted letters of the name of Qitmir occupy the centre. Collection of Halūk Perk, *Osmanlı Tılsım Mühürleri*. Halūk Perk Koleksiyonu, 95.
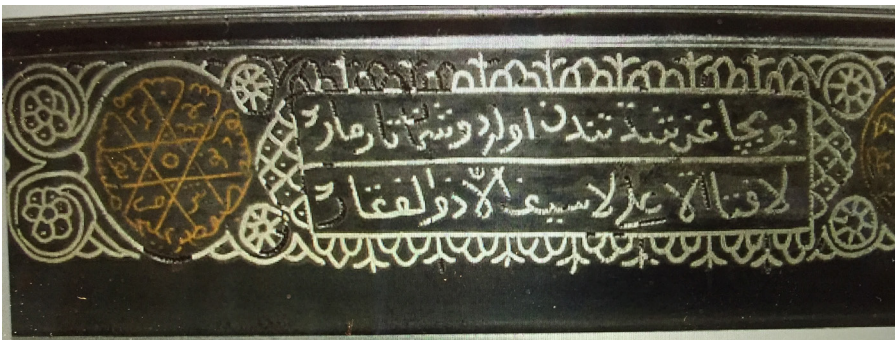

Fig. 15. The hexagon and the Solomon seal overlapping. No date, private collection, Istanbul.

Fig. 16. Ottoman calligraphy (1863) of the names of the Companions of the Cave in the form of a hexagon; the name of Qitmīr occupies the centre. Collection of Ziya Sofu, Istanbul, auction in 2009.

Fig. 18. A detail of the blade of a sword with an engraving of the names of the Companions of the Cave in the form of a hexagon. http://yataghan3.blogspot.com accessed May 2021.

the Seven Sleepers and their dog Qitmīr are also written in circular fashion to form a hexagon or Solomon's seal.[56] This hexagonal figure may be found in numerous inscriptions and artefacts, even non-religious ones: for instance, as noted by Seligman, it appears in talismans made by the impression of the seal of the Shaykh of the Mosque of the Rock in Jerusalem,[57] on the top of a religious skullcap, in a band around the edge of a mirror, etc.[58] On can find also the hexagon engraved on an Ottoman sword (*yataghan*) dated 1900-01 to protect the soldier who carried it. Such a practice is directly connected with the spirit of the Futuwwah, since the soldier might be also engaged in an inner battle against his ego. This spiritual dimension can be confirmed by the fact that the yataghan bears also, near the hexagon of the Companions, the well-known Shi'i formula *Lā fatā illā 'Alī, lā Sayfa illā Dhul'fiqār* ("There is no youth like 'Alī and no sword like *Dhul'fiqār*"), which hints at the fabulous sword of the valorous 'Alī, son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad (Fig. 18).[59] We do know an

[56] D. B. Macdonald, "Description of a silver amulet," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie* vol. 26:1-3 (1911), 267 (267-69).

[57] S. Seligmann, "Das Siebenschläfer-Amulett," 377–78; T. Canaan, "The decipherment of Arabic talismans," 89.

[58] V. Porter, "Amulets inscribed with the names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in the British Museum," 131.

59

http://yataghan3.blogspot.com (accessed May 2021).

60

Nev Müzayedecilik 17 Haziran 2012 (catalogue of auctions) (Istanbul), 226-227.

Ottoman cane-sword or stick-sword (dated 1910) engraved with the names of the Companions.[60] However, the upper extremity of this stick sword has the form of a *müttakā*, that is, a chin support made of wood which is placed under the chin of the Sufi during the time of his sleepless retreat in a room of seclusion (*khalwa*). Thus, the names of the Companions are a protection for the man engaged in a spiritual activity. It fits the tradition according to which many caves dedicated to the Companions were used by Sufis as retreat or meditation rooms (*khalwakhana, chillakhana*).

The Companions in a circular fashion

61

Gunnar Jarring, *Matters of Ethnological Interest in Swedish Missionary Reports from Southern Sinkiang* (Lund: CWK Gleerup Jarring 1979), 9-10.

62

Annemarie Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 83; A. Gallop, "The amuletic cult of Maʿrūf al-Karkhi in the Malay world," 175.

There is another kind of figure wherein the circular writing of the names of the Companions constitutes a perfect circle, instead of a hexagon or a six-pointed star. This pattern is less sophisticated than the hexagon model, and permits the amulet-makers to draw it easily, without using a seal or a stamp. In 2008, in Tuyuq, oasis of Turfan, in Xinjiang (China), I observed the curator of the Ashāb al-Kahf shrine drawing such a talisman (called *tumar* in modern Uyghur)[61] for the pilgrims coming to the place. He started by drawing the external circles composed with Qurʾānic verses, then he wrote one by one the names of the Companions, and finally he put the name of the dog Qitmīr in the centre of the circle (Fig. 19 and 20). Here also, the circle may remind the maker and the bearer of the talisman of the image of the Seven Companions in the cave, and the central place of the dog hints at the exceptional mission of this animal. The talisman is considered very sacred and the curator of the shrine told me that it must never be abandoned on earth, as indeed is the case for any document bearing Arabic letters. Note that this model of talisman, that is with the names of the Companions of the Cave written in a circle around the name of Qitmīr, is widespread throughout the Muslim world, from Africa, in Nigeria for instance (Fig. 21), to Turkey, the oasis of the Silk Road and the Malay Archipelago.[62]

Fig. 19. Circular calligraphy dedicated to the Companions of the Cave. Tuyuq shrine, Turfan oasis, China, 2008. Collection Zarcone.
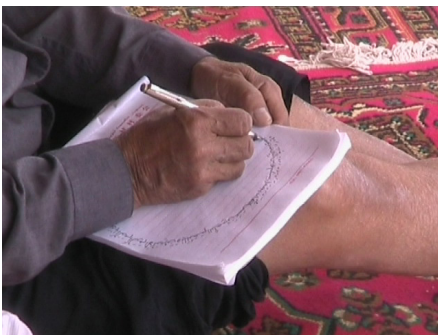

Fig. 20. A Uyghur curator of the shrine of the Companions of the Cave in Tuyuq, Xinjiang, making a talisman with the names of the Companions. Photograph © T. Zarcone, 2008.
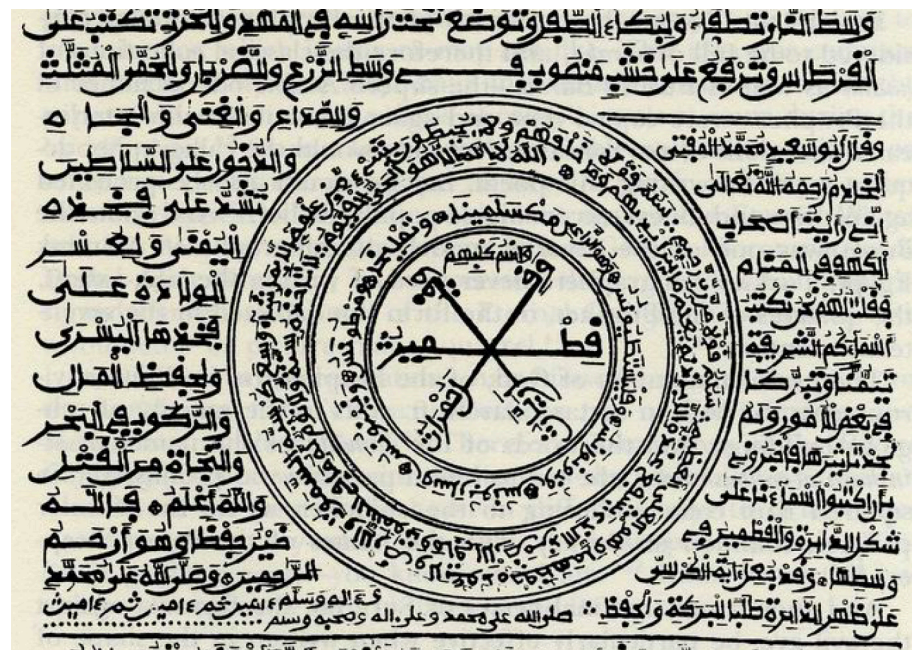

Fig. 21. Circular calligraphy dedicated to the Companions of the Cave. Nigeria. A. Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture*.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to comment on the process through which a saint's image, portrait or representation gain a prophylactic quality and become a talisman . . . The case of the Seven Sleepers/Ashāb al-Kahf is one of the best examples because of its strong influence and prominent place in talismanic art since the Christian era. More, the Companions of the Cave are frequently considered among the first saints of Islam and their place must be questioned when investigating saint veneration. (Their dog is also a saint.) The main difference however between Christians and Muslims regarding the veneration of the Seven Sleepers and their representation (including talismanic art) is embodied by Qitmīr. He was rarely, not to say never, represented by the Christian artists – although he was present in sixth century narratives – but, on the contrary, was omnipresent in Muslim miniatures and talismans. Moreover, his name has also inspired a spirit called Kitimiri in African rituals of exorcism in Zanzibar.[63]

The talisman of the Companions is no more than an "image-object," to quote an expression used by a specialist in saintly images in Christianity,[64] and, similarly to the Christian icon which plays the role of an "intercessor,"[65] this talisman of the Companions has also – like a saint – the ability to intercede with God. However, in Islam, in order to avoid the prohibition on representative art, the portrait of the Sleepers and that of their dog was replaced by a calligraphic and geometric symbolisation of the cave; the Sleepers being represented by the Arabic letters of their names. The exceptional power of the talisman lies finally in its association with the seal of Solomon, another very powerful protective symbol. To conclude, the conjunction of these two talismans may be interpreted as a successful attempt to combine in one symbol the geometric portraits of two major figures of the Islamic tradition: the very popular Solomon and the Ashāb al-Kahf, prototype of the Muslim saint, among whom the dog Qitmīr occupies a major position.

63
See Edward A. Alpers, "Ordinary household chores: ritual and power in a 19th-century Swahili women's spirit possession cult," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 17, No. 4 (1984): 677-702.

64
Jérôme Baschet, "Introduction: l'image-objet," in *L'Image. Fonctions et usages des images dans l'Occident medieval*, eds J. Baschet and J.-C. Schmitt (Paris: Le Léopard d'or, 1996), 7-26.

65
Olivier Boulnois, *Au-delà de l'image. Une archéologie du visuel au Moyen-Age, Vᵉ-XVIᵉ siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), 194.

Mixed Worship: the Double Cult of Sarı Saltuk and St. Nicholas in the Balkans

Sara Kuehn

Sara Kuehn
Department of Islamic Theological Studies,
University of Vienna
sara.kuehn@univie.ac.at

Abstract

In the Balkan borderlands, a region characterized by religious (and so cultural) ambiguity, the Muslim allocation of an equivalent saint in the 'pantheon' of Christianity was facilitated by a certain 'rapprochement' between the two religions: an ongoing fusion of disparate elements into a new language occurred that often blurred religious distinctions. The polymorphic figures of two 'saints', Sarı Saltuk and St. Nicholas, are emblematic of this process of cultural intermingling, ensuant act of translating and mixed worship. Their cult is a refraction of conquest and appropriation, tempered by interfaith circulations, joint pilgrimage, and cross-cultural accommodation. The 'interactions' and attendant double identity of the two saints will be examined from the perspective of mixed places of worship and the entanglements between the Christians and Muslim worlds taking place within these sites in the *longue durée*.

1
Cited after Helga Anetshofer, "Legends of Sarı Saltık in the Seyahatnâme and the Bektashi Oral Tradition," in *Evliyâ Çelebi. Studies and Essays Commemorating the 400th Anniversary of his Birth*, eds. Nuran Tezcan, Semih Tezcan, and Robert Dankoff (Ankara: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Culture and Tourism Publications, 2012), 296–304, here 297.

2
For a helpful overview of Sarı Saltuk and the sites of memory in the Balkan Peninsula which played an essential role in his cult, see Robert Elsie, *The Albanian Bektashi: The History and Culture of a Dervish Order in the Balkans* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021), esp. 6, 36–8, 43–7, 122–5, 161–72, 208–10, 249, 256, 308–11; and Sara Kuehn, "Multiplication, Translocation and Adaptation: Şarī Şalṭūq's Multiple Embodied Localities Throughout the Balkans," in *Constructing and Contesting Holy Places in Medieval Islam and Beyond*, eds. Andreas Görke and Mattia Guidetti (Leiden: Brill, 2023).

3
Anetshofer, "Legends of Sarı Saltık," 298–9.

Sarı Saltuk … riyāżet ile kandīd olmuş bir keşişdir.[1]

The 17th-century Ottoman globe-trotter Evliyā Çelebi (1611–c. 1682) was fascinated by Sarı Saltuk (Şarı Şalṭūq), the archetypal missionary dervish-warrior credited with the early Islamization (and Turkification) of the Balkans.[2] In his famous travelogue, Evliyā informs us that Sarı Saltuk's original name was Muḥammed Bukhārī, contending that he was a Yasavī dervish from Turkestan. He goes on to report a story that Muḥammed Bukhārī adopted the name Sarı Saltuk,[3] *after* he had killed St. Nicholas, the patriarch of the town of Danzig (Gdańsk) on the Baltic coast. He then dressed in the Christian saint's robes, assuming the identity of St. Nicholas (İsveti Nikola), and in this (dis)guise as Christian saint (Lat. *sanctus*) he called upon Christians to convert to Islam. Evliyā indignantly quips:

> Those who do not believe in the holy man have spread many rumours about him to slander him. [They say that] he was a Christian monk with the name of Sarı Saltuk who has tainted himself with sin. Even in the land of Poland there is said to be a monk named Saltuk Bay in the port of Danzig. He [Sarı Saltuk] had gone to him, and had challenged him to the [right] faith, but when he would not accept it, Saltuk Bay killed "İsveti Nikola" in his cell and assumed his robes. … For twenty-one years he pretended to be a Christian monk named Saltuk and invited the *kafīr*s [unbelievers] to embrace the true religion [Islam].[4]

Whether the Christian monks themselves identified 'him' as Sarı Saltuk or as St. Nicholas is not entirely clear, but what is clear is that this saintly persona

was able to pass between the two faiths with particular trickster-like ease and was evidently well-versed in such cross-cultural exercises.[5] Extending help and protection to his followers, the dervish-warrior may be seen in the role of *Heilsbringer* (or, 'bringer of salvation'). Yet Saltuk, the wanderer,[6] can also be perceived as ambiguous and equivocal mediator of contradiction, to use Claude Lévi-Strauss' words.[7]

Like Sarı Saltuk, the multivalent St. Nicholas[8] was (and is) an immensely popular holy person (or saint: a charismatic individual who is perceived by others as having attained a Christian ideal of perfection during his/her life-time and posthumously, and subsequently become the subject of devotion or worship), a constitutive status considered in this conversation as encom-passing concepts similar to the Muslim *velī* (pl. *evliyā'*) or 'friend of God.'[9] St. Nicholas was born in Patara (Latin Patras) on the south-west coast of Lycia in Turkey around 300 CE (one thousand years before Saltuk) and later became bishop of Myra (now Demre). As a saint he performs miraculous gifts of grace, or signs of sanctity,[10] and holds universal appeal as one who helps the needy and intervenes to right injustices against the common people.[11] Stories are told of St. Nicholas, protector of sailors and fishermen, calming wind and storms and walking over the sea to rescue ships in danger.[12] In this function he succeeded the Greek sea god Posei-don, attesting to the continuation and reconfiguration of an ancient cult within the process of Christianization. Ottoman-period Balkan Christians, in turn, often memorialized Saltuk in the form of St. Nicholas, reflecting yet another change of time and peoples as well as a shifting of boundaries. At the same time, we must remember that the *vitae* of both holy men have been elaborated with borrowed incidents from the lives of other saints.

In the course of the complex processes of such a religio-cultural *translation* (as a metaphor for conceptualizing ideas, terms, interpretations beyond text and language),[13] transformation and experience, the identifi-cation of Sarı Saltuk with the universally popular St. Nicholas was devised and the Muslim 'friend of God' Saltuk[14] was indeed revered as St. Nich-olas (and *other* Christian saints)[15] by Orthodox and Catholic Christians in the Balkans. The switching of clothes and identities between Muslim and Christian religious figures, as in the example of Sarı Saltuk, does not seem to have been uncommon. For example there were *fetvā*s (juridical opinions issued by Muslim jurists) which forbade actors from imitating or dressing up as Christian monks or priests on stage.[16] As we will see, Sarı Saltuk's saintly agency can be seen to derive from his resemblance to, imitation of, and (re)identification with the 'other': *sarı* in Turkish means 'yellow, pale,' alluding to his fair complexion and/or blond hair, the distinctive physiog-nomy of the 'yellow-haired' Byzantines. The underlying dynamic of this powerful cult is still in need of a detailed examination.[17]

My paper delineates the entangled developments of Sarı Saltuk and St. Nicholas within the context of the Balkan borderlands, a region given to mingling and exchange,[18] one manifestation of which is its religious (and so cultural) ambiguity[19] and hybridization.[20] The exploration builds on the nuanced observations on the ambiguization in the veneration of saints in the Bektāşī milieu of the early 20th-century by British archaeologist Frederick William Hasluck.[21] In Latin the term 'ambiguous' could allude to a double nature, as Dionigi Albera states succinctly, in turn providing an analogy with Hasluck's seminal work on double cults and shrines that appear to have a dual character. Hasluck surmised that the Bektāşīyye not only tolerated this ambiguity of the cult of saints, but deliberately

4

Seyaḥatnāme I.212b, II.266a, III.111a; Machiel Kiel, "Sarı Saltuk: Pionier des Islam auf dem Balkan im 13. Jahrhundert," in *Aleviler/Alewiten. Kimlik ve Tari/ Identität und Geschichte*, eds. Ismail Engin and Erhard Franz (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient Institut Hamburg, 2000), 253–86, here 273–4; Anetshofer, "Legends of Sarı Saltık," 298–9. There is a parallel story in the *Saltuknāme* (III.290), in which Sarı Saltuk "kills the monk Nestor … puts on Nestor's clothes and puts his clothes on Nestor … he wiped his face with his hands and took on the appearance of Nestor," cited after Anetshofer, "Legends of Sarı Saltık," 297.

5

For an example of Saltuk effecting religious 'cross-dressing,' see Sara Kuehn, "A Saint 'on the Move': Traces in the Evolution of a Landscape of Religious Memory in the Balkans," in *Saintly Spheres and Islamic Landscapes: Emplacements of Spiritual Power across Time and Place*, eds. Daphna Ephrat, Ethel Sara Wolper, and Paulo G. Pinto (Boston: Brill, 2020), 117–48, here 139–42. On traditions of cultural 'cross-dressing' and the disguise of body, self, and identity through changes in clothing as popular tactic to deceive the enemy, see *Battālnāme*, Facsimile edited by Şinasi Tekin and Gönül Alpay-Tekin with Introduc-tion, English Translation, Turkish Transcription and Commentary by Yorgos Dedes, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations of Harvard University, 1996), 627.

6

Kuehn, "A Saint 'on the Move'," 117–48.

7

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (London: Penguin, 1963), 226–7.

8

The rapid growth of Nicholas' popularity in the medieval period has yet to be investigated. As Nancy Patterson Ševčenko points out, "It is indeed surprising that a saint who was not martyred for the faith, who left no theological writings, and whose name is virtually never cited in the whole body of polemical literature of the 8th or 9th centuries, should have achieved such prominence right after Iconoclasm, and have so quickly become one of the most revered Fathers of the Church, alongside Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil and Chrysostom." Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, *The Life of Saint Nicholas in Byzantine Art* (Monografie dello Centro di Studi per la Storia della Civiltà Bizantina nell'Italia Meridionale, Torino: Bottega D'Erasmo, 1983), 20. On the cult of St. Nicholas and his role as protector in this life and the hereafter, see Henry Maguire, "From the Evil Eye of Justice: The Saints, Art, and Justice in Byzantium," in *Law and Society in Byzantium: Ninth-Twelfth Centuries*, eds. Elikē E Laïu-Thōmadakē and Dieter Simon (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1994), 200–39, here 227–30, 235–8.

9

See Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982) and Josef Meri, *The Cult of the Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), respectively.

For a discussion of the historical conceptualization of Islamic saints and sainthood across the early modern Ottoman world, see recently Jonathan Parkes Allen, *Self, Space, Society, and Saint in the Well-Protected Domains: A History of Ottoman Saints and Sainthood, 1500–1780* (PhD Thesis, University of Maryland, College Park, 2019), esp. 12–26.

10

For a discussion of 'miracle(s)' in both an Islamic and Christian context, see Sara Kuehn, "Miracle. Islam," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception (EBR)*, vol. 19, eds. C. M. Furey et al (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2021): 287–91.

11

Leander Petzoldt, "Nikolaus von Myra (von Bari)," *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* 8 (1976): 45–58.

12

Cf. Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pripovijetke* (Belgrad: Državna štamparija Kraljevine Jugoslavije, 1935), 270.

13

This discussion is informed by Peter Burke's exploration of creolization, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009) which affirms that appropriation or (religio-)cultural translation of beliefs, rituals and of objects and images has complicit human agency.

14

See n. 5 above. Cf. Ahmet T. Karamustafa, "Sarı Saltık Become a Friend of God," in *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation*, ed. John Renard (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 136–44.

15

For Saltuk's translation into and identification with St. Spyridon, see Sara Kuehn, "A Saint 'on the Move' "; and with St. George, see Sara Kuehn, "Entangled Sanctity: Sarı Saltuk and St. George in the Ottoman Balkans," in *Entangled Sufism in (Post-)Ottoman Europe: Cross-Disciplinary Approaches*, eds. Cem Kara, Evelyn Reuter, and Zsófia Turóczy (New York and London: Routledge, forthcoming). Also, Frederick William Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, vol. 2 (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2000; originally published Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), 254–59.

16

Metin And, *A History of Theatre and Popular Entertainment in Turkey* (Ankara: Forum Yayınları, 1963–64), 11–12.

17

The topic has been briefly discussed by Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Sarı Saltuk ve Saltuk-nâme," *Türk Kültürü* 197 (1978): 266–75.

18

Cf. Maria Couroucli, "Sharing Sacred Places. A Mediterranean Tradition," in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*, eds. Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 1–9.

19

This study is indebted to Dionigi Albera's articles

encouraged it in order to make the pilgrimage sites more accessible to the Christian population.[22] Accordingly, he referred to Sarı Saltuk as the "stalking-horse" of Bektāşī efforts in south-eastern Europe to win Christians over to their interpretation of Islam.[23] Their continual process of saint-making bespeaks religious mixture, transculturation, fluidity, and hybridity (as well as the contiguous conceptualization of syncretism and creolization) across religio-cultural boundaries.[24]

Both ambiguity and hybridity are instrumental in shaping the 'interactions' and ensuant double identity of the two 'utraquist' saints[25] – a term used with reference to the phenomenon of interreligious 'fusion,' or utraquism, of sainthood(s) – which will be examined from the perspective of mixed spaces (and places) of worship. These multi-religious sites are regarded here, following Edward Soja's persuasive argument, as a product of a dynamic process of religio-cultural translation, transformation, and experience, in which social and spatial structures are dialectically intertwined.[26] These are seen in the context of entanglements (conceived as a metaphor for the multiple forms of coping with other cultures/religions while living in proximity) between the shared cultural worlds of Christians and Muslims taking place within these places in the *longue durée*.

I will present five case studies of religio-cultural 'accommodation' exemplified by interfaith intermingling, starting in Babadağ in northern Dobruja (which is associated with Sarı Saltuk in the earliest surviving source on this 'friend of God'). We then proceed southwards to Kaliakra in southern Dobruja, Babaeski in eastern Thrace, and Patras in northern Morea. The last case study takes us further north-west to Makedonski Brod in the Kičevo region in western North Macedonia, the only sacred place in the Balkans today where we can still witness mixed worship of the double cult of Sarı Saltuk and St. Nicholas. Located on the periphery of the Ottoman empire, these religious sites act as focal points for contact between Balkan Christian and Muslim cultures, their permeable boundaries encapsulating the intercultural dynamic of confrontation and integration, appropriation and transformation.

The Varying Instantiations of Mixed Devotions of Sarı Saltuk and St. Nicholas

On the fringes of the Ottoman empire the Islamification of a holy figure within the Christian 'pantheon' was facilitated by a certain 'rapprochement' between the two faiths through what Mikhail Bakhtin calls an 'organic' hybridization, an ongoing fusion of different elements into a new language which had culturally productive effects.[27] In the process of accommodating to new circumstances an ongoing fusion of different elements into a new devotional language took place. This could lead to religio-cultural exchange in which ideas, practices, and information are imitated, adopted, and adapted – 'translated' in both the literal and the metaphorical sense into their new context. The ongoing cultural intermingling and subsequent devotional mixing was sustained by shared insights resulting from the cumulative experiences gained through the fusion of elements of mystical Islam, or Sufism, with pre-Islamic beliefs of the Turks, as well as Balkan Christianity's incorporation of pre-Christian traditions.

A pivotal element in both Sufism and Balkan Christianity was the cult of shared holy sites, the most important element in the rapprochement between the Christian and Muslim communities.[28] Saint worship, exemplified here by the double cult of Saltuk and Nicholas, seems to have

reflected a deep-rooted need of the faithful to place between themselves and God a number of special, chosen people marked by divine favour and holiness, so-called 'friends of God.' Through their intercession they can prevail upon God to intervene in the course of events in a protective and beneficial way.

These transcultural flows and entanglements created religio-cultural 'syncretistic' phenomena which could also be subversive and resistant to the dominant cultural power. This was aided by the fact that in the newly Islamized Balkan borderlands the dervishes led a life of self-imposed poverty and communicated in the vernacular spoken by the common people – traits which appealed to the masses. Largely uncompromised by political and cultural power holders, their piety periodically aroused the suspicion of the ruling elites, as a result of which they were repeatedly accused of subversive acts for not adhering to religious formalities but debasing it through corrupting 'innovations' (bidʿa).

1. *Babadağ in northern Dobruja*

Sarı Saltuk's "stupendous miracles and mighty deeds," which involved converting people to Islam and forming Muslim communities in Dobruja, are referred to in the earliest surviving source on the holy man, the *Tuffāḥ al-arwāḥ*, compiled in about 1314 by Muḥammad al-Sarraj al-Rifāʿī.[29] The text states that

> Saltūk al-Turkī was a wonder-working dervish. He lived in the town of İsakçe [Isaccea] in the Land of the Qıpçak [a Turkish tribal confederation in the western part of the Golden Horde region], died in the year 697 (1297/98) and was buried near the mountain where he had his retreat, some distance away from İsakçe. His followers erected a *zāviye* [often translated as a 'dervish lodge'] around his grave.[30]

Eighteen years after al-Sarraj's account, in 1332–3, the 14th-century traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa tells us that "Baba Saltuk" was an ecstatic (*mukāshif*) figure whom he characterized as

> extra-worldly and mystical, although things are told of him which are reproved by divine law (*seriat*).

The story derives from his journey through this frontier region, stopping at an important settlement named after the saint-hero (*er*) held by the 'Turks.' This settlement can be identified as Babadağ (literally, 'mountain of the father'; the honorific cognomen *baba* was used particularly in dervish circles denoting either the head of a *zāviye* (i.e., *tekke*) or, more generally, a respected spiritual guide or leader), situated some eighty kilometres from İsakçe in the south-eastern part of present-day Romania.[32] It is significant that the belligerent circumstances which characterized the frontier were not prejudicial to cultural exchange and 'fusion.' Interestingly, as the sociologist Roger Bastide has observed in a different context, this kind of exchange and fusion seems to occur more readily in times of war than peace.[33] The composite cultural and ethnic elements of frontier life were thus a melting-pot of contradictions that nonetheless accommodated a form of cross-cultural convergence between Muslim and Christian societies throughout the successive frontier zones.

When Bāyezīd I (r. 1389–1402) (re)founded Babadağ in 1389 the

"Towards a Reappraisal of Ambiguity: In the Footsteps of Frederick W. Hasluck," in *Pilgrimage and Ambiguity: Sharing the Sacred*, eds. Angela Hobart and Thierry Zarcone (Canon Pyon, Herefordshire: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2017), 29–49, and idem " 'Why Are You Mixing What Cannot Be Mixed?' Shared Devotions in the Monotheisms," *History and Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (2008): 37–59, https://doi.org/10.1080/02757200802150026.

20

My approach derives in part from the work of Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood, see their "Preface to the Critic Influence Change," and Pnina Werbner's "Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity," in *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, eds. Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (London: NBN International, 2015), xiv–xix, 1–26, respectively.

21

Frederick W. Hasluck, "Ambiguous Sanctuaries and Bektashi Propaganda," *Annual of the British School at Athens* 20 (1913–14): 94–119, http://doi.org/10.1017/S0068245400009424. Cf. Albera, "Towards a Reappraisal of Ambiguity."

22

Hasluck, "Ambiguous Sanctuaries."

23

Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, vol. 2, 436.

24

Paul Christopher Johnson, "Syncretism and Hybridization," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Study of Religion*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Steven Engler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 754–74; Charles Stewart, "Syncretism and Its Synonyms: Reflections on Cultural Mixture," *Diacritics* 29, no. 3 (1999): 40–62, http://doi.org/10.1353/dia.1999.0023.

25

Taking up a term coined by Romain Roussel in the 1950s which underlined the importance of "interreligious fusions" at pilgrimage sites "where, for various reasons, adherents of different, even competing, religions meet in the same sanctuary," Dionigi Albera shows that religious boundary crossings are widely accepted at 'utraquist' pilgrimage sites (Romain Roussel, *Les pèlerinages à travers les siècles* (Paris: Payot, 1954) and idem, *Les pèlerinages* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, [1956], 1972), 98, 117, cited after Dionigi Albera ("La mixité religieuse dans les pèlerinages. Esquisse d'une réflexion comparative," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 155 (September 2011): 109–29, esp. 110, 113, 121, http://doi.org/10.4000/assr.23323). Cf. Hans-Joachim Kissling, "Das islamische Derwischtum als Bewahrer volksreligiöser Überlieferung," *Beiträge zur Volkstumsforschung* 14 (1964): 81–96, here 82.

26

Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989), 126–27.

27

This "organic" hybridization was contrasted with an "intentional" hybridization in the process of which

two points of view are not mixed but set against each other dialogically; Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), 360.

28

Speros Vryonis, Jr., "The Byzantine Legacy and Ottoman Forms," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23/24 (1969/1970): 251–308, here 289, https://doi.org/10.2307/1291294.

29

Ibn al-Sarrāj, *Tuffāḥ al-arwaḥ wa miftāḥ al-arbāḥ* (The Apple of Souls and the Key of Gain), unpublished manuscript preserved in Berlin Staatsbibliothek Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Katalog W. Ahlwardt No. 8794. For references with partial translations, see al-Nabhānī in *Kitāb jamiʿ karamāt al-awliyāʾ*, vol. 2, Cairo 1394/1974, 100–101 (into Arabic). Andrew C. S. Peacock, "The Conversion Miracles and Life of the Dervish Sarı Saltuq, by Muhammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Sarrāj," in *Conversion to Islam in the Premodern Age: A Sourcebook*, ed. Nimrod Hurvitz (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2020), 263–66 (into English); Kiel, "Sarı Saltuk," 262–5 (by Bernd Radtke into German). The text tells us that Sarı Saltuk was affiliated with the Rifāʿī and the related Ḥaydarī Sufi communities, both of whom are known to have rejected commonly accepted norms of piety, so Saltuk's followers were presumably recruited from among nonconformist dervishes.

30

Ibn al-Sarrāj, *Tuffāḥ al-arwaḥ*.

31

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Tuḥfat al-nuẓẓār fī ġarāʾib al-amṣār wa-ʿagaʾib al-asfār*, trans. Hamilton Alexander Roskeen Gibb, *The Travels of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa: A.D. 1325–1354*, vol. 2 (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1972), 499–500.

32

Machiel Kiel, "The Türbe of Sarı Saltık at Babadag-Dobrudja. Brief Historical and Architectural Notes," *Güney-Doğu Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi* 6 (1977–78): 205–25.

33

Cf. Roger Bastide, "Problems of Religious Syncretism," in *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*, eds. Anita Maria Leopold and Jeppe Sinding Jensen (London: Routledge, 2014), 113–39, here 134.

34

Kiel, "Sarı Saltuk," 274.

35

See Ahmet T. Karamustafa, "Early Sufism in Eastern Anatolia," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From Its Origins to Rumi (700–1300)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1994), 175–98, 191 and n. 32.

36

Saltuknāme II.290a; Helga Anetshofer-Karateke, *Das Ṣalṭıḫnāme: Philologische und Islamkundliche Aspekte einer Heiligenlegende des 15. Jahrhunderts* (unpublished MA Thesis, University of Vienna, 1995), 32.

town's central place of veneration was Saltuk's tomb (*türbe*). However, a few decades later, according to Evliyā Çelebi, the holy man's commemorative structure was destroyed and covered with earth, stones, and garbage, probably as a result of Meḥmed II's harsh measures against the nonconformist dervish communities in the Balkans, denounced for their 'innovations' in practice and beliefs. Unlike Mehmed II, his son and successor, Bāyezīd II (r. 1481–1512), was a patron of Sufi lodges and during his visit in Babadağ in 1484–5 the *türbe* and *zāviye* were substantially rebuilt.[34] It was in the vicinity of this holy site that in 1473 Bāyezīd II's younger brother, Prince Cem (d. 1495), heard stories about Sarı Saltuk from the saint's followers. He subsequently asked a member of his court, a certain Ebū'l-Khayr Rūmī, to collect the extraordinary oral and built traditions circulating about the holy figure in the hagiographic compendium *Saltuknāme*, or *Book of Saltuk* (gathered by c. 1480).[35]

Today there is no trace of Sarı Saltuk's *zāviye* at Babadağ, south of Tulcea, in the Romanian Dobrogea (Dobruja). The holy man's *türbe* was last renovated and re-inaugurated by the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2007. The *türbe* consists of a domed tomb chamber and a portico that is open to the front, supported by two wooden posts and covered by a roof. Photograph © Sara Kuehn.

The religious instructions in this hagiography reflect the saint's 'confessional ambiguity.' While the author is at pains to promote Sarı Saltuk as a devout Sunni who fights against the heretics (*rāfiḍ*s), the stories also depict him as steeped in ʿAlid tradition. For instance, when some Muslims were taken captive by the Christians, the holy man left for the town of Eski Baba (discussed below) to perform there the ʿĀshūrāʾ fast[36] in mourning for the Prophet's grandson Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī and other members of the Prophet's family. Throughout the hagiography, Saltuk is moreover in constant communication with four prophets, all of whom are believed to be holy immortals in the Islamic faith tradition, three of them also central to Christianity: Ḫızır (Khiḍr; the immortal prophet-saint of Islam),[37] Ilyās (Biblical Elijah), ʿĪsā (Jesus), and Idrīs (Biblical Enoch).[38]

In addition, the text states that the real name of Saltuk is, in fact, that of the helper figure Şerīf Ḫızır who, importantly, is also a name-giver. An example of such a naming event – which echoes Evliyā's naming story discussed above – is that Şerīf Ḫızır was given the name 'Saltuk' by his enemy Alyon, whom he defeated in combat. The change of name is also based on the ancient Turkish tradition according to which a person adopts

a new name after an act of heroism. Saltuk, in turn, 'baptized' Alyon as a Muslim, giving him the name of Ilyās. Importantly, it is, once again, *after* this initiation that Saltuk *becomes* the protean character Hızır who appears in various guises and comes to the aid of people in distress. The mythological Hızır – the Green Man, who evokes the legendary presence of a wandering saint and fulfils an important mediating function – is often understood as the being behind the figures of Sarı Saltuk, Saint Nicholas, and other Christian saints.[39]

These modes of (cultural) translations and identifications are facilitated through notions of incarnationism (Ḥulūliyye; belief in divine manifestation in humans or other beings) and metempsychosis, which have played a crucial role in heterodox dervish circles as well as in the formation of the doctrine of the Bektāṣīs[40] buttressed by ʿAlid piety. In the process of their institutionalization they claimed Saltuk as their own, as stated in the 15th-century hagiographic *vita* of the Bektāṣī patron saint Ḥācī Bektash (d. 1270–1), even though Saltuk originally had nothing to do with Bektāṣīsm.[41] The doctrinal basis for metempsychosis led the Bektāṣī community to believe in the transmigration of the soul from one generation to the next. Accordingly, the souls of the holy figures can change their bodily shells and manifest themselves in new (animate or inanimate) forms. As mentioned above, in both Sufism and Balkan Christianity a holy (wo)man is often conceived as acting as a mediator between God and humans and directing human affairs. According to John Kingsley Birge, there are a number of saints, at least three hundred, who have the power to appear in any form, as human being or as angel, and to change this state at any moment. One of them is the most perfect human being (a mystical axis mundi/*quṭb*) who possesses spiritual authority (*velāya*). If this holy man dies, one of the three in the following rank takes his or her place. The place of these three, in turn, is filled by the seven following ones, and so on. These are called Abdāl (from *badal*, substitute) and are recruited from the believers,[42] though their identity remains secret. It is on this doctrinal basis that saints such as Sarı Saltuk and Nicholas, separated in time by almost an entire millennium, could be culturally 'translated' into one other. The notion of the 'Seven Abdāls' also brings to mind the significance of the number 'seven' in Christian teachings, notably the Book of Revelation (1:20), which refers to seven angels, churches, spirits, stars, etc.; it also recalls the well-known miracle of Saltuk's sevenfold increase in death and the multiplication of his coffins. This attests to the holy man's strategically placed efficacy, his 'relics' subsequently serving as important means of localizing an entitlement which was claimed by various parties, including the Bektāṣīyye.[43]

Next to show interest in Saltuk was Süleyman I (1520–1566). In 1538, during the expedition against the Voyvode of Moldavia, Petru Rareş (1487–1546), he stayed for four days in Babadağ visiting his *zāviye* and carrying out his devotions at the holy man's *türbe*.[44] However, Saltuk's identification with Christian saints, as well as some of the stories about his actions that were deemed 'heterodox,' must have caused some apprehension among 16th-century Ottoman authorities and ʿulema (Muslim religious scholars).[45] When enquiring about the saint's holiness (*velāya*), Süleyman obtained a *fetvā* from the famous Şeyhü'l-islām Ebū Suʿūd (d. 1574).[46] While the official legal opinion of the famous Muslim jurist underlined Saltuk's 'Christian aspect,' it remarkably had no detrimental effect on the privileges of his *türbe* and his *waqf* (charitable foundation),[47] the enduring link between the

[37] For a discussion of Hızır in the Balkans, see Sara Kuehn, "Cyclical Time, Nature Spirits, and Translation Activities: The Transreligious Role of the Meeting of Khiḍr and Ilyās in the Balkans," in *Khwaja Khidr from the Middle East to the Balkans: A Survey of a Multireligious Figure*, eds. Michel Boivin and Manoël Pénicaud (New York and London: Routledge, 2023).

[38] Anetshofer, "Legends of Sarı Saltık," 293.

[39] See n. 6 above. Irène Mélikoff, "Hasluck's Study of the Bektashis and its Contemporary Significance," in *Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage in the Balkans and Anatolia. The Life and Times of F. W. Hasluck, 1878–1920*, vol. 1 (Istanbul: Gorgias Press, 2010), 297–307, here 289–99. Also, Ahmet T. Karamustafa, "Sarı Saltık Becomes a Friend of God," in *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation*, ed. John Renard (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 136–44, here 137.

[40] Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Bektaşî menâkıbnâmelerinde İslâm öncesi inanç motifleri* (Istanbul: Enderun, 1983), 154–72; Rainer Freitag, "Der Kreislauf des Seins. Die Wanderung des Geistes bei den Bektaschis," in *Seelenwanderung in der islamischen Häresie*, ed. Rainer Freitag (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1985), 204–23. Cf. Cem Kara, *Grenzen überschreitende Derwische: Kulturbeziehungen des Bektaschi-Ordens, 1826–1925* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 73, 104, 116–9, 161, 207–8, 330–1.

[41] Erich Gross, *Das Vilâjet-nâme des Hâǧǧî Bektasch, ein türkisches Derwischenvangelium* (Leipzig: Mayer & Müller, 1927), 73–75. During the 16th century the Ottoman state increasingly restricted religious antinomianism which led to the Bektāṣīyye being transformed into a fully formalized order that absorbed other heterodox dervishes in the process. Cf. Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1550* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 84.

[42] John Kingsley Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes* (London: Luzac, 1937), 119.

[43] *Seyaḥatnâme* II.266b–267a, III.111a; Anetshofer, "Legends of Sarı Saltık," 302.

[44] Kiel, "The Türbe," 216.

[45] Anetshofer, "Legends of Sarı Saltık," 293.

[46] He was the chief jurist of the Ottoman Empire from 1545 to 1574. On the *fetva*, see M. Tayyib Okiç, "Sarı Saltuk'a Ait Bir Fetva," *Ankara Üniversitesi İlâhiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 1 (1952): 48–58, https://doi.org/10.1501/Ilhfak_0000001108.

[47] Kiel, "Sarı Saltuk," 278.

Türbe of Sarı Saltuk at Babadağ, south of Tulcea, in the Romanian Dobruja. Celebration of the 750th anniversary of the holy man's coming to the Balkans. Photograph © Sara Kuehn.

48
Cited after Anetshofer, "Legends of Sarı Saltık," 293.

49
Toader Nicoară, *Istoria și tradițiile minorităților din România* (Bucharest: Ministerul Educației și Cercetării, 2005), 68.

50
Tijana Krstić, "State and Religion; 'Sunnitization' and 'Confessionalism' in Süleyman's Time," in *The Battle for Central Europe: The Siege of Szigetvár and the Death of Süleyman the Magnificent and Nicholas Zrínyi (1566)*, ed. Pál Fodor (Brill: Leiden, 2019), 67–68.

51
Amet Refik, *On altıncı asırda Rafızîlik ve Bektaşilik* (Istanbul: Muallim Ahmet Halit Kitaphanesi, 1932), 17–19, cited after Grigor Boykov, "Abdāl-affiliated Convents and 'Sunnitizing' Halveti Dervishes in Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Rumeli," in *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450–c. 1750*, eds. Tijana Krstić and Derin Terzioğlu (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 308–40, here 326, 330.

holy man's sanctuary and the increasingly prosperous town of Babadağ:

> He is a Christian hermit emaciated through excessive fasting.[48]

Deeply resonant with Eastern Christian faith traditions, this description of the holy man's extreme asceticism must have offered an inspiring image that Greek, Slavic, or Latin Christians as well as Muslims could relate to and revere. Thus, by means of his 'office,' Saltuk's legacy acted as a bridge between Islam and Christianity.

While staying at Babadağ in 1641, the Bulgarian Catholic Archbishop of Ottoman Sofia, Petăr Bogdan Bakšič (1601–1674), observes that Sarı Saltuk is much honoured in this city and notes that his tomb was surrounded by candles. He adds that even Christians, who confuse the Muslim saint with St. Nicholas, come to pay their respects.[49] The site seems to have played a constitutive role in the continual process of saint-making. Facilitated by shared understandings of sainthood, the sacred place seems to have been appropriated, claimed, and venerated by the faithful of the two religions and became a centre of the double cult of Sarı Saltuk/St. Nicholas.

The visit must have taken place before the late 16th-century Ottoman 'Sunnitizing' policies and their reformist and puritanical tendencies,[50] which were sharply opposed to the cult of the saints as unorthodox, equivocal practice. The religious and political authorities targeted "the misbelievers in Baba" (that is, Babadağ) and took action against the "Kızılbaş" (perceived to be outside of canonical Sunni Islam) in Dobrudja engendered through their interfaith attendance. Saltuk's *zāviye* was transferred to the Halveti Sufi order (in 1584 a Halveti *halvethāne* existed in its place) and the resident dervishes were dispersed. The dervishes of the *zāviye* of Sarı Saltuk in Kilgra (discussed below) were similarly persecuted after a sultanic order was issued following a report of the judge (*ķāḍī*) of Kilgra in which he urged an investigation into whether the dervishes of the *zāviye* were guilty of 'heresy' and antinomianism.[51]

St. Nicholas Chapel, erected in 1993, at Cape Kaliakra in the Bulgarian Dobruja. Photograph © Balcon del Mundo.

2. *Kilgra in southern Dobruja*

Along the Black Sea coast a number of Orthodox church-monasteries were located on capes. The most popular patron saint of these religious sites was St. Nicholas. His popularity was so extraordinary that the British admiral Adolphus Slade (1804–1877), who had become an admiral in the Ottoman Navy, notes in his travel narrative:

> St. Nicholas is their favourite saint; and they have a superstition firmly believed by the lower classes that, when God dies, he will succeed him.[52]

It is here at Kilgra (present-day Kaliakra near Varna), the then-capital of Dobruja, situated on a cape extending out into the Black Sea that, according to the *Velāyetnāme*, Saltuk alights on his prayer rug together with two dervishes, Ulu Abdāl and Kiçi Abdāl. The story alludes to the flight of translocation as well as to the Sufi metaphysical understanding of 'flying' in inner space.[53] The shrine itself was a natural cave said to have been inhabited by a local dragon who was miraculously defeated by Saltuk. It was situated at or near the ruins of the ancient Greek church of St. Nicholas, under which, according to the epic *Saltuknāme*, Saltuk was later buried.[54]

Both the *Saltuknāme* and Evliyā's *Seyāḥatnāme* (Book of Travels) recount a contest between Sarı Saltuk and a Christian priest. Saltuk was victorious, signalling the appropriation of the Christian clergy and, by extension, the transmission of their sainthood and the adoption also of the potent force of their *bereket*, by Bektāşīsm, the religion which came to dominate Kilgra and its surroundings. Afterwards, Saltuk converted the king of Dobruja and his subjects to Islam and built a Sufi *tekke/zāviye*, known as Tekye-i Kilgra Sultān, on the promontory of Kilgra.[55]

Just as in Babadağ, the ambiguous devotions at this religious site at the margins of the empire attracted the attention of the authorities. In a decree from 1559, Süleyman I ordered the *ḳāḍī* of Varna to interrogate the members of the *zāviye* of Sarı Saltuk in Kilgra that were said to act

52
Adolphus Slade, *Records of Travels in Turkey, Greece, etc., and of a Cruize in the Black Sea, with the Capitan Pasha, in the Years 1829, 1830, and 1831*, vol. 1 (London: Saunders and Otley, 1854), 344.

53
Velāyetnāme 35–357. Saltuk's supernatural ability to travel the Danube on top of his prayer rug, or flight of translocation, is a common motif in the *Saltuknāme*. Anetshofer, "Legends of Sarı Saltık," 297.

54
Cf. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, vol. 2, 578.

55
Siyāḥatnāme 567; Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, vol. 2, 429–31, 578.

56

Ahmet Refik, *On altıncı Asırda Rafizîlik ve Bektaşîlik* (Istanbul: Ufuk Matbaası, 1994), 44, 49, 50.

57

François de Beccarie de Pavie de Fourquevaux, *Les Vies de plusieurs grands capitaines français* (Paris: Du Bray, 1643).

58

Konstantin Josef Jireček, "Archäologische Fragmente aus Bulgarien," *Archäologisch-epigraphische Mitteilungen aus Österreich-Ungarn* 10 (1886): 129–204, here 187–9. See also the detailed description of the cave ruins by the British civil engineer, Henry C. Barkley (c.1825–c.1895), in his travel book *Bulgaria Before the War. During Seven Years' Experience of European Turkey and Its Inhabitants* (London: J. Murray, 1877), 320–21.

59

Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, vol. 2, 431.

60

Rafał Quirini-Popławski, "Seaside Shrines in the Late Mediaeval Black Sea Basin," in *The Holy Portolano. The Sacred Geography of Navigation in the Middle Ages/ Le portulan sacré: la géographie religieuse de la navigation au Moyen Age: Fribourg Colloquium 2013 [September 2-4, 2013], Colloque fribourgeois 2013*, eds. Michele Bacci and Martin Rohde (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 95–120, here 117.

against the *şeriat*. When he learned that the rumours were true, the sultan ordered the *ḳāḍī* to ban all the dervishes that did not conform to the rigid confessional boundaries of the Ottoman Sunnitization campaigns that took place during the 16th century.[56]

However, the remote location of the *ẓāviye* was probably instrumental in protecting the sacred site from the stratagems of the *ḳāḍī* and other religious authorities. Some twenty-five years later, in 1585, the French François de Pavie (1563–1611), Baron de Fourquevaux, who was on a Black Sea galley tour from Constantinople to Balcik, visited Kilgra *ẓāviye*. He reports that

> there is a monastery where approximately 200 dervishes dwell dressed entirely in white, who […] give alms to all who come there, be they Christians or others.[57]

De Fourquevaux describes a large, devoted, and hospitable community of dervishes that, on account of their long white robes, were perhaps Bektāşī dervishes or related 'groups' and communities who clearly welcomed interfaith frequentation at their *ẓāviye*.

At the same site a parallel cult appears to have developed during the next three centuries and continued in existence. In his detailed account of the site in 1886 the Czech Slavist Konstantin Jireček notes that at the far end of the promontory of the cape there are four small interconnected caverns hewn into the rock next to the lighthouse. A corner framed with a lower walled enclosure was thought by the Christians to contain the grave of St. Nicholas, while the local Muslims worshipped it as the grave of a holy man known by the generic honorific "Hadži Baba."[58] Observing that "Sarı Saltuk's grave in the Kilgra cave is called S. Nicolas's as well for the benefit of a mixed population," Frederick Hasluck confirms that in the 1920s the site was still visited by both Muslim and Christian pilgrims.[59] Local lore moreover associates the cape with a miracle of St. Nicholas according to which, while the saint was fleeing from the Ottomans, God lengthened the ground before him, thus creating Kaliakra cape. Today nothing remains of the cave sanctuary described by Jireček and Hasluck, but in 1993 a chapel was erected above the purported location of the tomb of St. Nicholas,[60] testimony to his ongoing cult.

3. *Eski Baba in eastern Thrace*

61

Present-day Babaeski (literally 'old father', an honorific appellative also found in the name Babadağ). Milan Adamović, "Das Tekke von Sarï Saltïq in Eskibaba," *Materialia Turcica* 5 (1979): 15–23, here 21, observed that the settlement was first called 'Baba' but when the town with the same name was (re-)built in Dobrudja in 1484, it was given the epithet 'Eski' (the old) to distinguish it.

62

Saltukname II.259b, 271b, 290a; III 555a; Anetshofer, *Das Ṣalṭḥnāme* 29–33, 50.

63

Klaus Kreiser, "Babaeski," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, third edition (*EI³*), ed. by Kate Fleet…[et al.], Brill Online Reference Works.

Even though the small town of Eski Baba (Bulgarophygon)[61] was not yet under the dominion of the Turks during Sarı Saltuk's lifetime, the *Saltuknāme* associates the holy figure with the conquest of Edirne (Adrianople) and its surroundings by Murād I (r. 1362–1389) in 1362.[62] Located fifty-five kilometres east of Edirne on the Edirne-Istanbul Road, the settlement was already deserted by the Byzantines when Bulgarophygon was taken by Murād I's troops.[63] It is therefore conceivable that in the 14th and 15th centuries the eastern Thracian town was a primarily Turkish settlement. When visiting the town in the late 16th century, the German Lutheran theologian Stephan Gerlach recorded that Eski Baba was a Turkish village with few Greek inhabitants.[64]

One of Saltuk's legends nonetheless states that, after the conquest, Eski Baba's Christian sovereign Istefan rushed from the city walls to surrender to the saint and declare his conversion to Islam. Saltuk thereupon changed Istefan's name to Ismail and left him in possession of both

his "dignity" and his domain. This generous gesture reflected the Ottoman policy of *istimālet*, or conciliation towards conquered subjects, designed to win hearts and minds and to facilitate Ottoman expansion in the Balkans. The story also relates that next to the town of Eski Baba there was a church with forty priests who were forced to convert to Islam by the newly converted prince. Saltuk is then said to have 'converted' the church into a mosque.[65]

The fact that the conquerors found the town of Eski Baba uninhabited reduces the credibility of this legend, but we can assume that 'Islamization' of priests took place, given the documented conversion of clerics elsewhere in Thrace.[66] The story about the converted prince Istefan in Eski Baba shows that Islam was spreading in Thrace[67] and attests to intense cultural changes and encounters.

The Islamization and Ottomanization of the region was not only due to the Muslim saint's apparent superior power (*kerāmet*) and sanctity (*velāya*) but was facilitated by the prospect of economic improvement and social advancement – at a time when the Byzantine Church was undergoing an economic and moral crisis.[68] Islamization may also have been furthered by the fact that the Byzantine Church did not consider the Turks "infidels." Patriarch Neilos (1379–1388) called them "people who have a bad faith," a designation corresponding to the widespread idea, current both in Byzantium and in the West, that Muslims were not "infidels" but rather "apostates from Christianity."[69]

Travelogues by some of the first travellers to visit the settlement testify to the manifold exchanges between the Muslim and Christian communities. In 1470 the Venetian Giovan Maria Angiolello (d. c. 1525) described an old church with the tomb of a Christian saint who, after the Ottoman conquest, was much revered by the Turks, so much so that many dervishes settled nearby.[70] The earliest known traveller to mention the Islamic name of the town, "Eski Baba," was the diplomat and prelate Antonius Verantius (Antun Vrančić, 1504–1573), who travelled through the Thracian town in 1553 en route from Vienna to Constantinople.[71] A few years later, probably in 1557, the Polish diplomat Erazm Otwinowski (d. 1614) visited Eski Baba. He took a keen interest in Ottoman society and culture and was generally sympathetic towards Islam. In his travel report he does however remark upon the "idolatry" (*bałwochwalstwo*) at the shrine of St. Nicholas in Eski Baba:

> In the town Baba there is idolatry at the tomb of Nicholas, [performed by] Turkish monks [dervishes].[72]

The tomb then most probably had been 'converted' into a dervish *türbe* and the saint had become the object of double identification by both Christians and Muslims. The gradual creolization of sacred symbols of originally distinct religious traditions at the tomb of St. Nicholas must have produced new 'syncretic' ritual practices,[73] which Otwinowski perceived as "idolatrous."

A decade later, in 1567, a member of a Habsburg mission to Selim II, Marco Antonio Pigafetta, visited the town. He describes a monumental sarcophagus in the church of St. Nicholas in which he was told a giant Turkish warrior was buried, responsible for various miraculous deeds against the Christians. The sarcophagus was guarded by Muslim "priests" and monumental weapons hung on the church walls.[74] The Turkish warrior was identified by Stephan Gerlach with Sari Saltuk when he visited the

64
Stephen Gerlach, *Stephen Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch … herfür gegeben durch seinen Enckel Samuelem Gerlachium* (Frankfurt a. M.: Zunner, 1674), 511.

65
Saltuknāme, ed. Fahir Iz, fol. 245v–246r, 265v, 270v, 278r; see Adamović, "Das Tekke," 15. The hagiographical account of the miracles (*menāqıbname*) of Sheikh Bedreddin (composed by his grandson, Halīl bin İsmāil) similarly relates the conversion miracle of one hundred Christian relatives of Ghāzī Isrāʾīl's (Christian) wife, whom Ghāzī Isrāʾīl likewise treated very well and entertained daily. Hans Joachim Kissling, "Das Menāqybnāme Scheich Bedr ed-Dīns, des Sohnes des Richters von Samāvnā," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 100, no. 1 (1950): 112–76, here 140.

66
The conversion of priests is also known from a Byzantine document dated 1391. Another example is the return to Christianity by the Presbyteros Nikolaos together with his children: "…since many of them [the Turks] in fact believe the same as we do, namely those who achieve the [correct] faith through their character; these are Christians in practice and only lack the official designation." Ihor Ševčenko, "Alexios Makrembolites and his 'Dialogue between the Rich and the Poor'," *Zbornik radova Vizantoloskog instituta* 6 (1960): 187–228, here 196.

67
For further examples see Georgios S. Vogiatzis, *Die Anfänge der Türkenherrschaft in Thrakien und die ersten Niederlassungen* (PhD Thesis, University of Vienna, 1987), 244–46.

68
Vogiatzis, *Die Anfänge der Türkenherrschaft in Thrakien*, 245–48.

69
Ivan Dujčev, "Le patriarche Nil et les invasions turques vers la fin du XIVe siècle," *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome* 78, no. 1 (1966): 207–214, here 211.

70
Giovan Maria Angiolello, *Viaggio di Negroponte*, ed. Cristina Bazzolo (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1982), 20.

71
Verancsics' "*összes munkái*," cited after Konstantin Josef Jireček, *Die Heerstrasse von Belgrad nach Constantinopel und die Balkanpässe, eine historisch-geographische Studie* (Prag: F. Tempsky, 1877), 166–7.

72
Italics added. Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, *Podróże i poselstwa polskie do Turcji* [Polish Travels and Envoys to Turkey] (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Biblioteki Polskiej, 1860), 10. Kraszewski's publication is based on the 17th- or 18th-century manuscript in the Jagiellonian Library, Kracow, MS 52675.

73
See n. 33 above. Also, Magdalena Lubanska, "Religious Syncretism: History of the Concept; the Subject of Research," in her *Muslims and Christians in the Bulgarian*

Rhodopes: Studies on Religious (Anti)Syncretism (Warsaw, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 32–54.

74

Marco Antonio Pigafetta, *Itinerario di Marc'Antonio Pigafetta gentil' huomo Vicentino* (London: Appresso Giouanni Wolfio Inghilese, 1585), cited by Adamović, "Das Tekke," 17.

75

Gerlach, *Stephen Gerlachs*, 511.

76

For a discussion of Saltuk's wooden weapons, see Kuehn, "A Saint 'on the Move'," 125–28.

77

Gerlach, *Stephen Gerlachs*, 511 (translated from the German by the author).

78

Martin Gruneweg, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Dominikaners Martin Gruneweg (1562 – ca. 1618) über seine Familie in Danzig, seine Handelsreisen in Osteuropa und sein Klosterleben in Polen*, ed. Almut Bues (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), vol. 2, 739.

79

Reinhold Lubenau, *Beschreibung der Reisen des Reinhold Lubenau*, ed. Wilhelm Sahm (Königsberg: Beyer, 1914), 157 (translated from the German by the author).

80

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl. C 799, f. 50v.

81

Michael G. Brennan, *The Travel Diary of Robert Bargrave, Levant Merchant, 1647–1656* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1999), 127.

sanctuary eleven years later on June 10, 1578. Gerlach's account in his travelogue is closely comparable to that of Pigafetta.[75] He notes that in the Turkish village "Eßkibaba" there were only a few Greek families "who do not have churches, but have to go to the next village." While attesting to mixed attendance, he also states that both Christians and Muslims lay claim to the holy man whose tomb was located in the church of St. Nicholas. The Christians identified the tomb as the resting place of St. Nicholas, whereas the "Turks" claimed it for the dervish-warrior Sarı Saltuk Baba.

Gerlach documents the materialization of the sacred in the interior of the site, detailing the Muslim religious paraphernalia and the wooden weapons[76] which hung on the walls. The bishop's hat, or mitre, and other relics, alleged by the Muslims to have belonged to St. Nicholas, were not accepted as genuine by the Christians, who instead claimed that the Muslims put them there.[77] Even though the Christians did not accept the claim, it is noteworthy that the "Muslim priests" attributed the relics to the Christian saint. The "priests" in charge of this shrine were most probably dervishes. Since the Bektāşīs gradually incorporated Saltuk into their network and identified him with the Christian St. Nicholas, these "priests" were perhaps dervishes affiliated with the Bektāşīs who in the 16th century recognized the large sarcophagus in the former Christian church as the burial place of Saltuk and, in turn, as that of St. Nicholas.

Four years later, in 1582, another traveller, the Dominican friar and merchant Martin Gruneweg (1562–c. 1618) similarly notes the ongoing negotiation between the Christians and the Turks. He tells that in the weathered old Greek church there is supposed to be a stone, presumably the sarcophagus, that both the Christians and the Turks want to take out, or tried to lay claim to, but they did not succeed. This, Gruneweg says, substantiates the many miracles that are told about this holy place. He also records that besides the Turks and Greeks, Jews live close to the church.[78] The fact that members of the three monotheistic faiths chose to live in the proximity of the sanctuary suggests that the site was attractive to and perhaps also frequented by all.

The utraquist cult at the church-*tekke* of St. Nicholas was evidently an important centre of multi-religious pilgrimage in the late 16th and 17th centuries, because further travellers relate that an ambiguous saint's "tomb" is located in the former church of St. Nicholas. In 1587, dispatched to Constantinople by the Austrian emperor, the German apothecary Reinhold Lubenau (1556–1631) mentions the church in his account of the trip. He states that a certain Christian saint named "Sares Soldak" [Sarı Saltuk] is buried in the ancient Greek church:

> At night we arrived in Eskibaba ... here, too, there is a very old small Greek church, in which someone, by name of Sares Soldak, a Christian, is buried.[79]

The account of the British merchant Robert Bargrave (1628–1661) provides us with further insights into this church-*tekke*. In his diary[80] he notes in the entry for September 14, 1652:[81]

> We came to a Toune calld Babà Sarì Saltik (Father yellow Pate) which has its name from a Chappell therein so calld by the Turkes; but by the Greeks, Aghios Nicolas, where a Christian Saint is sayd to be buryed; to whom belongs this Story: When the Turkes

first conquerd these Parts, they assayd divers times to burne this Chappell, but were still miraculously prevented: wherefore they conclude that Saint to have been in part a Mussleman (of theyr Relligion) & so proclaime him to this day: It is now lookd to by a Dervis=woman, who keeps a Lamp allways burning in it, & it is calld a Tekie.

Bargrave's report confirms that the town was indeed named after Sarı Saltuk Baba. He also informs us that during and after the town's conquest by Murād I the church of St. Nicholas seemed to be miraculously protected despite several attempts by the Ottoman army to burn it down. This was interpreted as a miraculous sign of its sanctity and of the holy man's sainthood (*velāya*) whose supernatural ability (*kerāmet*) was such that he must (at least "in part") be a Muslim. Muslim conceptions of religious topography, as Josef Meri suggests, were thus also dependent on particular holy sites and their tomb inhabitants.[82] To consolidate the Ottoman claim over the remarkable tomb in Eskibaba, it is mentioned alongside Kilgra both in the *Velāyetnāme* and the *Seyāḥatnāme* as one of the holy spaces to which one of Saltuk's famous seven coffins was dispersed.[83] At the same time, Christians continue to claim the resting place within the church, known as "tekie" (*tekiya, tekke*), to be that of St. Nicholas.[84] We thus witness what Bakhtin refers to as "organic" hybridization of originally distinct religious traditions at the site, an ongoing mixing and fusing of diverse elements into a new "language." Christians participated in what appears to be a Bektāşī-coded cult but clearly on their own terms.

The keeper of the tomb (*türbedar*) of St. Nicholas (alias Sarı Saltuk) who ensures that the candle at the tomb is always lit was a woman. The ritual use of candles or oil lamps at tombs points to a Bektāşī administration of the sacred site. This tradition of permanently lit lights is found both in Bektāşī *tekke*s and in Christian monasteries.[85] The fact that both practices followed ancient patterns suggests however that these overlaps were based more on shared cultural heritage than on processes of religious exchange.[86]

In 1667 the cult provoked the censure of the strict Sunni preacher Vani Mehmed Efendi who wanted to abolish it as superstitious.[87] Despite this opposition, the joint cult continued, as is shown in the account of John Covel [Colvill] (1638–1722), who went to Constantinople as chaplain to the Levant Company and was commissioned to make a study of the Greek church and, interestingly, of its stand on transubstantiation.[88] In 1675 he stayed at Baba Eski, which he describes as "a pretty large town, [which] will dayly increase."[89] In his travelogue he further notes that

> An old Turk took it from the Christians, and from him it is now so named, for bobba [*baba*] is the common name for Father, and is given to every old man in common discourse. He lyes buried in St. Nicholas' church, the one thing remaining of the Greekes memoriall or building here. It is made a place of prayer, and he is reckoned a great saint amongst the common people. When we went into it to see his tomb we met another old Turk, who had brought three candles, and presented them to an old woman that looks after it, and shews it to strangers. He said he had made a vow in distresse to do it.

Covel, once again, mentions the cult of burning candles and alludes to the

82 Meri, *The Cult of the Saints*, 11–12.

83 Anetshofer, "Legends of Sarı Saltık," 303. In alternative versions there were twelve or forty coffins. Peter Brown (*The Cult of the Saints*, 90–103) notes that the possession of a saint's relics could even unify communities.

84 Anetshofer, "Legends of Sarı Saltık," 303.

85 Andreas Kiriakidis, *Bektaschitum und griechisches orthodoxes Mönchtum. Religionskontakt und Vergleich zweier mystischer Traditionen* (Berlin: EB Verlag, 2010), 35.

86 Kiriakidis, *Bektaschitum und griechisches orthodoxes Mönchtum*, 35.

87 Madeline C. Zilfi, "The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45, no. 4 (1986): 251–269, here 263, https://doi.org/10.1086/373194.

88 John Covel, "Extracts from the Diaries of Dr. John Covell, 1670–1679," in *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant*, ed. J. Theodore Bent (London: Hakluyt Society, 1893), 186.

89 Covel, "Extracts from the Diaries," 186.

90

In the diary of a journey to Jerusalem by Arsenije Crnojević, published in Bernard Lory, "Les notes de voyage du patriarche Arsenije III Crnojević, de Peć à Silivri, en 1682," *Turcica* 49 (2018): 373-87, here 373, http://doi.org/10.2143/TURC.49.0.3285085; John Bagnell Bury, *A History of the Eastern Roman Empire* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1912), 345.

91

Cf. Lory, "Les notes de voyage," 384. On the 9th-century St. Nicholas the Warrior, model of chastity, see Claude Laporte, *Tous les saints de l'orthodoxie* (Vevey: Xenia, 2008), 649.

92

Hasluck (*Christianity and Islam*, vol. 2, 55, n. 6, and 271) notes that in 1907 "Christians incubated in the church, and that a round stone on which patients sat gave oracles by turning under them, right for recovery and left for death. The tekke-church has not yet fallen into ruin, and down to the Balkan war was more or less occupied by dervishes, according to one of my informants."

93

An attempt to localize Sarı Saltuk's "tomb" at Eski Baba is made by Thierry Zarcone in "*Alévi* et *Bektasî* de Thrace orientale: les *tekke* de Sari Saltuk à Babaeski et d'Ariz Baba à Havsa," *Ikinci Tarih Boyunca Karadeniz Kongresi Bildirileri, 1–3 Haziran 1988* (Samsun: T.C. Ondokuz Mayis Üniversitesi Egitim Fakültesi, 1990), 629–38.

practice shared between Christians and Sufi communities, such as the Bektāşī, when making a wish or propitiatory vow to secure a saint's intercession. Should the vow be fulfilled, the supplicants make votive offerings to the holy man. In this case the old man brought three candles in gratitude for the saint's intercession. Covel also records a short conversation on the intercessory powers of the saint which he had with the female *türbedar* (who was perhaps the same woman Bargrave encountered during his visit twenty years earlier):

> The old woman told us: Yes, my sons, when ever you are in danger pray to this good holy man, and he will infallibly help you. Oh, fye! sister, quoth the old Turk, do not so vainly commit sin, for he was a mortall man and a sinner as well as we. I know it, quoth the old wife, that onely God doth all, and he doth nothing; but God for his sake will the sooner hear us; and so ended that point of Turkish divinity.

As the female *türbedar* concisely puts it, despite the holy man's human frailty and the fact that he was like them in everything including sin, an appeal to him was thought to grant immediate access to the power and presence of God.

A few years later, in 1682, the church-*tekke* was visited by the Serbian Patriarch Arsenije III Crnojević (1633–1706), Archbishop of Peć,[90] who supported Ottoman expulsion from the Balkans. Contrary to Covel's observations that the church was "pretty intire [intact]," Arsenije III states that the building was heavily damaged. When he and his entourage went to pay their respects at the holy tomb of the saint, he identifies the saint as the 9th-century "Saint Nicholas the Warrior, who had a vision in a dream of the Greek emperor Nicephorus going to war against the Bulgars, as it is written in the Prologue [or Synaxarion, a Greek church calendar of commemorated saints arranged by feast]," thus linking the saint to a historical event, the disastrous campaign of Emperor Nicephorus I against the Bulgars in 811. At the same time, he tells us that he[91]

> was secretly angry that the Turks had twisted a turban around his [the saint's] head; above the tomb is his bow, which is very large, and the banner which he carried with him.

While expressing his indignation at the Ottomanization of the sacred place, he had no doubt that the bow and banner belonged to the Christian saint, unlike the Christians Gerlach encountered a century earlier who attributed the relics to the false claim of the Muslims, implying that, over time, interfaith frequentation blurred religious distinctions in the wake of translator thinking of local religious ideas, practices, and of sacred objects and images. In addition, the learned clergyman tells us that this church at Eski Baba was named after the famous St. Nicholas of Myra, with whom Sarı Saltık is identified in other places.

Interestingly, Gerlach also noted that the *tekke* functioned as a hospital. There is a parallel here with Hasluck's report from the 1920s, which states that Saltuk's *türbe* at Eski Baba lies in a famous pre-Islamic sanctuary thought to possess miraculous healing power, said to be a church of St. Nicholas, but visited by both Greeks and Turks.[92] The holy site disappeared completely when it was levelled by Bulgarian troops during the First World War.[93]

4. Patras in northern Morea

While it was mainly Muslims who conflated Saltuk with St. Nicholas, Christians were well aware of this appropriation and, in turn, at times also claimed Saltuk as their own. In the *Seyāḥatnāme*, Evliyā, for instance, records that Greek Christians of Patras (Turkish Baliabadra), the capital of the province of Morea (today's northern Peloponnese), visited the pilgrimage site (*ziyaretgāh*) of a saint called Sarı Sadık Baba, claiming, "This is Sarı Saltuk who is our Sveti (İsveti) Nikola." Through offerings to the caretakers (*türbedārlar*) of the shrine, they manage to visit the tomb, to the chagrin of all judges (*ḥākimler*) who have not been able to prevent the Christian visits nor their claim.[94] In spite of the apparent tension and ambiguity reflected in the story, it also shows that the local population responded with initiative and adaptability to the agents of change. By noting that the holy man was a successor of Ḥācī Bektash, Evliyā shows that he, too, equates Sveti Nikola of Patras with Sarı Saltuk Baba.

A local legend attributes the creation of a promontory near the town of Vostitsa (to the north of Patras) to the miraculous power of Sari Sadik Sultan (Sarı Saltuk Baba?). When the dervish wanted to catch the ferry to the opposite shore of Naupaktos and the ferrymen left without him, he filled his garments with sand and then gradually scattered it into the sea, creating new ground so that he could cross on foot. The story parallels the above-mentioned legend of the divine creation of Kaliakra by St. Nicholas. The boatmen, fearing for their business were the strait to close completely, returned and brought the saint to his destination. Other *menākib* performed by Sari Sadik (Siddīk?) Sultan, who now rests in Patras, are said to be recorded not in Muslim sources but in Byzantine chronicles (*rūm tevārīkhleri*) alluding to a Byzantine appropriation of what appears to be Sarı Saltuk Baba.

It is remarkable that Evliyā uses the Slavic form to name the saint, Sveti Nikola, rather than "Hagios Nikolaos" as one would expect in Greek-speaking Patras. But since Evliyā gives no information about the setting of the sacred site, its exact location can no longer be determined. He mentions only the *türbedārlar* – hence only a *türbe* and no *tekke* seems to have existed – but does not allude to a former church. The behaviour of the *türbedārlar*, however, does not exclude the possibility that the Bektāşī had a hand in this. It remains a matter of speculation as to whether or not there had been an earlier local shrine of St. Nicholas, the Greek patron saint of the sea, or whether Evliyā was influenced by stories he had heard from the Bektāşīs with whom he spent eight months in the large Kilgra *tekke*.

5. Makedonski Brod in western North Macedonia

According to Christian popular tradition, a monastery dedicated to St. Nicholas had been established before the Turkish invasion on a hill near the small town of Makedonski Brod, located in the rural hinterlands on the road that leads from Kičevo (Kërçova) to Prilep (Kanatlar) in the western part of North Macedonia. This is corroborated by an archival text from 1544 stating: "It is the *zāviye* of Hızır [Khiḍr] Baba – otherwise known as Nikola Baba . . ."[95] This entry may have come about because after the arrival of the Turks in Kičevo a dervish called Hadir (Hızır) Baba settled in what was probably an abandoned Christian monastery and 'converted' it into a *zāviye* (i.e. *tekke*). According to local tradition, he had come from Khurasan in Eastern Iran to this part of Macedonia during an outbreak of the plague. When he began to heal the sick,

94
VIII.262a, cited after Anetshofer, "Legends of Sarı Saltık," 293.

95
Tapu defteri no 232, f. 210r, Başbakanlık Arşivi, Istanbul, see Liliana Mašulović-Marsol, "Les Bektachis dans la république de Macédoine," in *Bektachiyya: études sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach*, eds. Alexandre Popovic and Gilles Veinstein (Paris: Geuthner, 1997), 339–68, here 351.

local people were convinced of his miraculous powers.

H'd'r Baba Tekke/Church of St. Nicholas (Crkva Sveti Nikola), Makedonski Brod in western North Macedonia. Photograph © Glenn Bowman.

Tomb of H'd'r Baba in the H'd'r Baba Tekke/Church of St. Nicholas (Crkva Sveti Nikola), Makedonski Brod in western North Macedonia. Photograph © Glenn Bowman.

A Bektāşī *tekke* once occupied the site but was destroyed in 1918. Today only the *türbe* remains, an unassuming square shaped building built of sundried brick and timber. In the south-western part of the building there is a single tomb covered with a green cloth. According to the Christians, this contains the remains of Sveti Nikola, whereas for the local Muslims it is the resting place of

Hadir (H'd'r) Baba. The Baba carries the name of and has since been conflated with the mythological Hızır (Khidr) who, as mentioned earlier, is often seen to stand behind the saints Sari Saltuk (Sar' Salt'k) and Nicholas.[96] In 1994 the local bishop officially consecrated a church at the shared sanctuary henceforth known both as Church of St. Nicholas (Crkva Sveti Nikola) and as H'd'r Baba Tekke. The mixed local population, however, still refers to it simply as *türbe* or *tülbe*. Each year Christian pilgrims gather together to honour the Translation of the Relics of St. Nicholas as well as the feast day of St. George on May 5–6 (also known as H'derlez) and Muslim pilgrims to honour the memory of Hadir Baba on May 6–7. Across from the entrance of the tomb, icons of St. Nicholas hang on the wall. It is on this side that Christian believers come to pray and light their candles, while the opposite side is reserved for Muslim devotions. When the Muslim pilgrims come, the Orthodox caretaker, presently a woman, replaces some of the Christian materializations of the sacred with Muslim religious paraphernalia, such as large prayer beads, and depictions of 'Alid piety, such as 'Alī, the Twelve Imams, and Bektāşī saints.

Icon of St. Nicholas in the H'd'r Baba Tekke/Church of St. Nicholas (Crkva Sveti Nikola), Makedonski Brod in western North Macedonia. Photograph © Glen Bowman.

Members of both the various Muslim denominations and North Macedonian Orthodox Christian communities participate in several ritual practices of the 'other group' – such as the exchange of coloured eggs, lighting candles, and the apotropaic rite of passing through long strings of prayer beads to obtain the holy man's blessing and protection. Seeking health, well-being, and happiness for their families and themselves, members of both conceptual communities also visit the site for its well-known curative properties and take holy water and local herbs home with them. Pilgrims seeking the healing or transform-ative power of Sveti Nikola/H'd'r leave personal items, such as towels, blankets, shirts, or socks, overnight by or on the *türbe* in the belief that this, like the water and the herbs, would help to heal a disease, cure infertility, and gain various other blessings. Unlike the examples discussed above, these practices

97

Elizabeta Koneska, *Peace for All*, 26', Broadcasting Council of the Republic of Macedonia, 2007; http://practicalmattersjournal.org/2012/03/01/peace-for-all/; Kiriakidis, *Bektaschitum und griechisches orthodoxes Mönchtum*, 126–7.

98

Bowman, "Orthodox-Muslim Interactions," 206.

99

Irène Mélikoff, "Qui était Sarı Saltuk? Quelques remarques sur les manuscrits du Saltukname," in *Studies in Ottoman History in Honour of Professor V.L. Mélange*, eds. Colin Heywood and Colin Imber (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1994), 231–8.

100

Kiriakidis, *Bektaschitum und griechisches orthodoxes Mönchtum*, 35.

are still shared across the religious traditions and attest to a "non-competitive atmosphere of connectedness."[97] Yet while the different faiths share the same space and there are intercommunal interactions in the apotropaic and healing rites or the exchange of presents, the communities no longer cross religious borders and partake in common saintly devotions and joint religious observances, as was the case during Ottoman times.[98]

Conclusion

"The name of Sarı Saltuk," as Irène Melikoff has pointed out, "should be seen as a symbol of the Islamic-Christian syncretism characteristic of the Balkans. It also remains an eloquent symbol of the spirit of religious tolerance that prevailed during the early centuries of the Turkish conquest."[99] We might add that it can still be felt today (even though it has lost much of its force). Saltuk's encounter with Nicholas and his subsequent 'reincarnation' as this Christian saint demonstrate the fluidity and porousness of cultural paradigms. This is evidenced, for instance, by the *fetvā* of Ebū Suʿūd (d. 1574) which emphasized the Muslim saint's "Christian aspect," providing an inspirational conceptualization which both Christians and Muslims could relate to and revere.

The case studies have shown that the transfer and translation of saintly cults, sainthood, and holy places took place mostly in borderland regions in south-eastern Europe at the margins of the Ottoman empire and were initiated by dervish orders rather than representatives of the official religion, who instead looked askance at this mixed worship. Despite recurrent instances of orthodox opposition, the saints' followers continued to translate devotional practices directed towards the Christian saint to the Muslim saint, and vice versa, enacting the inextricable embeddedness of religio-cultural contact.

These cultural paradigms allowed ancient religious structures associated with St. Nicholas to be perpetuated and jointly reconfigured with "the blonde dervish." In this they followed ancient pathways of religio-cultural translatability as exemplified by Nicholas himself absorbing elements of the cult of Poseidon. This process of assimilation, which took place under the umbrella of the Sufi confraternities, was facilitated by the fact that recognizing a holy man in Islam was both a personal and an informal affair, often based on a consensus of the common people, the saint's devotees, and their interaction with 'their' saint. The translation process also benefitted from the fact that, as Andreas Kiriakidis notes, "those laymen in both cases are followers of a mystical community (Bektāşī dervishes and Greek Orthodox monks, respectively) that is a model in spiritual terms and a point of orientation in spiritual life."[100] The dervishes had taken a vow of poverty and lived in secluded asceticism, comparable to Christian monastic orders. The Bektāşī in particular, but also other Sufi orders, were conciliatory and empathetic toward Christianity and practiced religious coexistence. Consequently, they translated Christian modalities just like the Christians had appropriated and reinterpreted ancient pagan traditions. In this they saw themselves as natural successors and 'guardians' of the Christian tradition in the new Islamic environment. In this way, they also had no difficulty in transforming the Christian saint's name, St. Nicholas, into that of Sari Saltuk. The process was also aided by the function attributed to these religious sites which was (and still is) linked to a particular efficacy such as healing. There was a certain trans-confessional pragmatism, which focused on the hoped-for effects anticipated at these holy places

irrespective of religious affiliation.

The double cult of the protean figures of Saltuk and Nicholas thus embraces conquest and appropriation along with multi-religious pilgrimage and cross-cultural negotiation. Outside the remit of official religious policy, they embody that assimilation and cultural exchange characteristic of borderlands that allows customs to converge on both sides. The tangled routes of cultural transmission can be traced through the simultaneous use of these holy figures, their shared sacred sites, and sometimes even their shared holy dates. These time-honoured routes allowed and can still allow for rapprochement, translation, and positive, peaceful contact between Muslim and Christian communities.

Miracles and Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Lebanon: the Proof is in the Eyes of the Other

Emma Aubin-Boltanski

Emma Aubin-Boltanski
CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche
Scientifique), CéSor (Centre d'études en sciences
sociales du religieux)
emma.aubin-boltanski@ehess.fr

Abstract

On 21 August 2004, the small Maronite village of Beshwāt in the Beqaa plain of Lebanon was the site of a miracle of the Virgin Mary. In the weeks following the event, an interreligious and interconfessional pilgrimage, consisting of devout Christians (Maronites, Melkites, Greek Orthodox, and Armenians) and Muslims (Shiites and Sunnis), started coming to the site, with the press estimating that over one million pilgrims descended upon the tiny village from August 2004 to January 2006. This article discusses Virgin's essential indeterminacy and its impact on interreligious relations.

1

Emma Aubin-Boltanski, "Notre-Dame de Béchouate. Un 'objet-personne' au cœur d'un dispositif cultuel," *L'Homme,* 203-204 (2012): 291-320; "Fondation d'un centre de pèlerinage au Liban. Notre-Dame de Béchouate," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 151 (2010): 149-168; "La Vierge, les chrétiens, les musulmans et la nation," *Terrain*, 51 (2008): 10-29.

2

This essay was initially presented in a seminar organized in 2007 by Jacques Cheyronnaud and Elisabeth Claverie, then published afterwards in French on the website of the Centre Norbert Elias (EHESS). As this electronic version of the article has now disappeared, I warmly thank the editors of this special issue for having agreed to publish a revised English version.

3

I take up the definition of the situational disposition proposed by Elisabeth Claverie and Albert Piette, which brings together enunciations and material objects; see Elisabeth Claverie, "Voir et apparaître," *Raisons pratiques* 2 (1991): 157-176, and Albert Piette, *Le fait religieux* (Paris: Economica, 2003), 38.

On 21 August 2004, the small Maronite village of Beshwāt in the Beqaa plain of Lebanon was the site of a miracle of the Virgin Mary. In the weeks following this miraculous event, an interreligious, interconfessional pilgrimage, consisting of devout Christians (Maronites, Melkites, Greek Orthodox, and Armenians) and Muslims (Shiites and Sunnis), started coming to the site, with the press estimating that over one million pilgrims descended upon the tiny village from August 2004 to January 2006. In August 2005, I started a long-term investigation in Beshwāt which led to several publications[1]. First in a series, this essay[2] aims to analyze the role of the Muslim witness in attesting to the veracity of apparitions and miracles of the Virgin Mary. It will show:

- A vertical relationship that was created and then recreated between the faithful and the invisible being known as the Virgin. On this point, the main issue is also to consider the local economies of the divine, given that Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, with some nuanced differences between them, offer up a transcendent and distant deity; the issue of the accessibility of and contact with that deity is an important matter, and one that is often problematic for these faiths. At Beshwāt the situational apparatus allowing for the presence of the Virgin was characterized by a precarious and unstable equilibrium.[3] The Virgin's presence was at the center of an essential indeterminacy: hesitations and questions accompany the reciprocal encounter between the supernatural being (the Virgin) and ordinary individuals (Christian and Muslim believers) every step of the way. Because this apparatus is fragile and unstable, the faithful are continually led to critical reasonings and justifications. The "holding as true" that defines religious faith does not mean that the various actors fell prey to some kind of hallucinatory presence; instead, there was *constant* work on their part to

understand the event.[4]

- A horizontal link between the faithful of different religions, with particular attention to the specific Lebanese context where interreligious and interconfessional relations are extremely tense. During my two research trips, which occurred during the massive interreligious pilgrimage to Beshwāt, I discovered an exclusively Maronite village.[5] At certain times of the year, especially during the week from 15 to 21 August, Beshwāt opens some of its sites – the chapel, the market of devotional objects, and restaurants – to Christian and Muslim "foreigners." In Lebanon, religious identity generates a strong pressure upon religious actors. Yet the individuals who came to Beshwāt as pilgrims did not fit into a series of specific and exclusive confessional identities. Their journeys responded to a number of different objectives, from the religious (addressing a prayer to the Virgin Mary and attending mass), to the political (celebrating national unity around the Virgin), to tourism (a family getaway, purchasing souvenirs from the Beqaa, listening to Maronite hymns). These individuals oscillated between the postures and identities of pilgrims, citizens, and tourists. As a result, the horizontal link that was formed in this emergent pilgrimage took on very different shades. The lack of fixed meaning to the pilgrimage and the relative flexibility in the motivations for the trip itself was a way to avoid conflicts and social disruption.

This essay focuses mainly on the impact on interreligious relations rather than on the political or touristic implications of the pilgrimage to Beshwāt.[6] More specifically, it aims to look at the intersection of the horizontal and vertical links that took shape in this Marian shrine by showing that in the apparitions of the Virgin Mary, the figure of the "Muslim" plays a central role by representing a reference point from which to create the presence of the figure of the invisible. In the process involved in miracles and Marian apparitions, the Other constitutes, in a way, a proof of "authenticity."

Beshwāt, a Maronite Village of the Beqaa Plain

Beshwāt, located at an altitude of 1,200 meters on the western face of Mount Lebanon, dominates the Beqaa plain. Since 2003, the village has been administratively connected to the governorate (*muḥāfaza*) of Baalbeck-Hermel, which corresponds to the northern part of the Beqaa. The incorporation of the Beqaa into Lebanon is a relatively recent event; it was only in 1920, when the Lebanese state was formed, that it was added to "Little Lebanon," the area formed around Mount Lebanon in 1860-61. Before that, the Beqaa was governed by a number of interior Syrian cities, mainly Homs (for the northern part of the plain).[7] The Beqaa extends from north to south between two mountain chains that structure the country and form a shared border with Syria. Characterized by a relatively underdeveloped population density – it makes up 40% of the national territory but holds only 15% of the country's population – the Beqaa is seen as a poor, rural and agricultural periphery neglected by the economic center. Yet the area is geopolitically strategic because of its closeness to Syria and the relatively unsecured border. As the "soft underbelly" of the Lebanese territory, the Beqaa is in the first line of attack for any Syrian power moves.[8] After the Syrian evacuation of Lebanon in April 2005, the Beqaa was used as an offensive rear base for Hezbollah.[9] Even if the vast majority of the Beqaa's population consists of Shiites, the plain, like

Fig. 1. The village of Beshwāt in the Beqaa valley.

4

Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit*, vol. 3: *Le temps raconté* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), 271.

5

Maronites are the largest Christian community in Lebanon. They are Oriental Catholics; their Church recognizes the primacy of the Vatican.

6

On that issue, see also Aubin-Boltanski, "La Vierge, les chrétiens, les musulmans et la nation," 10-29.

7

Karine Bennafla, "La Bekaa, une zone libanaise stratégique au voisinage de la Syrie," in E. Picard and F. Mermier, ed., *Liban, une guerre de 33 jours* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007); and "La Bekaa (Liban): un espace géostratégique," *Mappemonde* (2007).
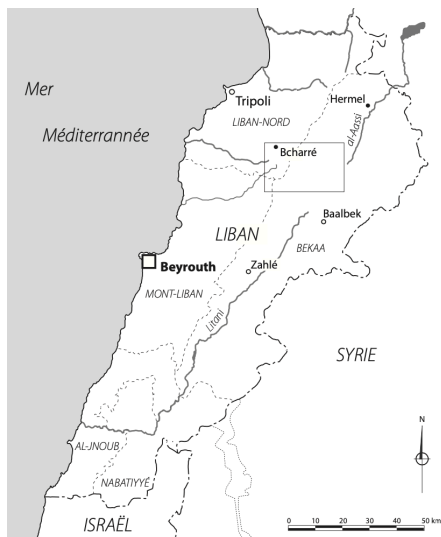
8

Ibid.

9

Ibid.

Fig. 2. Map of Lebanon.

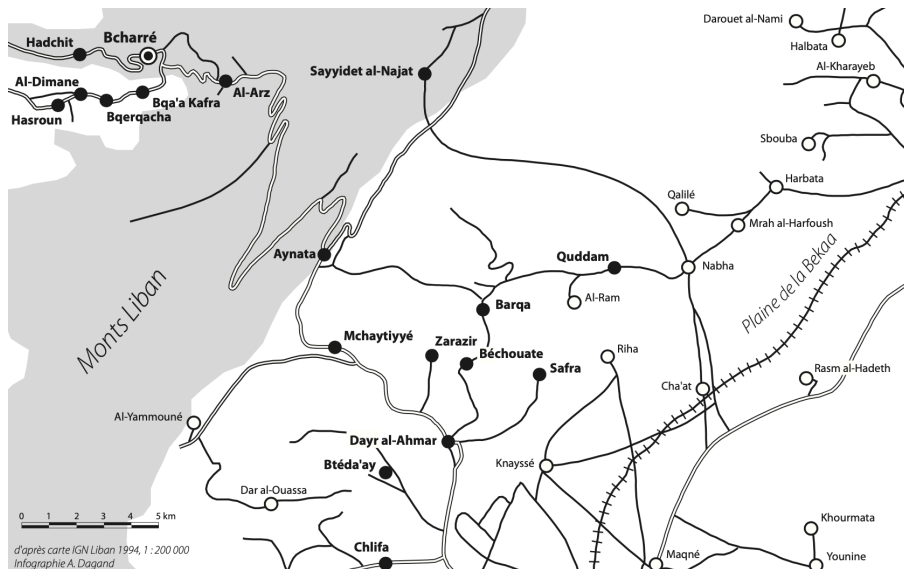d'après carte IGN Liban 1994, 1 : 200 000
Infographie A. Dagand

Fig. 3. Map of the Beqaa Plain, in *Terrain*, 51 (2008).

10

The Jacobites are also called Western Syrians. They are Monophysites who split from the Roman church by refusing the definition of the person and the two natures of Christ formulated at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. They were organized as a separate church by Jacob Baradaeus in the sixth century.

11

Issam Farid Karam, *Tārīkh sayyida Bichū'āt mazārihā wa 'aja'ibihā* [History of the Sanctuary and the Miracles of Our Lady of Beshwāt] (Beirut: n.p., 2006).

Lebanon, is a communitarian and confessional hodgepodge, containing Christians (Maronites, Greek Catholics and Armenians), Sunnis, Syrian and Palestinian refugees.

Beshwāt has around 250 inhabitants and is situated at the center of a cluster of around 14 exclusively Maronite villages. This Maronite area is called Dayr al-Ahmar, after the most important city and the seat of the Maronite bishopric in the region. At the outskirts of this Maronite pocket of around 20 square kilometers there are a few mixed villages (Maronite and Shiite), which have been largely deserted by their Christian population since the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990).

Beshwāt is inhabited by a single family: the Kayrouz. According to Issam Farid Karam, who has written a history of the region, the Kayrouz were originally from Ayn Halya in Syria. They first settled in Beshwāt at the end of the 18th century, after an "alliance" with the Shiite Emir of the region, Jahjah Harfush. At that time, the village was inhabited by Jacobite Christians, several Shiite families, and "an icon of the Virgin."[10] The Kayrouz appropriated this image through violence in order to construct a church for "her" in 1790. Several years later, after a bloody massacre, the Kayrouz allegedly expelled the Jacobites and Shiites from the village.[11]

In this village, which is today exclusively Maronite, a distrust towards the "confessionally Other" dominates: "For us," as the mayor of the village told me with a gesture of disdain, "Muslims, Shiites, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, they are all the same." He then added: "No stranger, even Maronite, can settle in the village. That is the rule here. They can live in Dayr al-Ahmar, but not here." These words are especially significant since, for over ten years now, the pilgrimage to Beshwāt has developed significantly, representing an important financial boon that has mainly profited the Kayrouz in the village.

Furthermore, like many of the surrounding Maronite villages, Beshwāt is a stronghold of the Lebanese Forces (LF). The LF, which were first a Christian militia that played a major role throughout the long civil war, were founded in 1976 by Bashir Gemayel. After the Taif peace accords in 1989 they became a "political party" with a hardline attitude against the Syrian occupation. This position resulted in the arrest of the LF's leader Samir Geagea in 1994 and the dissolution of the party by the Lebanese

Fig. 4. The old and the new churches.

government. During the civil war, the LF distinguished themselves from other militias by the extensive use of symbolic markers in the territories they controlled. These included not only numerous posters of their leaders but also inscriptions placed on homes and buildings of their two emblems: a cedar tree in a red circle symbolizing the blood of the martyrs, and a red cross in the shape of a sword.[12] During the eleven years that their leader was imprisoned these symbols were outlawed. After the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in April 2005, and Samir Geagea's release from prison in July, they began reappearing in pro-LF neighborhoods and villages. In Beshwāt, in the immediate aftermath of Samir Geagea's release, every house in the village had a poster of the LF leader and the young men proudly wore the LF's red cross around their necks.[13]

Beshwāt has two churches, an "old" one and a "new" one (Fig. 4). The former, which became a central site for the pilgrimage, is also called in Arabic *mazār* (literally, sanctuary or chapel); I will use the term "chapel" to refer to it. But let us begin with the "new" church, an imposing structure that was built in the 1990s. It is one of the many "church fortresses" that have been built (and, in many cases, continue to be built) since the 1980s in the Dayr al-Ahmar region. Since 2013, the "largest rosary in the world" has been under construction. It stretches over 625 meters, and its 59 beads can each accommodate two to three people. Those that correspond to the recitation of the Our Father will become confessionals[14] (Fig. 6, next page). Visible from a radius of several kilometers, these massive structures give a Catholic character to the surrounding landscape. With the exception of Dayr al-Ahmar and Aynata, two towns with around 2,000

12

Régina Sneifer-Perri, *Guerres maronites. 1975-1990* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), 141.

13

On that issue, see also Emma Aubin-Boltanski, "Samir Geagea : le guerrier, le martyr et le za'īm," in *Leaders et partisans au Liban*, ed. Franck Mermier and Sabrina Mervin (Paris/Beirut: Karthala-IFPO-IISMM, 2012), 57-80.

14

Emma Aubin-Boltanski and Anna Poujeau, "Culte des saints, renouveau monastique et pratiques religieuses contemporaines," in *Les Chrétiens du Proche-Orient* (exhibition catalogue), (Paris: Gallimard IMA, 2017), 178-187.

Fig. 5. The church fortress of Safra.

Fig. 7. A shrine dedicated to Saint Charbel on the road leading to Beshwāt.

Fig. 6. The largest rosary in the world.

Fig. 8. An ex-voto at the entry to the village of Safra.

inhabitants each, the other villages of the region are sparsely populated, with anywhere from 100 to 150 inhabitants. Despite these small populations, every village has a "new" church, which is usually huge, on top of an "old," usually much more modest, church (Fig. 5). Every locality also has a number of small glass shrines with statues of the saints or other devotional objects in them (Fig. 7). There are also, since the 2000s, gigantic ex-votos which take the shape of statues, usually located at the outskirts of the villages. These statues are financed by believers who wish to thank the saint represented for having fulfilled their wishes (Fig. 8). In the last few years, memorial monuments have appeared for young men who died prematurely, whether as martyrs or victims of accidents or disease. All of these religious symbols – churches, glass windows holding relics, ex-votos, memorials – provide a Catholic stamp to this Maronite stronghold otherwise situated in a largely Shiite area.

The Chapel and the Statue of Our Lady of Beshwāt

The new church is a devotional space exclusively attended by Christian worshippers where the Muslim faithful rarely enter (and when they do, it is usually by mistake). The church hosts masses and sacraments, which are especially numerous during the "months of the Virgin" in April and May. Outside of these services, its doors remain closed. It is thus towards the chapel, the "old" church, that the Christian and Muslim pilgrims go. Much smaller, without even a bell tower, the chapel dates from 1910. It was constructed on the ruins of the original 1790 church, which was destroyed in a fire in 1905. Unlike the new church, which is a strict devotional space where the faithful are meant to sit in tightly-bunched rows facing the altar, the chapel is a relatively sparse devotional space. On days with many visitors, the Sisters of the Maronite Order are present,

but only to oversee the movement of the people inside the chapel.

After walking in through a small door, one enters a nave that is about 10 meters long and five meters wide. To the immediate left are two trunks for donations and alms. On the wall, above a tiny alcove, is a painting of the Assumption of Mary. At the bottom of the nave, there are two statues of the Virgin on each side of the altar. On the right wall a piece of pink marble is placed in a basin. While all of these objects have their own level of importance and signification, with the faithful looking, touching, kissing, and caressing them, the pink marble stone and one of the two statues hold a special meaning. They play a central role in the apparatus that signals the presence of the Virgin Mary, constituting the two principal visual and tactile supports for the construction of that presence and in so doing helping to establish contact with her.

To begin with the statue of the Virgin: the altar is framed by two "Virgins," the *sayyidet Lūrde,* Our Lady of Lourdes, and, on the other side, the *sayyidet Beshwāt*, Our Lady of Beshwāt (Fig. 9). If there are numerous examples of the statue of Lourdes in the Middle East, there are very few of Our Lady of Beshwāt, which is a representation of an apparition of the Virgin in 1871 in the small French village of Pontmain (Mayenne department).[15] The apparition at Pontmain concluded a series of so-called attested or verified apparitions.[16] It took place in a specific political context, with the invading Prussian army at the doors of Laval, ready to enter Brittany. The Virgin appeared in front of five children with a message of hope several days before the armistice and the withdrawal of the Prussian army, which has led to it being interpreted in political and nationalistic terms: the mother of Jesus had protected France and repelled the Germans. The Virgin of Pontmain has some distinctive traits: appearing as an "animated icon," she is dressed in a long night-blue tunic ornamented with star constellations, her head covered with a dark veil and a golden crown.[17] In her hands she holds a bloody crucifix. Her eyes are fixed to the ground; her facial expression is severe. This is a far cry from the classical Western iconography of the Virgin, and the contrast with the well-mannered Virgin of Lourdes is striking. The Byzantine aspect of this particular Virgin requires further exploration.

How this statue made its way into Lebanon remains a mystery. Several competing explanations have been offered. In an interview, the mayor of Beshwāt claimed that after the chapel fire in 1905 a French ambassador had it transported to the village because "he wanted to thank the Virgin for having cured his sick daughter." According to a former parish priest, Fadi Bassil, the villagers wanted a "French statue" to decorate their church. They passed on their request to a Jesuit priest who sent on a copy of Our Lady of Pontmain. A third explanation claims that an immigrant to the village who had lived for many years in South Africa brought the statue to the village.[18] Since the publication in 2006 of a book on the history of the sanctuary of Beshwāt an official version has prevailed: a Jesuit priest, Father Goudard, who had written a book on the Virgin in Lebanon,[19] was "so impressed" by the beauty of the village and its inhabitants that he gave them the statue as a gift.[20]

In Lebanon today, this statue has come to "personify" Our Lady of Beshwāt. I use the term "personify" because it is common to hear the believers employ the term *al-shakhs*, a polysemic term which in Arabic designates an individual, a person, and a stone statue.[21] The statue can, in fact, be called an "object-person": the product of an operation to make it

Fig. 9. The statue of Our Lady of Beshwāt.

15
To my knowledge, there are only two such statues in the Middle East; the other is at the Church of Saint Anne in Jerusalem.

16
She followed the apparitions in Salette (1846) and Lourdes (1858). On the invention of the verified apparition, see Joachim Bouflet and Philippe Boutry, *Un signe dans le Ciel: Les apparitions de la Vierge* (Paris: Grasset, 1997), 127-163.

17
Ibid., 159.

18
This final story is not as fantastic as it seems; the cult of Our Lady of Pontmain was spread by the congregation of Oblates of Mary in South Africa starting in the late 19th century.

19
Joseph Goudard, *La sainte Vierge au Liban* (Beirut: Dâr al-Machrek, 1993 [1908]).

20
Issam Farid Karam, *Tārikh sayyida Beshwāt mazārahā wa ʿajaʾibihā*, p. 9.

21
Kazimirski (1860): "dark object seen from far away. Person, individual"; Dozy (1927): "medal, piece of metal created in honor of someone, an absent person. Role, character, what an actor must play. Representation of an object, figure, statue"; Mounjed (1986): "the darkness of an individual (or another) visible from far away. Also could mean the individual. In contemporary usage: a statue made of stone or another material"; Hans Weir (1980): "individual, person, character (in a play), image of someone."

22

Emma Aubin-Boltanski, "Notre-Dame de Béchouate. Un 'objet-personne' au cœur d'un dispositif cultuel," 291-320.

23

On the principle of individuation over the production of "god-things," see Jean Bazin, "Retour aux choses-dieux," in *Corps des dieux,* ed. C. Malamoud and J.P. Vernant (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 351-381.

24

I take up the analysis here from Albert Piette on the wafer; see *La religion de près: L'activité religieuse en train de se faire* (Paris: Métaillé, 1999), 253-255.

particular, it is itself unsubstitutable and unique.[22] At first the statue was a simple object, a copy of the Virgin of Pontmain, but then a process of individualization transformed it into a singular "thing," Our Lady of Beshwāt.[23] It has a *name,* Beshwāt, to distinguish it from other statues of the Virgin of Pontmain. A *signature,* that of sculptor Pierre Machard, is engraved on the underside of its base. Loaded with history, a number of *dates* are attached to the statue: 1871, 1976 (apparition in the skies of Dayr Ahmar at the start of the Lebanese civil war), and 2004. The statue is not a raw, inanimate, unchanging material object. It undergoes the effects of the erosion of time and is constantly being remodeled by the action of the faithful. The dress has become lighter, pieces of stone fall out ("Her dress needs to be fixed on a regular basis," a church official in charge of the sanctuary told me), and her crucifix seems to change frequently in size and shape (red at first, it has been replaced by a series of crosses in light wood). The statue breathes, moves, expresses itself.

These attributes of being animated, of being a person, do not take away the statue's status as an object. The representatives of the Church regularly remind the faithful that it is "only" a stone statue. To return it to its status as a simple object, an image of an image, the parish priest placed a glass in front of the statue in July 2006 so that believers and pilgrims could no longer touch or kiss it. The statue could thus only be seen from a distance. As an "object-person," the statue is a locus of tension between the affirmation of a presence ("it is the Virgin") and its negation ("it is not that," "it is only an object"). The faithful oscillate between these opposing views. No extreme position is taken up: the Virgin is neither literally absent nor completely present. This indeterminacy and the constant movement of hesitation the statue arouses in the faithful play an essential role in creating the space for the Virgin's presence.[24]

The Virgin Mary in Islam

25

A thorough study on the Virgin in Islam can be found in Michel Dousse, *Marie la musulmane* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2005).

In the chapel Christian and Muslim believers are found side by side. They walk together and touch and kiss the same objects. A single ritual gesture – the sign of the cross made upon entering and exiting the chapel – differentiates the Christians and the Muslims. Muslims do not make the sign of the cross, but they do sometimes dip both hands in the holy water before dabbing their faces. These gestures are not ostentatious and are quickly made. It sometimes happens that a Muslim might ask to be given enough space for the ritual prayer that consists of two bows in the direction of Mecca and two others in the direction of the statue, but that is a rare event. More generally, with the exception of the veil of some Muslim females, it is rather difficult to determine who among the pilgrims are Muslim and who among them are Christian.

"The Virgin is for everyone," a Shiite woman from Baalbek tells me as justification for her trip to Beshwāt. The expression *al-ʿadrāʾ la –l- kull* is frequently heard in Lebanon to explain the devotion of both Christians and Muslims to the Virgin. Who is the Virgin for Muslims, though? Without claiming to exhaust the subject, it should be noted that the Qurʾān and the hadiths reserve an exceptionally prominent place to Mary (*Maryam* in Arabic).[25] In the Qurʾān, which devotes an entire surah to her (19), she is exalted "above all women in the world" (3:42). Mary is considered to be a sign of God, announcing Muhammad's future divine mission to mankind. When God invites the chosen ones to enter Paradise, it is Mary who will be the first one to go inside. She, along with her son, was the only person

spared any contact with Satan (*shaytān*) from her birth, and Muhammad vouches for her perfection. While the Virgin is generally considered by most Qurʾānic interpreters a *siddīqa*, a truthful one (the *sidiqīyya* constitute the most elevated form of sainthood), theologians like Ibn Hazm or Al-Qurtubi go even further and call her a prophet. The Virgin thus constitutes the ultimate model of saintliness for females.[26]

Mary holds a particularly important role in the Shiite tradition. The devotion to her in this branch of Islam is reinforced by the devotion to Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet, wife of Ali and mother of Husayn and Hasan. Fatimah shares a number of qualities with the Virgin, making her in a way a double of her. According to a hadith, the mother of Jesus aided the Prophet's wife Khadija in giving birth and transmitted her charisma to the new-born child.[27] In Shiite hagiography, Fatimah is, like the Virgin, "above all the other females in the world."[28] Despite her children, she has conserved her virginity. This leads Shiites to call her *al-batūl* (the virgin), and she is even sometimes called *umm ʾabīhā* (mother of her father).[29]

It is also important, when discussing the Virgin Mary in Islam, to consider the particular status of objects and images representing her. Islam is often presented as a visually neutered or even iconophobic religion.[30] In mosques, for instance, images are often rejected in favor of abstract designs like arabesques or calligraphy: the word is always preferred over the image, and abstraction over figurative representation.[31] Yet when it comes to the representation of saints and prophets, scholarly work has shown that Islam has adopted contrasting positions in different historical periods, in different geographic spaces, and with regard to various traditions.[32] To take up Jack Goody's phrase, Islam contains "cognitive contradictions" when it comes to representations, rather than a definitive, single attitude that is unquestioningly transmitted from one generation to the next.[33] This ambivalence towards representation is even more pronounced when considering that the Qurʾān lacks a genuine theology of the image.[34] The Qurʾān only proscribes the adoration of pagan idols and the production of images in three dimensions that "create shadows" (which are seen as failed attempts to imitate God's power of creation). It was only in the ninth century, with the composition of the hadiths, that all forms of figurative representation, whether of statues or two-dimensional objects, were banned. Even within this case, though, striking contradictions appear when it comes to painted images of the Virgin. A famous hadith reports that while Muhammad ordered the destruction of the idols of the Kaaba, he refused to allow anyone to touch an icon of the Virgin and Child, protecting it with his own hands.[35]

The history of the diffusion of images of Christian saints in the Middle East shows the ambivalent and contradictory attitude of Islam towards figurative representation. Bernard Heyberger has argued that the few icons and the sometimes complete absence of religious images in Christian sanctuaries in the region before the 17th century can be explained by the "hatred and incomprehension of Muslims towards them."[36] Yet, starting in the 17th century, Catholic missionaries began to import statutes and images of the saints into the region, and these diverse representations came to be adopted not only by the region's Christians but also by Muslims, who asked the missionaries for these images so as to make amulets. The portraits of Mary gained great popularity in the area.[37] The cult devoted to images of Jesus's mother remains important even now,

26
Michel Chodkiewicz, "La sainteté féminine dans l'hagiographie islamique," in *Saints orientaux*, ed. D. Aigle (Paris: De Boccard, 1995), 99-115.

27
Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Chosen of All Women: Mary and Fatima in Qurʾānic exegesis," *Islamochristiana* 17 (1981): 19-28.

28
Ibid.

29
Louis Massignon, "La mubālaha de Médine et l'hyperdulie de Fatima," *Opera Minora*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Maaref, 1963). In the same volume see also "La notion du vœu et la dévotion musulmane à Fâtima."

30
On Islam as an "iconophobic" religion, rejecting representations of the human figure, see Valérie Gonzalez, "Réflexions esthétiques sur l'approche de l'image dans l'art islamique," in *L'image dans le monde arabe,* ed. G. Beaugé and J.F. Clément (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1995), 69-78.

31
Jean-François Clément, "L'image dans le monde arabe: interdit et possibilités," in *L'image dans le monde arabe,* ed. G. Beaugé G. and J.F. Clément (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1995), 11-42.

32
Ibid.

33
Jack Goody, *Representations and Contradictions: Ambivalence towards Images, Theatre, Fiction, Relics and Sexuality* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997).

34
Clément, "L'image dans le monde arabe."

35
Ernst Diez, *L'art de l'Islam* (Paris: Payot, 1966); Clément, "L'image dans le monde arabe."

36
Bernard Heyberger, "Entre Byzance et Rome: l'image et le sacré au Proche-Orient au XVIIe siècle," *Histoire, économie et société,* 8-4 (1989): 527-550, at 532.

37
Ibid.

although it continues to be at the center of a fraught, unresolved debate over images in Islam. Throughout churches in the Middle East, it is not uncommon to see the Muslim faithful make the ritual prayer facing a painting of the Assumption or the Immaculate Conception. When a statue is transported in a procession, the Muslim faithful will join the crowd of Christians. In numerous households, especially in Shiite ones, images of Maryam can be found. She is often depicted in a pictorial vocabulary that is strikingly Catholic: statuettes of the Sulpician Virgin decorate living rooms, framed by engravings where golden letters on a black background inscribe the names of Allah and the Prophet Muhammad. Mary's presence is normally more understated – tiny vignettes in a purse, often given by a husband or brother. Nevertheless, the veneration towards representations of the Virgin can sometimes lead to violent execration and rejection, as a Shiite inhabitant of Beirut, Fatimah, told me:

> I have an image of the Virgin with me. She is here, I talk to her. She reassures me. I was infertile, but thanks to her I had three boys. My brother Mahmoud saw the image one day. He tore it up. He said that we do not need an image. He launched insults. Of course, he is right, it is only an image, but, still (…) I don't know. It is the Lord who knows best. Now, I have another image.

The attitude of the Muslim believer with regard to objects manifesting the presence of the Virgin is thus situated in an *in-betweenness*: neither complete acceptance nor total rejection.[38]

The Proof of the Miracle is in the Eye of the Other

To now look at the interconfessional link created around the Virgin through the pilgrimage to Beshwāt, I will examine the discourse of Maronites about Muslims, those "Others," who, as I noted earlier, play an important role in staging the presence of the Virgin (apparitions, miracles). My argument will stem from the description of the following two scenes:

Scene 1. Saturday, 7 April 2007, Beshwāt. I have just arrived. My bags dropped off, I go to the home of Therese and Umm Charbel. Therese starts to question me:

> Did you pay a visit to the person [*al-shakhs*]? Do you know that there was a new miracle two weeks ago? A four-year-old boy was healed. He was born unable to walk. His mother is from here. She asked for the Virgin's aid. The Virgin had appeared in a dream, and the next day the mother went to the chapel with her son. The boy who had never taken a step suddenly got up on his legs and started running.

Umm Charbel shrugs her shoulders: "There's nothing special about this. We are used to these sorts of things here!" Therese continues:

> Have you gone to see her, in France, at Pontmain? I have seen photos. Her face is more beautiful here. It's like she wants to talk like a real person. Her face changes, it is round, it's like she's

smiling. And sometimes her face scrunches up like this (*Therese grimaces, pulling in her cheeks*). Is that possible? Can her face change when it is just a statue? Doesn't that mean that she is here? On Fridays her face often gets sadder. The people who go into the chapel for a quick visit don't see anything, of course. But I see the changes. I've spoken to the priest and showed him, but he doesn't see anything. He told me that I have a "small brain" *(she shrugs her shoulders)*. But others have seen the same thing. Even the Muslims have seen things.

Scene 2. Later that afternoon, I meet up with Fadi Bassil, a Lazarist who lived in the village for nine years and who, at the time of the apparition in 2004, was the parish priest. He played a central role in organizing the pilgrimage from the start, but then was removed by the Maronite Church. We chat about this and that. I ask him about the most recent miracle. He makes a face: "Yes, I know. I know the mother, she is from here, from the village. She is very devoted in her faith. Poor thing, her two sons are handicapped. But there are no medical certificates." I ask him what he thinks about miraculous healings. He is visibly upset by my question. He leans forward, elbows on his knees, moves his hands from left to right: "We have to be careful, we cannot believe everything. But, of course, when two Shiites come and tell you what has happened to them, it's different, you tell yourself that something must have happened." Then, Fadi Bassil tells me about two Shiites living in the area who were miraculously healed:

> There was a man from Baalbek watching a report on Our Lady of Beshwāt on TV. For a few weeks his legs were so swollen that he couldn't walk. He spoke to the Virgin on the TV, telling her: "Do something for me!" Then he heard a voice telling him to get up and walk. He got up and walked normally. He called out to his wife and told her to bring him a Qurʾān. He opened the Book at random and landed on the surah about Maryam. There was also this neighbor, this man whose child was sick. He went to the doctor but didn't have money for medicines. He threw away the prescription and came here, to Our Lady of Beshwāt. His son got better. We recorded their testimonies on a DVD.

I asked him why, without a more thorough investigation, he accepts these two stories as "authentic miracles," and he responded: "Because normally the Muslims don't believe in this stuff. There are no miracles in their religion. They are much more rational, you see."

The DVD with these two testimonies of miraculous healing was available for purchase at the village's market of devotional objects. These stories also appeared on the Maronite religious channel Télé-Lumière. What is most striking in Father Fadi Bassil's discourse is the suspicion of the story that a Maronite child from the village was miraculously healed and reluctance to believe it, compared to his seemingly unquestioning acceptance of the miracles happening to Muslims. To better understand the role of "proof" that is given to the "Muslim," I would like to come back to the initial miracle of August 2004 that provoked a massive surge of pilgrims to Beshwāt.

The main actor of the miracle of August 2004, Muhammad al-Hawadi, is a Sunni Muslim originally from Jordan. He was 10 years old at the

39
See the two very detailed articles by Fady Noun that appeared in *L'Orient-Le Jour* on 23 September and 23 December 2004.

40
L'Orient-Le Jour, 23 September 2000.

time. Al-Hawadi is thus doubly "Other": Jordanian and Sunni. In August 2004 he was taking a tourist trip to Lebanon with his father, a high-ranking Jordanian civil servant. With their Maronite friend, François Saab, who acted as a guide, on 21st August the group went to the Cedar region, a very popular tourist attraction. On the way, "by chance," they stopped at Beshwāt. The child and François Saab entered the chapel for a "sightseeing" visit. While he was looking at the statue of Our Lady of Beshwāt, the child asked the family friend "who this woman who was smiling at him was." The adult explained that it was a statue that "did not move, did not smile." But the child, to the surprise of his companion and an inhabitant of the village who happened to be in the chapel at the time, began to let out a long prayer that the Lebanese Christian press described as "greater than him." The prayer was "greater than him" because it was seen as having a very strong Christian connotation: "Greetings, Virgin Mary, Queen of the world, of peace and love. The elderly, children and women fall in the world. Bring peace, love, and liberty to the earth, oh Queen of the world." Surprised by the child's behavior, the two adults approached the statue and observed that she was breathing. They also perceived that the rosary between the statue's arms was moving. They noticed that the statue seemed to make the sign of the cross with her eyes. Later, the statue exuded oil. News of the miracle spread quickly through the region, and the next day a good number of Christian and Muslim pilgrims came to the chapel. The day following, the miraculous healing of an infirm man set off an even greater influx of pilgrims.

The events were immediately questioned, especially by the Maronite religious authorities, who to this day refuse to officially investigate what transpired. Some priests and even a bishop became personally interested in the case, but the Church hierarchy prevented them from going further. If the official Church wishes to cover up or bury the event, certain political entrepreneurs – from state organs, the media, and political parties – have contributed to the success of the pilgrimage by interpreting the miracle as the Virgin calling for unity among the Lebanese.[39] This political, nationalistic reading has a double meaning given what Lebanon went through in 2005 with the assassination of ex-prime minister Rafic Hariri and the Syrian army's withdrawal from the country after three decades of occupation.

In the Lebanese Christian media, such as the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI), Télé-Lumière, and the French-language daily *L'Orient-Le Jour*, the Muslim child was the object of special attention. He became "Muhammad, the young Jordanian seer." In the numerous articles or reports on him, his "Muslim" identity was always foregrounded. It was stated that he comes from a "pious family that is devoted to the Qurʾān" and that his mother covers herself.[40] On 21 August 2005, a ceremony was organized at Beshwāt by the Maronite bishop of the region to celebrate the first anniversary of the miracle. Muhammad al-Hawadi and his father were the special guests of honor. The bishop spoke for a long time on Muhammad's religious faith, on how he faithfully attended a Qurʾānic school in Amman, and on his hailing from Jordan. The bishop also added that Muhammad was "a good student at school." The religious identity of the young witness to the miracle in August 2004 thus played the role of a proof of the authenticity of the miracle.

A book on Our Lady of Beshwāt published two years after the 2004 apparition by Issam Fadi Karam, a historian of the region, made me

understand that this phenomenon is neither circumstantial nor unique.[41] At the start of the 20th century, the miracles of Our Lady of Beshwāt that were judged to be true, and thus worthy of being written down, systematically highlighted Muslim witnesses. Karam devotes an entire chapter to the first three miracles of Our Lady of Beshwāt, which were also detailed by Father Goudard in his *La Sainte Vierge au Liban* (1908).[42] These narratives, in each instance, give a leading role to a Shiite Muslim. The first miracle concerns the *mahdaleh*, the pink marble stone that the Christian and Muslim believers kiss, touch, and sometimes pass over the sick parts of their bodies. This stone has attracted an intense devotion that the Church has found embarrassing. In August 2005, Father Fadi Bassil had the basin in which it is placed surrounded by a metal barrier. As he puts it, this was done to prevent it being stolen. A woman from the village gave me a different reason for the barrier: "The women who cannot have children, you see, take the *mahdaleh* and rub it over their stomachs. He is a priest; he does not want to see women doing this in a church." This testifies to the difficulty faced by priests in controlling practices judged to be idolatrous. When I came back in April 2007, the metal barrier had disappeared and the faithful could manipulate the stone as they wished. Even if Fadi Bassil condemns the ritual of the *mahdaleh*, he happily speaks of the miracle surrounding it. Here is the version reported by Father Joseph Goudard and taken up by Issam Fadi Karam:

> We were shown in the church, before the Holy Table, a piece of pink granite that everyone devoutly kissed. It is from the debris of the ruins of the old vault, said one of the priests, and our predecessors had it encased in the wall of the first church. (…) The Metouali Emir Amin Harfush had a seraglio built in Nebk [Syria]. One day, he needed a column. A mason told him: there is a beautiful one in the church of the *Saïde* [Our Lady] in Beshwāt. The next day some men and a camel were sent to take the column. It broke our heart. What could we do against the emir? The column was taken, loaded on the camel, and the Metoualis went off, laughing. They spent the night in a village in the plain. But when they woke up, they couldn't find the column. They came back, furious, saying that the people of Beshwāt had stolen it from them. They entered the church and saw that the column was back to where it was the day before, but without any sign that it had been moved or taken out, as if no one had touched it. They got scared and left. The emir called them cowards and sent a second group of men who tried to show how courageous they were by singing and acting tough. They put down their belts and their *keffieh* on the altar and began to dislodge the column. But then the *keffieh* and the belts caught on fire and burned up. The Metaoulis were scared and ran out of the church. How awful, they cried out. We have desecrated a *waqf* [a pious foundation]! The emir was also scared. Not only did he leave the column, but in order to appease the Christian *Saïde* whose vengeance he feared, he swore that neither he nor anyone from his family would pass the church without making an offering of reparations.[43]

This narrative puts forward the complexity of the interreligious ties

41
Issam Fadi Karam had also published *Tārīkh dair al-aḥmar* [The History of Dayr al-Ahmar] (Zuk Michael: n.p., 1980).

42
Goudard, *La sainte Vierge au Liban*.

43
Goudard, *La sainte Vierge au Liban*, 246.

44
Issam Farid Karam, *Tārīkh sayyida Bichū'āt mazāribā wa 'ajā'ibihā*, 51-52.

45
Emma Aubin-Boltanski, "La Vierge apparait au Caire (1968)," in *Le Moyen-Orient. XIXe-XXe siècle*, ed. Leyla Dakhli (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2016), 113-120; Angie Heo, "The Virgin between Christianity and Islam: Sainthood, media and modernity in Egypt," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 81, n. 4, (2013): 1117-1138.

46
Brigitte Voile, *Les coptes d'Egypte sous Nasser. Sainteté, miracles, apparitions* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2004), 215.

47
Bouflet and Boutry, *Un signe dans le ciel.*

48
On the notion of disinterestedness, see Elisabeth Claverie, "Procès, affaire, cause: Voltaire et l'innovation critique," *Politix* 7.6 (1994): 76-85.

around the Virgin. The "Shiite Muslim" is designated by the pejorative term "Metouali." If he plays the seemingly positive role of "caution" and "proof" in attesting to the miracle, the Muslim is also the violent heretic who threatens the Virgin but who finds himself ultimately defeated by her. Issam Farid Karam takes up, word for word, Father Goudard's account, which was originally presented as a simple anecdote, and historicizes it by adding dates. He also makes it more dramatic by presenting the Emir as a bloodthirsty individual without any respect for the Christian religion and making the inhabitants of the village into simple frightened "goatherds."[44]

To conclude, I would like to widen the scope of this study by turning to Egypt, where Marian apparitions are frequent occurrences in the Christian Coptic community. One of these apparitions, from 1968, led to huge crowds and was analyzed in depth in a chapter of Brigitte Voile's *Les coptes d'Egypte sous Nasser* [The Egyptian Copts under Nasser]. The Virgin appeared in Zeitoun, a new suburb of Cairo, under the dome of a Coptic church.[45] The first three witnesses were Muslim employees of the public transport company abutting the church. Voile notes that Copts often use Muslim figures to attest to the veracity of a miracle of a Christian saint, "the ultimate proof of its powers."[46] In Egypt, as in Lebanon, then, the Muslim is a privileged figure in attesting to the veracity of apparitions and miracles. The figure of the "religiously Other" in the Middle East thus plays the same role in attesting Marian apparitions as the "innocent" (the child or uneducated woman) had done in Europe from the 16th to the 19th centuries.[47]

A comparison can be made between the miracle that "deflates" and remains confined to a local space without provoking a mass pilgrimage (like the miraculous healing of the child of Beshwāt in April 2007) and the miracle of August 2004 which became a prominent national matter. These two cases put forward very different witnesses:

- In the first case, the principal witness was a woman from the village – a local insider. Because she is from the village, she and her family could be suspected of having a certain interest in the affair. On top of that, she is a Maronite and someone with a "strong faith," as Father Fadi Bassil puts it. In this context, being a strong believer is paradoxically a negative judgment from the ecclesiastical leader, synonymous with subjectivity and irrationality. And by speaking of the "poor woman [whose] two children are handicapped," Fadi Bassil moves the case to the arena of the individual and psychological.

- In the second case, the principal witness, Muhammad, is in a way an impartial spectator, doubly "Other" as a Sunni Muslim and Jordanian. It would be impossible to be further away from the local, and thus he represents a figure of complete detachment.[48] By underlining the fact that he is a good Muslim and good student, that he *a priori* is "someone who does not believe in miracles," the witness's rationality and objectivity are highlighted. The Muslim thus occupies the structural place of the good witness in the Maronite staging of the presence of the Virgin (and also for the Copts in Egypt). This is because the Muslim brings together, *a priori* and without the need for any further inquiry, the necessary characteristics of detachment, disinterest, independence, and objectivity.

A Paradoxical Pilgrimage.
The Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba

Dionigi Albera, Manoël Pénicaud

Dionigi Albera
CNRS, Idemec, Aix-Marseille University
dionigi.albera@univ-amu.fr

Manoël Pénicaud
CNRS, Idemec, Aix-Marseille University
manoelpenicaud@gmail.com

Abstract
In North Africa, the long-term coexistence between Jews and Muslims generated many interfaith crossings. It was not uncommon for the followers of one religion to visit a shrine of the other, in order to obtain *baraka* (divine grace). This phenomenon has mostly disappeared throughout the Maghreb, but it persists on the island of Djerba (southern Tunisia), where over a thousand Jews are still living. Every year, for the Jewish holiday of Lag Ba'Omer, a pilgrimage gathers together thousands of Jewish pilgrims in the Ghriba synagogue. Many come from abroad, notably from France and Israel, where many Tunisian Jews migrated after the mid-20th century. Some Muslims also participate at different moments of the pilgrimage. Based on historical research and on ethnographic work carried out in 2014 and 2022, this article elucidates a series of paradoxes that make the singularity of this holy place. Here the interactions between Jews and Muslims at the shrine are characterized by an intense conviviality. Yet, during the last decades this site has been affected by tangible eruptions of bloody violence by Islamist terrorists. The structure of the pilgrimage seems to rest on a delicate balance between local and external forces. More generally, the Ghriba pilgrimage is crossed by major political dynamics, and is recurrently affected by the turmoil of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

1
Robert Hayden and alii, *Antagonistic Tolerance: Competitive Sharing of Religious Sites and Spaces* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

2
Frederick William Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929).

3
Dionigi Albera, "Toward a Reappraisal of Ambiguity: In the Footsteps of Frederick W. Hasluck," in *Pilgrimages and Ambiguity: Sharing the Sacred*, eds. Thierry Zarcone and Angela Hobart (London: Kingston Publishing, 2017), 23-43.

The shared sacred places, where faithful of different religious affiliations converge, give shape to situations of fragile and enigmatic coexistence. These settings are characterized by a complex blend of oppression and conviviality, open contest and transitory respite, subterranean rivalry and ongoing openness. Distrust and desire for domination often mix with conviviality and human sympathy. Hospitality can find its way through hostility. The effective hybridization of many ritual practices can coexist with the jealous affirmation of one's religious identity.

Various concepts have been conceived to express these complex configurations, looking for specific formulations that can go beyond generic notions such as syncretism or mixedness. Robert Hayden resorted to oxymoron-based formulations, such as 'competitive sharing' and 'antagonist tolerance.' On this basis he has developed over the years a rich program of collective research, as well as a pessimistic theory on the matrix of these exchanges.[1] Many years ago, Frederick William Hasluck[2] resorted to the idea of 'ambiguity' in relation to shared shrines. The relevance of this concept has been explored, in an expanded perspective, in some recent studies.[3] In these latter works, ambiguity is understood not as synonymous with a kind of disorder or lack of clarity, but as the potential manifestation of a wealth of meanings and of a ritual experimentation that insinuates into the interstices of the established political and religious orders.

Probably the idea of 'paradox' may likewise prove useful as an exploratory tool. A first meaning of this word is strictly linked to its etymological roots. The term paradox comes from the Greek, and has a long history in philosophical thought, since at least Plato's *Parmenides*. Its etymology shows that it comes from *para* meaning "contrary to" and *doxa* ("opinion").

Therefore, as suggested by Merriam-Webster, paradox designates "a tenet contrary to received opinion." It is in this sense that Marcel Proust famously wrote, in *Les plaisirs et les jours*, that the paradoxes of today will be the prejudices of tomorrow. This meaning of the word may be easily extended outside the strict realm of ideas and opinions, encompassing practices and situations whose mere existence contradicts common expectations and viewpoints.

A second meaning concentrates more stringently on the working of contradiction itself in a paradoxical setting. From this point of view, Merriam-Webster gives the following concise definition: "one (such as a person, situation, or action) having seemingly contradictory qualities or phases." The core of this meaning derives from the close association of things that are apparently incongruous. Their match looks unexpected, implausible and somewhat suspect.[4]

These two meanings of the term paradox grasp crucial aspects of the configurations that are observable in shared sacred places. On a general level, it is possible to argue that the latter are usually paradoxical in the first meaning of the term, because they defy some common assumptions concerning religious identities and practices, which are generally supposed to be closed and mono-denominational. From this point of view, they offer interesting observatories to explore the shaping and the negotiation of religious conceptions and behaviours, and also the false premises of the doxa (be it merely common sense, or unsubstantiated scholarly opinion).

The second meaning of paradox alerts us to the proliferation of seemingly contradictory ideas, practices and objects that characterizes the daily choreography at shared sacred places. It also draws attention to the succession of different phases in the control of the site, and in the expression of intermingling, during the time. Moreover, it points to the complex interplay of religious and political dynamics that gives a particular physiognomy to these places.

In this article we will especially explore this second dimension of the idea of paradox, by concentrating on a particular site and chiefly on a particular moment in the year – namely the yearly pilgrimage to the Ghriba synagogue, on the island of Djerba in contemporary Tunisia. Here opposite realities do converge in astonishing ways. On the one side, from the point of view of the interreligious interactions at the shrine, it is possible to perceive an intense religious hybridity. On the other side, during the recent past this site has been affected by tangible eruptions of strong political confrontations, which even came to bloody violence. This pilgrimage displays a powerful concentrate of contrasting religious and ideological undercurrents. Inside the Ghriba synagogue the religious borders between Muslims and Jews can be easily crossed, while at the same time the international attendance at the annual pilgrimage is reinforcing ideological and political conflicts inside Tunisian society, as well as generating clashes between Tunisia and the State of Israel.

As we will argue in more detail below, in order to grasp the main components of this pilgrimage, the approach proposed 30 years ago by Michael Sallnow and John Eade proves very pertinent.[5] In this perspective, the pilgrimage is seen as an arena, where different and often divergent groups intersect, bringing contrasting meanings and practices to the shrine.

This essay is a further step in an ongoing and long-term research project initiated in the 2010s.[6] Based on two ethnographic fieldworks (2014

4

See https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/paradox. A third meaning of the word paradox is more deeply related to the field of logical argumentation and seems less easily transferable to the sociological field. It designates a statement that is apparently contradictory and in fact is true; or, conversely, a statement that at first seems true and in fact is self-contradictory; and so on, including other combinations involving the interplay between the premises and the arguments.

5

John Eade and Michael Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (London and New-York: Routledge, 1991).

6

Our fieldwork in 2022 was carried out thanks to the programme "Connectivités djerbiennes. Globalisations méditerranéennes des juifs de Djerba," AMIDEX (Aix-Marseille Univ), IRMC (Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb contemporain), CRFJ (Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem), 2020-2022.

Entrance of the Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba, 2022. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

7
During these two fieldworks, we focused mainly on the space-time of the pilgrimage. In the future, it would be necessary to broaden the focus to the functioning of the local society during the rest of the year, which we hope to do in the framework of a multi-handed study.

8
Lucette Valensi and Abraham Udovitch, *Juifs en Terre d'Islam: Les communautés de Djerba* (Montreux: Éditions des archives contemporaines, 1984). This book was also published in English: *The Last Arab Jews. The Communities of Jerba, Tunisia* (Chur, London and New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1984). Let us mention the new French version : *Juifs de Djerba. Regards sur une communauté millénaire* (Tunis: Demeter, 2022).

9
On that aspect, see Dora Carpenter-Latiri, "The Ghriba in the Island of Jerba (or Djerba) or the re-invention of a shared shrine as a metonym for a multicultural Tunisia," in *Sharing the* Sacra: *The Politics and Pragmatics of Intercommunal Relations Around Holy Places,* ed. Glenn Bowman (New York: Berghahn, 2012), 118-138; Dionigi Albera, "La Ghriba : étrangère, solitaire et mystérieuse," in *Lieux saints partagés,* ed. Dionigi Albera, Manoël Pénicaud and Isabelle Marquette (Arles: Actes Sud/Mucem, 2015), 140-143; Dionigi Albera and Manoël Pénicaud, "La synagogue de la Ghriba à Djerba: Réflexions sur l'inclusivité d'un sanctuaire partagé en Tunisie," *Cahiers d'Outre-Mer* 175 (2016): 103-132.

10
Manoël Pénicaud, "The Visual Anthropology of Pilgrimages: Exploring the Making of Films and Photographs," in *Approaching Pilgrimage: Methodological issues involved in researching routes, sites and practices* eds. John Eade and Mario Katić (London and New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

11
Jacques Perez passed away in July 2022, while an exhibition of his work was underway at the Museum of Jewish Art and History in Paris: *Jacques Perez, un regard tunisien.*

and 2022[7]) and on historical research, it aims to uncover the dynamics and paradoxes that drive this pilgrimage. In order to do so, the articulation between diachronic and ethnographic approaches seemed to us to be the most relevant, in order to give an account of the complexity and the thickness of the phenomenon, without simply remaining on its surface. We are consciously following in the footsteps of the pioneering study conducted in 1979-1980 by Lucette Valensi and Abraham Udovitch, whose book was significantly titled "The Last Arab Jews."[8] It is noteworthy that these historians had adopted an ethnographic approach for this investigation. Our article participates in both a continuity and a renewal of an anthropological look at this pilgrimage following its transformations, with an emphasis on its interfaith dimension.[9]

From a methodological point of view, we attach crucial importance to visual and sound materiality, both in the fieldwork and in its written reconstruction. Images (still or moving) and sounds are particularly valuable first-hand sources in the case of pilgrimages that last only a few days a year. They make it possible to return to the field in retrospect, when comes the time for data analysis.[10] Moreover, this approach echoes that adopted by Valensi and Udovitch in mobilising the images taken in 1979-1980 by the Tunisian photographer Jacques Pérez, that punctuate their book.[11]

This study consists of several nested developments, which first present the local and historical backgrounds of the phenomenon, thanks to numerous sources dating from the end of the 19th century to the present day. Then, after analyzing the different foundation narratives, we focus deeper on the interfaith and inter-ritual dimensions, based on our ethnographic journeys. Besides the spontaneous attendance of the synagogue by some Muslim women, we also critically analyse the political speeches and the calls for tolerance, as well as the reverberation, on the pilgrimage, of the turbulent political context in Tunisia, but also in Israel-Palestine.

An enduring community

The Jewish community of Djerba may be seen as an exception in the recent history of the Jewish population of North Africa. It can be estimated that at the moment of its apogee, in the first half of the 20th century, the latter was not very far from 500,000 in the region including the three countries subjected to French domination (Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco). In the following decades there was a rapid and important migration of this population, attracted by the Zionist project in Israel and also driven by the worsening of its living conditions and the menace to life and property in the newly independent countries, especially due to the shadow of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Presently, the Jewish population has entirely disappeared in Algeria. Likewise, the various tens of thousands of Jews who still resided in Libya and Egypt in the 1940s have all fled those countries. Only a few thousand Jews remain in Morocco and Tunisia. In the case of Djerba, there has been a significant decline in the Jewish population, but not a real collapse as elsewhere. In the 20th century the Jews of Djerba represented one of the largest communities out of the total Jewish population of Tunisia. With around 3,000 people at the beginning of the century, and more than 4,000 in the 1930s, it was the most important Jewish settlement outside the metropolitan area of Tunis.[12] At the beginning of the 1950s, the island's Jewish population was still around 3,000, out of a total of nearly 100,000 Jews for Tunisia as a whole.[13] Nowadays the Jews in Djerba number roughly a thousand, but they alone represent about two-thirds of the entire Jewish presence in Tunisia (which amounts to about 1,500 inhabitants).

The pilgrimage to the Ghriba in Djerba constitutes one of the last traces of a form of religiosity that has been particularly lively for many centuries. The cult of the saints and the pilgrimage to their tombs or shrines have been important for the Jewish populations settled in North Africa and the Near East.[14] These cultural manifestations combined the influences from the Bible, the Talmud and the Kabbalah with others deriving from the cultural environment characterized by the predominance of Islam. From this point of view, the cult of the saints constituted a sort of "conceptual bridge" between Jews and Muslims (Goldberg, 1983). The main forms in which this devotion materialized were the visit (*ziyara*, in Arabic, a word used by both Muslims and Jews) to the sanctuary, and the *hiloula*, the commemorative feast of the saint. The almost total cancellation of the Jewish presence on the map of North Africa has affected the vitality of these manifestations. Almost all of them have disappeared. In many cases the physical structures still remain, but they are rarely visited by the faithful. In some cases, the cult of North African saints has been imported into Israel, with the construction of shrines and the transfer of objects and relics.[15] The recent decades have also witnessed the return of Moroccan Jews established in Israel, in the context of travels that mix a tourism of memory with the visiting of mausoleums and sacred places (Lévy, 2010). The annual pilgrimage to Djerba is a special case from this point of view, not only for the intensity of the ceremonial sequence and the number of people involved, but also because it relies on a substantial Jewish community still present on the spot.

In North Africa the long-term cohabitation between Jews and Muslims has given rise to numerous crossovers and interactions between the two faiths. It was not uncommon for people of one religion to visit a shrine of another religion to obtain *baraka* ("divine grace" or "blessing" in Arabic). The act of sharing holy places (such as the tombs of rabbis or Muslim saints) was an important phenomenon. Hundreds of common

12
Robert Attal and Claude Sitbon, *Regards sur les Juifs de Tunisie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979), 315.

13
Michael Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century. The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 257, 272.

14
Josef Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

15
Yoram Bilu, "Reconfigurer le sacré : le culte des saints juifs marocains en Israël," *Archives Juives* 38, 2 (2005): 103-123.

16

Issachar Ben Ami, *Culte des saints et pèlerinages judéo-musulmans au Maroc* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1990); Emile Dermenghem, *Le culte des saints dans l'islam maghrébin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), Louis Voinot, *Pèlerinages judéo-musulmans du Maroc* (Paris: Larose, 1948); Haim Zafrani, *Deux Mille Ans de vie juive au Maroc* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1983).

17

For a discussion of the historical traces of Djerba's Jews, see Valensi and Udovitch, *Juifs en Terre d'Islam*, 11-15. The Maimonides' reference is *Iggarot u-Sh'elot u-Techubot*, Amsterdam, 1712, 3a, quoted in Haim Zeev Hirsch-Berg, *A History of the Jews in North Africa*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 165. For the map (1560), see Valensi and Udovitch, *Juifs en Terre d'Islam, op. cit.*, 15.

18

It is worth mentioning that already Maimonides had noticed this parallel. *Ibid.*, 12.

19

Ibid., 17-21.

20

Ibid., 88.

sites have been documented by scholars.[16] Since in its annual pilgrimage it is possible to see a presence of Muslims alongside the Jews, Djerba hosts what is probably the only example of religious mixing between Jews and Muslims which is still alive in this region.

A Jewish presence in North Africa goes back to antiquity. Likewise, in the case of Djerba, the local Jewish population claims millennial roots in the island. This is possible, but there is no archaeological or historical evidence to support this assertion. The earliest document which provides a historical proof of the existence of a Jewish community on the island comes from the Cairo Genizah synagogue. It dates from the 11th century and shows that the Jews of Djerba were then well involved in the Mediterranean trade. A little later, Maimonides paints an unflattering portrait of the Jews of Djerba, whose opinions, beliefs and practices he criticizes, especially condemning their excess in matters of ritual purity. Significant testimony to the continuity and importance of the Jewish settlement in the island comes from an Italian map of 1560, in which the only inhabited places mentioned are two Jewish villages.[17] Even thereafter, the Jewish population retained its concentration in two *haras* (an Arabic term for Jewish quarters in North Africa). These villages remained exclusively Jewish until the 20th century. Their names are Hara Sghira ("small quarter"), also called Dighet, and Hara Kbira ("large quarter"), six kilometres to the north. While being linked, the two villages also present structural oppositions, which translate into different origin myths. The inhabitants of Hara Sghira claim to have arrived from Palestine after the destruction of the First Temple in the 6th century BC, while those of Hara Kbira claim to have experienced a more recent emigration from the Iberian Peninsula.

The Jewish community of Djerba emerges in a better documented way starting from the 18th century. It is then characterized by a great intellectual ferment. A large number of schools, synagogues and rabbis made Djerba an important centre of religious study and teaching. Several specialists scrupulously codified the peculiarities of local Judaism, which as Maimonides had already noted is characterized by a particular scruple for ritual purity - manifesting in this a sort of echo with the Ibadism that characterizes the Muslim population of the island.[18] During this period, a strict control of the behaviour of the population by the local rabbinical court was established. This constellation of features gave a peculiar shape to local Judaism, creating what Lucette Valensi and Abraham Udovitch defined as a "theocratic republic," which was maintained in the following century and also throughout the colonial period.[19] At the beginning of the 20th century, printing presses were introduced in Djerba. This further amplified the island's massive production of religious literature. In the following decades Djerba became a driving force for the printing of religious treatises for the Tunisian south, expanding its influence also to other regions of North Africa.[20]

The particular conformation of the local Jewish society explains the particular resistance exerted against the westernizing tendencies coming from French colonialism but also from the action of Zionism. This conformation is also probably at the origin of the particular resilience of the Jews of Djerba, who maintained a significant demographic continuity when around them the entire Judaism of North Africa became disrupted and almost disappeared. The assiduity of religious practice is attested, since the 18th century, by the presence of numerous synagogues on the

island.[21] The most famous of these synagogues is certainly that of the Ghriba, which is the epicentre of a well-known pilgrimage.

Contrasting narratives

Ghriba is an Arabic term that means "foreign," "lonely," and also "mysterious." Some local narratives trace the legendary history of this sanctuary, also establishing a link with this denomination. A first block is composed of narratives that are inscribed within an oral and local horizon. They revolve around the theme of a young foreign woman who in an indefinite past arrived on the island. This "foreign," "lonely" and "mysterious" young woman – the Ghriba – is said to have come one day to settle in a hut of branches in a deserted place near Hara Sghira. The locals kept their distance from this "mysterious" woman, and no one dared approach her. But one night, her cabin caught fire; the villagers thought that she was engaged in magic practices and did not come to her aid; the next day, they discovered her lifeless yet still intact body. They therefore understood that she was a saint and decided to erect a synagogue in this precise place. The description of the mysterious young woman makes no mention of her religious affiliation, so because of this indeterminacy, some consider that she may have been either Jewish or Muslim. This version of the story is already mentioned at the beginning of the 20th century in a description of the island.[22]

Another set of narratives is situated on a deeper historical ground. An account present in the community of Djerba indicates that Jewish priests (*cohenim*), fleeing Palestine after the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in 586 BC by the army of Nebuchadnezzar, landed on this island, which seemed "strange" to them and "mysterious."[23] Deciding to settle there, they founded their synagogue there, by embedding stones from a door of the holy Temple that they had been able to take with them. This legend was first published in a book by Rabbi Abraham Haim Addadi of Tripoli, printed in Livorno in 1849. It was subsequently detailed by Nahum Slouschz who had collected it there at the beginning of the 20th century.[24] Towards the end of the 19th century, a European traveller was told a variant of this legend: at the Ghriba, he writes, "bearded and solemn priests, looking like sphinxes with a red headband falling over their shoulders in the Egyptian style, keep the Tablets of the Law that Moses received at Sinai from Jehovah's hands. I have not seen them, nor any Jew on the island, but the priests assure them that they are in the sanctuary." The latter also asserted that a well, located in the courtyard of the synagogue, would communicate with the Temple of Jerusalem.[25] The author of a geographical description of the island at the beginning of the 20th century takes up the same theme, observing that a legend claims that "a table of Moses" was found on the site of the synagogue.[26]

This second narrative, with all its variants, emphasizes the Jewish character of the synagogue by directly linking its foundation to the Temple of Jerusalem, the symbolic pivot of Judaism. Moreover, it puts the accent on its illustrious and distant origin (in time and space), which links it to seminal episodes of biblical history. At the same time, this story is related to the foundational myth of Hara Sghira, whose first inhabitants would have been Jerusalem's priests fleeing after the destruction of the First Temple. On the contrary, the first narrative proposes a chronology of the foundation of the sanctuary that is much more vague. Even the religious inscription of the founding figure appears rather fuzzy.

21

In the mid 20th century there were about 20 active synagogues, for a Jewish population of about 4,000 people, *ibid.*, 124.

22

F. Gendre, "L'île de Djerba," *Revue tunisienne* 15 (1908): 78).

23

This etymological explanation of the name of the synagogue transforms the hypothetical Hebrew escapees of the 6th century BC into Arabic speakers.

24

Nahum Slouschz, *Travels in North Africa* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909). Nahum Slouschz was an orientalist of great erudition and fervent Zionist, who, in the first decades of the 20th century, visited different regions of the Maghreb – from Libya to Morocco – to document the living conditions of the Jews and to detect the historical and archaeological traces of their past. Below we will refer again several times to this important work. For an appreciation of the contribution of this author, see for example Jörg Shulte, "Nahum Slouschz (1871-1966) and His Contribution to the Hebrew Renaissance," in *The Russian Jewish Diaspora and European Culture, 1917-1937*, eds. Jörg Shulte, Olga Tabachnikova and Peter Wagstaff (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2012), 109-126.

25

Vincent Amaury, *A travers le monde* (Paris: Hachette, 1896), 396.

26

Gendre, "L'île de Djerba," 78.

27
Slouschz, *Travels in North Africa*, 347-348.

28
Albera, "La Ghriba : étrangère, solitaire et mystérieuse," 141.

29
Edward Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (London: Macmillan, 1926), vol. I, 46.

Strangeness and hospitality

In spite of the local grounding of the mythical chart of foundation of this synagogue, the Ghriba in Djerba is part of a wider cultural complex, which was brought to light more than a century ago by Nahum Slouschz. During his explorations, he isolated a typology of synagogues present in Libya, Tunisia and Algeria, marked by an identical name – Ghriba – and by an attendance extended to Muslims. Slouschz identified six such synagogues, and put forward historical hypotheses as to their origin. In his view, these were not mere synagogues, but sanctuaries whose origins dated back "to ancient times" and even to pre-Islamic times.[27] Basically, Slouschz's hypothesis shared some fundamental assumptions of the stories he had heard from the rabbis of Djerba, simply stripping them of the most picturesque and improbable aspects. However, the historical arguments put forward by Slouschz were very hypothetical, and may be difficult to accept today; yet he had the merit of underlining the existence of a web linking the various Ghriba of the Maghreb, which has not yet been the subject of an in-depth study.

The elements contained in the popular version provide other clues that lead to a larger configuration. For example, the theme of the death of a woman is also present for the Ghriba of Kef, in northern Tunisia, where another legend has been collected that tells of three orphaned siblings who separate, wander and are at the origin of the Ghribas of Annaba, Kef and Djerba.[28]

There are good reasons to think that the theme of the *baraka* stemming from the tombs of unknown strangers went beyond the Jewish sphere, and was common to Muslim milieus. A passage by Edward Westermarck is very significant from this point of view:

> "If a stranger from afar dies and is buried in the place he visits, his grave is regarded as a shrine, and he is called Sîdi or Sîd l-Grîb, "Monsieur" or "Mr. Stranger." At Fez there is the grave of a female saint named Lalla Griba; and the *feddân l-gurba*, outside Bab g-Gîsa, which is a cemetery for homeless strangers who have died in Fez, is considered to possess much *baraka*. Those who are buried there will go to Paradise."[29]

As the above quotation clearly shows, the legendary corpus connected to a dead stranger intersects the theme of hospitality. This aspect is evident also in Djerba's narrative. The inhabitants are inhospitable to the foreign woman, and after her death they try to make amends for this behaviour by giving her a cult and dedicating a sanctuary to her.

The vicissitudes of a pilgrimage centre

The local narratives on a very old origin of the Djerbian Ghriba come up against the lack of historical sources for remote times. The architecture of the Ghriba does not reveal any hints of a very distant past. Several additions and renovations rather suggest an expansion of the sanctuary from the second half of the 19th century onward. Slouschz gives some precise information deriving from his visit to the site at the beginning of the 20th century. About 40 years before his visit (therefore sometime around 1860) the building had been rebuilt. The addition of the vestibule appears even more recent. During his visit in 1906, Slouschz also noticed the ongoing construction of housing for sick pilgrims from far and wide, including those coming from Egypt

and Morocco, drawn by the miraculous properties of the shrine. In short, everything seemed to confirm the growing success of the Ghriba.

Subsequently, the interior decor has again been enriched and the vestibule (apparently built, on what was before an open courtyard, shortly before Slouschz's visit to the site) becomes a room in itself. Important renovation work took place in particular around 1920.[30] In the 1950s, further enlargement works concerned the space to house pilgrims, especially those coming from Libya.[31] Taken together, these expansion works reflect the growing success of the sanctuary, which attracted crowds of pilgrims even from far away. Furthermore, the growth of the pilgrimage seems to be correlated with the strong influence that the Jewish community of Djerba exercised elsewhere. It should not be forgotten that, in addition to exporting rabbis and religious books, the Jews of Djerba were also at the origin of important flows of artisans and merchants. It is possible that these migrants may have contributed to expanding the fame of the Ghriba cult.

During the first half of the 20th century, the Ghriba of Djerba seems to have all the features of an important regional pilgrimage centre. It attracts pilgrims who come not only from the main basin of Djerba's influence – southern Tunisia, Libya – but also from more distant lands (Morocco, Egypt, Greece). At the beginning of the 20th century, Slouschz compares the Ghriba of Djerba to one of the most important European pilgrimage sites. In his eyes "the Ghriba is a sort of Jewish Lourdes, not without its Mussulman and even its Christian votaries."[32] This statement clearly suggests that the miraculous curative powers attributed to the sanctuary are largely recognised even outside the Jewish domain. Despite these overflows from the bed of Judaism, the pilgrimage appears above all as a meeting point for a Jewish population scattered in various Mediterranean regions. On the occasion of the annual meeting, the pilgrimage thus brings together a vast conglomerate of Jewish communities from all North Africa, and even from beyond. The festivities begin on the 14th of the Hebrew month of Iyar, in commemoration of Rabbi Meier Baal Haness, and last until the 18th which corresponds to the festival (*hilula*, in Hebrew) of Lag Ba'Omer.[33] This date celebrates in particular the rise of the soul of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai (called "Rabbi Shim'un" locally), the supposed author of the Zohar, who is buried in Meron in Israel – another important pilgrimage centre. This date is celebrated in many *hiloulot* at the tombs of other Righteous (*tzaddikim* in Hebrew) who enjoy an aura of holiness.

In 1930, Jacques Véhel provides a description of this profuse pilgrimage. In the interwar period, Jewish musicians and singers are brought in from Tunis, but also from Cairo and Alexandria. Boats are chartered to transport the pilgrims from the ports of Tunisia, Tripolitania, Egypt, Greece. Caravans of merchants go to Djerba to sell religious books and religious objects. For several days, ceremonies, songs, music, feasts, hugs, follow one another, in an atmosphere that evokes that of an "oriental Lourdes."[34]

The second half of the 20th century saw a gradual transformation of the context of the pilgrimage. The Jewish population of North Africa experienced a dizzying decrease, to the point of practically disappearing, within a few decades, from most of the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. This is the case of Algeria, Libya and Egypt. The pilgrimage did not lose its importance, but its sociological core experienced a shift. Now the largest contingent of pilgrims is made up of Tunisian

30

Jacques Véhel, "Pèlerinages nord-africains," *L'univers israélite*, 23/05 (1930): 208.

31

Valensi and Udovitch, *Juifs en Terre d'Islam*, 128.

32

Slouschz, *Travels in North Africa*, 264.

33

Lag Ba'Omer occurs on the 33rd day of the counting of the Omer, which is celebrated the day after Pessah.

34

Véhel, "Pèlerinages nord-africains," 208.

35
Valensi and Udovitch, *Juifs en Terre d'Islam.*

36
Shlomo Deshen, "Near the Jerba Beach: Tunisian Jews, an Anthropologist, and Other Visitors," *Jewish Social Studies,* New Series, vol. 3, 2 (2010): 90-118; Sylvaine Conord, "Le pèlerinage Lag ba Omer à Djerba (Tunisie). Une forme de migration touristique," in *Socio-anthropologie de l'image au Maghreb. Nouveaux usages touristiques de la culture religieuse,* ed. Katia Boissevain (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010), 105-116.

Jews who emigrated to Europe or Israel. In this way, the pilgrimage has increasingly become a place of temporary reunion for the Tunisian Jewish diaspora, besides that originating in Djerba. Going to Djerba on the occasion of the Lag Ba'Omer festival is also equivalent to temporarily reconnecting with one's roots (rites, language, music, food, etc.). The space-time of the pilgrimage allows the ephemeral reconstruction of a community innervated by the reinforcement of religious practice and by festive effervescence.[35] In addition, pilgrimage practices display a hybridization with those of mass tourism (use of travel agencies, sojourn in luxury hotels).

Returning to a land that has often been left in a hurry – because of a feeling of insecurity – requires overcoming a double difficulty: the memory of the uprooting and the current threats to the Jewish presence in Muslim countries. The turbulences of Mediterranean geopolitics have invited themselves into the synagogue of Djerba. The sanctuary has been tragically wracked on several occasions by the tensions of a political environment fuelled by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and by the rise of Islamist terrorism. In 1985, a Tunisian soldier in charge of the security of the Ghriba opened fire in the sanctuary, killing five people. This act was a retaliation for an airstrike that a week before the Israeli army had made on a suburb just outside of Tunis, targeting the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) headquarters, and causing the death of 36 persons. After a period of crisis, the annual festival of Ghriba gained momentum again. In the early 2000s, the pilgrimage attracted several thousand pilgrims, including many from Israel.[36] But a tragic turning point suddenly interrupted this expansion. On April 11, 2002, a few weeks before the Lag Ba'Omer holiday, a suicide bombing attributed to the Al-Qaeda organization caused the deaths of 19 people, including 14 German tourists, in front of the synagogue entrance. Since then, the sanctuary has enjoyed significant protection from the authorities. During Ben Ali's regime (1987-2011), the pilgrimage was an opportunity to show the tolerance of the Tunisian government and society. Ministers often made their appearance in the synagogue, with public speeches that had an enthusiastic welcome from the crowd of pilgrims.

The last decades have been characterized by recurring political crises that have had serious repercussions on pilgrimage, which has thus known its ups and downs. With the fall of Ben Ali's regime in January 2011, the entire country was plunged into a period of turmoil. For two years the pilgrimage was particularly reduced, because many foreign pilgrims did not participate. After a relative resumption of the pilgrimage, another crisis was provoked by the attacks perpetrated at the Bardo Museum in Tunis in March 2015 and on a beach in Sousse in May 2015. Here again, pilgrims from outside feared threats of an attack which circulated in particular on social networks. Moreover, information issued by the Israeli government warned against the risk of terrorist attacks, trying to discourage Jewish people from attending the pilgrimage. In the following years the pilgrimage has experienced some resilience, before being severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021.

As can be clearly seen from what has just been said, in recent decades the history of this pilgrimage is by no means linear. It has experienced ups and downs, periods of prosperity and others of crisis. The Ghriba synagogue and the pilgrimage that goes with it can be described in terms of an intricate web of paradoxes. In the following sections we will limit ourselves to indicating some of them, without undertaking a more in-depth analysis,

which would require a much larger space. We will stress some features of the arena created around this synagogue and its pilgrimage, with a number of concentric circles and a juxtaposition of borders which intersect the field generated by the Ghriba.

A web of paradoxes

A first aspect concerns the religious qualification of the synagogue. The very nature of this religious building manifests some paradoxical features. To understand the complexity of the configuration of the Ghriba, it is necessary to make a general distinction between place of worship and holy place. The first corresponds to the space of collective, regular and routine religious practice (synagogue, church, mosque); the second, on the other hand, is marked by a denser sacrality which gives rise to more exceptional practices, in the unique space-time of the pilgrimage. In several respects, the Ghriba falls within both of these registers, and in the course of all its documented history, it manifests a double nature. On the one hand, it is a place of worship with a local character, closely linked to Hara Sghira. It is even the only synagogue in this settlement that contains Torah scrolls. Like any synagogue of the island, the Ghriba is a place of prayer, study and assembly for the men of the village. On the other hand, the Ghriba is a centre of pilgrimage with international impact. As a place of worship, the Ghriba is a uniquely masculine space. As a holy place, and especially at the time of pilgrimage, the synagogue becomes a mixed space, mainly occupied by women, who are the protagonists of many rituals, often linked to fertility. More recently, the Ghriba has also become a tourist spot, turning into a stopover on discovery tours of the island: a type of visit that is also found in a large number of holy places, and less in routine places of worship.

We have already pointed out the existence of diverging narratives concerning the origin of the sanctuary. Even today, the two registers coexist and can be in turn mobilized in the local discourse according to the occasions, the interlocutors, and the purposes. When it comes to promoting the pilgrimage and establishing its prestige, historical arguments are put forward. This makes it possible to accentuate the importance of the synagogue from the point of view of heritage and to emphasize its direct kinship with the holy of holies of Judaism. Such filiation erects and legitimizes the exceptionality of the Ghriba, in the mythical time of this diaspora of the 6th century BC. The opinion according to which the stones brought back from Jerusalem would be none other than the Tablets of the Law – which amounts to seeing in this building a substitution of the Temple – still finds some followers today.[37] In contrast, the inclusive narrative, centred on the unknown young woman, largely dominates today among pilgrims (but not among local Jews), with variations that show a mythological creativity.

Furthermore, the post-mortem hospitality granted to this stranger in the local pantheon of holy figures also reverberates on the relative opening of the sanctuary itself. It is no coincidence that in Djerba, as in the other Ghribas, attendance also involves Muslims, who in turn attribute *baraka* to figures and places that are foreign to them from a religious point of view. Thus, a game of mirrors and a sequence of concatenations are established that also involve ritual practices. In 2014, a Jewish woman coming from France, met in the synagogue, established clearly this link when she exposed a slightly different version of the foundational legend:

[37] See for instance Bernard Allali, *Les juifs de Tunisie : un autre regard*, (Paris: Éditions Bernard Allali, 2014), 324-329.

Blessing of Pilgrims in the Synagogue, 2022. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

Jewish and Muslim women praying side by side, 2014. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

"The Ghriba means 'the loner' in Arabic and in Jewish [sic]. They say it was a young girl that people found on the beach. The Muslim Tunisians said she was a girl of theirs, and the Jews here said she was a girl of theirs. So, they built a synagogue where you walk as if you were inside a mosque, with your head covered and bare feet."

The polarization that emerges from the legendary corpus more generally pervades the religious practices associated with this sanctuary. It determines a field where opposites can coexist and find forms of conciliation.

A cauldron of rituality

Another aspect that highlights the duplicity of this pilgrimage site derives from the contrast between the austere and rigorist tendency of local Judaism, and the complex ritual choreography implemented at the sanctuary, which leaves much room for the fervour of popular devotions. According to our observation in 2014 and 2022, the synagogue becomes indeed the theatre of an intense ritual effervescence during the pilgrimage days. In the first room, a few Djerbian rabbis sitting on benches recite prayers for visitors who make offerings in exchange. These sacred gifts and counter gifts are materialized by the sharing of biscuits, dried fruits, and fig alcohol (*bukha*). Pilgrims mix various languages, Arabic, Hebrew, and French.

The atmosphere becomes festive, punctuated by smiles and laughter, jokes, percussion rhythms (playing *darbuka*), and collective songs. Pilgrims move freely, without any sexual division of space. At the back, an employee draws from a well a sacred water that visitors pass on their faces while praying, or else they pour into plastic bottles. According to one lady: "When you have a problem, when you can't work, this water allows you to do what you have to do. If you have bad luck or problems in your store or in your house, then you have to wash the floor, or simply your hands!" The rituality becomes more intensive in the second room, the historical heart of the synagogue. Its specificity is that one has to take off one's shoes to enter it. But we observed that, in the constant flow of pilgrims, many do not respect this rule. In that room, worshippers are more concentrated on their own ritual performance, because requests are more susceptible to be granted there. The burners attract many devotees, mostly women, who light candles. Some of them burst into tears, without trying to hide themselves because this type of effusion is accepted by all. Private and public spheres are intimately nested.

The eastern wall houses five sacred cabinets, reminiscent of the Temple Ark of the Covenant (*heikhal*) where the Torah scrolls are kept. Many pilgrims come to pray against this wall covered with ex-voto. Let us mention here the case of a Jewish woman accompanied by a Muslim one, both from Paris. Accustomed to the place, the first spontaneously invites her friend to reproduce her gestures, in particular the fact of praying in the direction of Jerusalem. In fact nothing then makes it possible to distinguish their respective religious belonging.

An emblematic (almost exclusively feminine) ritual consists of inscribing one's wish on chicken eggs. Throughout the day, women are waiting to descend into a sort of small crypt through a narrow opening in the eastern wall. It is believed that this is the exact place where the inanimate body of the mysterious Ghriba was discovered. Eggs are directly related

to fecundity, and most of the expectations to marriage and childbirth. Women enter that tunnel to deposit their eggs and candles. Muslims also discreetly perform this eggs ritual.

From a theoretical point of view, these few examples - which would deserve a longer and more detailed ethnographic description[38] - lead to an understanding of the space-time of pilgrimage as an arena of heterogeneous practices and behaviours that cohabit under the same roof. Then the theoretical model defined by John Eade and Michael Sallnow,[39] who see pilgrimage centers as "empty vessels" that pilgrims fill with the meanings of their choice, seems particularly operative, including at the ritual level. Several levels of practices and interpretations coexist, sometimes in a contradictory way and above all varying according to the origin of the pilgrims, local or foreigners. For example, many pilgrims from abroad extinguish and then take with them the candles they have just lit. However, this practice is considered "abnormal" by local Jews. Similarly, the practice of laying dozens of eggs per pilgrim is contested by locals who do not engage in this ritual with such fervour.

This type of divergence reinforces the paradox stated above, between on the one hand the external pilgrims who are the main actors and promoters of the ritual effervescence, and on the other hand the local Djerbians who are much less demonstrative. More religiously conservative and rigorous, the latter do not look kindly on the abundance of heterodox rituals that some - among the more orthodox - even associate with idolatry. This contrast reveals a collision between these two spheres, which at first glance escapes observation. The informed observer can see that during the pilgrimage days, the external pilgrims are the most numerous in the sanctuary. But at the end of the day, the latter return to their seaside luxury hotels, while most of the local Jewish community, which is mainly based in Hara Kbira, arrives in numbers. In other words, it is as if the locals are taking over the place. The Djerbian women take the opportunity to pray in the Ghriba, a space reserved for men the rest of the year. Then the whole space of the Ukala is taken over by these numerous families and the festivities can be in full swing.

Let us introduce the more profane space of the Ukala, which is part of the Ghriba complex and which is situated opposite the synagogue, on the other side of a road that is now closed. The Ukala is a former caravanserai, where non-Djerbian pilgrims (including many Libyans) were once housed in small rooms. In the open-air courtyard, vendors sold pastries, jewellery, amulets (e.g. *khamsa*) and souvenirs, displayed on ephemeral stalls. In one corner, women were attracted by a monumental candlestick more than two metres high called "Menara" and made by a silversmith. They devoutly tied shimmering scarves of fabric and artificial silk to it. Then came the crucial sequence of the auction of the Menara *rimonims*, which are the silver ornaments of the Torah placed atop the candlestick on this day. Pilgrims were publicly competing - for up to several thousand dinars - for the privilege of symbolically acquiring these holy pieces, which were then returned, while large sums of money became donations to the shrine.

At the end of the auction, the Menara was solemnly carried in procession outside of the Ghriba. In the past and before the attacks, the procession had to pass by Hara Sghira. But since then, it has ended down the street a few dozen metres away for security reasons. The pilgrims walked as if everything was normal, but the concentration of security forces was

A Woman Pilgrim and Votive Eggs, 2022. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

The Ghriba Menara, 2014. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

38
Albera and Pénicaud, "La synagogue de la Ghriba," 183-194.

39
Eade and Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred*, 15.

very strong. Armed men in balaclavas advanced among the pilgrims; snipers were posted on the roof of the synagogue; a helicopter flew over it and intelligence services filmed everything. In other words, the procession, which was once (and still partially is) an occasion of sharing and conviviality, had become overprotected and seemed to be under siege. Such a contrast looked also paradoxical.

A mix of hetero-rituality and poly-rituality

Coming back at a theoretical level to analyse ritual performances and the issue of inter-rituality between different religious groups, the analytic distinction between hetero-rituality (silent cohabitation of ritual practices) and poly-rituality (official speeches and gestures showing tolerance and mutual acceptance) seems particularly relevant in the Ghriba's case.[40] On the one hand, hetero-rituality implies that "the distinction between religious groups is put into brackets, and it is not performed through the ritual. There is no planned overall ritual sequence but a multiplicity of individual ritual packages that may converge, diverge, and be superimposed, drawing on a larger pool of ritual practices that present family resemblances and permit some forms of translatability from a religious group to another."[41] This form of inter-rituality mainly concerns the ritual arena described above, as a mix of spontaneous ritual mimicry and bricolages. On the other hand, poly-rituality occurs with the orchestration of interreligious gathering and understanding: "the existence of different religious identities is constitutive and is expressed and performed through the ritual sequence and the provisory interdependence between them in the spatial and temporal setting of the ritual. In this case, the architecture of the ritual sequences is oriented toward an articulation of the components that maintains the distinction between religious groups, which are considered coherent wholes."[42]

In other words, both hetero-rituality and poly-rituality are at work during the pilgrimage. When it comes to poly-rituality, the rhetoric of inclusiveness and so-called *convivencia* is developed in several moments inside the choreography of the pilgrimage days, which always includes some official interventions by political authorities. Therefore, each year the pilgrimage offers an opportunity to reaffirm the "tolerance" and "openness" of Tunisian government and society. This is obviously a political message that Tunisian authorities want to send to the Tunisians and to the world. Already during the Ben Ali regime, ministers used to visit the site during the pilgrimage days, and in their speeches they would exalt Tunisian tolerance, dialogue and fraternity, extolling the central role of President Ben Ali. In 2014, the former Minister of Tourism Amel Karboul gave a speech before the synagogue during the pilgrimage, emphasizing the friendly coexistence between Muslims and Jews for centuries: "Today, Tunisia, which brings together all religions, which tolerates all ideologies, wishes to experience a new 21st century *convivencia*. I believe in Tunisia's ability to have its golden age. Not just Tunisia, but the whole region. It will not be an exception, it will show the way. Our country is yours. You, Tunisians who left to come back, a little more often, a little longer, maybe forever!"

After the break imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the pilgrimage revived in May 2022. On this occasion also the pilgrims were welcomed in the area of the synagogue by the new Prime Minister, Najla Bouden, accompanied by the Minister of Tourism, Mohamed Moez Belhassine.[43]

40
Dionigi Albera, "Ritual mixing and inter-rituality at Marian shrines," in *Crossing Ritual Borders: Opportunities, Limits, and Obstacles,* ed. Marianne Moyaert (New York: Palgrave, 2019), 137-154.

41
*Ibid.,*152.

42
Ibid., 152.

43
In 2012, President Moncef Marzouki visited the Ghriba in order to solemnly commemorate the 10th anniversary of the attack on the synagogue. More recently, in March 2020, President Kaïs Saïed also visited the synagogue. He in his turn asserted the peaceful coexistence in Djerba between inhabitants of different religions.

The German, Canadian, and French ambassadors were also present. The case of Hassen Chalgoumi is symptomatic of this official poly-rituality: known as the imam of the French city of Drancy, this French-Tunisian citizen was invited, as special guest, to deliver a speech of tolerance, by the auction moderator, in these terms: "Bless him! [. . .] May God give us 500 million people like you! May we have peace in the world, may we have *shalom*, may we have *salam*, may we find ourselves, Jews and Muslims: we all love each other and we want to love each other!" Then the imam declaimed the rhetoric of living together to the crowd of pilgrims: "The Ghriba is a miracle! It connects us all, it is a flame of hope!" His words were greeted with thunderous applause.

Another significant moment of poly-rituality occurred in 2022 (replicating a performance that had already occurred in previous editions). During one of the musical interludes that punctuated the auction and official speeches, a Jewish pilgrim took the microphone and began to sing in a very solemn way the Muslim call to prayer "Allah Akbar" (*God is Greater*), then "Sh'ma Israel" (*Hear, O Israel*), the well-known centrepiece of the morning and evening Jewish prayer services, then "Adonai" (*My Lord*), and again "Allah Akbar" in a very vibrant and emotional voice. His performance was obviously planned but it looked improvised, and the audience was surprised at first, before applauding and welcoming this call for peace.

A different initiative of poly-rituality occurred in May 2019, when the Jewish pilgrimage coincided with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan for the first time since 1987. Thus, the Tunisian authorities and the Ghriba committee organized an *iftar* (fast breaking ceremony) dinner. Many guests were invited at sunset to break the fast close to the synagogue. Called the "Iftar of Fraternity," this unexpected ceremony gathered together Jews, Muslims, Christians, but also the Tunisian Prime Minister Youssef Chahed, other ministers, foreign ambassadors, and rabbis from European countries. According to the Tunisian press, Chahed claimed that "Tunisia remains a pioneering country in the consecration of cultural diversity and civilization."[44] Obviously, it was also an operation of communication, as is proved by the presence of many journalists. This event can also be decrypted as an alternative attempt to promote peaceful coexistence in the register of official interreligious dialogue. In effect, such shared *iftar* gatherings during Ramadan are quite frequent in interreligious milieus, but it was a first at the Ghriba.[45] But beyond the symbol of a shared ritual of commensality, it should be noted that the event was strictly reserved for handpicked guests and never involved the local population. Indeed, the ceremony was held on the first evening of the pilgrimage under high security because of the threat of terrorism. These conditions therefore relativize the real impact of such an inclusive initiative on ordinary people.

During the pilgrimage, access to the site becomes very difficult, especially for Djerbian Muslims and, more generally, Tunisian ones, because one has to show a foreign passport or an official invitation, which limits the Muslims' spontaneous participation. Some of the villagers cannot easily return home because of security measures. A woman we met in the synagogue in 2014 told us that she had been barred from entering twice, in the previous days, "because I'm a Muslim, I don't know why!" Finally, an outside observer cannot avoid noticing the tension that lies between situations of coexistence - actual, staged or idealized - and the difficulty of accessing the sanctuary.

From our observations, inclusive discourses advocating tolerance and

Tolerance speech of imam Hassen Chalgoumi, 2022. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

44
Samir Dridi, "Pèlerinage de la Ghriba: un bel exemple du vivre-ensemble," *La Presse de Tunisie*, May 24, 2019, https://lapresse.tn/8990/pelerinage-de-la-ghriba-un-bel-exemple-du-vivre-ensemble/

45
A week later, on May 29, a similar event was organized in Tunis by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Also called the "Iftar of the Human Fraternity," it brought together Muslims, Christians, and Jews and repeated the unitary message, "We are all Tunisians," the need for tolerance and the call to accept the religious Other. The event received extensive media coverage.

Sniper on the roof of the Ghriba Synagogue, 2022. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

interreligious coexistence are conveyed "from the bottom" by the pilgrims themselves, be they Jews or Muslims. On the spot, the pilgrims willingly express their feeling of Judeo-Muslim fraternity, like this Parisian pilgrim encountered in 2014: "There is a great fraternity between Arabs and Jews. We grew up with them, we played with them, we never had any problems. Between families, we exchanged a lot of things!"; and a Moroccan Jew added spontaneously: "We were brothers and sisters! Muslims believe in the holy woman, and in her miracles, they come to deposit their eggs and they say prayers. It proves that we are connected!"

Another aspect of the perceptible feeling of inclusivity for foreign Jews is that most of the people proclaimed their "Tunisianity." Indeed, their belonging to Tunisia constitutes a major stake in the pilgrimage: even if they live abroad, they remain Tunisians in their heart. Such a patriotic aspect was materialized in the dozens of pennants of the Tunisian flag which were suspended across the Ukala courtyard, which meant in a sense "You are at home." In exchange, these pilgrims were very grateful to the state: "Thanks to Tunisia for welcoming us and providing us these security forces so that we can continue to come every year! [. . .] Please applaud the Tunisian police, I beg you! I feel like I'm seeing a war movie, they love us so much! They are there, everywhere, downstairs, upstairs, on the roof!", the auctioneer said on the microphone. This overprotection reassured them and demonstrated, according to them, the consideration of the state that had not forgotten them. But in another sense, these security measures relativized the spirit of openness.

Echoes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

In the last years, the arrival of pilgrims from Israel has also generated political struggles connected with the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Each year, strong controversies emerged at the local level and especially at the national level. Some political parties and social networks made these controversies harder. After 2011, anti-Semitic and radical slogans were heard in Tunis. Consequently, in 2012, the Israeli National Security Council strongly advised Jewish nationals against travelling to Tunisia, in particular to Djerba, because of the risk of an attack. In 2014, some Tunisian deputies demanded that Israeli cruise passengers be banned from entering Tunisia. In 2019 a polemic erupted over a video broadcast on an Israeli channel, showing Israeli pilgrims going by bus to the Ghriba, chanting: "Long live Israel . . . Long live Tunisia!" This video circulated widely on social networks, which stirred controversy to the top of the Tunisian State. Some demonstrations were even organized by groups fighting against the so-called normalization. Another manifestation of tension occurred locally in 2020, when a road sign was installed without any authorization on the roundabout near the Ghriba in Djerba, with the inscription: "Jerusalem, Capital of Palestine: 3090 km," accompanied by the Palestinian flag. Thus, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has repercussions on the local scale, but not only. As the picture was published on Facebook, it spread digitally around many networks, whether of pro-Palestinian activists or shocked pro-Israeli Tunisian Jews. Once again, the pilgrimage centre coagulates geopolitical tensions. The Ghriba is impacted by the Mediterranean geopolitical tumults, mainly the Arab-Israeli conflict. Moreover, we observe the central, increasing, and catalytic role played by social networks that propel a local pilgrimage into the globalized and digital arena.

A political key figure: René Trabelsi

Year after year, the Ghriba pilgrimage has become a contact zone between locality and globalisation, at the same time traversed, boosted, and disturbed by its internationalization, with a strong entanglement between religious and political dimensions. This predicament is currently well illustrated by the role played by René Trabelsi, a key figure of contemporary pilgrimage, who in some respects seems to incarnate several of the paradoxical characteristics associated with this pilgrimage. He lives between Paris and Djerba, and is both the eldest son of the current head of the local Ghriba committee and the director of a tour operating company based in France, and very involved in the logistics of the Ghriba pilgrimage. Both an orthodox Jew and a business-man, he is an "impresario" of this pilgrimage, with the goal of developing its magnitude, both in a religious and an economic perspective. When we inter-viewed him in 2014, he clearly stated his main objectives. His ambitious target was to attract up to 20,000 Jews from all over the world for the pilgrimage. He was really open to the Muslim participation but for him priority would have to be given to Jewish pilgrims. Through the figure of Trabelsi, we see how the Ghriba has become a crucial lever for economic development and the affir-mation of Jewishness in the Tunisian national community.[46] The links between pilgrimage and politics are also evident in the heritagization initiatives carried out during the last years, in which Trabelsi has been involved. Since 2012, the Tunisian state has proposed the inscription of the whole Djerba island in the UNESCO World Heritage List. The candidature valorises the mythological past of the island, associated with the island of lotus-eaters in Homer's Odys-sey, but also with the hypothetical existence of the Ghriba synagogue since antiquity. Thus, the narrative put forward is that of the "mysterious" island supposedly discovered by Hierosolymitan priests in the 6th century BC. The obvious political goal is promoting Djerba in terms of tourism and culture on an international scale, in order to attract more visitors. Among other heritage initiatives directly supported by Trabelsi, let us also mention the project of a Ghriba Museum within the area of the sanctuary.

After the terrorist attacks of 2015 in Sousse and Tunis, not only did the participation of foreign pilgrims in the Ghriba decline significantly, but the whole tourism industry collapsed. In November 2018, the Tuni-sian prime minister Youssef Chahed appointed Trabelsi as Minister of Tourism, arguing that he was a renowned professional of this economic sector. This choice was not minor and it had a strong impact in public debates in Tunisia and in the wider Arab world. Trabelsi then became the country's first Jewish minister for more than 60 years,[47] Moreover, he was often qualified as "the only Jewish minister in the Arab world." At the beginning, the appointment of Trabelsi was criticized by several sectors of the political world, because of his lack of diploma and also because of his Jewishness. Yet he gradually won the support of public opinion, given the largely positive results of his political action. Under his mandate, cruise tourism revived and many hotels reopened. For 2019, Trabelsi set himself the goal of attracting nine million foreign visitors in Tunisia. At the end of the year this goal had even been exceeded.

That year, the Ghriba pilgrimage was particularly successful, with an attendance of more than 5,000 people, according to the organizers. This success was the result of an intense marketing campaign orchestrated by the Tunisian government. The Ghriba pilgrimage opens the tourist season, and it may have a positive impact on the number of arrivals that follow. In

René Trabelsi's TV Interview, 2014. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

46
Mourad Boussetta, "Reducing barriers: how the Jews of Djerba are using tourism to assert their place in the modern nation state of Tunisia," *The Journal of North African Studies* 23, 1-2 (2017): 311-331, https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2017.1383160.

47
Albert Bessis and André Barouch were ministers under Habib Bourguiba in the 1950s.

48
"René Trabelsi: 'Je suis contre la normalisation avec Israel'," *La Presse de Tunisie*, June 24, 2019, https://lapresse.tn/13741/rene-trabelsi-je-suis-contre-la-normalisation-avec-israel/

49
"René Trabelsi, Juif et ministre tunisien, 'contre la normalisation avec Israel'," *The Times of Israel*, June 25, 2019, https://fr.timesofisrael.com/rene-trabelsi-juif-et-ministre-tunisien-contre-la-normalisation-avec-israel/

other words the pilgrimage is both an economic lung (or locomotive) and an international showcase for Tunisia. Because of the wide Jewish diaspora, many Tunisian Jews aim at coming back to their "country of heart," by combining seaside tourism, memorial travel, and pilgrimage. These aspects are not at all perceived as antinomic, nor incompatible; they are on the contrary all combined. Quite popular, and on the strength of his success, Trabelsi was even the only minister to be renewed in office by the new government in January 2020, but he finally was replaced in April 2020.

Under his mandate, Trabelsi was accused of wanting to normalise relations between Tunisia and Israel, often called "the Zionist entity" in Tunisian political debates. In June 2019, he had to take an official position claiming in the Tunisian press that he was "against the normalization with Israel."[48] According to the *Times of Israel* newspaper, he also had to condemn "the praise of the Israeli army on Tunisian soil," and declare that the Ghriba pilgrims must "behave properly,"[49] in relation to the polemic concerning the video broadcast showing Israeli pilgrims chanting: "Long live Israel . . . Long live Tunisia!" During a street demonstration, a photo of Trabelsi was even burnt.

In February 2020, another controversy arose when Meyer Habib, deputy of the French living in Israel, part of whose family comes from Tunisia, called for a tourist boycott of Tunisia. In reaction to a position taken by the Tunisian President against a Franco-Israeli sportsman, this deputy close to the Israeli conservative right argued that "anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism," considering that Tunisia, "once a model of living together, is falling into obsessive hatred," and comparing this country to Iran. Trabelsi stepped up to the plate by sending him an open letter calling on Habib to apologize to the Tunisians.

The position of the Tunisian President of the Republic regarding the Ghriba and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict appears also ambiguous. According to a press release from the presidency, when President Kais Saied officially visited the Ghriba with René Trabelsi in March 2020, he "underlined the necessity to differentiate between the Jewish religion, which is one of the divine revelations, and the Zionism which occupies the land of Palestine and oppresses its people," adding that "it is time for humanity to end this injustice."

The 2019 pilgrimage represented the climax of René Trabelsi's dual role as pilgrimage impresario and tourism minister. It is under his leadership that the *iftar* mentioned above was organized. The 2020 edition of the pilgrimage was hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic, when Trabelsi had already given up his post as minister. The international pilgrimage was cancelled and only locals confidentially visited the site. In addition, René Trabelsi himself became seriously ill with the virus during the spring of 2020 and remained hospitalized in Paris for over a month and a half. His followers were informed of the severity of his illness through social networks. Once healed, the ex-minister considered himself the beneficiary of a Ghriba miracle. This is what he confessed to a journalist, Hichem Ben Yaïche, who posted a dedicated message on his LinkedIn account. As a non-Jew, it is significant that this journalist adds: "From having made ten pilgrimages to the Ghriba, in the context of my work, I can testify to the power of this place." In August 2020, Trabelsi returned to Djerba and went to thank the Ghriba, a gesture which falls within the popular register of private devotion, far from any political stake.

In 2021, the pilgrimage also remained restricted, with strict health

protocols (individual prayers, none of the usual gatherings, and compulsory mask). A few people did come from abroad, however. Inside the Ghriba, Trabelsi was accompanied by about 30 French pilgrims. He told the press: "This year, the number is not high, but that does not matter. What matters is that we have been given the chance to come here to pray for the entire world."[50] In 2022, when the pilgrimage resumed with good success (with the arrival of around 3,000 pilgrims, according to the organizers), Trabelsi returned to his functions as a travel agent and organizer of pilgrims' sojourns on the island, while also assuming an unofficial political role, receiving important guests such as the Tunisian prime minister and several ambassadors.

René Trabelsi returning as a pilgrim to the Ghriba, 2021.

50
"Pèlerinage de la Ghriba 2021 : Un retour discret, mais retour tout de même," *Kapitalis*, April 28, 2021, http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2021/04/28/pelerinage-de-la-ghriba-2021-un-retour-discret-mais-retour-tout-de-meme/

Conclusion

This article represents a modest attempt to update, 40 years later, some aspects of the seminal research work carried out by Lucette Valensi and Abraham Udovitch on the Arab Jews of Djerba. In a theoretical perspective, we took up the case of the Ghriba pilgrimage to explore the pertinence of the notion of paradox for an analysis of the often-contradictory components that are at work in several sanctuaries attended by faithful of different religious obediences. This work is part of a quest for new analytical tools that could somewhat replace more traditional ones, like syncretism or *métissage*. In conclusion, it seems that the idea of paradox may prove useful to grasp some significant elements, alongside other concepts, like ambiguity or polytropy, which partially recover its analytical field. The Ghriba synagogue appears as a rare laboratory to observe a long-term common rituality practiced by Jews and Muslims in North Africa. Moreover, still in the 21st century it remains a place of spiritual magnetism and of interfaith mixing. The annual pilgrimage is a matrix of intertwined contrasts and paradoxes, whose range exceeds the issue of interreligious sharing. Their articulation is highly complex: several paradoxes appear entangled and nested, creating a convoluted architecture.

The sets of paradoxes described and analysed throughout this article can be organized around a number of foci. They concern, for example, the dual nature of this synagogue as a place of worship and a holy place, with the oscillations between the predominance of one or the other dimension during the annual cycle, as well as the changing characterizations of this space in terms of gender; although it lacks, like all other synagogues in Djerba, a space reserved for the prayer of women, the latter can frequent the Ghriba synagogue as pilgrims or tourists at various times of the year, and then become the main protagonists of the ritual actions that take place there during the festival of Lag Ba'Omer. With the impossibility, for reasons of space, of following all these threads, we will single out only one aspect of paramount importance: namely, the delicate balance between local and external forces on which the structure of the pilgrimage seems to rest. This aspect is evident from the opposition between the two founding narratives of the sanctity of the synagogue: the one purely local and immersed in a rather indistinct religiosity, without a clear confessional identity emerging; the other that makes the Ghriba synagogue a sort of holy relic of the First Temple of Jerusalem, thus charging it with a universal meaning for the whole of the Jewish world. A sub-paradox inscribed in this second narrative is the attribution of an Arabic name Ghriba to a holy place that would have been created in the 6th century BC. This paradox also refracts on the interpretation of the ritual practices. Some

pilgrims, for example, interpret the tradition of entering the innermost part of the Ghriba synagogue barefoot as an imitation of what Muslims do in mosques. On the other hand, we have also listened to erudite local aetiologies which see this habit as a perpetuation down the millennia of a typical custom of the faithful in the Temple of Jerusalem.

It is then possible to read in the very structure of the pilgrimage the results of another contrast between local and external dynamics, with paradoxical outcomes. In fact, since the pilgrimage began to experience great success, towards the end of the 19th century, it seems to operate a sort of accommodation between the pietistic tendencies of the Djerbian Judaism and a much more exuberant religiosity introduced in the synagogue and in the adjacent spaces by pilgrims who came from elsewhere, often from very far away. This paradoxical coexistence between divergent tendencies can still be read now in the subdued criticism of many local Jews of the most ostentatious manifestations in the religious practices of many pilgrims of the Tunisian diaspora, as well in their silent distancing from most of them.

Relations with Islam are also affected by the paradoxical effects of this tension between local and external dimensions. The relative quiet coexistence between Jews and Muslims in Djerba is upset at the time of the pilgrimage, when a massive deployment of the army and police hinders local life. The space of the synagogue represents the acme of the contrast between contradictory tendencies. The warm conviviality between Jews and Muslims inside the Ghriba, and the omnipresent rhetoric of inclusivity, highly contrast with the huge display of security forces outside the buildings. In fact, there is a contradiction between the message of tolerance and the potential threat of attacks like that of 2003, between the situation inside and outside. More generally, the Ghriba pilgrimage is crossed by major political dynamics, with an international scope, being regularly affected by the turmoil of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Every year the arrival of Israeli pilgrims arouses anti-Israeli animosities in Tunisian society. Conversely, the Israeli government advises regularly its citizens against going to Djerba for the pilgrimage.

The figure of René Trabelsi, both an observant Jew from Djerba, economic impresario of the pilgrimage and former Tunisian minister, embodies the subtle combination of the different facets of the pilgrimage as a complex social phenomenon. The fact that, after his exclusion from the government and his serious illness, he recently claimed to have recovered from the Covid-19 thanks to the therapeutic power of the Ghriba, in a sense, brings the story full circle.

the 2022 pilgrimage, we had the chance to meet Lucette Valensi and Abraham Udovitch on the spot. We thank them for their generosity in sharing with us their memories and their remarks. We also salute the memory of the photographer Jacques Pérez, whom we met several times in Tunis and Marseille, who passed away in 2022.

Heterography 1:

Rachid Koraïchi's Migratory Aesthetics

Sara Kuehn

Sara Kuehn
Department of Islamic Theological Studies, University of Vienna
sara.kuehn@univie.ac.at

1

While 'refugees' and 'migrants' are two distinct legal categories, their status prior to death is unclear. As such, for the purposes of this paper, I will follow the policy of Al Jazeera and use the term 'refugee' because "the word migrant is no longer fit for purpose when it comes to describing the horror unfolding in the Mediterranean. It has evolved from its dictionary definitions into a tool that dehumanises and distances, a blunt pejorative." Barry Malone, "Why Al Jazeera Will Not Say Mediterranean 'Migrants.' The Word Migrant Has Become a Largely Inaccurate Umbrella Term for This Complex Story," *Al Jazeera* (August 20, 2015). Available online: https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/8/20/why-al-jazeera-will-not-say-mediterranean-migrants. Accessed on October 3, 2022.

2

Anonymous, "Mediterranean Crossing Still World's Deadliest for Migrants – UN Report," *UN News. Global Perspective Human Stories* (October 24, 2017). Available online: https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/11/637162-mediterranean-crossing-still-worlds-deadliest-migrants-un-report. Accessed on September 10, 2022; Nicholas De Genova, "Introduction. The Borders of "Europe" and the European Question," in *The Borders of "Europe," Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering*, ed. Nicholas de Genova (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 1–35, here 1–2.

3

Btihaj Ajana, *Governing through Biometrics: The Biopolitics of Identity* (London: Palgrave, 2013), 58; Maurizio Albahari, *Crimes of Peace: Mediterranean Migrations at the World's Deadliest Border* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Nadhem Yousfi, "The Mediterranean Sea, a Graveyard for Humans and Hopes," *Assafirarabi* (June 4, 2020). Available online: https://assafirarabi.com/en/30281/2020/04/06/the-mediterranean-sea-a-graveyard-for-humans-and-hopes/. Accessed on October 3, 2022.

4

Mieke Bal, "Lost in Space, Lost in the Library," *Thamyris/Intersecting* 17 (2007): 23–36, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401204675_003; Sam Durrant and Catherine M. Lord, "Introduction: Essays in Migratory Aesthetics: Cultural Practices Between Migration and Art-making," in *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics: Cultural Practices Between Migration and Art-making*, eds. Sam Durrant and Catherine M. Lord (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 11–20.

The site will remain an enduring beacon of humanity in the face of suffering.
Rachid Koraïchi

Introduction

The artwork of Paris-based artist Rachid Koraïchi, one of the leading Arab artists of his generation, is steeped in the aesthetics of Sufism and distinctive in its thematic integration of migration, memory, and mourning. The traces of the perilous migratory movements that characterize our contemporary culture are a central preoccupation in his creations. One of Koraïchi's most important projects, the newly opened Le Jardin d'Afrique (The Garden of Africa) in southern Tunisia was created to honour and commemorate the increasing number of refugees and migrants[1] – women, men and children – who have drowned crossing the Mediterranean Sea from North Africa, especially Libya, while attempting to reach asylum in Europe. Koraïchi is one of the few artists worldwide whose work memorializes undocumented refugees. Fleeing extreme poverty and military conflict, a mounting number of people of various nationalities and faiths have died on what the UN calls the world's deadliest migration route,[2] resulting in the "world's largest mass grave."[3]

This article addresses the "migratory aesthetics" (a term coined by Mieke Bal in 2007) in Koraïchi's project. "As an incontestable source of cultural transformation," Bal identifies migration as a "constructive focus of an aesthetics that does not leave the viewer, spectator, or user of art aloof and shielded, autonomous and in charge of the aesthetic experience." For Bal the term enhances "the possibilities of art to be politically effective,"[4] amply illustrated by Koraïchi's oeuvre, especially in his Garden of Africa project.

The exploration is also inspired by decolonial thinkers such as Walter Mignolo.[5] While engaging with postcolonial thought (for instance, Edward Said's foundational *Orientalism*[6]), they deliberately reject the concept of a single universal aesthetic traditionally posited for the Western tradition. In contrast to the univalent construct of Western aesthetic ideology, decolonial aesthetics postulates a plurality of aesthetics.[7] Processes of displacement or migration also generate an aesthetic of transcultural formation, in which transculturation is understood as the "effects of cultural translations."[8]

Drawing on these recent methodological developments, the article explores how this contemporary global artist engages with the applied aesthetics of the 'lived' Sufi experience.[9] It delineates the aesthetic junctures of embodied sensations (Birgit Meyer's "sensational forms")[10] and the intersensorial nature of Sufi perception. As a manifestation of transcultural frames of reference,[11] Koraïchi's work articulates the culturally entangled dynamic of multi-religious engagement.

Sufism, social activism, decolonial aesthetics/aesthesis

During the chaotic post-colonial period, when terrorist violence escalated after 132 years of French colonial rule in Algeria (1830–1962), Koraïchi (b. 1947 in Ain Beida, Algeria) fled to Paris at the age of 21. There he continued his studies at the École nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs and the École d'urbanisme. Koraïchi comes from a family of distinguished Sufis (his grandfather

was a Tijani *muqaddam*, or spiritual leader, in Ain Beida) descending from the Quraysh, the Meccan-based 'tribe' to which the Prophet Muhammad himself belonged. The French-Algerian artist is an active member of the Tijaniyya order, founded by Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani (1737–1815) in Algeria in the Oran region before spreading to other parts of the world. Known for their social reforms and longstanding resistance to European colonialism in Africa, Tijanyya members combine mysticism with humanitarianism and social activism, a common thread running through Koraïchi's works.

It is in this spirit that the Garden of Africa project aesthetically contests the "necropolitical" conditions (a term coined by Achille Mbembe)[12] of "this extended period of global Anthropocene crisis, ongoing 'refugee crisis,' mass incarceration, and endless war."[13] Due to hardline border security policies and new methods of migration control,[14] refugee deaths in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas have increased since the 1990s.[15] As a result, Europe's "horrific modern hecatomb," in the words of French-Senegalese novelist David Diop, is poignantly inscribed in the region's death-scape.[16] Yet the Mediterranean and Aegaen sea borders are only one of many regions where refugees are dying in their search for asylum. In the Sinai, the Sahara, in Central America, at the US-Mexican border, on the Andaman sea and elsewhere, refugees are dying in untold numbers.

Koraïchi positions his work as a resistance to neocolonization. In the intolerable conditions of migration, he sees the tragic legacy of colonialism. But, he says, "colonialism is worse today because it is hidden."[17] In 2005, he built the Jardin d'Orient (Garden of the Orient) at Château Royal d'Amboise in the Loire Valley in France as a tribute to Emir Abdelkader (1808–1883), Algeria's former spiritual (Sufi) and military leader in the anti-colonial struggle against the French invasion, and the Algerians killed in the resistance. Emir Abdelkader was imprisoned at the château from 1848 to 1852, together with his family and followers, more than twenty of whom perished and were buried in an unmarked mass grave in the courtyard of the castle. In an interview in 2020, Koraïchi offers insights into the "catalyst" that led him to create the Jardin d'Orient:[18]

> I was praying there [the courtyard of the Château d'Amboise] one day. A woman's pet dog came near me and peed near my feet. "Who are you?" she asked me. I said that I was Rachid Koraïchi. She said, "Are you working here? My dog has the habit of peeing here since a long time." My response was, "At least you're sincere and honest in telling me this!"
> This moment led to my thinking of making the cemetery [Jardin d'Orient]. So, the dog was the catalyst. It was also "maktoob" – destiny, fate. Choices we make and don't make . . . like being at a crossroads.

The French-Algerian artist also views his mission as illuminating the human catastrophe resulting from the NATO-backed overthrow and death of Libya's long-time president Moammar Gaddafi in 2011.[19] The ensuing violence plunged the country into chaos and, in Koraïchi's words, "opened the gates of hell" across the African continent and beyond.[20] "Now," he says, "all the weapons that France, Italy, Britain and Germany sold to Libya for millions are in the hands of terrorists all over Africa. But no one is taking responsibility for these genocidal arms sales."[21] Terrorized Africans continue to flee to European shores, while for years the EU funded, trained and equipped the Libyan

5

Walter D. Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing. On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking, and Epistemic Disobedience," *EIPCP* (September 2011). Available online: http://eipcp.net/transversal/0112/mignolo/en. Accessed on October 23, 2022; Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality, and the Grammar of Decoloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 1-2 (2007): 449–514, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647.

6

Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978).

7

Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing"; Tlostanova, Madina, *Postcolonialism and Postsocialism in Fiction and Art: Resistance and Re-existence* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 29.

8

Joel Kuortti, ed., *Transculturation and Aesthetics: Ambivalence, Power, and Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

9

Heinz Streib, Astrid Dinter, and Kerstin Söderblom, "Preliminary Materials," in *Lived Religion: Conceptual, Empirical and Practical-Theological Approaches: Essays in Honour of Hans-Günter Heimbrock*, eds. Heinz Streib, Astrid Dinter and Kerstin Söderblom (Leiden: Brill, 2008), ix–xiii.

10

Birgit Meyer, "Introduction: From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding," in *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Region and the Senses*, ed. Birgit Meyer (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1–18; idem, "Religious Sensations: Why Media, Aesthetics and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion," in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (Fordham University Press, 2009), 704–23.

11

Gilberto Freyre, *The Mansions and the Shanties*, trans. Harriet De Onís (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).

12

Politics surrounding death (Greek *necro-*) involve the policy of allowing certain groups to die under otherwise avoidable conditions. Achille Mbembe refers to these death-worlds as "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead." Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

13

Jill H. Casid, "Necropolitics at Sea," in *Migration and the Contemporary Mediterranean, Shifting Cultures in Twenty-first-century Italy and Beyond*, ed. Claudia Gualtieri (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2018).

14

Maurizio Albahari, *Crimes of Peace: Mediterranean Migrations at the World's Deadliest Border* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Leanne Weber and Sharon Pickering, *Globalization and Borders:*

coast guard to intercept those trying to cross the border and send them back to Libya, where they are held in detention centers.[22] Refugees also arrive from Qatar, Koraïchi says. To build the stadiums for the World Cup finals Qatar's government hired 30,000 foreign labourers, mostly from Bangladesh and Pakistan. Forced to pay exorbitant recruitment fees, their wages withheld and their passports confiscated,[23] they are reduced to conditions of modern slavery. The bodies of thousands of migrant workers dying in Qatar after it won its World Cup bid are said to be used as a filling material in the construction of the stadiums.[24] Many flee these inhumane conditions via the sea route, which explains the large number of refugees from Pakistan and Bangladesh arriving in Tunisia, many perishing on the way and arriving in body bags at the Garden of Africa, says Koraïchi.[25]

In past decades, refugee deaths have been addressed only occasionally in photography, documentaries, and artwork. Among the few works of art that depict the deaths is Berlin-based artist and activist Khaled Barakeh's (b. 1976 in Syria) 'Multicultural Graveyard,' a censored Facebook album of photographs of refugee children drowned off the coast of Libya.[26] His testimony of death is intended "to make life matter."[27] Runo Lagomarsino's (b. 1977 in Sweden) installation 'Sea Grammar' draws upon metonymic refraction to articulate the muted tragedy of those drowned to death in the Mediterranean. It depicts an aerial view of the Strait of Gibraltar, pierced by more and more holes until finally these holes completely obscure the strait. The holes recall an expression seafarers use when their comrades are carried away by the waves: "making a hole in the sea." The work is part of the exhibition 'They Watched Us for a Very Long Time,'[28] named after the title of a 2014 work at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin,[29] in which Lagomarsino illuminates European neocolonialism and the way history is constructed as a "a mirror with amnesia." With this work, Lagomarsino refers to Walter Mignolo's words of warning that:[30] "The colonial past is not a past; it's part of our contemporary life. [. . .] Modernity hides coloniality behind its darker side, in other words, coloniality is constitutive of modernity – there is no modernity without coloniality." Also worth mentioning is the 17-minute video 'Liquid Traces: The Left-to-Die Boat Case,' directed by the activist-researcher and filmmaker Charles Heller and the architect Lorenzo Pezzani, produced in Berlin in March 2014;[31] and Swiss-Icelandic artist Christoph Büchel's (b. 1966) project 'Barca Nostra' (Our Boat), the wreckage of a fishing boat that had sunk with hundreds of refugees aboard, displayed at the 2019 Venice Biennale.[32] These artworks enunciate the *abjection* of marginalized refugees: Julia Kristeva describes this as what was once part of the self but was cast off because the self violently expelled it due to its disgust with the abject.[33]

In spring 2018, social media reported large numbers of decomposing bodies of drowned 'others' of refugee origin that had washed up on a Tunisian beach near the old port of Zarzis, many of them remaining unburied. Koraïchi's daughter Aïcha heard about this humanitarian disaster and alerted her father. Soon after father and daughter visited the small coastal town and were "terrified" by what they saw.[34]

Locals refused to bury the dead in their own cemeteries, often on the basis that the religious beliefs of the deceased were unknown – described by Koraïchi as "open racism."[35] As Judith Butler has shown, a subject emerges through a process of abjection, by not conforming to the norm of the human subject, in this case the citizen.[36] To find out the faith of the deceased, the locals even went so far as to check whether the dead

Death at the Global Frontier (Basingstoke and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

15
The exact number of refugees currently dying anonymously trying to cross the Mediterranean is unknown. Statistics indicate that 50,873 people died or disappeared between 1993 and 2020. Nicolas Lambert, "Fermer les frontières tue!," *Carnet (neo) cartographique* (February 26, 2020). Available online: https://neocarto.hypotheses.org/9586. Accessed on October 4, 2022.

16
That is, material expressions in the landscape of practices relating to death. David Diop, "The Depths of Our Humanity," trans. Anna Moschovakis, *The New York Times* (December 8, 2021). Available online: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/03/special-series/africa-migrant-deaths-mediterranean.html. Accessed on October 5, 2022. See also the SEA WATCH election campaign video circulated by DIE PARTEI (a German political party headed by EU parliamentarian Martin Sonneborn) before the EU election in spring 2019. Die PARTEI & Sea-Watch, "Hold your Breath," *Wahlwerbespot zur Europawahl 2019* (May 8, 2019). Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obDJQNRnyus and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKZ9m_qWYqI (with English subtitles). Accessed on October 4, 2022. Cf. De Genova, "Introduction. The Borders of "Europe" and the European Question," 2.

17
Hadani Ditmars, "Jardin d'Afrique: A Moving Memorial to Forgotten Migrants," *MEI@75. Peace, Prosperity, Partnership* (July13, 2021). Available online: https://www.mei.edu/publications/jardin-dafrique-moving-memorial-forgotten-migrants. Accessed on October 15, 2022.

18
Laila Rahman, "Mystic Artist in Our Midst," *The Friday Times* (March 13, 2020). Available online: https://www.thefridaytimes.com/2020/03/13/mystic-artist-in-our-midst/. Accessed on October 1, 2022.

19
Ditmars, "Jardin d'Afrique."

20
Rachid Koraïchi, "Virtual Tour and Talk. Tears that Taste of the Sea," *Aga Khan Museum/UK Patrons' Circle Webinar* (October 3, 2020). Available online: https://octobergallery.co.uk/exhibitions/2020_rachid_koraichi. Accessed on October 15, 2022.

21
Ditmars, "Jardin d'Afrique."

22
Ditmars, "Jardin d'Afrique."

23
Anonymous, "World Cup 2022: How has Qatar Treated Foreign Workers?," *BBC World* (November 9, 2022). Available online: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60867042. Accessed on October 11, 2022. See also "FIFA/Qatar: Commit to Compensate Abused Migrant Workers," *Human Rights Watch*

Religiographies

120

(often in an advanced stage of decomposition) were circumcised or not, but only a few bodies were accepted in local Muslim or Christian cemeteries.[37] A makeshift cemetery for refugees known as the "Cemetery of Strangers" in the middle of a wasteland received all the dead (regardless of their religion). The humanitarian initiative was managed single handedly by Chemseddine Marzoug, a local fisherman and occasional taxi driver,[38] but by 2019 the cemetery of mostly unmarked graves had no space left for more burials. Many bodies were therefore simply dumped on rubbish heaps. "There were piles of bodies along a very long beach," says Koraïchi. "The bodies are carried there by the ocean currents, and they were collected by rubbish trucks and dumped on heaps infested with dogs and rats." "It was unbelievable," he recounts.[39] This description corresponds with what Butler describes as the process of rejection: "The refuse of such a process includes various forms of spectrality and monstrosity, usually figured in relation to non-human animal life."[40]

This spectrality is reflected in the invisibility and inaccessibility of the 'burial sites,' the denial of identification, mourning and care for the refugee dead. Far from the nearest human settlement, anonymous and abandoned, the remains of the dehumanized refugees are dumped in mass graves. With no genealogical ties, cut off from their families, they leave no trace. The depersonalized bodies are merely covered with earth. They receive no proper ritual burial and there are no grave markers or other recognized symbol to commemorate the dead. The insinuation that the "martyred" corpses[41] can rot below the ground and be easily forgotten betrays the disregard for the refugees as actual members of a political, social and cultural community.[42] The denial of state responsibility for these violations of rights reveals a profound inequality even in death for these refugees,[43] as well as for their relatives, left behind in a limbo of uncertainty, with no means of finding the missing.

Koraïchi recalls, "I immediately said that we must buy a piece of land to build a cemetery. Since they [the locals] refuse to give them [the refugees] a dignified burial, I will build them a palace,"[44] "with an oasis, to roll out a prayer rug for them," he says.[45] In late 2018, Koraïchi together with his daughters Aïcha and Fatma purchased a 2,500 square meter field of olive trees near the small town of Zarzis to create a dignified and peaceful final resting place for the hundreds of unburied corpses (Fig. 1). Because of its location, sharing borders with both the European Union and Libya, the town is particularly concerned with migration issues. Irrespective of their (mostly unknown) religion, all are received and equally honoured. In doing so Koraïchi follows the Sufi tradition of universal humanism that God embraces all humans without regard to race, religion, or any other distinction. This holistic, humanitarian ethic is the central thread linking together all the facets of human rights and humanitarian action. It represents Koraïchi's personal tribute to the countless men, women, and children who have perished in search of a better life. He believes that "the site will remain an enduring beacon of humanity in the face of suffering."[46]

What makes Koraïchi's Garden of Africa stand out from most other artworks on the suffering of refugees is that it actively helps those in need by providing a place of refuge and sanctuary for both the dead and their living friends and relatives. While all of these artworks are important expressions of a decolonial aesthetic, Koraïchi's work is also exemplary for its humanitarian activism. Rather than confining his art to the traditional aesthetic of "feelings of beauty or sublimity," Koraïchi's garden cemetery

(August 12, 2022). Available online: https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/12/fifa-qatar-commit-compensate-abused-migrant-workers. Accessed on November 10, 2022; also Pete Pattisson and Niamh McIntyre, "Revealed: 6,500 Migrant Workers Have Died in Qatar since World Cup Awarded. Guardian Analysis Indicates Shocking Figure Over the Past Decade Likely to be an Underestimate," *The Guardian* (February 21, 2021). Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/23/revealed-migrant-worker-deaths-qatar-fifa-world-cup-2022. Accessed on October 11, 2022.

24
Koraïchi, telephone interview with author on November 10, 2022.

25
Koraïchi, telephone interview with author on November 10, 2022.

26
Anne König, "The Multicultural Graveyard. A Conversation with Khaled Barakeh About His Censored Facebook Posts that Changed the Way the West Viewed Immigration," *Collecteurs* (2015). Available online: https://www.collecteurs.com/interview/khaled-barakeh-the-multicultural-graveyard. Accessed on September 30, 2022.

27
Nicholas D. Mirzoeff, "Facebook Censors Refugee Photographs," blog post *How to See the World* (September 1, 2015). Available online: https://wp.nyu.edu/howtoseetheworld/2015/09/01/auto-draft-78/. Accessed on October 3, 2022.

28
Runo Lagomarsino, "They Watched Us for a Very Long Time" (September 25, 2015). Available online: https://www.la-criee.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/press_pack_runo_lagomarsino.pdf. Accessed on October 3, 2022. The installation was one of seven contemporary art projects in the 2015 exhibition *Refugees, réfugiés: quand l'art contemporain résonne avec l'actualité*.

29
Runo Lagomarsino, "Against My Ruins," *Nils Stærk* (March 22, 2014). Available online: https://www.nilsstaerk.dk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=152&catid=10. Accessed on October 3, 2022.

30
Runo Lagomarsino, "Q&A with Runo Lagomarsino," *Kunstforum* (April 7, 2014). Available online: https://kunstforum.as/2014/04/qa-with-runo-lagomarsino/. Accessed on October 3, 2022.

31
Sophie Hinger, "Transformative Trajectories – The Shifting Mediterranean Border Regime and the Challenges of Critical Knowledge Production. An Interview with Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani," *Movements. Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies* 4/1 (2018). Available online: https://movements-journal.org/issues/06.wissen/12.hinger--transformative-trajectories-the-shifting-mediterranean-border-regime-and-the-challenges-of-criti-

cal-knowledge-production-charles-heller-lorenzo-pez-zani.html. Accessed on October 1, 2022. The film was also shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York as part of the group exhibition, *Insecurities: Tracing Displacement and Shelter*, October 1, 2016–January 2017.

32
Balasz Takac, "Barca Nostra – Christoph Büchel's Shipwreck in Venice Biennale," *Widewalls* (December 4, 2020). Available online: https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/barca-nostra-christoph-buchel-ship-venice-biennale. Accessed on October 3, 2022.

33
Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982).

34
James Imam, "As 'Mountains of Corpses' Wash Up on Tunisian Shores, Artist Rachid Koraïchi Builds Burial Site for Migrants," *The Art Newspaper* (June 11, 2021). Available online: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/06/11/as-mountains-of-corpses-wash-up-on-tunisian-shores-artist-rachid-koraichi-builds-burial-site-for-migrants. Accessed on September 30, 2022.

35
Ditmars, "Jardin d'Afrique."

36
Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009).

37
Koraïchi, "Virtual Tour and Talk. Tears that Taste of the Sea."

38
Thessa Lageman, "The Cemetery of Unknown Refugees from the Mediterranean," *Al Jazeera* (December 29, 2016). Available online: https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2016/12/29/the-cemetery-of-unknown-refugees-from-the-mediterranean. Accessed on October 5, 2022; Sarah Mersch, "Tunisia's "Cemetery for the Unknown": The Gravedigger of Zarzis," *Qantara* (2018). Available online: https://en.qantara.de/content/tunisias-%E2%80%B3cemetery-for-the-unknown%E2%80%B3-the-gravedigger-of-zarzis. Accessed on October 5, 2022. See also the short documentary by Walid Falleh, *Le cimetière des inconnus* (The Cemetery of Strangers) (1:19 mins.) *Mobile Film Festival Africa* (March 3, 2020). Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9z9F4A05uZk. Accessed on November 1, 2022.

39
Imam, "As 'Mountains of Corpses' Wash Up on Tunisian Shores."

40
Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 141.

41
Mirzoeff, "Facebook Censors Refugee Photographs."

42
Jason De León, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and*
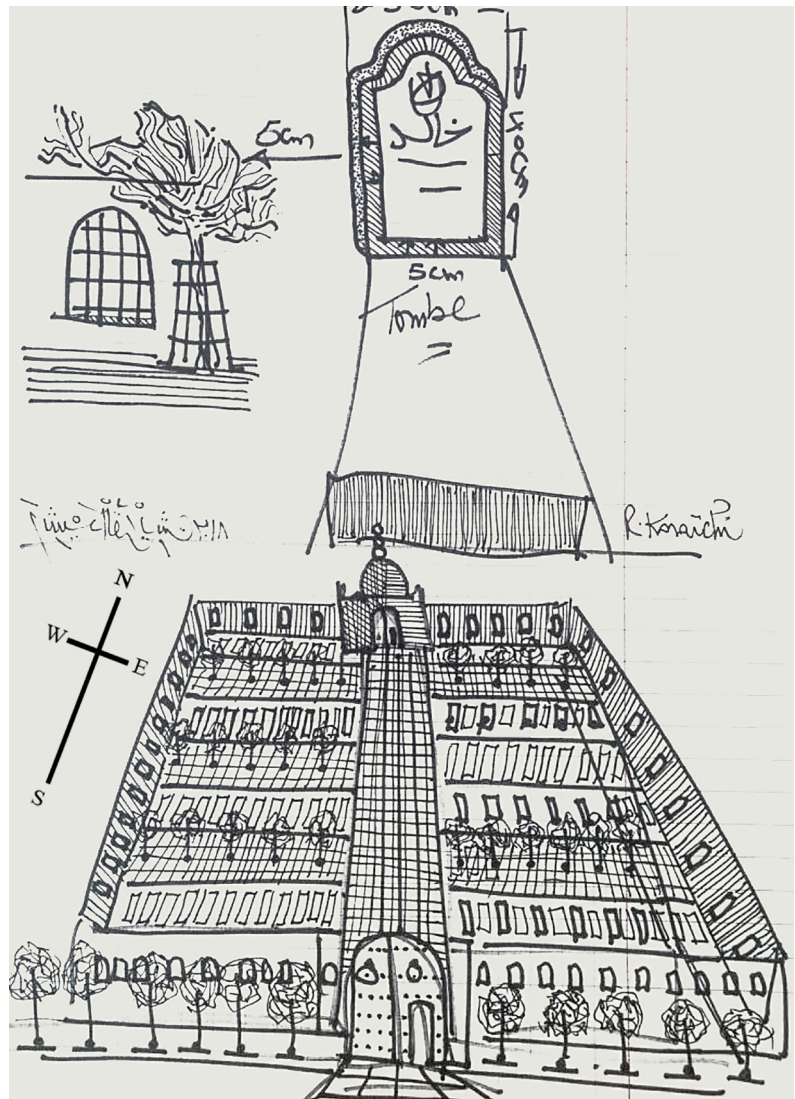
Fig.1 Design sketches for *Le Jardin d'Afrique*, Zarzis, Tunisia, see Rachid Koraïchi, *Tears that Taste of the Sea* (London: October Gallery, 2021), 9.

speaks to "sadness, indignation, repentance, hope, and determination to change things in the future."[47]

When Koraïchi took on the task to self-finance the sanctuary with proceeds from the sales of his works, he was following the example of his grandfather, who had reminded him on his deathbed that: "Everything that is not given is lost" [not passed on, not given in a spirit of humanity and generosity].[48] He was reminded of the fact that whatever money the grandfather did not spend for his family and on the Sufi shrine (*khanqah*) was used for humanitarian purposes, so that the public benefited.[49]

The multi-faith memorial garden cemetery
The result, an ecumenical garden cemetery of great beauty, embodies sharedness. Tapping into the long history of shared sacred sites and practices, the complex serves as a memorial, a cemetery and a garden, providing sanctuary and a final place of rest for all those who have perished on the dangerous sea routes in search of a dignified life and whose countless unidentified and unclaimed bodies all too often wash up on the Tunisian coast. Irrespective of their (mostly unknown) faith this shared space represents a special

Fig. 2. View of the garden cemetery and multi-faith prayer room, Le Jardin d'Afrique, Zarzis, Tunisia. Photograph © Rachid Koraïchi.

arrangement for all (Fig. 2). The sacred space embraces not only the dead but their families and friends as well, who can mourn there and pay a dignified final tribute to their loved ones.

It is important to remember that the remains of the dead do not simply constitute inert and passive material, merely to be handled and disposed of by local communities; rather, they "provide an agency to affect the experience and actions of mourners and evoke memories of the past."[50] Koraïchi's Garden of Africa gives them this voice. In this way he invokes the conceptualization of Ottoman multi-religious cemeteries which, as Amila Buturović points out, offered a space where "[t]he dead . . . can maintain an affective social presence with a lasting impact on the way they are remembered and can enhance coexistence through rituals and narratives, synchronically and diachronically, that engage communities and groups across ethnic and religious lines."[51] This time-honoured approach began to break down with the import of Western ideas of nationalism, when nation states tried to construct univalent societies which were inherently inimical to religious pluralism.[52] It was in the context of this socio-political upheaval that the practice of sharing sacred spaces began to change and that "traditions of mixing and sharing began to disappear."[53]

At the Garden of Africa, Koraïchi created a transcultural (from the Latin prefix *trans-* meaning "across," "beyond") aesthetic in terms of cultural signification: a juncture between cultures and a site for transitioning between them, endowing it with a distinctive state of a cultural liminality. The cemetery's transcultural aesthetic focusses on local and transregional traditions in a new formal language that both appeals to the local population and represents the various religious communities housed in the cemetery (who Koraïchi affectionately calls the "United Nations") through

Dying on the Migrant Trail (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 17.

43
Oscar Martínez, *Los Migrantes que no Importan* (El Faro: Icaria Editorial, 2010), 175.

44
Rachid Koraïchi, "Le Chant de l'Ardent Désir" (2022). Available online: https://www.aicon.art/exhibitions/rachid-koraichi2. Accessed on September 30, 2022.

45
Laetitia Fernandez, "A Zarzis, dans le sud-est du pays, l'artiste algérien Rachid Koraïchi a conçu le 'Jardin d'Afrique pour accueillir avec dignité les dépouilles des naufragés," *Le Monde* (June 14, 2021). Available online: https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/06/14/tous-les-reves-finissent-ici-en-tunisie-un-jardin-cimetiere-pour-les-migrants-morts-en-mer_6084012_3212.html. Accessed on October 5, 2022.

46
Imam, "As 'Mountains of Corpses' Wash Up on Tunisian Shores."

47
Walter D. Mignolo, and Rolando Vázquez, eds., "Social Text: Periscope," *Decolonial AestheSis Dossier* (2013). Available online: https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/the-decolonial-aesthesis-dossier/. Accessed on September 15, 2022.

48
Rahman, "Mystic Artist in Our Midst."

49
Rahman, "Mystic Artist in Our Midst."

50
Amila Buturović, "Headless, They March On: Cephalophores and Coexistence in Ottoman Bosnia," in *Architecture of Coexistence: Building Pluralism*, ed. Azra Akšamija (Berlin: ArchiTanglee, 2020), 100–9, here 103.

51
Buturović, "Headless, They March On," 103.

52
Elazar Barkan and Karen Barkey, *Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites. Religion, Politics and Conflict Resolution* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2014), 3.

53
Maria Couroucli, "Sharing Sacred Places – A Mediterranean Tradition," in *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims, and Jews at Shrines and Sanctuaries*, eds. Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 1–9, here 3.

Fig. 3. Koraïchi attaches a plaque to a tombstone; the yellow-green bowl on the grave is meant to catch rainwater and attract birds, Le Jardin d'Afrique, Zarzis, Tunisia. Photograph © Rachid Koraïchi.

54
Diop, "The Depths of Our Humanity."

55
Rachid Koraïchi, "Le Jardin d'Afrique, Zarzis," *E-Architect* (July 9, 2022). Available online: https://www.e-architect.com/tunisia/le-jardin-dafrique-zarzis. Accessed on October 15, 2022.

56
Diop, "The Depths of Our Humanity."

57
Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

58
Ditmars, "Jardin d'Afrique."

59
Ditmars, "Jardin d'Afrique."

their religio-cultural symbols.

In order to preserve memory and promote sustainable development, Koraïchi has taken care to build on the pre-existing architectural context and provide site-specific responses in terms of ecology, climate and materials. For instance, the yellow and green bowls on the graves are designed to collect rainwater and attract birds (Fig. 3).[54] The focus was on local resources and their aesthetic qualities, as well as climatic aspects given the harsh, sweltering climate. In the the Garden of Africa all walls, domes, vaults, tombstones, and paving stones – even the locks of the doors and the nail work on the doors – were made entirely by hand by local artists and craftsmen.[55]

The artist designed the mortuary monument around the idea of 'the cemetery as a primordial garden' – a recurring theme across different religious traditions – filled with the scent of fragrant flowers and the soothing sounds of fresh water: a carefully laid out Garden of Eden for the dead and the living.[56] Symbols play a part in the production of that meaning.[57] Access to the walled Garden of Africa is via a 17th-century gate painted bright yellow, said by the artist to symbolize the blazing desert sun (Fig. 4).[58] The entrance is intentionally kept low so that when crossing the threshold visitors need to stoop to pass through, a gesture of respect for the souls of the deceased within.

Set in an olive grove, the six hundred tombs are shaded by fruit-bearing trees, a large variety of flowering plants such as sweet and fragrant jasmine from North Africa, Persian jasmine with a spicier smell, night-blooming jasmine, or "night musk," bitter orange trees, night-blooming cacti, bougainvillea, as well as medicinal herbs such as agave, aloe vera, and marigold. The stench of the corpses which often arrive in an advanced state of decomposition is such that it helps to imbue the air with the fresh, sweet scent of fragrant plants.

In this symbolic landscape many plants bear important meanings: the bright red bougainvilleas, represent "the blood of Christ" and "the oxygen of life."[59] Bitter orange trees symbolize both the harshness of death and

Fig. 4. The yellow 17th-century gate of *Le Jardin d'Afrique*, Zarzis, Tunisia. Photograph © Rachid Koraïchi.

the sweetness of life after death.[60] Pomegranates were planted for their potent Sufi symbolism, as "rubies encased in each other." "The lone seed is fragile," says Koraïchi, citing an old proverb, "but together, the fruit is hard. A single person is vulnerable, but humanity is strong if we stand together in unity."[61] The tombs are surrounded by five olive trees, representing the five pillars of Islam (the profession of faith, prayer, almsgiving, fasting and pilgrimage) as well as by twelve huge vines signifying the twelve apostles, the first disciples of Jesus.[62] Two huge alabaster stelae, one on each side of the gate, serve as "symbolic, talismanic guardians of those who pray for the dead," states Koraïchi, referring to the families and friends of the deceased (Fig. 2).[63]

Inscribed with a diversity of religions, rows of white tombstones are set amid rows of hand-painted tiles (Figs. 2 and 7). On the main axis, the tiles consist of 17th-century Tunisian ceramics and, on the side paths, the tiles are covered with Koraïchi's talismanic and apotropaic glyphs, alluding to the shelter provided by the garden. All tombstones are alike, eliding the friction between religious, social and gender distinctions and instead speaking to a common humanity.

Another 17th-century gate opens on to the large multi-faith prayer room, "to give it the feeling of a palace," explains the artist. The light-filled space offers a place of refuge, worship and retreat for all (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). The complex also contains a morgue with facilities for preservation and identification of the often badly decomposed corpses, as well as a doctor's office. Especially in summer, many bodies often arrive at the same time and need to be cooled. Although these facilities are in place, the Garden

60
Ditmars, "Jardin d'Afrique."

61
Ditmars, "Jardin d'Afrique."

62
Ditmars, "Jardin d'Afrique."

63
Juliet Highet, "Sea of Tears, Garden of Memory," *AramcoWorld* (January/February 2022). Available online: https://www.aramcoworld.com/Articles/January-2022/Sea-of-Tears-Garden-of-Memory. Accessed on October 5, 2022.

Fig. 5. The multi-faith prayer room, Le Jardin d'Afrique, Zarzis, Tunisia. Photograph © Rachid Koraïchi.

64
Anonymous, "Tunisia: Drowned Migrants Get Burial in 'Africa's Garden' Cemetery," short documentary film (3:10 mins.), *Ruptly. Migrant Situation 2021* (June 20, 2021). Available online: https://www.ruptly.tv/en/videos/20210619-059-Tunisia-Drowned-migrants-get-burial-in-Africa-s-Garden-cemetery-DISTRESSING-CONTENT-. Accessed on October 15, 2022.

65
Ditmars, "Jardin d'Afrique."

66
Pauline Boss, "Ambiguous Loss Research, Theory, and Practice: Reflections After 9/11," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (2004): 551–66, here 554, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00037.x.

67
Receiving the body would allow relatives to 'honour' the dead and bury him or her locally, delineating the boundary between the living and the dead and creating a culturally appropriate collective space for mourning. Adam Rosenblatt, *Digging for the Disappeared: Forensic Science after Atrocity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 180.

68
Rosenblatt, *Digging for the Disappeared*, 165.

69
Koraïchi, telephone interview with author on November 10, 2022.

of Africa is still waiting for authorization from the city of Zarzis to carry out the DNA analyses on site. In the meantime, these are still carried out at the Gabès hospital, 140 km away, which means that the bodies have to be transported from there to the Garden of Africa.[64] There mortuary care includes the systematic collection of various types of post-mortem data from the corpse (identifying characteristics such as age, sex and the type of clothing worn by the deceased, material items such as SIM cards and wallets, date and place of shipwreck, witness statements and DNA data). The data is noted on each headstone in the hope that this will enable future identification.[65] The complex also contains a small residence for the guardian and caretaker, Nour el-Din el-Sowayi, while marble benches and tables invite visitors to take a rest and reflect. When leaving the complex, visitors are, once again, greeted by a 130-year-old olive tree (Fig. 7), a symbol of peace.

For the families of the dead and missing in the refugees' countries of origin, it is extremely difficult to obtain information about the fate of their relatives or to obtain any information at all. Without bodies or news about the missing, families cannot perform funeral rites – they live an "ambiguous loss."[66] The fact that even identified refugees are "beyond the reach of care" (given the geographical distance, and the bureaucratic obstacles and costs associated with visiting a grave in another country or repatriating a body)[67] is, as Adam Rosenblatt puts it, an additional "violation of the dead."[68] To date only few relatives have come to the Garden of Africa in search of their loved ones. Among these was a Libyan father who came to visit the grave of his son, identified by fellow travelers. When he was offered to take the body home, he replied, "God has abandoned Libya. This is not a cemetery; this is a paradise. My son will be more beautiful here. I entrust him to you," recalls Koraïchi.[69] By building such a serene and aesthetically congruent garden cemetery, the artist wants to give grieving relatives the assurance that their loved ones are resting in a dignified final resting place, and also to help them find "closure."

Fig. 6. Interior of the multi-faith prayer room, Le Jardin d'Afrique, Zarzis, Tunisia. Photograph © Rachid Koraïchi.

An effort is made to include the death customs of different religions and to address their ritual and symbolic meaning. The funeral rites at the gravesite follow mixed religious burial practices. If the ethnicity of a corpse can be determined, a resident of the same ethnicity from the nearby refugee shelter run by the Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM) is asked to say the funeral prayers in their native tongue (Fig. 8). Often Mongi Slim, Head of the Medenine branch of the Tunisian Red Crescent, is present at the Garden of Africa and assists with these rituals. In the various religions, fundamental values are revealed through death and its remembrance. In several religions, it is also believed that the way a body is prepared for burial has implications for the afterlife.[70] In Islam, drowning victims are considered martyrs (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhari 2674), which is why their bodies do not have to be ritually washed (*ghusl*) before burial. Wrapped in waterproof body bags, the bodies are placed in the dug graves in the sandy earth which is completely dry. The caretaker covers the grave with five large concave tiles and seals the joints with cement. The east-facing tombs are all directed towards the sunrise and Mecca.

[70] Sajjad Rizbi, "A Muslim's Perspective on the Good Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny," in *Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny: Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. David Marshall and Lucinda Mosher (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 69.

Fig. 7. The 130-year-old olive tree at the entrance of Le Jardin d'Afrique, Zarzis, Tunisia. Photograph © Rachid Koraïchi.

Fig. 8. Residents of the nearby refugee shelter offering funeral prayers at Le Jardin d'Afrique, Zarzis, Tunisia. Photograph © Rachid Koraïchi.

71
Ditmars, "Jardin d'Afrique."

Thus characterized by and encoded in sensory imagery such as light, radiance, and beauty, the Garden of Africa, a private and multi-faith hybrid of cemetery, garden and art installation, was inaugurated on June 9, 2021 by UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay. The special ceremony hosted by Tunisian President Kais Saied was also attended by representatives of the three major historical faith traditions, the Rabbi of Djerba (of the El Ghriba Synagogue), the Catholic Archbishop of Tunis, and the local Imam, all of whom recited funeral prayers at the cemetery to celebrate the fusion of faiths in one universal vision.[71]

Tears That Taste of the Sea

While working on the Garden of Africa near Zarzis, Koraïchi opened the exhibition *Tears That Taste of the Sea* in London, displaying works created in various media that were produced during the 2020 global lockdowns.[72] Like the cemetery, the exhibition also revolves around the themes of migration, memory, and mourning. These run like a thread through the artworks, which include a large blue and white etching, blue and white ceramic vases from the 'Lachrymatoires Bleues' (Blue Lachrymatory Vases) series, white acrylic on black canvas from the 'Mouchoirs d'espoir' (Handkerchiefs of Hope) series, as well as three large steel sculptures depicting vigilant guardian figures.

The central work of the exhibition is a large etching that bears the same name as the garden cemetery in Zarzis, Le Jardin d'Afrique, because the etching narrates a similar migratory narrative (Fig. 9). Koraïchi explains his work as follows:[73]

> Symbolically, the rectangular figures enclose elements of the real world, while the circle in the middle, representing infinity, reveals elements from another realm. The isolated figure caught in the center of the circle stands at a crossroads, suggesting a traveler arriving at that place of destiny where this earthly journey ends and another journey begins.

Fig. 9. Rachid Koraïchi, The Garden of Africa Le Jardin d'Afrique, 2020. Edition of 70, Etching, 108.5 x 76 cm. (RK5039) © the artist.

The sphere that encloses the nameless "traveller" in this separate reality floats on the waves of the ocean and eventually drifts ashore (Fig. 10). Many are prevented from continuing their journey and are borne away by the deep. For many of the refugees fleeing war, death by drowning is just as likely as being killed in the war itself. Koraïchi's symbolism can also be seen as an allegory of the mystical experience of the Sufi, characterized as a seeker or wanderer, who undertakes the potentially dangerous journey of travelling the spiritual path ending with God. It also reminds us of the grey area described by Giorgio Agamben, which has no space or definite geographical connotation, but is rather a condition of in-betweenness, which does not end when the Mediterranean Sea is crossed, and the rescue operations concluded.[74] On yet another level this state is reflected in the Sufi metaphysical concept of *barzakh* or "intermediary state,"[75] which denotes the realm located between the world of matter and spirit, the unseen in-between. The basic notion of a *barzakh* refers to the mysterious realm that lies between the two realms of purely physical and purely intelligible/noetic being.

The sphere is surrounded by figures symbolizing what Koraïchi calls "the praying ones," the mothers, fathers, families and friends who continue to pray anxiously for the welfare of the souls already departed. Koraïchi's commitment to the refugee crisis also has its roots in a painful personal story. His brother Mohamed, one year older, drowned in the Mediterranean Sea shortly after Algeria gained its independence in 1962. His body was never found, leaving a wound that never healed.

The blue and white ceramic vases from the 'Lachrymatoires Bleues' series are also covered by Koraïchi's system of signage for which he draws on his own system of letters, numbers, and talismanic symbols inspired by different religious traditions. Intended to imbue the vessels with apotropaic and talismanic powers and to protect their future owners from harm. The blue ink of the inscriptions, representing infinity, also suggests the soothing colors of the sea and the sky.[76]

72
Rachid Koraïchi, *Tears that Taste of the Sea* (London: October Gallery, 2021).

73
Koraïchi, *Tears that Taste of the Sea*, 1, 15.

74
Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); idem, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2005).

75
Salman H. Bashier, *Ibn Arabi's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014); James Morris, "Spiritual Imagination and the "Liminal" World: Ibn 'Arabi on the *Barzakh*," *POSTDATA* 15, no. 2, (1995): 42–9 and 104–9 (in Spanish).

76
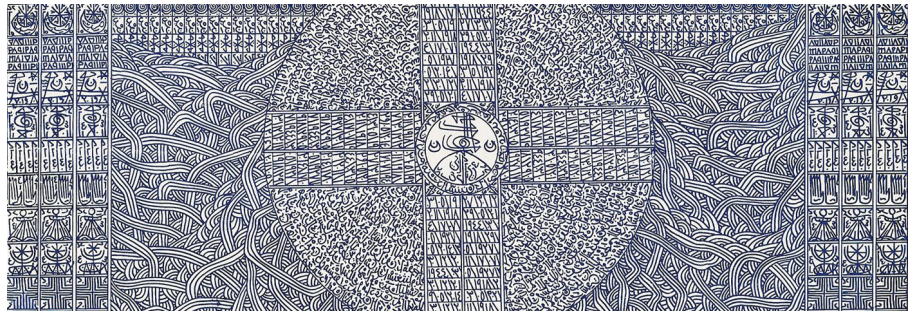Koraïchi, "Virtual Tour and Talk. Tears that Taste of the Sea."

Fig. 10. Rachid Koraïchi, The Garden of Africa - Le Jardin d'Afrique, 2020. Edition of 70, Detail of Etching, 108.5 x 76 cm. (RK5039) © the artist.

77
Koraïchi, *Tears that Taste of the Sea*, 6, 16–21.

78
Koraïchi, *Tears that Taste of the Sea*, 3.

79
Koraïchi, "Virtual Tour and Talk. Tears that Taste of the Sea."

80
Koraïchi, "Virtual Tour and Talk. Tears that Taste of the Sea."

81
Koraïchi, *Tears that Taste of the Sea*, 7–8, 24–7.

82
Koraïchi, *Tears that Taste of the Sea*, 5.

While making the works, the artist kept thinking about the oceans of tears caused by the loss of the refugees. These are metaphorically collected in large, inscribed lachrymatory vessels (from the Latin *lacrima*, "tear") on display in the exhibition.[77] Their creation was inspired by the tiny antique glass vials found in Roman and late Greek tombs, which Koraïchi first saw on display at the Bardo Museum in Tunis.[78] These fragile and intimate "tear gatherers" were believed to be receptacles to store the bitter tears of pain shed by a grieving relative. "I was inspired by people who had made such delicate, little glass containers, such as the ancient Phoenicians, also the Romans, the Greeks, the Iranians and later the Victorians in Britain, people in a multitude of places." For him, it spoke of "a history of love."[79] To reflect the scale of death in the Strait of Gibraltar and the millions of uncollected tears, Koraïchi made giant versions of the tiny vessels, each half a meter tall, with four handles that allude to the vessel being held by both a mother and a father.[80] Metaphorically speaking, one can "perform the ablution with one's tears," which flow so profusely that they can serve, as it were, as purifying streams of water.

The inscribed handkerchiefs, the 'Handkerchiefs of Hope,' their color black symbolizing mourning, are likewise seen as repositories of tearful memories and, in Koraïchi's words, "chronicles of intense emotions," conveying "signs of love and joy as well as tears of loss that are inextricably linked."[81] Each rectangle encapsulates a single intimate palimpsest of an untold story. Not only does the artwork possess talismanic powers – it also acts as a sensory vessel. The delicate material of the handkerchiefs, for instance, is soft to the touch; its use implicates the olfactory sense; its inscribed signs and glyphs appeal to the sense of sight.

The watchful and protective presence of the tall black openwork sculptural forms in Corten steel, named 'Les Vigilants' (The Watchers) references both calligraphy and bodies in motion, while also guarding the graves in the Garden of Africa in Tunisia.[82] Their forms evoking both sorrow and compassion, the presence of these guardians ensures peace and stability at the shared sacred site.

Koraïchi was awarded the 2011 Jameel Prize for contemporary Islamic art from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London for his series 'Maîtres Invisibles' (Invisible Masters), embroidered cloth banners on which he explored the lives and legacies of fourteen great Sufi shaykhs. His Garden of Africa in Zarzis has been shortlisted for the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 2022. Promoting religious tolerance through emotional empathy and compassion but also commemorating the dead, Koraïchi's project makes a real difference in the face of terrible suffering. Attracting visitors from far and wide since its opening in June 2021, the multi-faith memorial garden cemetery has been gaining more and more momentum.

Concluding thoughts

Spaces for the dead reflect the changing conditions of the living, as well as shifting meanings and discourses about life in our often dehumanizing and fragmented globalized world. For these spaces possess cultural and symbolic significance for the living, and represent microcosms of the society within which they are established. In her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag says, "Remembering is an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself. Memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead."[83] Koraïchi's intimate engagement with death, mourning and commemoration is expressed in his idyllic garden cemetery, imbued with deep symbolic meaning.

The artist's activism makes the lifeless bodies of refugees visible to a wider audience. The dehumanization of refugees, and thus their less lamentable and more disposable status, is evident in the EU's migration "necropolitics."[84] Acknowledging the grievability of refugee bodies, Koraïchi addresses what Mieke Bal calls "an aspect that hovers between ontology and epistemology"[85] – also in the context of the "collateral victims of globalization."[86] Bal asks:[87]

> Can we see faces, can we look someone in the face? The second aspect, coming to terms, harbors a socio-political agenda of migratory culture; it makes us aware how often we fail to do this: facing what people go through, their losses and sacrifices. This question is of a political and ethical order.

Koraïchi's private initiative to create the Garden of Africa is to be understood as an 'aesth-ethic' and political project that not only commemorates the deceased refugees, but also promotes global awareness of their deaths and makes them accessible to a wider public. In the future it will also contribute to the transnational structures required to manage data about missing refugees that can help the lives of thousands of families in the refugees' countries of origin who live without knowing the fate of their loved ones. In this way, Koraïchi's project speaks to the deeply embodied ways in which personal pain, emotional suffering, trauma of migration, sacrifice, loss and grief are articulated.

The Garden of Africa plays a fundamental role in the way aesthetic practice is constituted through migration. With this, it underscores the crucial connection between aesthetics, politics and human survival. Replete with symbolic markers of peace and mutual respect between peoples, the multi-faith garden cemetery also renders visible a culturally sensitive aesthetic that illuminates the peaceful coexistence of different communities in life as well as in death.

Addendum

Shortly after this article was written, tragedy struck when citizens from Zarzis vandalized the Garden of Africa and desecrated the dead, with the local police being complicit. How did this happen?

Migration not only through but increasingly *from* Tunisia is surging. Tens of thousands of Tunisian and foreign migrants have set off from Tunisia's shores to reach Europe. Today, more Tunisians are believed to sail to Europe than all other Sub-Saharan African and other refugees together.[88] Many do not survive. On September 21, 2022, a makeshift boat

[83] König, "The Multicultural Graveyard."

[84] Mareike Gebhardt, "To Make Live and Let Die: On Sovereignty and Vulnerability in the EU Migration Regime," in *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 23, no. 2 (2020): 120–37, here 135.

[85] Mieke Bal, "Heterochronotopia," *Thamyris/Intersecting* 19 (2008): 35–56, here 53, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401206068_003.

[86] Joly, "Tous Refugees?"

[87] Bal, "Heterochronotopia," 53.

[88] Anonymous, "How Tunisia's Kais Saied Uses Irregular Migrants for Political Gain," *The New Arab* (September 13, 2022). Available online: https://english.alaraby.co.uk/features/how-kais-saied-uses-irregular-migration-political-gain. Accessed on November 11, 2022.

89

Anonymous, "Communiqué Conjoint. Encore une tragédie au large de Zarzis: À la recherche de la vérité et de la justice," *Avocats Sans Frontières* (October 15, 2022). Available online: https://asf.be/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Communique-conjoint_FR.pdf. Accessed on November 11, 2022.

90

Koraïchi, telephone interview with author on November 10, 2022.

91

In a telephone interview on November 10, 2022, Koraïchi confirmed that only *three* bodies were exhumed and transferred. See also Anonymous, "How Tunisia's Kais Saied Uses Irregular Migrants." Some media reports however speak of four or even five bodies.

92

Tarek Amara, "Tunisian Fishermen Retrieve Bodies of Eight Migrants," *Reuters* (October 10, 2022). Available online: https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/tunisian-fishermen-retrieve-bodies-eight-migrants-2022-10-10/. Accessed on November 11, 2022.

93

Anonymous, "Tunisia: Zarzis Protesters Condemn Govt's Inaction in Locating Missing Migrants After Shipwreck," short documentary film (3:25 mins.), *Ruptly. Sociedad* (November 5, 2022). Available online: https://www.ruptly.tv/es/videos/20221104-059. Accessed on November 11, 2022.

94

Anonymous, "Tunisia: Civil Organisations Express Solidarity with Drowning Victims' Families, Residents Expel Government Officials," *Middle East Monitor* (October 15, 2022). Available online: https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20221015-tunisia-civil-organisations-express-solidarity-with-drowning-victims-families-residents-expel-government-officials/. Accessed on November 11, 2022.

95

Tarak Guizani, "In Tunisia, Tragic Migration Attempt Spurs Outrage and Mourning," *Deutsche Welle* (October 27, 2022). Available online: https://www.dw.com/en/in-tunisia-tragic-migration-attempt-spurs-outrage-and-mourning/a-63576089. Accessed on November 10, 2022.

96

Guizani, "In Tunisia, Tragic Migration Attempt Spurs Outrage."

97

Anonymous, "Anger and Grief in Tunisian Coastal Town after Failed Migration Attempt," *The Arab Weekly* (October 13, 2022). Available online: https://thearabweekly.com/anger-and-grief-tunisian-coastal-town-after-failed-migration-attempt. Accessed on November 11, 2022.

98

Robert M. Hayden and Timothy D. Walker, "Intersecting Religioscapes: A Comparative Approach to Trajectories of Change, Scale, and Competitive Sharing of Religious Spaces," *Journal of the American*

sank after departing Zarzis. The 18 migrants on board, all Tunisians from Zarzis, were trying to reach the Italian island of Lampedusa, less than 130 kilometers offshore.

With no news from them, two days after their departure the families of the migrants alerted the Tunisian, Italian and Maltese authorities, as well as civilian search and rescue boats. Faced with the lacklustre response of the national authorities to their requests to launch search operations, the local Fishermen's Association undertook four autonomous search operations at sea. The Tunisian League for Human Rights later castigated "the inability of the authorities to mobilize the necessary means to carry out search and rescue operations with speed."[89]

In early October the shipwreck was confirmed: the body of one of the women was found on a beach in Djerba. Photos of other bodies that had washed up on the Tunisian coast began to circulate on social media. The bodies of three young men washed up close to Zarzis harbour. According to Koraïchi, when the bodies of the drowned were recovered by National Guards, they were decomposed and covered with a dark substance (probably shipping oil), so the local authorities believed them to be Sub-Saharan refugees. After performing autopsies and issuing death certificates, the authorities mistakenly sent the bodies in waterproof body bags directly to the multi-faith Garden of Africa for burial (only the National Guard is allowed to touch the bodies), instead of conducting genetic tests at the Gabès hospital.[90] When local residents learned of these burials, they called for an investigation to determine if their relatives were buried in the Garden of Africa. During the exhumation of the three decomposed bodies, one mother recognized the shorts of her son. The bodies were genetically analyzed, the DNA samples matched, and the three bodies[91] were transferred to another cemetery as designated by the families.

Subsequently the bodies of eight further Tunisian migrants were recovered from the sea.[92] But the families of the other missing Tunisian migrants, in the belief that their relatives might be buried in the Garden of Africa, demanded further investigation. When this was not immediately undertaken, thousands of outraged people protested in Zarzis.[93] In many neighborhoods, tires were set on fire and streets were blocked to demand that authorities fulfill their "duties to their citizens"[94] and intensify the search for the missing Tunisian migrants. Many thought the way the corpses of the Tunisian nationals were treated was "dishonorable."[95] They did not want their relatives to be buried "like strangers."[96] "They buried our sons in a cemetery for foreigners, they should be ashamed of themselves," said a rights activist.[97] A key marker of majoritarian political identity is thus that of "Tunisian citizen," demarcating the local population from the "strangers," the "foreign refugees/migrants."[98] In this way, non-Tunisian refugees/migrants are degraded to "non-persons" (a term coined by Alessandro Dal Lago in reference to Hannah Arendt), and for a local citizen to be buried next to such a non-person is anathema.[99]

Yielding to "national outrage," the local prosecutor's office ordered the temporary shutdown of the cemetery while DNA-testing was done on all the remains that were recently buried to confirm identities.[100] Twenty-eight graves were selected for the procedure. After DNA test results came back negative, scores of people, including the families of the missing Tunisian migrants, climbed over the cemetery wall and began digging up the graves themselves, allegedly to identify

bodies, according to videos shared on social media.[101] In the presence of local police, about forty graves were opened, the dead desecrated, gravestones vandalized and smashed, graffiti sprayed on the graves, the newly planted trees, plants and seedlings trampled and torn out.[102] This violation of graves and subversion of the universal notion of peace in death and respect for the dead is profoundly disturbing.

Despite the fact that the Garden of Africa is probably the most beautiful cemetery in Tunisia, it is considered the cemetery of "strangers," migrants and asylum seekers (the number of which in Tunisia, with its nearly twelve million inhabitants, is probably well over one million).[103] Those who arrive alive in Tunisia are subjected to "brutal racism."[104] The darker the skin color, the lower the status of marginalized refugees[105] and the more blatant the racism.[106]

It has to be remembered that the multi-faith garden cemetery, privately owned by Koraïchi, was trespassed by both locals and police. That the shared sacred site has been created by a non-Tunisian of international repute has been a thorn in the side for many Zarzis residents, as they do not want a "stranger" interfering in their affairs. The French-Algerian artist has repeatedly stated that as a non-Tunisian launching a humanitarian project in Tunisia, he is antagonized by the local population. He is subjected to slander and now even receives death threats.[107] This antagonistic attitude coheres with contemporary attitudes towards human rights, which increasingly assume that rights derive in part from group membership,[108] in this case Tunisian citizenship. Although the religious site is located outside the town and next to a refugee shelter, it has a high profile both nationally and internationally.[109] Koraïchi philosophically says he will wait for things to settle down before restoring the damaged graves in the sacred site and replanting the garden. Then the gates of the site, which has symbolic significance far beyond Tunisia's borders, will open again. It is hoped that Koraïchi's important humanitarian initiative will serve as a shining example to be emulated in many other countries.

Academy of Religion (May 2013): 399-426, here 421, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lft009.

99
Alessandro Dal Lago, *Non-persone. L'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999); translated as *Non-Persons: The Exclusion of Migrants in a Global Society* (Milan: Ipoc Press, 2009).

100
Guizani, "In Tunisia, Tragic Migration Attempt Spurs Outrage."

101
Anonymous, "Tunisia: Families of Missing from Zarzis Tragedy Desperately Open 'Suspicious Graves' to Search for Loved Ones," short documentary film (2:56 mins.), *Ruptly. Accidentes y desastres* (November 8, 2022). Available online: https://www.ruptly.tv/es/videos/20221107-049-tunisia-families-of-missing-from-zarzis-tragedy-desperately-open-suspicious-graves-to-search-for-loved-ones-distressing-content-. Accessed on November 11, 2022.

102
Koraïchi, telephone interview with author on November 10, 2022.

103
Anonymous, "How Tunisia's Kais Saied Uses Irregular Migrants."

104
Anonymous, "Tunisia and Libya: UN Experts Condemn Collective Expulsion and Deplorable Living Conditions of Migrants," *United Nations Press Release* (10 November 10, 2021). Available online: https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/11/tunisia-and-libya-un-experts-condemn-collective-expulsion-and-deplorable. Accessed on November 11, 2022.

105
Kristeva, *Powers of Horror.*

106
Abdirahim Saeed, "Tunisia Racism: 'I Lost the Will to Leave my Home,'" *BBC News Arabic* (August 28, 2022). Available online: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-62376905. Accessed on November 11, 2022.

107
Koraïchi, telephone interview with author on November 10, 2022.

108
Hayden and Walker, "Intersecting Religioscapes," 400. See also, Molly Land, Kathryn Libal, and Jillian Chambers, "Introduction. The Human Rights of Non-citizens," in *Beyond Borders: The Human Rights of Noncitizens at Home and Abroad*, eds. Molly Land, Kathryn Libal, and Jillian Chambers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 1-19, here 1-2.

109
Cf. Hayden and Walker, "Intersecting Religioscapes," 421.

Heterography 2:

Writing in Three Dimensions: Heterographies of Shared Sacred Sites

Dionigi Albera, Manoël Pénicaud

Dionigi Albera
CNRS, Idemec, Aix-Marseille University
dionigi.albera@univ-amu.fr

Manoël Pénicaud
CNRS, Idemec, Aix-Marseille University
manoelpenicaud@gmail.com

In 2007, the city of Marseille was preparing an application to become the European Capital of Culture. The person in charge of this endeavour invited one of us to collaborate on the drafting of the dossier to be submitted for evaluation. The latter presented a project for an exhibition on the sharing of holy places in the Mediterranean region, a theme he had been studying for several years. This exhibition project was included in the city's application, which was finally selected in 2008 by a European jury. In the following years, preparatory work was carried out to organise this exhibition, but in the end (due to budgetary arbitrations linked to the implementation of the initiative), this project was abandoned and did not feature among the official events of *Marseille-Provence 2013, European Capital of Culture*. However, around the same time, the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations (Mucem) showed an interest in the subject. This new museum was then in an advanced phase of prefiguration work and was to be inaugurated the same year, 2013, in Marseille. For this kind of "museum of society" (*musée de société*),[1] where anthropology plays a leading role, in line with the *Musée national des arts et traditions populaires* (MNATP) in Paris,[2] we worked from 2012 onwards to conceive and organise a temporary exhibition. It took three years of intensive work with the museum's teams before the *Lieux saints partagés* exhibition was inaugurated in April 2015[3] (Fig. 1 and 2).

Fig. 1. Main visual of the temporary exhibition *Lieux saints partagés* (*Shared Sacred Sites*) at the Mucem, Marseille, 2015.
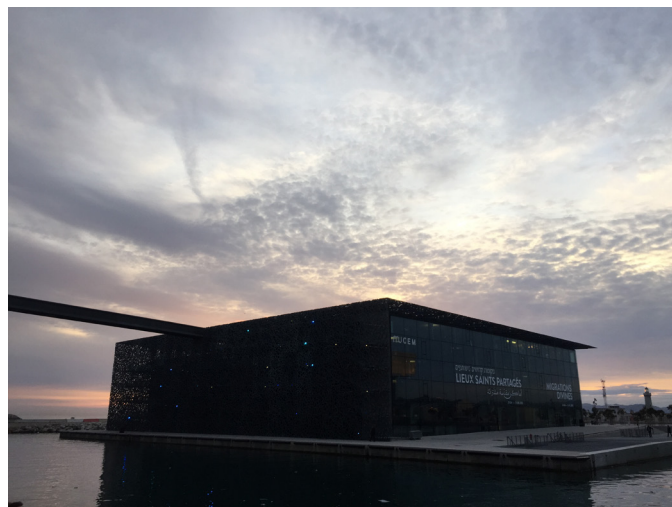
Fig. 2. The Mucem in Marseille, 2015. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

[1]
The term "musée de société" is typical of the transformation of French museology during the last thirty years, without a clear equivalent in the English-speaking world. We use here the expression "museum of society" as a provisional translation. For further discussion, see below.

[2]
From the 2000s onwards, the MNATP in Paris underwent a long and profound reconfiguration that culminated in the creation of the Mucem in Marseille in 2013. See Martine Segalen, *Vie d'un musée. 1937–2005* (Paris: Stock, 2005) and *Métamorphoses des musées de société* edited by Denis Chevallier (Paris: La documentation française, 2013).

[3]
Between 2012 and 2015, Manoël Pénicaud was a postdoctoral researcher (Mucem-LabexMed) whose mission consisted in deepening the study of shared sanctuaries and carrying out the associated curatorship of the exhibition of which Dionigi Albera was the general curator. Isabelle Marquette, curator at the Mucem, acted as internal curator.

The exhibition was quite successful, attracting over 120,000 visitors in four months. Moreover, although no touring exhibition had been planned, several museums subsequently expressed interest in the theme. Between 2016 and 2021, revisited versions of the exhibition were presented in museums and/or art institutions elsewhere in France and in several other countries (Tunisia, Greece, Morocco, United States and Turkey).[4] The first adaptation was displayed at the Bardo Museum in Tunis (19 November 2016–12 February 2017), for the official reopening of this museum, hit hard by the attack on 18 March 2015 for which ISIS claimed responsibility (Fig. 3 and 4).

Fig. 4. Bardo Museum, Tunis, 2016. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

Subsequently, another version was shown simultaneously in three institutions in Thessaloniki (Greece): the Museum of Photography, the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, and Yeni Cami (23 September 2016–17 February 2017)[5] (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Κοινοί Ιεροί Τόποι, National Museum of Photography, Thessaloniki, 2017. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.
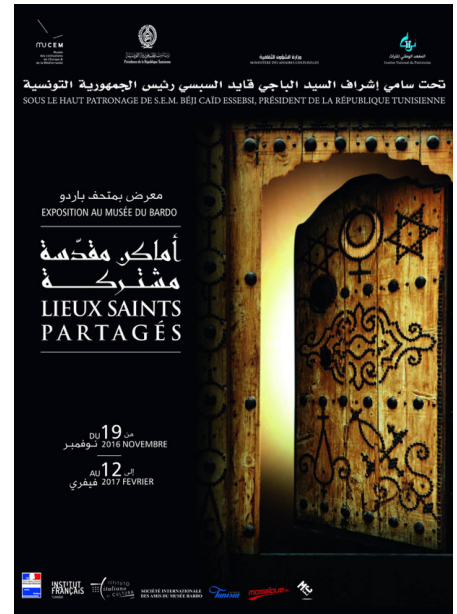
Fig. 3. Main visual of *Lieux saints partagés*, Bardo Museum, Tunis, 2016.

4
The title of the English versions was *Shared Sacred Sites*.

5
We would like to highlight the valuable contribution of our colleague Karen Barkey, with whom we shared the curatorship with other Greek colleagues. See *Shared Sacred Sites in the Balkans and the Mediterranean* edited by Dionigi Albera, Karen Barkey, Stergios Karavatos, Thouli Misirloglou, Dimitri Papadopoulos and Manoël Pénicaud (Thessaloniki: Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, 2018).

In parallel, the exhibition was also presented—in other forms—at the *Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration* in Paris (24 October 2017–21 January 2018)[6] (Fig. 6 and 7), as well as at *Dar El Bacha-Musée des Confluences* in Marrakech (18 December 2017–19 March 2018) (Fig. 8 and 9).

Fig. 6. Main visual of *Lieux saints partagés*, Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris, 2017.

Fig. 7. Scenography, *Lieux saints partagés*, Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration, Paris, 2017. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

Fig. 8. Main visual of *Lieux saints partagés*, Dar El Bacha-Musée des Confluences, Marrakesh , 2017-2018.

Fig. 9. Showcase, *Lieux saints partagés*, Marrakesh, 2017-18. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

We then developed a new version presented simultaneously in three venues in Manhattan: the New York Public Library, the City University of New York (James Gallery) and the Morgan Library and Museum (27 March–30 June 2018)[7] (Fig. 10 and 11).

[7] We again shared the curatorship with Karen Barkey, at that time a professor of sociology at Columbia University, without whom this project would never have been possible. See *Shared Sacred Sites* edited by Dionigi Albera, Karen Barkey and Manoël Pénicaud (New York: New York Public Library, City University of New York and Morgan Library & Museum, 2018).

Fig. 10. Main visual of *Shared Sacred Sites*, The New York Public Library, The City University of New York, The Morgan Library and Museum, New York, 2018.

Fig. 11. Scenography, *Shared Sacred Sites*, NYPL, New York, 2018. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

The exhibition has subsequently been shown at *Depo* in Istanbul (20 April–28 July 2019) (Fig. 12) and at the CerModern museum in Ankara (1 July–30 September 2021) (Fig. 13). Other projects are being developed in other institutions,[8] while some projects have been abandoned along the way, partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

[8] A less complex version was also designed in 2018–2019 for the Chapel of Notre-Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, a site built by Le Corbusier and classified by Unesco. Photographic versions were also presented at the *Rencontres Orient-Occident* in Switzerland (2018), at the *Maison Inter-universtaire des Sciences de l'Homme – Alsace* (MISHA) in Strasbourg (2019), at the *Institut Français* in Marrakesh (2022), at the *École Française de Rome* (2022–2023), etc.

Fig. 12. Exhibition, *Paylaşılan Kutsal Mekânlar*, Depo, Istanbul, 2019. Photograph © Serra Akcan.

Fig. 13. "Mavi Kalp / Cœur bleu", by Sarkis, *Paylaşılan Kutsal Mekânlar*, CerModern, Ankara, 2021. Photograph © Sébastien de Courtois.

However, at this point we were not complete neophytes, since we had been previously involved, in different ways, in the planning of exhibitions: *Dal monte al piano* (1991) and *Montagna in movimento* (2007) for Dionigi Albera; *Voyages Confrériques au Maroc* (2004), *La Méditerranée des Sept Dormants* (2011) and *Au bazar du genre. Féminin/Masculin* (2014) for Manoël Pénicaud.

10

We refer here to this notion as it has been developed since 2016 in several research seminars at the Idemec (CNRS-Aix-Marseille Univ).

Two types of innovation should be highlighted in this unconventional itinerancy. The first is that we have accentuated the project's modularity to adapt it to the country and the collections of the host museum, also with the aim of limiting the costs of transportation and insurance. This allowed extending the project to multiple sites. For example, by the end of 2018 it had been presented simultaneously in three countries. Moreover, this modularity made it possible to deploy the exhibition in three locations in the same city (as we did in Thessaloniki and New York).

The second type of innovation is that each stage involves a rewriting. The aim is also to adhere as much as possible to the specificities of the host institutions, which sometimes have different thematic orientations. For example, we have worked with museums that tend to focus on art from different periods (classical, medieval, contemporary) or on history or photography. We also took into account the geographical and cultural context of the region in which these institutions operate. In the Tunisian and Moroccan versions, for example, we emphasised the North African dimension of the exhibition, whereas in the Thessaloniki version, we highlighted the Balkan situation, and in Istanbul and Ankara we focused particularly on the Anatolian contexts. In other words, at each step, a new exhibition was presented, with a mix of common elements and new items.

Step by step, we have been immersed in (and sometimes overwhelmed by) a process that has forced us to move away from the classic communication tools of our anthropological discipline. While, in many cases, human and social science studies do not go beyond the borders of the academic world, our work on shared sanctuaries was different. Transforming it into a public exhibition was, in itself, a translation into a language other than that of scientific publications. Since we were neither museologists nor art historians, the two paths of specialisation in this area, we became exhibition curators in a rather empirical way.[9] We therefore had to cope with several challenges. Indeed, researcher-curators must reinvent their way of working, to address a large number of people. Moreover, they are called upon to take a stand, often on sensitive social issues.

We would like to outline here a reflection on this dual experience of acting as both anthropologists and exhibition curators. We will explore the making of this multifaceted project. How, as a researcher-curator, does one write an exhibition on religious themes? What are the challenges and difficulties? How does one adapt to different configurations, particularly in terms of collections, cultural contexts, and designing spaces? Based on concrete examples, this feedback offers a modest contribution to the development of a broader theoretical reflection on the writing of an exhibition.

1. Heterography and Expography

To begin with, the notion of heterography[10] can be of some help, providing a tool to elucidate this experience. From this point of view, heterography can be conceived as a set of "other writings," that is, a range of devices that differ from textual writing, and which in turn are able to convey the knowledge derived from ethnographic research. This is certainly a minor genre, but it has accompanied almost the entire history of anthropology, such that there is nothing revolutionary about it.

While the dominant style, in terms of academic prestige and power, has undoubtedly coincided with articles published in peer-reviewed

journals, and with monographs (more or less linked to the format of PhD dissertations), other forms of expression have been circulating for a long time as complementary media, such as documentary films, photography or, of interest in our case, exhibitions. Someone once remarked that the main difference between anthropology and sociology was that the former had museums, while the latter did not. This statement is probably excessive, but not without meaning.

One merit of the notion of heterography is undoubtedly that it links a vast number of alternative expressions under the same banner. All the more so since the flag chosen, that of writing, is certainly not trivial. This increases the weight and legitimacy of these expressions, which thus aspire to become forms of ethnography in their own right. We might add that this federating movement now resonates with our post-postmodern zeitgeist, characterised by a profusion of alternative experiments in terms of scientific expression, whether it be collaborations between researchers and artists, comic strips, or languages that are in vogue in the field of digital humanities, such as those used in websites, web-documentaries, or GIS storymaps.

The exhibition finds its particular place within the variegated and magmatic whole of heterography. But it should be immediately added that this place is rather broad and complex because the exhibition does not correspond to a single language. It is rather the art of assembling several languages. In this respect, an important contribution comes from the museologist André Desvallées, who in 1993 proposed the notion of "expography" to mean the writing of exhibitions[11]. For him, this neologism covers "the art of exhibiting," hence translating theoretical content by situating it in space.[12]

Writing our exhibition was undeniably influenced by the French museological tradition. From this point of view, *Lieux saints partagés* is what is defined in France as an "exhibition of society" (*exposition de société*), a category intended to "show in order to make us understand," according to the sociologist and specialist in museology Jean Davallon,[13] who distinguishes these exhibitions from so-called "art exhibitions."[14] Temporary or permanent, "exhibitions of society" are displayed in museums also known as "museums of society" (*musées de société*) in which "the criteria for choosing objects have shifted. It is no longer art or history that are put forward and that underlie the scientific approach, but the relationship of a community to artefacts. In 'museums of society', the principle of total understanding of the social fact prevails, in the sense of bringing to light all the ins and outs of a social fact. . . ."[15]

Both "museums of society" and "exhibitions of society" are the French expression of a wider process of transformation experienced by several anthropological museums around the world.[16] A number of these institutions have been more and more open to contemporary issues linked to social, cultural or environmental problems, such that they take on a civic and social function. From this point of view, an important role in the genealogy of contemporary French museology can be attributed to the ancestor of the Mucem, the *Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires* (MNATP), founded in 1937 in Paris by Georges-Henri Rivière.[17] Strongly influenced by ethnography and anthropology, this leading figure revolutionised the field of museums in France by giving full importance to material culture as direct testimony of contemporary social life.[18]

One of the particularities of the MNATP, was the practice of surveys,

11

André Desvallées invented this notion, in addition to that of "museography," as part of the thesaurus of museology that took shape in 1993 within the *International Council of Museums* (ICOM) and the *International Committee for Museology* (ICOFOM). See *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de muséologie* edited by André Desvallées and François Mairesse (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011).

12

Ibid., 599.

13

Jean Davallon, "L'écriture de l'exposition : expographie, muséographie, scénographie," *Culture & Musées. La (r)évolution des musées d'art*, 16, 2010, 229. Even in this case, there is no precise equivalent of "exposition de société" in the Anglophone museology tradition. We propose the expression "exhibition of society" as a provisional translation.

14

This categorisation is still relevant today, even if it could be slightly nuanced, since in recent years there have been partial hybridisations between these two forms.

15

Denis Chevallier, "Introduction. Les musées de société : la grande mue du XXIe siècle," *op. cit.*, 15 : ". . . les critères de choix des objets se sont déplacés. Ce n'est plus l'art ou l'histoire qui sont mis en avant et qui sous-tendent la démarche scientifique, mais le rapport d'une communauté aux artefacts. Dans le musée de société prévaut un principe de compréhension totale du fait social, au sens de la mise au jour de l'ensemble des tenants et aboutissants d'un fait de société. . . ."

16

For a recent discussion of the role of these kinds of museums in France, which also examined them from an international perspective, see the special issue "Les musées de société aujourd'hui : Héritage et mutations," *Culture & Musées. Muséologie et recherches sur la culture*, 39, 2022.

17

François Mairesse, "Un demi-siècle d'expographie," *Culture & Musées*, 16, 2010, 219–229; Martine Segalen, *Vie d'un musée. 1937–2005, op. cit.*; see also the temporary exhibition *Georges Henri Rivière. Voir, c'est comprendre* au Mucem, Marseille (14 November 2018–4 March 2019) and the exhibition catalogue *Georges Henri Rivière. Voir, c'est comprendre* edited by Germain Viatte and Marie-Charlotte Calafat (Paris: Mucem/RmnGP, 2018).

18

Starting in the early 2000s, our institution (Idemec, CNRS, Aix Marseille University) was a direct partner of the MNATP, and then of the Mucem that succeeded it. We have therefore drawn on this museology current steeped in anthropology.

19

This practice of these "enquêtes-collectes" was inaugurated by Georges-Henri Rivière. See Germain Viatte G. and Marie-Charlotte Calafat, *op. cit.*; *Collectes sensorielles : Recherche-Musée-Art* edited by Véronique Dassié, Aude Fanlo, Marie-Luce Gélard, Cyril Isnart and Florent Molle (Paris: Pétra, 2021).

Fig. 15. *Muslims at the St. George Monastery*, Manoël Pénicaud, Mucem-Idemec, 2015, 4 min 48 : https://youtu.be/5k-2_-niHdI.

defined as "enquêtes-collectes": ethnologists carried out short fieldwork studies and brought back objects linked to a specific social practice.[19] This practice has been inherited by the Mucem. Therefore, in the years before our exhibition, we had the possibility to travel to Morocco, Turkey, Tunisia, Israel-Palestine, Italy and the Republic of North Macedonia, bringing back ethnographic materiality: artefacts, ex-voto, candles, rosaries, etc. (Fig. 14). We also collected sound and visual elements to use them in space-designing processes and/or ethnographic films displayed for visitors (Fig. 15).

Fig. 14. Display case with popular devotional objects, *Lieux saints partagés*, Mucem, 2015. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

As in all "exhibitions of society," our objective was to transmit knowledge to the public. The decisive point is that, at the heart of the project, there is a guiding idea that is the result of academic research. Beyond that, several layers of writing are necessary to create the three-dimensional exhibition.

This writing process can be divided into several distinct phases. The exhibition project is written down on paper, defining the main ideas and an initial narrative structure. Next, an initial list of works and objects is drawn up to materialise these guiding ideas. This stage requires in-depth research in public or private collections, requests for loans with no guarantee of results, and the first evaluation of the insurance and transport costs. Thus, the first lists of works are often unrealistically optimist. Only the financial assessment and the availability of the items allow the project to coalesce in a more concrete (and generally more modest) way.

In French national museums such as the Mucem, the design phase of an exhibition is strictly standardised: the initial sketch (the project's intention) is followed by the preliminary design ("avant-projet sommaire," APS), then the final design ("avant-projet définitif," APD). The third phase concerns mainly the Production Department and tends to formalise the work contracts for constructing the exhibition. Behind this technical jargon, it should be noted that each phase involves more rewriting, the direct involvement of several museum departments, and a substantial amount of work. Spatial transcription begins at the sketch stage but is formalised at the APS and especially the APD stage, with the involvement of a professional scenographer recruited by tendering. As we will see in

greater detail below, this last role is essential in thinking about the layout of the project, according to a coherent itinerary—and, above all, one that can be taken by as many people as possible.

As we have seen, an "exhibition of society" is characterised by the interlocking of different formats and registers of writing: texts, images, sounds, artworks, several types of objects in three dimensions, etc. From this perspective, the articulation between textual writings and non-textual forms can be conceived in a complementary manner. Researchers, who are professional practitioners of academic writing, often find it difficult to detach themselves from it in favour of other formats. In general, they tend to explain everything through a text. Yet the exhibition medium is not a scientific article. Too many written texts (room texts, section texts, labels) can paradoxically hinder the understanding by the public.

In an exhibition, the texts are absolutely not the only vehicles of meaning. Recent studies have shown that many visitors do not read the texts very carefully, or at least not in their entirety.[20] Moreover, many visitors move around at will, without necessarily following the direction of the visit, and read the texts on the fly, often in a fragmentary manner. Therefore, the curator must also suggest the main ideas in other ways, especially through the works and objects presented.

That said, texts are certainly valuable and should certainly not disappear, as is the case in some contemporary art exhibitions. They are crucial to convey key ideas to the public, for example in the introduction to the exhibition, where they offer an initial tool for interpretation.[21] As far as texts are concerned, we have not hesitated to repeat certain ideas, adopting a spatially de-linearised writing style that is likely to reach (at least ideally) the greatest number of people.

The curator must then coordinate several forms of expression, rearranging formally heterogeneous elements: three-dimensional works and objects, still and moving images, projections, sound installations, etc. In terms of writing, this composite approach requires an adjusted syntax and grammar (Fig. 16). One should think not only through ideas and concepts, but also in terms of space and materiality. Ideally, every key idea should be spatially embodied, through a work, a document, an object, an image or a sound. To give an account of interreligious sharing, we had to learn to write, so to speak, in three dimensions.

20
See Daniel Jacobi, *Les Musées sont-ils condamnés à séduire? et autres écrits muséologiques* (Paris: MkF Editions, 2017).

21
See Daniel Jacobi, *Textexpo. Produire, éditer et afficher des textes d'exposition* (Dijon: OCIM, 2016), 7.

Fig. 16. Virtual visit of *Lieux saints partagés* at the Mucem, Manoël Pénicaud, 2015, 3 min 29 : https://youtu.be/-_8cT4ksArw ; the soundtrack is a montage of elements collected around the Mediterranean.

22
We should at least mention the classic work on this subject: *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* edited by James Clifford and Georges E. Marcus (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1986).

23
Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

24
Jonathan Gottschall, *The Story Paradox: How Our Love for Storytelling Build Societies and Tears Them Down* (New York: Basic Books, 2021).

2. Storytelling, Emotion and Interactivity

Heterography departs from the "orthography" of standard scientific production not only in the medium chosen, but also because it gives more space to narrative and emotional expression. Of course, these dimensions are not absent in the standard forms of ethnography. A few decades ago, post-modern scholars took great pleasure in unmasking the rhetorical devices scattered through the classics of anthropology.[22] Moreover, Clifford Geertz has convincingly argued that the anthropologist can be conceived as an author.[23] The control mechanisms put in place to monitor scientific production (academic reputation, peer reviews) can only partially check this trend. That said, the cursor shifts, more or less significantly, with heterographic productions (and especially with the subgenre of exhibitions), which move further away from the univocal precision of mathematical equations and get a little closer to poetic expression. In all these cases, however, an anchoring in facts and a pact of scientific truth are safeguarded. In other words, one does not enter the realm of fiction.

An exhibition cannot simply consist of the dissemination of scientific knowledge. To have minimum effectiveness, it must be organised as a narrative. In other words, we have never tried to make the exhibition a kind of simplified summary of an academic presentation, such as can be done in teaching, in a seminar, or in a Power Point presentation. We took a certain amount of data stemming from our research and faithfully reproduced it, while also weaving a story, whose purpose was above all a civic one.

The exhibition medium offers the possibility of reaching a wider audience, comprising people of different conditions and backgrounds, not to mention their religious or other beliefs. One of our aims was to try to challenge the public's common sense, by inviting them to understand the complexity of religious configurations, without giving in to the shortcuts and caricatures that are very present in mass media and social networks. We have constantly tried to talk about interreligious interactions by stressing nuances and applying contextualisation. With this approach, we adopted as much as possible a human-sized, embodied and sensitive approach.

Our exhibition was conceived in a particularly deleterious social and political climate, marked by terrorist attacks, an accentuation of identity-based tensions, and the rise of populist and extreme right-wing movements that capitalised on people's fears. The main incarnation of a threatening otherness had a religious profile, and above all the face of Islam. It should be remembered that the first edition of the exhibition took place in the year of the so-called "Charlie Hebdo" and "Hyper Casher" attacks in Paris, so the management of the Mucem expressed some apprehension about public reaction to our subject, also fearing security risks. However, no incidents occurred.

Nowadays countless stories have a great impact on millions and millions of people.[24] Most of them focus on processes of victimisation and on the projective identification of evil in threatening adversaries. Opposing these stories is far from easy. Such simplifications have undeniable narrative force and appeal, as many recent political events have extensively shown. Challenging these shortcuts with in-depth discussions that emphasise the complexity of the real world is certainly meritorious, but may prove inconclusive. Even patently absurd stories, like those popularised by QAnon and flat-earthism, often show a surprising degree of resistance to rational argument, and even to hard facts. Instead, we have tried

to show this complexity by embodying it, so to speak, in the exhibition, and by making the public discover it in a concrete way. The story we have tried to tell is therefore an implicit plea for peaceful, mutual knowledge and for reciprocal acceptance beyond religious borders.

Of course, we did not propose an irenic image of religions. We certainly did not forget the antagonisms and conflicts. But the materials we had at our disposal allowed us to construct an alternative story, which raised doubts and encouraged reflection. For example, one section showed the strong presence of the Marian cult in Islam, and its theological and devotional significance, which went against the preconceived ideas of many visitors. Above all, testimony concerning interreligious interactions inside the sanctuaries revealed behaviours that the public did not suspect in the least. They implied that repulsion of the other is not inevitable and suggested that when the conditions are right, people of different religions are able to pray side by side at the same sacred places. This idea was not explicitly expressed in the texts, but was allowed to arise from a visitor's experience. It was an impression of this kind that we hoped visitors could construct by themselves to some degree, moving through the contents we had organised in the space.

This approach was based on the deployment of a de-linearised narrative. Certainly, we suggested a main itinerary, but visitors could also move around as they wished in a space organised into different stations. Conceived as a metaphorical pilgrimage, this exhibition invited each visitor to make his or her own synthesis of the complex phenomenon of shared shrines, in the hope that he or she would emerge partially "transformed," as in a real pilgrimage seen as a rite of passage. The emphasis was on the human dimension underlying the various religious manifestations: on an existential vulnerability common both to the faithful encountered in the exhibition's various sections through the lens of an array of items, and to the visitors themselves. It was a way to foster, in the latter, something akin to a sentiment of existential *communitas*, a notion that Victor Turner associated, in several seminal works, with the personal feelings that social actors experience during the ritual process, and specifically during pilgrimage.[25]

One of the aims of *Shared Sacred Sites* was therefore to immerse visitors by metaphorically making them take up the pilgrim's staff to discover shared sanctuaries. At the entrance to the exhibition, at the Mucem and in subsequent versions, a large-scale projector showed human-sized silhouettes of pilgrims in shadow form, with which the shadows of the visitors merged. This visual installation was coupled with a sonic creation composed of sounds collected throughout the Mediterranean region, interweaving songs, prayers, voices, bells, muezzin, different languages, etc. At the exit, the public found this set of silhouettes at dusk, completing the loop of the visit (Fig. 17).

The success of this kind of exhibition depends on the subtle relationship between erudition, aesthetics and emotion. Such tension is central to this type of heterography, insofar as the scientific and didactic approach must be counterbalanced by a more emotional, sensitive, even poetic dimension. The emotion produces a driving force in the experience of the exhibition, and also in the understanding of the social facts presented.

A series of photographs and films resulting from our research was displayed throughout the exhibition, allowing visitors to experience an immersion in a number of ethnographic contexts. In the same way, devotional objects acquired during our investigations materialised the demands

25
Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1969); "Pilgrimages as Social Processes," in V. Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1974), 166–230; Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

Fig. 17. *The Pilgrims*, video-installation, Mucem, 2015, 3 min 20. Graphic design by Gilda Sergé, L'œil Graphique, Marseille. Sound creation realised in the framework of an educational partnership with the SATIS Department (Sciences Arts et Technologies de l'image et du Son) and the laboratory ASTRAM (Arts Sciences Technologies pour la Recherche Audiovisuelle Multimédia), Aix-Marseille University. https://youtu.be/LcNzqPvGeIM.

and expectations of the faithful.

In such an attempt to "take the public on a journey" *in situ*—and to give them the opportunity to see, touch and feel—the challenge that remains, obviously, is to find the best balance between emission (by the curator) and reception (by the public). To take these issues into account, we can capitalise on the work of Roland Barthes who theorised the effect of an image on the receiver, attributing an important role to the reactions and emotions this image can elicit. In particular, he developed two concepts that can be useful here.

The first concept is *studium*, which designates the interest we have in an image, based on its informative and descriptive dimension. This notion "doesn't mean, at least not immediately, 'study' but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity. It is by *studium* that I am interested in so many photographs, whether I receive them as political testimony or enjoy them as good historical scenes: for it is culturally (this connotation is present in *studium*) that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions."[26] The second concept is *punctum*, which punctuates or breaks *studium*: "It is not I who seek it out . . . it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. . . . for punctum is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)."[27]

We argue that both dimensions singled out by Barthes also operate in an exhibition, not only through the reception of a photograph, but also through that of a film, a painting or an object. A successful visiting experience implies good complementarity between these two phenomena. An attitude based on *studium* is necessary to acquire a good deal of relevant information concerning the theme. The strong involvement of *punctum* is certainly rarer and represents the climax of the visitor's aesthetic and emotional experience. The problem is that it is uncontrollable from the curatorial point of view, as there is no absolute guarantee of the receivers'

26
Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 191), 26.

27
Ibid., 26-27.

Fig. 19. Interview with Paolo Dall'Oglio, Manoël Pénicaud, Mucem-Idemec, 2015, 3 min 28 : https://youtu.be/oKccDUeQ_F0.

Fig. 18. Excerpt from the guestbook, *Lieux saints partagés*, Mucem, Marseille, 2015.

reaction. Moreover, it is not an isolated work that necessarily produces this inner emotion, as this can also be generated by a set of elements that resonate with each other.

As far as possible, we sought to embody the content, flesh it out and give it a lived dimension, calibrating what we can reasonably expect to produce the effects of *studium* or *punctum*. This approach has probably hit the mark in several cases, as the guest books in the Mucem exhibition attest (Fig. 18). Many testimonials openly bear witness to a strong emotional reaction: visitors were touched, beyond our expectations, for example by the testimony of the Jesuit priest, Paolo Dall'Oglio, presumably executed by ISIS during the war in Syria (Fig. 19).

Fig.20. Visitors Messages, *Lieux saints partagés*, MNHI, Paris, 2017. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

Fig. 21. Thierry Fournier, Ecotone, video installation, *Shared Sacred Sites*, Thessaloniki, Istanbul, Ankara, 2017- 2021. Created in 2015, this artwork evokes the digital desires that often overlap with the votive expectations of pilgrims: "A landscape is generated live by messages sent on twitter, read by synthesized voices and which all have in common to express desires: I would like so much, I dream of, my dearest wish... A camera moves in slow motion and infinity in this artificial paradise." https://vimeo.com/122249270.

This led us to imagine other devices to record the public's reactions, such as a "wall of wishes" in Paris, inspired by those found in certain shrines, such as the House of Mary in Ephesus in Turkey (Fig. 20). More generally, interactivity is important in the visiting experience. One example is the work entitled "Ecotone", created by the French artist Thierry Fournier, which materialises a virtual landscape based on desires expressed in real time on the social network Twitter (Fig. 21).

28
Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder." In *Exhibiting Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Levine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press 1991), 42–56.

To describe our curatorial approach, two concepts can be referenced, *resonance* and *wonder*, which Stephen Greenblatt has put forward to describe the exhibition of artworks. He gives a clear and concise definition of both: "By *resonance* I mean the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand. By *wonder* I mean the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention."[28]

In our exhibition, a dimension of resonance was present in certain modest objects, such as ex-votos, which have the power to evoke the fragility of human live, with a constant interweaving of needs, requests and existential predicaments. Take, for example, an installation that reconstituted a fragment of the wall of wishes of the House of Mary in Ephesus, using votive materials collected onsite (Fig. 22), or the presentation of a series of ephemeral structures that expressed wishes to have a child, get married, or overcome illness (Fig. 23).

Fig. 23. Ephemeral wishes performed by Muslims, *Lieux saints partagés*, Mucem, 2015. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

Fig. 22. A Muslim visitor intrigued by a Muslim rosary in the Wishing Wall, *Lieux saints partagés*, Bardo Museum, 2016. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

All these small objects embodied a series of existential experiences, clearly originating in distant spaces and different from the point of view of the cultural means of expression, but nevertheless representing the struggle with a set of concerns familiar to the viewer.

Conversely, the power to generate wonder in visitors was conveyed by certain items singled out by their uniqueness. Here we can mention an autograph by Denis Diderot, which mentions the double cult (Christian and Muslim) present on the island of Lampedusa in modern times (Fig. 24), as well as some splendid Muslim miniatures (Fig. 25) and rare Christian incunabula, such as the stunning panoramic view from Damascus to Alexandria, centred on Jerusalem, published in 1486 by Bernhard von Breydenbach in the first illustrated Holy Land pilgrimage journal to be printed (Fig. 26). Another example consists of precious manuscripts like the Morgan Picture Bible, which will be briefly presented below.

We should add that the distinction between resonance and wonder

Fig. 25. Miniature of Iskandar (Alexander) and the Prophet Khizr in Tarjumah-i Shāhnāmah (Book of Kings), 10th century, copied in Istanbul 1616–20, *Shared Sacred Sites*, The New York Public Library, Spencer Collection, 2018.

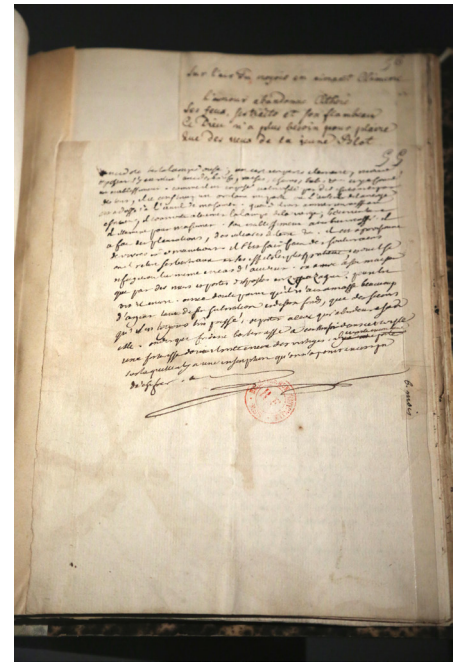Fig. 24. Autographe de Denis Diderot, anecdote sur l'île de Lampedusa, recueil Mélanges de littérature, manuscrit, BnF, Paris, *Lieux saints partagés*, MNHI, 2017-18.

Fig. 26. Bernhard von Breydenbach, View of Jerusalem in Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam (detail, 1486), *Shared Sacred Sites*, The New York Public Library, Rare Book Division, 2018.

partly overlaps with that between *trace* and *aura*, as Walter Benjamin formulated it in a famous aphorism: "Trace and aura. The trace is appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us."[29] This dialectic between nearness and distance was a thread that ran through the entire exhibition and was materialised in various forms, thereby giving multifarious shapes to the texture of meanings we intended to communicate.

3. *Embodiment, Metaphor and Metonymy*

As already mentioned, works of art of various kinds find their place in an "exhibition of society" like *Lieux Saints Partagés/Shared Sacred Sites*. Art produces an aesthetic emotion, which is part of a broader phenomenon that potentially

29
Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), M 16a, 4, 447.

30

In 2010, Annunciation Day (25 March) was established as a national Muslim-Christian holiday in Lebanon to promote Muslim-Christian dialogue. See Emma Aubin-Boltanski, "Pratiquer le dialogue interreligieux au Liban. La célébration de la fête de l'Annonciation." In *Traversées des mémoires en Méditerranée. La réinvention du "lien"* edited by Maryline Crivello and Karima Dirèche (Aix-en-Provence: PUP, 2017), 97–107.

summons spiritual emotion—and obviously this does not only occur among "believers." One of our objectives was that every visitor should be able to find themselves in the mirror of otherness. From this point of view, three modalities of concrete use of this medium can be isolated in our exhibition.

The first modality concerns artwork as an *embodiment* of the theme at the centre of the display. In other words, there are cases where the religious imbrication is manifested in the object itself. One example is an icon of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, saints common to both Christians and Muslims, which a Syrian Catholic artist painted with the insertion of a deliberate Muslim marker (the dog that keeps them during their miraculous sleep) (Fig. 27). Another example is a work displaying more explicit Islamic-Christian significance, as shown in another Lebanese icon of the Annunciation that is framed on the left by a passage from the Gospel of Luke (27-30) and on the right by an extract from the Qurʾānic Sura Al ʿImran (29, 41–46)[30] (Fig. 28).

Fig. 27. Ossama Musleh, *The Seven Sleepers*, icon, Damascus, 2010.

Fig. 28. Noha Ibrahim Jabbour, *The Annunciation*, icon, Beirut, 2007.

Other examples concern architectural imbrications, presented through photographs, like those showing Greek churches that have sometimes kept a minaret, a trace of their previous conversion into mosques (Fig. 29), or the ancient Yeni Cami mosque in Thessaloniki, dedicated to the cult of the Donmeh (Jewish converts to Islam), which is known to contain Stars of David hidden in the interior decoration, and which was—as a cultural space—one of the venues for our tripartite exhibition in 2017 (Fig. 30). A final emblematic case is a jewel of medieval art, the Morgan Picture Bible, a leaf of which was exhibited at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York in 2018. This work is, in itself, a palimpsest written through its belonging to successive groups (Fig. 31). The manuscript dates from the 13th century. Its origins are unclear, but it has

Fig. 29. Tower bell and Minaret of St.Nicholas Church, Hania, 2017. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.
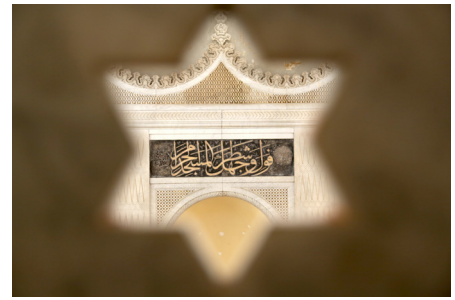
Fig. 30. Mihrab And Star of David, Yeni Cami, Thessaloniki, 2017. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

Fig. 31. Bible of St. Louis or Morgan Picture Bible, Paris, ca. 1250, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, ms m.638, fol. 3r, purchased by J. P. Morgan, jr., 1916, *Shared Sacred Sites*, The Morgan Library and Museum, 2018.

often been linked to the court of the French King Louis IX (1214–1270). When it was first created, it contained only a series of images depicting scenes from the Bible. Some fifty years later, Latin captions were added, and quite certainly this happened in Italy. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the manuscript had travelled again and was in the hands of a Polish cardinal, the bishop of Cracow, who entrusted it, as a diplomatic gift for the Persian Shah, to a mission of friars that reached Isfahan in 1607. The Bible was presented to the Shah in the first days of 1608. At his court, captions in Persian were added to the Latin inscriptions. A century later, probably when the Afghans conquered Isfahan in 1722, the royal library was dispersed. The precious manuscript was acquired by a Persian-Jew, and a third layer of captions was added, this time in Judeo-Persian.[31] As a result, this wonderful artwork also harbours a complex work of intertextuality, displaying Christian, Muslim and Jewish points of view on the same image. It summarises, in an astonishing way, a web of interreligious relations distributed over an extended period of time. Looking carefully

31
For an insightful account, see William M. Voelkle, "Shared Sacred Stories and the Morgan Picture Bible," in *Shared Sacred Sites*, *op. cit.* 103–119.

32
Claudio Monge, *Dieu hôte. Recherche historique et théologique sur les rituels de l'hospitalité* (Bucarest: Zeta books, 2008); Dionigi Albera and Manoel Pénicaud, "Coexistences, interférences, interstices." In *Coexistences. Lieux saints partagés en Europe et en Méditerranée* edited by Dionigi Albera and Manoel Pénicaud (Arles: Actes Sud-MNHI, 2017), 16–23.

33
Aby Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas MNEMOSYNE* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH, 2003).

34
Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit.

at it makes it possible to discover the biography of a wonderful object, which is a valuable condensate of centuries of commingling, despite disagreements, antagonisms, and conflicts between religions and societies.

The second modality is when a single artwork may be seen as a *metaphor* of interreligious conversations. From this point of view, we can mention the representations of the patriarch Abraham, who alone sums up the common genealogy of the monotheisms (Fig. 32). This figure symbolises the central theme of hospitality in both Genesis and the Qur'ān,[32] a theme that is prominent throughout the exhibition and constitutes one of its narrative threads.

Fig. 32. Section on Abraham at the Mucem. On the left, detail of *Abraham lavant les pieds aux trois anges*, by Émile Levy, huile sur toile, 1854, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

The third modality—central to deploying the exhibition's narrative—involves *metonymy*. This type of arrangement operates through the juxtaposition of works that, in principle, are heterogeneous or originate from different sources. Each signifier thus interacts with the others, the whole producing a surplus of meaning.

This process is certainly not new. In its genealogy we can mention famous experiments, such as the panels of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, in which Aby Warburg organised sequences of reproductions of artworks, without any textual support, thus creating a visionary project of art history only in images.[33] We can also mention the process based on the montage of quotations and short comments that marks Walter Benjamin's monumental work on Parisian arcades.[34]

In turn, we have tried to establish a "good neighbourhood" for works that sometimes have very different religious, cultural and geographical backgrounds. This allows the viewer to immediately perceive resonance between objects that, in principle, share no common elements. This device makes it possible to show an interplay of analogies, distinctions and mutual influences, without verbalisation, but by making it immediately palpable for the visitor's senses. To some extent, a web of relationships and transmutations becomes, so to speak, immanent in the arrangement and layout of the artworks.

For example, we have placed representations of the same holy figures

as they are portrayed in different religious registers. At the Bardo Museum in Tunis, we placed three sculptures evoking both maternity and the figure of Mary in dialogue. On the left was the Qurʾānic sura of Mary calligraphed by the contemporary artist Abdallah Akar, which materialises this character without representing her in an anthropomorphic way. In the centre was a Catholic statue of the Virgin Mary. On the right, a mother goddess from the Tunisian collections introduced a theme that has genealogical and semantic links with the Madonna figure (Fig. 33). This metonymic process makes it possible to show the complex relations between religions, an interplay of contrasts and familiarities, influences and transformations. Also in Tunis, another display case contained both a leaflet from the famous blue Qurʾān (tenth century) mentioning Jesus, and a sixth-century Christian ceramic tile with his effigy. It is also important to take into account the context: such a close association of Christian and Muslim materials is not common in Muslim countries today (Fig. 34).

Fig. 33. Marial Triptych, *Lieux saints partagés*, Bardo Museum, 2016. Photograph © Manoël Pénicaud.

Fig. 34. Tile representing Jesus (6th-7th century, Bardo Museum) and folio of the Blue Qurʾān, Sura Ar-Zukhruf, verses 54-63 (10th century, Raqqada Museum), *Lieux saints partagés*, Bardo Museum, 2016.

35
Cédric Parizot and Douglas Stanley, "Recherche, art et jeu vidéo. Ethnographie d'une exploration extra-disciplinaire," *antiAtlas Journal*, 1, 2016: https://www.antiatlas-journal.net/01-recherche-art-et-jeu-video-ethnographie-dune-exploration-extra-disciplinaire/, DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.23724/AAJ.2.

36
Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind: The Nature of Human Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

37
Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

4. Conclusion

In the foregoing, we have tried to discuss the process underlying the making of the exhibition *Shared Sacred Sites* (*Lieux saints partagés*). The verb "to write" has been used several times to designate this process, itself understood through the prism of heterography, which brings together a set of "alternative writings" that researchers are increasingly making use of, without hesitating to cross the boundaries of creation. This movement is also part of the florescence of so-called "art-science" projects that combine mixed and interdisciplinary approaches, exploring new territories that are, in principle, "uncomfortable zones" for researchers.[35]

Being both curators and anthropologists, we are always keen to maintain the centrality of the ethnographic dimension by showing the pilgrim practices that constitute the heart of the phenomenon we want to describe. Our decision to rely on a heterogenous set of media (artworks, films, photographs, installations, collected objects, archives, texts, etc.) has led to a logic of combination and interlocking of different formats, discourses, and registers (Fig. 35).

Fig. 35. Guided tour of *Lieux saints partagés* by its two curators, Mucem, 2015, 13 min 38 : https://youtu.be/lGOk-j3rh7Q.

These disparate elements must be coordinated, fit together in the most coherent way, and on several levels: scientific, informative, educational, aesthetic, experiential, etc. Modularity allows the assemblage of blocks, as in a three-dimensional puzzle.

This process overlaps with certain issues of the *bricolage* paradigm, insofar as one must constantly adapt pre-existing materials, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss' distinction between the "engineer" and the "bricoleur."[36] The staging of an exhibition calls for both the first orientation (conceiving a specific plan) and the second approach (adaptation, accommodation, compromise). Much more often than one might think, one has to "make do" with elements only partially controlled, like in the "arts of making" analysed by Michel de Certeau.[37] It is possible to expand Lévi-Strauss' reflection on bricolage and de Certeau's insights on the arts of everyday life by applying the perspectives developed more recently by Tim Ingold on the processes by which objects are made by *makers*, and the flow of materials conceived as "active" rather than passive. Ingold distinguishes between "hylemorphism" (a complex design, which is close to the engineer's model of Lévi-Strauss) and "morphogenesis" (a humbler design, where the object partly creates itself). The concept of morphogenesis is

stimulating for understanding the process of writing in three dimensions, with its subtle interplay between an intellectual project and the engagement with materials. In our case, the artworks and the objects can also be understood as partially active and performative. The *maker* (in this case the curator) is somewhat guided and inspired by the materiality contained in the artworks, even if this means modifying and adapting the initial project.[38]

Our account would be incomplete if we omitted the countless constraints and inevitable compromises that accompany the process of making an exhibition. Indeed, the exhibition is initially conceived in the abstract and in the ideal, but it is never this project that the public will ultimately discover. The initial plan is continually reworked, rewritten, modified, amputated and completed during the various phases of development. A desired artwork may not be available, or it may be too expensive to include, so an alternative must be found. Putting the material on display may involve extra costs, which the Production Department may or may not allow.

Putting an exhibition on display is therefore a succession of choices, arbitrations, compromises and accommodations that are not always the responsibility of the curator. In our case, we were sometimes encouraged to develop one aspect or cut out another, for financial or even political reasons. This is part of the rules of the game because, whether we like it or not, the host institution is also involved in orientating the exhibition and has the final say. The complexity of the decision-making process, and the involvement of several different players in this context, make it difficult to maintain the desired narrative, and sometimes require a subtle balancing of ingredients. Also, this naturally has consequences for the degree of explicitness of certain contents and, more generally, for the general narrative conveyed by the exhibition.[39]

Unlike most of the textual writing, the production of an exhibition is a collective process. Its production from A to Z involves input from many people, from conception to implementation. From this point of view, it would be possible to speak of co-writing. This is all the more true in our case, given that we have co-curated different versions of this exhibition in partnership with several Greek, Tunisian, Moroccan and American colleagues. Then, at the end of the process, each idea must be materialised in the space, and this requires input from a number of specialists: lighting engineer, graphic designer, sound designer, etc. Particularly important is the contribution of an architect-scenographer, who takes into account several practical aspects: feasibility, circulation of the public inside the space, accessibility for disabled people, size of the items, but also budget and logistics. The scenography is therefore a crucial phase in the whole process and plays a major role in the exhibition's identity.[40] But it also involves negotiations and compromises with the curators. At the Mucem, a labyrinthine layout of the exhibition was designed by Agence NC to convey the idea of a pilgrimage, but without imposing a direction of circulation: everyone could wander where they wanted and retrace their steps thanks to a side section that was connected to the other three. But very different scenography choices were made in later versions, creating different kinds of interplay between the ideas of circularity, verticality and horizontality.[41]

Finally, we should acknowledge that this adventure, ongoing for some years now, also entails a certain degree of serendipity. After the first venue in Marseille, we thought we had finished the job. The artworks had been

[38] "This is not, of course, to deny that the maker may have an idea in mind of what he wants to make. […] even if the maker has a form in mind, it is not this form that creates the work. It is the engagement with materials. And it is therefore to this engagement that we must attend if we are to understand how things are made." See Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archeology, Art and Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 22.

[39] A full discussion of these issues is impossible in the framework of this article. We intend to develop it elsewhere.

[40] The scenography or staging of the exhibition merits an entire article, as it raises so many questions on the conceptual, aesthetic, technical and even economic levels. See Marie-Laure Mehl, "La scénographie, une discipline à part entière," *Culture & Musées*, 16, 2010, 248–252, DOI: https://doi.org/10.3406/pumus.2010.1577.

[41] We worked with the teams of the host institutions and several agencies, such as Atelier Maciej Fiszer at MNHI, Westerman Design LLC at NYPL, and Karşılaşmalar Agency at Depo and CerModern.

returned to their place of conservation, the entire scenography had been dismantled and at that point, we expected that the only tangible trace of the ephemeral product that is every exhibition would be the printed catalogue.[42] However, we received requests to display the exhibition elsewhere, in a way we had not foreseen. We decided to embark on this adventure. From one adaptation to the next, this led us to progressively conceive the formula of a "touring exhibition" which is fundamentally based on rewriting, adaptation and modularity. In other words, visitors to *Lieux Saints Partagés/Shared Sacred Sites* in Marseille, Tunis, Marrakesh, New York or Istanbul did not see the same exhibition. The substance and the guiding ideas were broadly the same, but not the artworks or the objects presented, nor the spaces and the scenography.

To conclude with a metaphor, the long process of creating and recreating this exhibition involved not only writing a musical score, but also composing (or at least attempting to compose) different orchestrations of it, and finally conducting various musical ensembles, always respecting, as far as possible, both the idiosyncrasies of a number of renowned soloists, and the inclination and willingness of the various musicians, who are all crucial to giving substance to the project.

Book review by Gianfranco Bria

Fabio Giomi. *Making Muslim Women European: Voluntary Associations, Gender and Islam in Post-Ottoman Bosnia and Yugoslavia (1878-1941).* Budapest: CEU Press, 2021, pp. 386. Hardcover $ 105.00, ISBN 9789633863695
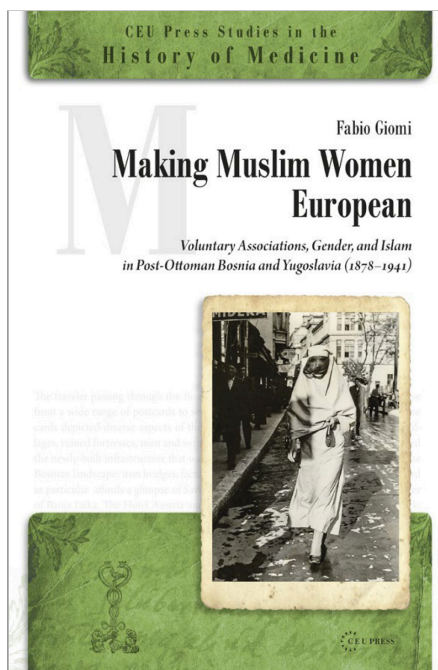
As the author, Fabio Giomi, writes in the first pages, this book is "an attempt to tell a different story and to contribute to the history of Bosnian Muslims in the first decade of the post-Ottoman era, by putting women and their experience in the picture" (p. 5). This sentence sums up the mission of this work, which intends to explore the heuristic power of gender to study the history of Bosnian Muslims, overcoming classical national and ethno-confessional categories. The time frame considered ranges from 1878, the year of the Berlin Congress, to 1941, when Yugoslavia was invaded by Axis troops. During this time, the Bosnian space was integrated into two imperial structures, Ottoman and Hapsburg, and then had a double national experience, first as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and then as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

The author decided to focus on voluntary associations as a kaleidoscope through which to analyse the history of Muslim women and gender relations in the post-Ottoman Bosnian space. Associations, according to the author, have left a plethora of written traces, largely unexplored. Moreover, the associational prism will allow us to gain "a glimpse of Muslim women in their relationship with the rest of society and how this changed over time" (p. 8). In this way, Giomi's book aspires to give back Muslim women's agency and "get rid once and for all of the Orientalist stereotype portraying them as silenced and oppressed" *(ivi)*. Muslim associations were the privileged institutions where Muslim women became visible and that took on the Muslim woman question (p. 11). Similarly, the author is aware of the limits of the associational focus, which risks pushing other segments of Yugoslav society into the background.

The book has the great merit of proposing an insight into the pre-1941 experiences of Bosnian Muslim women within a historiography that has tended to obscure pre-socialist female agency. The silence on women's issues in the inter-war period has served to implicitly confirm the idea that "Muslim women had remained in the shadow of a timeless patriarchal oppression, obscurantism and passivity up to the establishment of the socialist state" (p. 17). A different awareness of the role of women and gender relations in post-Ottoman times has only recently started to emerge, after the great emphasis on confessional and ethnic studies, and Giomi's book is one of the milestones of this new awareness.

The volume is divided into seven parts, organised thematically and chronologically. The first two chapters focus on the Habsburg period, the last four on the Yugoslav period. The first chapter focuses on three points: first, it addresses the place of Bosnia within the administrative and political apparatus of the Habsburg Empire; second, it looks at the impact of the Viennese government's educational policies on Muslim women, aimed as these were at encouraging them to follow the standards of civilisation proposed by the Hapsburgs; third, it deals with the role of Muslim women within voluntary associations. The Empire aimed to forge Muslim women who were typically Habsburg, socialising and educating them according to its gendered ideal of progress within a new educational system. In this way, the Austro-Hungarian authorities intended to essentially de-Ottomanise Muslim women and place them within their ideal of human progress, in which education was one of the focal points. However, this strategy encountered various forms of opposition from some Islamic families and especially from Islamic authorities such as the *ulema*. However, as the first chapter points out, in those years, voluntary associations - with philanthropic and cultural aims - composed of Muslim women developed and acquired a new visibility in the public sphere. These new organisations

were associated in different ways with Hapsburg modernity, even if they advocated a reinterpretation of some traditional values, resulting in a bridge between modern and traditional forms of culture.

The second chapter deals with the evolution of the question of Muslim women in Hapsburg Bosnia as it was influenced by the movement of people and texts across the imperial borders. This movement favoured the influence of social Darwinism, Islamic modernism and positivism. The resulting debate reflected on the imaginary and narrative place of Bosnian Muslims between East and West as an alternative space of civilisation. The issue of women became a symbol of this debate, in which men participated but women also made their voices heard. As Giomi quotes, "while participating in the debate around the Muslim woman question, women expressed, albeit keeping to the status quo of their milieu, different ideas of appropriate Muslim post-Ottoman femininity" (p. 107). In their writing, they explained that a purely religious, oral and domestic education was no longer sufficient to meet the needs of a Muslim post-Ottoman society. At the same time, Muslim women imagined different forms of sisterhood which probably laid the groundwork for the development of various voluntary associations after 1918.

The third chapter addresses the involvement of Muslim women volunteers with the rest of society. It concerns relations with Muslim and non-Muslim political parties, the Yugoslav administrative apparatus and religious institutions. This part notes how the first Muslim women's groups found Muslim communities to be the most appropriate space for their involvement. These voluntary associations remained largely excluded from the decision-making process, as male Muslim political elites still managed this. In this case, it was family ties that made the difference: "the ability of a specific association branch to involve the female members of prestigious families in its activities could make the difference between success and failure for its activities" (p. 166).

The fourth chapter seeks to explain how the Muslim woman question became a terrain for confrontation between competing political projects, namely secular progressive, Islamic progressive and feminist. In this way, Muslim women's voluntary associations participated in the elaboration of new discourses on women, Islam and modernity. The intertwining of these ideologies radically reshaped the Muslim woman question, causing issues to arise that addressed new themes, such as: the active involvement of women in the economy; the precedence of the current needs of society over the preservation of tradition; the importance of national interfaith sisterhood. The practice of the veil was the epitome of these themes, as it became the focus of various progressive discourses after 1918. In this way, the issues of Muslim women became highly politicised. Voluntary associations of Muslim women ultimately became part of the progressive field, along with their male and non-Muslim counterparts. Nevertheless, they were able to produce a different discourse, using terminology that distinguished them from the other associational groups.

The fifth chapter focuses on voluntary activities that aimed to train new Muslim women through education and work. Working together, these associations tried to raise funds by maintaining good relations with the organisations that could finance them, such as ministries, governorates, municipalities, Islamic institutions and the Crown. In this way, they provided support for the education of Muslim girls, some of whom succeeded in having remarkable professional careers. This challenged the Orientalist

ideal of submissive Muslim women. In this respect, the cultural associations promoted a progressive ideal of accomplished women in extra-domestic work; while the philanthropic associations were more inclined to preserve female domesticity for the urban poor.

The sixth chapter analyses the different leisure activities for recreation and sociability in which Bosnian Muslims were involved, through the gendered prism of associative networks. Festive events, such as the *zabava*, have been interpreted "as collective performance of existing class, gender, national and religious hierarchies as a tool to reinforce collective loyalties" (p. 310). In these performances, the exposure of the body was regarded as the main marker of civilisational advancement. A new model of Muslim women was created in reaction to Orientalist discourses and in order to survive in the Yugoslav cultural landscape. The *invisibilisation* of confessional markers on women's bodies served as a strategy to avoid being subsumed into the Serbian and Yugoslav national body. Through the ritual of *zabava*, the cultural associations developed their own idea of emancipation, which was to be guided by enlightened Muslim males. In fact, it was a paternalistic form of emancipation, which marginalised women from the decision-making process. Nevertheless, the bodily self-expression practices of these rituals gave women a new visibility, allowing them to gain new public spaces and eroding sexual segregation.

The seventh and final chapter deals with two new phenomena that shaped Bosnian society from the second half of the 1930s. The first concerns the growing success of Communist ideas and organisations among young people, especially secondary school and university students. The second concerns the emergence of Islamic revivalism as a reaction to the progressive secularisation of Bosnian and Yugoslav society. Both these movements proposed new ideas in the debate on Muslim women and new social practices. Through their associative structures, these two movements were able to promote new forms of (in)visibility and (non-)involvement of women within Yugoslav society. The Communist establishment regarded the project of Muslim cultural progressivism as inadequate. The Muslim revivalists promoted the re-Islamisation of society as the only possible political project. However, the involvement of the Communist and Islamic revivalists challenged the liberal and secular postulates of the Western associationalist model. On the contrary, in the late 1930s we witness associations whose members prepared an upheaval of the established political order in the name of certain radical ideals.

This book has many merits, first and foremost highlighting the involvement of women in associational activities in post-Ottoman Bosnia. In this way, the author notes the agency of Muslim women in building alternative modernity (and civilisation) projects by proposing various discourses and practices that also included their increasing participation in the public sphere. The book intends to re-evaluate gender relations and the role of women in interwar history through the associational prism. This work therefore fills the gap within a historiography, that of Yugoslavia, that speaks "more about horses than women"; at the same time, it frames the associational movements of Muslim women within the larger panorama of gendered movements of the first half of the twentieth century. In this it represents a milestone. The fluency of the writing certainly reinforces the quality of this work, which employs a very rigorous historical method. Not surprisingly, the work is supported by a plethora of first-hand sources, which the author has meticulously researched in archives and elsewhere.

The only flaws of this work lie in the fact that it treats Muslims and Islam as mere political or sociological data. The book tells us little about the beliefs, practices and doctrines of Muslims, which could have provided further useful information on what *being-Muslim* meant in Bosnia at that time. But this is probably more of a choice by the author, who rightly wanted to privilege other aspects in his analysis, than a limitation.

In spite of this, this is an extraordinary book that offers an unprecedented picture of European Muslim women that certainly challenges the most common historiographic and public narratives about this topic. Moreover, it proposes a paradigm of Muslim women's agency that questions mainstream models (Western feminism, Islamic docility, etc.), in order to propose an in-depth, historicised but still little-known gaze on it.

Gianfranco Bria

Book review by Lynda Clarke

Rose Wellman. *Feeding Iran: Shi'i Families and the Making of the Islamic Republic.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2021, pp. 262. Hardcover $ 85.00, ISBN 9780520376861, Paperback $ 34.95, ISBN 9780520376878
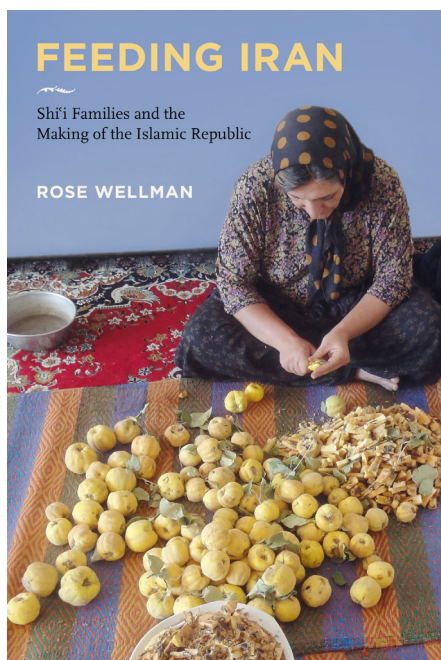
CENTRO STUDI
DI CIVILTÀ E SPIRITUALITÀ
COMPARATE

fondazione ONLUS
GIORGIO CINI

Feeding Iran offers an account of kinship and the intersection of kinship and politics, based on an ethnography of an extended family in the small town of Fars-Abad in the southwestern Fars Province of Iran. The family is described as non-elite, non-urban affiliates of the "Mobilization of the Oppressed," a nation-wide voluntary force engaged in a variety of government-sanctioned activities, from the organization of charity and religious ceremonies to security patrols. One of the virtues of the study, as the author points out, is that it portrays the life and ideals of supporters of the regime, a part of the population that has been neglected due to a focus on less traditional, urban youth involved in opposition. Wellman, in fact, began her fieldwork not long after the 2010 protests against the re-election to the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, which were widely covered in the West. Although not the purpose of the book, it goes some way toward explaining the continued existence of the revolutionary regime.

As "card-carrying" members of the *Basij* (Mobilization), the subjects of *Feeding Iran* relate their ideas about kinship and belonging to the regime's presentation of the Iranian nation and Shiite Islam, while the regime, in turn, builds on those ideas to consolidate support. Wellman explores the private and public worlds of Fars-Abad to elucidate these social processes, using a wide lens that captures the meaning of kinship beyond genetic relations, across a "full spectrum of material substances, immaterial qualities, acts and processes" (p. 4).

The book opens with an Introduction to the key personalities of the family and physical setting. We learn that Wellman had gained the trust of her subjects, with whom she resided during her fieldwork, through a long prior association; that they dealt with gender boundaries by classing her as "almost *mahram*," that is someone with whom the males of the household could associate without observing all the usual restrictions; and that religious difference was handled by regarding her as a potential convert learning about Islam. Wellman's role as an ethnographer seems to have shifted between observer participant and participant observer. She remarks that her subjects assumed that that she was in some way a believer or potential believer, which often happens in fieldwork, although Wellman joining her hostess on a prayer carpet for morning prayers gives one pause. The always complex issue of the positionality of the ethnographer is not, in any case, discussed from the point of view of theory or ethics, but rather portrayed through a brief description of the situation.

Chapter One, "Blood, Physio-Sacred Substance, and the Making of Moral Kin," examines kinship as an "embodied, sacred, and ethical process." A review of the formal structures of kinship according to Islamic law and local culture is followed by an account of how moral qualities such as purity and spirituality are believed to be transmitted through blood lineages of both sayyeds (descendants of the Prophet, who are especially revered in Shiism) and non-sayyeds. The blood of "martyrs," referring principally to soldiers killed in the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran War, known as the "Sacred Defence," similarly transmits respectability and blessing to the martyrs' kin. Moral qualities, however, are not simply inherited. They must be cultivated. The folk of Fars-Abad accomplish this performatively through everyday rituals and acts such as prayer, sharing of food, correct gender behaviour, and careful maintenance of familial interaction and relations.

Chapter Two, "Feeding the Family: The 'Spirit' of Food in Iran," examines how food is used to nourish and fortify the family spiritually as

well as physically. The chapter contains mouth-watering descriptions of how a variety of foods are chosen, prepared, and served. Everyday food practices are intertwined with concerns for purity that have a religious cast and moral implications. Food should be procured from reputable, preferably local sources; not processed but rather prepared in the home; and carefully cooked and served with pure intention of blessing by the mother and other female relatives. Feeding the family with preferred foods with attention to their supposed physical and spiritual effects serves to reconstitute the smaller kin group, to the extent that even relatives outside the household are not included. Commensality with the extended family and larger society is established through the rhythm of fasting in Ramadan and charitable cooking and feeding, often coordinated with religious occasions or in honour of Shiite saints and frequently arranged in fulfillment of vows intended to benefit kin.

The role of blood in constructing the nation as kin is taken up in Chapter Three, "Regenerating the Islamic Republic: Commemorating Martyrs in Provincial Iran." Wellman describes how the government of the Islamic Republic evokes the blood of those fallen in the Iraq-Iran War to establish moral kinship between citizens. One of the ways this is done is by recovering bodies of the many unknown soldiers killed in that conflict and re-burying them, with great ceremony, at key locations across the country. Martyr commemoration, including re-burials, dates back to the years of the war itself, but Wellman says that her ethnographic account of such an event in Fars-Abad is the first related to provincial Iran, where the regime is said to enjoy much support. Since the martyrs are unknown, they can be imagined as kin. This is especially so for those who made sacrifices during the war, as many Basijis did, but the martyrs are meant to belong to the whole town, which their burying place strategically overlooks. The blood of martyrs is efficacious in ways similar to that of good lineage. As a substance, it is pure to the extent that contact with coffins and blood-stained cloth confers blessing. As a metaphor, it creates relationships between citizens honouring the martyrs through whom they are brought collectively closer to God. Iranian Shiite culture abounds in tropes about the life-giving purity of blood spilled in martyrdom, on which the regime draws heavily to mobilize the Basij and nation at large. References to the legend of Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet who fell in the 7th-century Battle of Karbala, are particularly compelling since they involve both family ties and bloody martyrdom in defence of Islam.

The fourth chapter, "Creating an Islamic Nation through Food," builds on Chapter Two as the third chapter builds on the first. The chapter begins by examining how food choices and etiquette function also outside the home to express virtue and authenticity. For instance, if one eats outside, a restaurant that serves Iranian rather than foreign food and in which unrelated people are not seated close together is better than a crowded, Western-style establishment. It is certainly wrong to eat or drink in public during Ramadan, even if one is not fasting, and "ugly" to eat on the street, especially for women. Just as in the home, halal foodways are the kernel of larger ideas about proper food and behaviour. Wellman shows food, like blood, to be very much a biomoral substance.

Food in the Islamic Republic of Iran is also a "technology of religious nation-making," as Wellman puts it, deployed by feeding the pious at multiple sites such as cemeteries and occasions such as Muharram, the month that saw the martyrdom of Husayn. At the vast "Paradise of

Zahra" cemetery in Tehran, food and blood together make citizens into virtual kin as visitors donate and share thick soups, puddings (and so on) in proximity to the martyrs of the Revolution and Iraq-Iran war, while surrounded by imagery and slogans proclaiming the shedding of blood in the cause of Islam. Here, in the shadow of the tomb of Khomeini, visitors address each as other as "sister" and "brother." Food serves to bring kinship not only to the nation, but also politics, especially since feedings are often sponsored by the state.

Feeding Iran contributes substantially to several fields. As a study of kinship and particularly the new kinship studies advanced by, notably, Janet Carsten, it shows how kinship in Iran extends beyond lineage and descent to relatedness created by everyday acts such as collective mourning and feeding. Blood and food, the substances of kinship, flow beyond the family into the nation and politics, carrying with them notions of purity and righteousness. Wellman's vivid description is particularly effective in capturing the role of the elusive quality of emotion in making relatedness. The book contributes to the emerging sub-field of food and nationalism. It describes how local foodstuffs and foodways are associated with purity, virtue and authenticity, in contrast to materially impure and spiritually vacuous foreign food and food habits. The pious supporters of the state on whom the study focuses regard preparing and serving good food as prime instruments in a struggle to preserve the family and ultimately Iran and Islam against corruption. Although the book is not a study of women or gender, we also learn much about women's activities and concerns since the ethnographer moves primarily in the world of women.

Wellman is careful to acknowledge that the Basijis among whom she worked do not represent all opinion or lifestyles in Iran. She may have felt a need to defend her engagement and friendship with ardent supporters of the regime. Academic readers are unlikely to mistake the emotional and perspectival empathy she applies in her fieldwork for over-rapport, let alone a political statement, so it is fortunate that she does not spend much time on this concern.