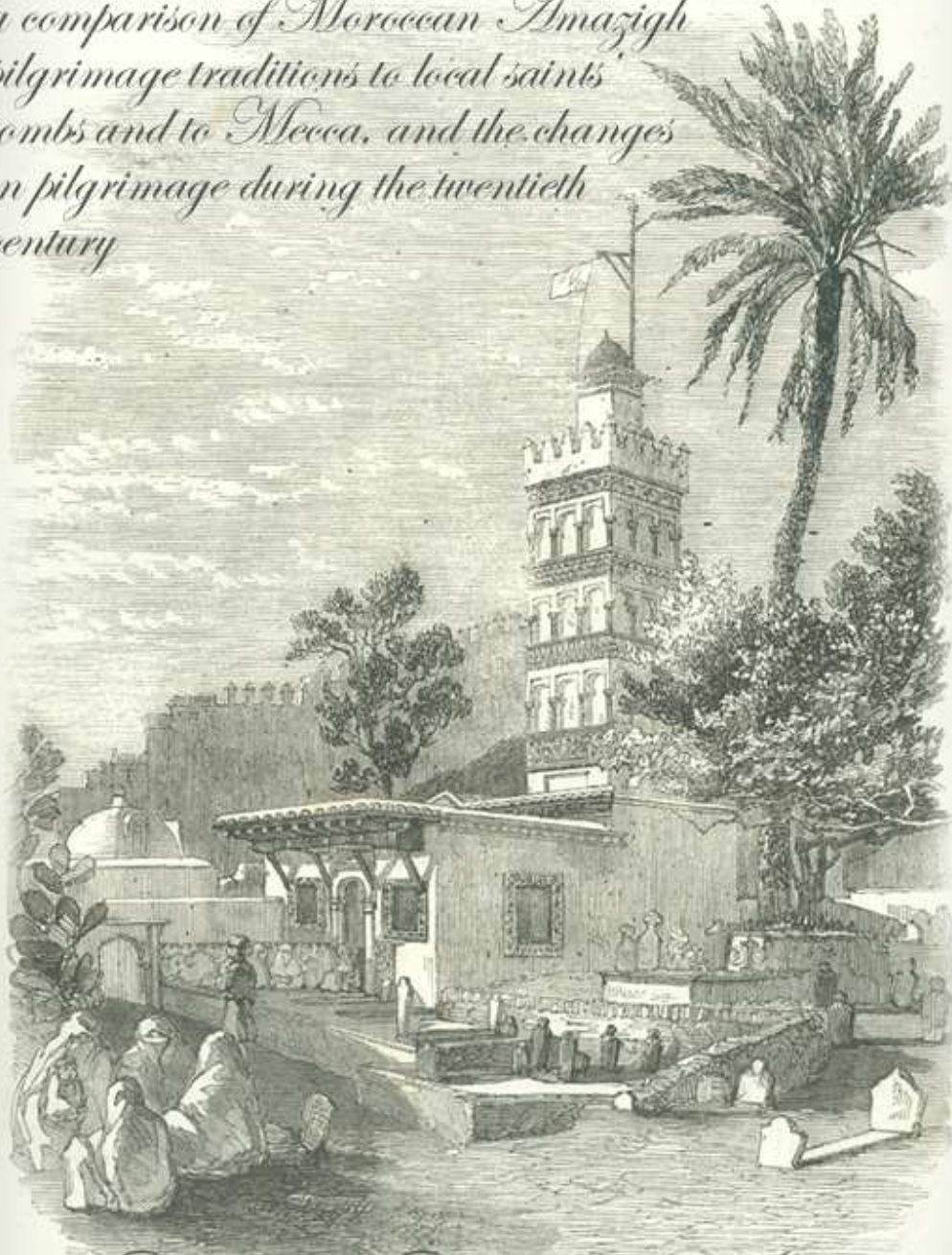


Formal & Popular Muslim Pilgrimages in Morocco:

*a comparison of Moroccan Amazigh
pilgrimage traditions to local saints'
tombs and to Mecca, and the changes
in pilgrimage during the twentieth
century*



Catherine Cartwright-Jones

Formal and Popular Muslim Pilgrimages in Morocco: a comparison of Moroccan Amazigh pilgrimage traditions to local saint shrines and to Mecca, and the changes in pilgrimage habits during the 20th century

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Hajj, Muslim Culture, Islam

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Foreword:

I wrote “Formal and Popular Muslim Pilgrimages in Morocco: a comparison of Moroccan Amazigh pilgrimage traditions to local saint shrines and to Mecca, and the changes in pilgrimage habits during the 20th century” for ‘The Geography of Religion’ a course taught by Dr. Surinder Bhardwaj, in partial fulfillment of the Masters of Liberal Studies at Kent State University in 2002. I wrote the foreword and added images in 2012 to introduce the subject to a more general public. I chose to do this to offer some perspective on the increasing destruction of saint’s tombs in North Africa.¹ There are problems of gender, modernity, and economic aspiration in this destruction that are not included in the brief news articles, which tend to concentrate on connections to Al-Qaeda, military conflicts, pickaxes and machine guns.

Many materials in this paper source documentation from colonial Morocco, and are meant to provide a background of pilgrimage at saints’ tombs, and are not intended to be representative of the present habits of Moroccan people.

There are two terms that may be unfamiliar to readers, ‘popular’ and ‘universalizing’ religion. Popular religious practice is that which is locally interpreted and locally practice, such as the recognition of locally respected holy people and local celebrations of religious practice. Universalizing religious practice is that which is based directly on divine scriptural, and practiced by all members of a faith.

¹ AFP. Thursday, 18 October 2012. “Mali Islamists destroy more saints’ tombs in Timbuktu: witnesses” <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/10/18/244553.html> (accessed October 20, 2012)

“Islamists controlling northern Mali were destroying more Muslim saints’ tombs Thursday in the ancient city of Timbuktu, witnesses said, in the latest attack on the world heritage sites considered blasphemous by the jihadists.

“Currently, the Islamists are in the process of destroying the tombs of Kabara,” a neighborhood in the south of the city, a witness said.

“They are destroying the first tomb with pickaxes and other tools and saying they are going to destroy all the tombs,” he said.

Another resident confirmed the report and said the Islamists had arrived in the area “in three vehicles, some of them armed”.

In July, Islamists from Ansar Dine (Defenders of the Faith) -- an armed group that controls Timbuktu along with Al-Qaeda’s North African branch, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb -- drew condemnation for smashing seven tombs of ancient Muslim saints as well as the “sacred door” to a 15th-century mosque.

Islamists also destroyed tombs in the northern towns of Goundam and Gao in September.

They have also threatened to destroy the city’s three ancient mosques, one of which dates back to 1327.”

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Catherine Cartwright Jones, February 26, 2002

Islam dominates Moroccan Amazigh life, and exists in both formal and popular forms. Formal Islam has universalizing elements, such as the revelations of the Koran and the Five Pillars, which apply equally to Muslims across the world and establish their relationship with Allah. Popular Islam has ethnic elements, such as belief in local saints to whom people bring offerings and make specific personal requests for healing, harvest, and fertility. Moroccans made pilgrimages to both formal Islamic sites and popular sites according to their needs and means, and both universalizing and ethnic forms of Islam were integrated seamlessly into the fabric of the community at the turn of the 20th century. Since Moroccan independence in 1956, internal popular Islamic pilgrimages have declined and external formal pilgrimage to Mecca has increased.

Van Binsbergen (1980, 1: p.72) defines formal Islamic practice as belief and action based on as Koranic law, and this practice falls into the category of “universalizing” religious activity. The Koran requires acknowledgement of Allah as the only deity, prayer, fasting, charity, and a pilgrimage to Mecca. North African rural groups also practice a popular and less strict form of Islam, emphasizing worship at a saint’s shrine, ecstatic cult ritual at the shrine, and fertility festivals based on the agriculture calendar. This popular form may be termed “ethnic” religious activity, though the participants consider themselves to be Muslim, which is identified as a universalizing religion. Some of the local popular Islamic pilgrimages are referred to as “*Mawlid*”, meaning birthday, and is a celebration of a holy person. Pilgrimage to a saint’s shrine is not considered a proper Islamic custom, and conservative Islamic sects deplore worship at saint’s shrines based neither on Koran nor Sunna. Local pilgrimages became popular during the medieval period, and maintained many elements of earlier pagan traditions. Though Muslims know that worship at saints’ shrines as not truly Islamic, most accept such as “*bid’a*”, a good invention within Islam (Kgeilen, 2001).

Moroccan Amazigh tribal groups practiced popular traditions of both “formal” and “popular” religious pilgrimage, maintaining their pre-Islamic worship sites, though transferring their patronage to Islamic holy men. Moroccan and Meccan census data from 1930 indicates that fewer than one in 500 individuals were able to make the required Hajj during their lifetimes to fulfill their obligation to Allah (calculated from Long 1979, p. 131, and Brown, 1976, p.47). Westermarck and Laouste record that during the same period nearly all the rural population made pilgrimages to local saints shrines at least twice a year to negotiate spirits and saints assistance for harvest, health and fertility (Westermarck, 1926, Laouste 1926 and Van Binsbergen, 1981: p.201).



Figure 1: Saint's Tomb Bou Saada Oasis Algeria, photograveure from original photograph by Lehnert & Landrock, published by Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, Berlin, 1924.

Since 1970, the popular, ethnic form of religious pilgrimage has declined due to several factors while the proportion of the population making a formal, universalizing religious pilgrimage to Mecca has increased. According to 1972 statistics, one in thirty Moroccans made the pilgrimage to Mecca during their lifetime (calculated from Long 1979, p. 131, and US Bureau of the Census, International Data Base). Morocco achieved independence in 1953-6, and immediate efforts were made to improve literacy, standardize language, build roads, create a health care system, improve agriculture and build the economy. The sixteen-fold Hajji increase after independence was in many ways enabled by the changes following the establishment of the socialist-oriented independent state of Morocco. Mandatory education expanded the number of people able to read the Koran, building the desire to participate in formal Islam rather than popular Islam practiced in the local Amazigh language. Government subsidized and organized agricultural improvements and health care lessened dependence on saints for assistance in drought, harvest, and healing. Infrastructure improvements allowed people to travel, and economic improvements permitting the accumulation of sufficient individual wealth for a person to make Hajj. Those who were, or who aspired to be, socially elite, identified formal Islam with literacy, good jobs, and respectability. By association, formal Islamic pilgrimage became a status attribute, while popular pilgrimage was increasingly associated with the lower classes (Van Binsbergen, 1980, 1: p.86). Increase in Moroccan participation increased sharply in the decades following independence: In 1933, only 1,284 made Hajj. In 1966, 10 years after independence, that number leaped to 11,242. In 1972, 15,463 Moroccans made Hajj (Long, 1979: 133-4). During this period, saints' shrines were used less and less frequently.

Sacred sites existed in Morocco for both formal and popular Islamic worship and a pilgrim would visit both Islamic mosques or Mecca and local saints' tombs during their lifetime to satisfy different needs. The purpose of the pilgrimage to a formal Islamic site is metaphysical and universal. Prayers offered at a mosque unite the person with the one God. The pilgrimage to Mecca is to gain redemption from sin, and insure a place in paradise (Westermarck, 1926: p136). The purpose of visits to saints' shrines is to address personal, immediate, physical needs and seek a local spirit's assistance with agriculture, a birth, an illness, a drought or a marriage. Attendees at a mosque are predominantly male. Visitors to animist sacred spaces are more likely to be female (Brett and Fentress, 1996, 265 – 9). The behaviors in these spaces are different. In the mosque or at Mecca, people dresses simply, are subdued, disciplined and prayerful, and meet during the daytime. At saints' shrines, there was nighttime dancing, singing, drumming, and ecstatic possession by spirits; the female participants arrived hennaed, bringing food offerings, and sometimes made blood offerings to the spirit (Westermarck, 1926: 264 - 7). No one was permitted to sleep overnight in a mosque, though pilgrims often slept overnight in saints' shrines to receive prophetic dreams. The Amazigh, as most other groups in rural North Africa prior to 1930, utilized both formal and popular Muslim pilgrimages as suited their means and needs.

Origins of Amazigh Popular Islamic Pilgrimage Traditions

Amazigh tribal groups are descendants of people who have inhabited Morocco since Bronze Age (Arnaiz-Villena et al; 2001). They were converted to Islam before 1000 CE, but retained beliefs and ritual actions from their earlier fertility based polytheistic religion.

A Punic fertility and nature based animist religion was established in Morocco by 1800 BCE, arriving with colonists from the Syrian coast. This religion was based on grain agriculture and the cycle of rainy and dry seasons; the major deities of which were Baal and Anath. This developed into the Punic worship of Baal and Tanit. This religion was practiced across North Africa from Siwa Oasis to Gibraltar and into Spain, from 1800 BCE into the Roman period. Tanit was a virgin warrior grain fertility goddess, the consort of Baal, the god of rain and thunder. These male and female deities were equal in importance and power. The ritual practices of this religion were to insure sufficient rain, plentiful harvest, the fertility of women and domestic animals. Many of the sacred areas, such as caves, springs and waterfalls in the Amazigh landscape have been associated with the fertility cults since the pre-Roman period. Djebel Taya and Slonta have been sites of fertility cult worship since the Hellenistic period (Brett and Fentress, 1996, 265 – 9). After the defeat of Carthage, this religion was reorganized as a Roman religion with some alterations, notably that the goddess Caelestis replaced Tanit, who was neither the equal nor the consort of the male deity. With the coming of Islam, the female deity disappeared entirely from the dominant belief system. This may be a factor in women's continued utilization of the animist sites into the Islamic period and the 20th century, while men took their spiritual needs to the mosques and Mecca (Brett and Fentress, 1996, 269).

Popular/Ethnic Sacred Space and Pilgrimage in Morocco

Moroccan popular Islamic sacred geography includes the tombs of saints, the places they prayed or performed miracles. The Koran does not recognize saints, nor did the Prophet Mohammed claim to have miraculous powers, though such were ascribed to him. The Amazigh belief in saints, curers of illness, holy men, and creators of miracles is an extension of the animist traditions that pre-dated Mohammed, and was not discarded when cultures they embraced Islam. The Moroccan tombs of a saints and shrines were regarded to have “*baraka*”, the quality of blessedness, from their contact with the saint. A pilgrim could partake in the *baraka* by contact with the soil, rocks, water, tree, or structure of the shrine. The saint's spirit within the shrine would be offered food and incense in exchange for healing, blessings, or instructive dreams.

Factors in the maintenance of pilgrimages to local saints' shrines into the Muslim period despite official condemnation were accessibility, usefulness and habit: the local shrines are near enough for a person to go to when ill, to run to for assistance when a woman is in labor with a difficult birth, to carry in a sick child, close enough to organize a visit by a bridal wedding procession, and to walk to between tending crops and livestock. The local pilgrimages had been established as part of Amazigh life for hundreds of years before the

import of Islam. A pilgrimage to Mecca could be undertaken only over a period of months and at great personal risk and expense.



Figure 2: Tomb of a Saint: Marabout dans L'Oasis, Algeria. Collection Ideale P.S., #1236, 1943

The Structure of Amazigh Saint's Tombs

A sacred space enclosing a saint's tomb might be a small square building known as a *qobba*, a walled enclosure. A simpler *haus*, a ring of stones, may also enclose a saint's grave or his favorite spot for prayer. The ring is constructed to prevent it from being defiled by people stepping over the location and fouling the *baraka*, or blessedness (Westermarck, 1926, Vol. 1, p 6). People came to these stone rings to pray, to ask the saint for special favors. The saints are regarded as merely sleeping, not dead, and to be able to hear pilgrim's requests or offer advice. They also intercede with Allah in favor of those who bring them offerings (Legey, 1926, p 211-2). Earth from a holy man's tomb was called the "*saint's henna*", and was used to make amulets, or might be mixed with water from the shrine to make a curative potion (Westermarck, 192: v.1, 165). If people took a bit of soil from a shrine to keep in their home, the saint would be required to protect them (Legey, 1926, pp 30-1). Both Muslims and Amazigh traditions otherwise regard soil as something polluting and to be avoided, as demonstrated by Muslims spreading prayer rugs on the ground to kneel upon before prayer, or washing before praying or entering a Mosque.

Cairns also marked locations of *baraka*. These are often near a saint's tomb marking the location when the tomb first becomes visible to a traveler. Each pilgrim puts a new rock on the pile (Westermarck, 1926, p.56 – 8). Though there are snakes in these rock rings,

visiting pilgrims would not kill the snakes, as they would in other locations (Westermarck 1926: v.1, P 62) These cairns are presently rarely utilized in present day pilgrimage, but are pointed by guides on tour busses as sacred shrines, leaving tourists slightly bewildered at a non-descript pile of rocks being described as an ancient sacred site (Dan, 1983).

Combining Popular and Formal Islam at Id al-Adha

Prior to the mid 20th century, at Id al-Adha villagers would bring their sheep for sacrifice to saints' cairns and rings when there was no mosque nearby, so saint's *baraka* would bless their sacrifice. They sanctified their knife by thrusting it between the cairn's rocks, repeated the "*Bismillah*" (the prayer affirming that Allah is great) and positioned the animal's head towards Mecca at the moment of slaughter. This demonstrates the Amazigh blending of formal and popular Muslim beliefs, in that the knife utilized for a formal Muslim sacrifice would be purified by contacting the *baraka* of an popular shrine, and the sacrifice would be blessed by facing Mecca (Westermarck, 1926: v.i, p119). However, as of 2002, though, a visit to neither ethnic cairn or nor formal mosque is required for Id al-Adha, the sacrifice can be done online by Udhiya/Qurbani On-Line at <http://islamicity.com/mosque/Hajj/Adha/Udhiya1.htm>!

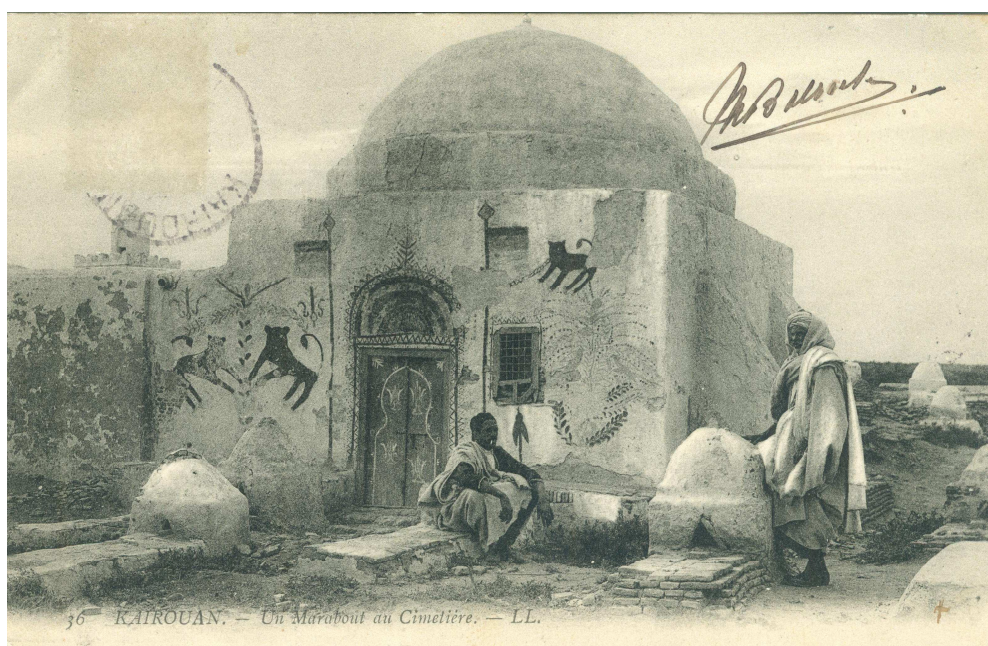


Figure 3: Saint's Tomb. 36 – Kairouan, Tunisia. - Un Marabout du Cimetiere. Postmarked 1909

Healing and Ethnic Saint's Shrines and Sacred Spaces in Morocco

Trees, springs, caves, rapids and cascades also had spirits and saints, usually with specific abilities. One such was the sanctuary of Sidi Hahia Qartoubi where there were two ponds. A saint enabled the tortoises in those ponds to diagnose and cure syphilis, leprosy, and

other skin diseases, and pilgrims would bathe there on Sunday mornings to be cured (Laouste, 1926: 213). A person with advanced syphilis or leprosy would not have been in good enough health to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, and may not have felt comfortable going to a mosque amid hostile stares. This person would have taken some comfort in bathing fellow sufferers at a site where they believed they could get some blessing or relief for their illness. The shrine of Moulay Jacoub has hot sulfur springs used for the same purpose (Laouste, 1926: 214), and other disease-specific shrines existed as well. Nationalized health care improvements since Moroccan independence, immunizations, accessible hospitals and antibiotics have diminished the need for shrines devoted to healing, to the point that many have fallen into disuse as of the 21st century.

Women and Popular/Ethnic Saints Shrines and Sacred Spaces

Amazigh women rarely learned to read the Qur'an or pray to Allah, as Arabic was a foreign language not spoken in their region. This may have left them unwilling to relinquish their local saints whom they felt would understand their prayers, particularly if formal Islam encouraged them to passively accept their difficulties as the will of Allah. Women could assertively, directly, communicate with a spirit at a saint's tomb and feel they could take some active control over their problems rather than passively accepting them. Barrenness, infant death, difficulties in childbirth, and miscarriage were serious concerns for women as they were often in jeopardy of being divorced if they failed to produce healthy children, particularly sons. To remedy these difficulties, women brought meals, flowers, and incense to the saints' tombs to negotiate the spirit's assistance, and made blood sacrifices, splattering the tomb to please the saint within. (Brett and Fentress, 1996: 266). Women came at night to saints' tombs such as that of Lalla Aouiche or Lalla Mimuna to dance "*djdeb*"; to drum and dance into ecstatic trances when séance and exorcism was deemed appropriate to resolve a serious difficulty (Laouste, 1926: p39). None of these ritual actions would have been permitted at a formal Islamic mosque, but they felt useful and comforting to the women who performed them.

Prior to the late 20th century, Amazigh women felt at risk throughout their lives, because if they were not married and mothers, they were marginalized and vulnerable in society. Therefore they implored their local saints for a husband. If they married, they prayed to the saint for children; if they did not bear children their husband would repudiate them. When pregnant, if they had a difficult labor, they returned again to the saint's shrine for assistance. After giving birth, they put their child under the protection of the saint. Where saints bathed in springs, kindly spirits clustered. Women made pilgrimage to these springs, *Lalla T'abakiyut*, *Asif n Sidi Nasar u Mhasar*, and others, to offerings, to bathe, to find husbands if they were unmarried, or to become mothers if they were married (Westermarck 1926 v.1, 66). In Aglu, when a pregnant woman was laboring and could not be delivered, a friend of hers might go to the shrine of Lalla Ta'bullat, scratch some grit from the rock, mixed it with hot water and bring it back to the woman to drink. If the child was born alive, five tufts of hair would be left unshaven from the child's head, then later cut and taken back to the shrine and left there (Westermarck 1926 v.1, 69).

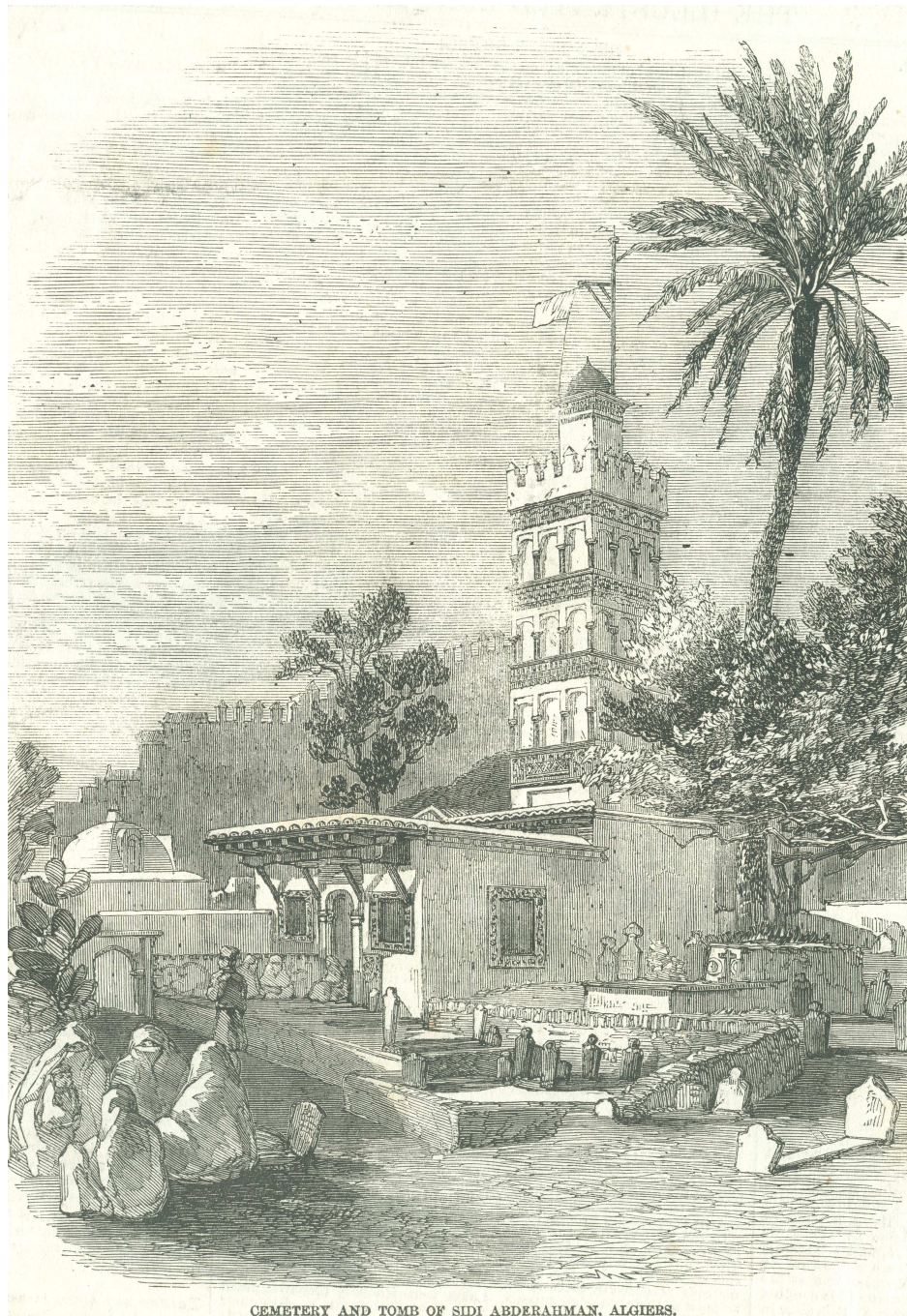


Figure 4: 'Cemetery and Tomb of Sidi Abderahman, Algiers' Illustrated London News, London, UK, 1858

Childless women in the area of Rabat knotted rags at a saint's shrine, hoping that the saint would untie the knot and end the malicious spell that was causing their suffering (Westermarck 1926 v.1, 73). Ait Warain women who were barren made a pilgrimage to a pair of larch trees believed to work miracles. They would wrap their belt seven times

around one of trees and leave it there, feeling assured that they would soon bear a child (Westermarck 1926 v.1, 77). Formal/universalizing Islam encouraged women to bear and accept Allah's will in the circumstance of spinsterhood, barrenness, death in childbirth or death of their child. Women who were not inclined to suffer humbly could go to their ethnic/popular shrines and not only petition the saint for assistance, but they could meet and commiserate with other women who were suffering.

When the Moroccan government instituted health care programs, women were at less risk in reproductive matters, and are now more likely to go to a clinic for fertility and maternal health than to a saint's shrine. When the government made literacy and basic education available to all children, women were potentially self-sufficient economically, and so required less assistance from the saints to insure marriage partners. Amazigh women continue the more picturesque elements of their fertility festivals, with songs, dances, henna and harquus, but for other purposes: the festivals are now supported and promoted by the Morocco Office of Tourism. Women now earn money and prizes by posing for pictures, winning folk festival competitions, and selling handcrafts at festivals that were formerly pilgrimages made in an earnest effort to address serious concerns in their lives. Information about the Imlilchil fertility festival, previously an ethnic/popular Islamic pilgrimage, is now promoted online, and tourists from around the world can book tours of the shrines with a few mouse clicks.

Popular/Ethic Islamic Pilgrimage for Drought

People responsible for herds were distant from formal Islamic sacred spaces and had neither time nor resources to leave their animals to make long pilgrimages. Drought always imperiled Amazigh pastoral tribes. Saints shrines, cairns, and caves dotted rural areas and received farmers' entreaties. Extended droughts meant famine for the group, and supplications to saints for rain were urgent and intense. Ritual actions for drought performed at saints' shrines were very different from prayers offered at a mosque, as they included images of a goddess, making animals urinate, and making children cry. In Hiaina, a young ewe was draped with a woman's shawl, adorned as a bride and taken to a shrine. The women sing, "O God we shall set light to the ladles, O God, very much rain" hoping that the ewe will be startled and urinate, a good auspice for rain. In many tribes, women create a puppet dressed as a bride with her hennaed hands raised and carry her to a saint's shrine to bring needed rain. This figure might be created from a pitchfork or bamboo, with a ladle tied crossways for hands, and was carried to the shrine at night so as not to be seen by men. They addressed this figure as "T'agunja, the mother of hope" and entreated her for rain. They asked her to raise her palms to the sky to call to the rain God. They splashed water onto the figure, or pinched the children brought with them and pinch them or splash water on them to make them weep (Westermarck p 265-6). The local saint was regarded as appropriate and locally responsive to immediate needs such as rain, and was used parallel with prayers to Allah. This figure was a descendant of the Punic Tanith/Baal religion, and an ethnic tradition for the Amazigh; parading of an image of "the mother of hope" was certainly not a formal Islamic tradition. Though drought is still a concern for farmers, modern irrigation and weather forecasting have relieved the devastating consequences of drought.

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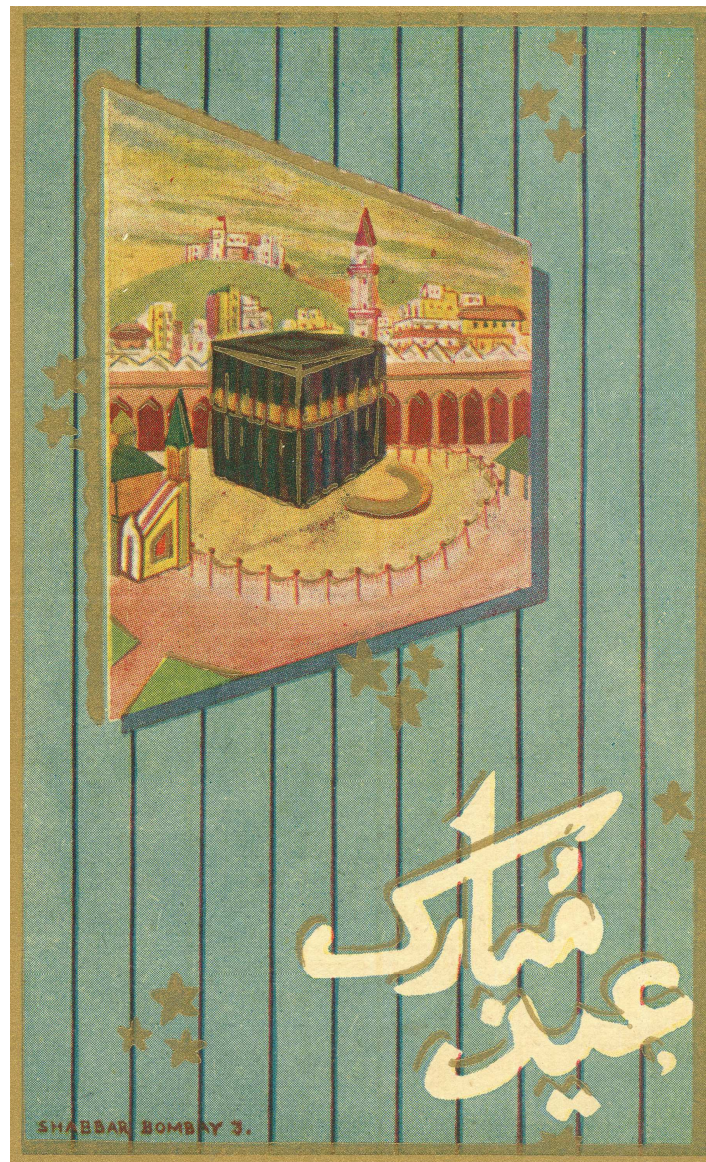


Figure 5: Masjid al-Haram, the mosque surrounding the Kaaba, metallic gold and color print postcard. Published by Shabbar Trading Corpn, Bombay-3.

Formal/Universalizing Muslim Sacred Space and Pilgrimage in Morocco

The most desirable and sacred pilgrimage location for Muslims is Mecca, particularly the Q'aba. This is the focus of much of Moroccan sacred landscape, though it is external to Morocco, in Saudi Arabia. Every Muslim hopes to make *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, during their lifetime. Those who have made the pilgrimage, hajji, are regarded by their community to have increased in blessedness, but no more than one in 500 Moroccans could afford to make the journey by earliest counts of Moroccan population and pilgrims

coming from Morocco. 2,825 Moroccans made the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1928 (Long 1979, p. 131) out of a population of about 5,300,000 (Brown, 1976, p.47). These people were considered blessed, and were well regarded in their communities. However, if only 1 in over 2500 people were able to obtain the blessings of Hajj in any given year, the other 2499 people, whose need of blessing was presumably no less, had to make do with pilgrimages to local shrines. The majority of the population related to the Hajj in terms of the rare occasion of someone leaving on a long, expensive, dangerous, and highly desirable journey from which that person might not return, as well as the even rarer return of the pilgrim from Mecca. The departure and return of the Hajji was surrounded with ritual and celebration. Their family observed ritual behaviors in their absence. The returnees, their gifts and relics brought back from Mecca were integrated back into local popular Islam and saint's tombs.



Figure 6: Hajji leaving for Mecca from Algeria, 1910. *Algerie - Pèlerins revenant de la Mecque.* Collection B. B. - Cliche Sadoun. Soussan, 94, Avenue Kleber, Bel-Abbes.

Departing for the Hajj, Leaving Local Ethnic Sacred Space for Distant Universalizing Sacred Space

Before the middle of the 20th century, the Hajj was a long, dangerous pilgrimage requiring 10 years to walk to Mecca and back. Many Hajji did not return. Those who died on Hajj or in Mecca were considered to be particularly blessed. Hajj was a conduit for cholera, yellow fever, smallpox, and typhus epidemics before the early part of the 19th century when efforts began to bring this under control. Cholera, endemic in South Asia, arrived with hajji who had developed resistance to the disease, and rapidly spread into hajji populations with no resistance. In 1865 a cholera epidemic began at the Hajj, killing 15,000 of 90,000 Hajjis, and spreading from there to Egypt, 60,000 subsequently died

(Long, 1979: p69). Recent efforts by the Saudi Ministry of Health, including proof of immunizations and quarantine have reduced hajji deaths from epidemic to zero in may recent years (Long, 1979: p82), though heat exhaustion and meningitis epidemics remain hajj health concerns (El-Bakry, et al; 1995) (Taha, et al; 2000).

Because of the danger of the Hajj journey, and the uncertainty of the pilgrim's return before the 20th century, neighbors and kin performed elaborate rituals to insure a successful pilgrimage. The forefeet of the animals departing with the pilgrim were sprinkled with milk, as would be the horse of a bride leaving for her wedding. Women trilled "*zgarit*" to drive away malicious spirits (Westermarck 1926; v.2, p 297). Hajji offered their wives an amicable divorce so they might be free to marry if they did not return, and put their affairs in order as though they were to die.

Behavior of Local Kin in Domestic Space While Hajji Travel in Distant Sacred Space

A pilgrim's kinfolk enacted ritual behaviors to prevent harm from coming to the Hajji during his travel. Water was not thrown out of the house, for that would bring news of his death. They were not to weep, nor beat their children and make them weep. They were not to wash their clothing, nor were they to wear henna. These addressed the concern of a Hajji suffering from thirst in the desert, and the humility and simplicity required of the Hajji (Westermarck, 1926: v.1, p251). The Saudi Ministry of Tourism takes great care to see that every Hajji is secure, so that they may make their prayers without being distracted by thirst, privation and hunger. By the 21st century, a family could be kept informed of a Hajji's progress by telephone or internet communication, and could watch the circumambulation of the Q'aaba on television, so they have less need to enact ritual behaviors to insure a safe return.

Hajji Returning from Mecca to Morocco, Integrating External Formal Islamic Sacred Space into Local Popular Islamic Sacred Space

When the Hajji returned to early 20th century Amazigh life, he was considered very blessed, and ritual behaviors integrated him, and his newly acquired universalized blessedness back into the local ethnic landscape. The forefeet of the animals returning with the pilgrim were sprinkled with milk again as upon return, and again women trilled "*zgarit*" to drive away malicious spirits that might attack him (Westermarck 1926; v.2, p 297). People would rush to kiss his right hand or forehead to benefit from his blessedness. He refrained from having his head shaved so as to bring the blessings of Mecca back home with him. His wife or mother then preserved his hair cuttings. The sweat and dirt of his pilgrimage shirt were also filled with blessings, so it was not washed upon returning, but preserved and occasionally taken out and kissed (Westermarck, 1926: v.1, p136).

The pilgrim could not return directly to his home, but had to ritually reintegrate into the domestic sphere. He first spent three days at a saint's tomb, or until he had a prophetic dream wherein the saint told him he could return home. His wife could visit him during this period, but not have intercourse with him. Scribes reciting the Koran accompanied

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his procession home. However, a woman pilgrim had to go directly home and spend three days in seclusion, only being allowed out to the “*hamam*” or village bath (Westermarck, 1926: v.1, 227).



Figure 7: Postcard from Saudi Arabia, featuring Mecca, 1960. Photographed and distributed by Said H. Salah

Water from Zemzem was brought home to be used as the pilgrim’s funeral, his family’s funerals, and to be sprinkled at his house and garden, to tie the local landscape to the blessedness of Mecca. Cakes of dirt from Mecca and Medina mixed with water from the well Zemzem were made into amulets and hung up in the local saint’s shrines (Westermarck, 1926: v.1, p137).

The pilgrim brought home gifts from Mecca. Dates, rosaries, turbans, rings, honey, tea, candles, perfumes, henna and incense are beloved gifts from Mecca (Westermarck, 1926: v.1, p137). The henna from Mecca is used to ornament women’s hands in the Id celebrations following Hajj, and Meccan henna is reputed to be the reddest and loveliest to be found anywhere. Hajj gifts, particularly henna, are as much appreciated now as in centuries before, though now, gifts from Mecca can be ordered online from IslamiCity Bazaar (Islamicity; 2002)

Family may now collect the Moroccan Hajji at the seaport, train station or airport, and there is always celebration, hugging and joy, dispensing of gifts, but there is less surprise

and awe, as a phone call or letter may have preceded the return. The returning pilgrim will visit to the local mosque, but is unlikely to feel that a visit to saint's tomb is necessary.

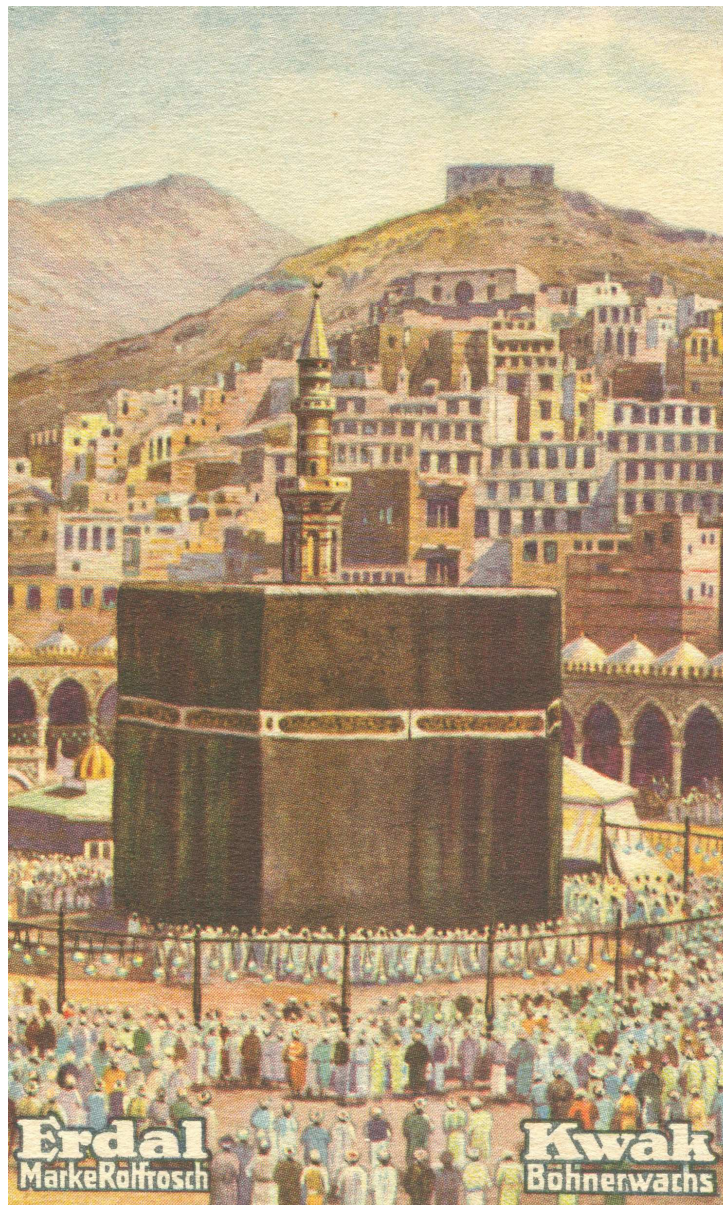


Figure 8: Trading card with image of the Kaaba, 1928. Erdal – Kwak – Serienbild Serie 80: “Kultstätten ausserchristlicher Religionen. Arsben: Die Kaaba in Mekka.”

Conclusion:

Prior to 1956, a large proportion of the Moroccan population was rural, illiterate, were hampered by malnutrition and marginal farming harvests, had no access to health care,

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and relied upon local saint's shrines to address their concerns and spiritual needs. Fewer than one in five hundred people were able to make Hajj pilgrimage, though virtually all of the population accessed local saints' shrines. They integrated formal/universalizing Islam and popular/ethnic Islam without any feeling of conflict into their belief system.

Since Moroccan independence, the changes in economy, infrastructure, education and health care have changed Amazigh utilization of ethnic/popular and universalizing/formal Islamic pilgrimage sites. When lycees' were established and attendance made mandatory by the Moroccan government, the proportion of people literate in Arabic increased, and thus followed an increase in the number of the people who could read the Koran and participate in formal/universalizing Islam. Well-paying jobs became available to the educated class, so participation in formal Islam rather than ethnic Islam became a mark of upward mobility. This contributed to the decline in popular/ethnic pilgrimage and the decrease in formal/universalizing Islamic pilgrimage. Other factors in diminishing the utilization of local saints' shrines were a public health care system, increasing per capita income, reliable transportation, and improved infrastructure. Hajj has increased hugely because of the ease and security of transportation provided by travel agencies. The health and well being of the hajji have improved because of the Saudi Ministry of Health regulations, so that more people can make hajj without causing worry to their kin left at home. All arrangements for hajj can be made online with a few mouse-clicks and a credit card. The hajji's kin at home can be in touch with the pilgrim frequently by phone or Internet. Hajj can be viewed on television and internet so the journey seems feasible and attainable rather than exotic and rare.

Though many saints' tombs have been abandoned because they are no longer needed to address personal concerns, the Moroccan ministry of tourism promotes the more photogenic and economically profitable saints' festivals. Publications such as National Geographic, and photographers such as Angela Fisher (1984) have interested the world in the picturesque, colorful Amazigh pilgrimage traditions. However, this popularization of tradition has altered the ritual actions to suit the tourists' camera and expectations to more effectively extract the tourist dollar. Photographs of 21st century saint's tomb celebrations have to be aimed to not include tourist buses (Dan, 1983). Sellers hawking amulets, talismans, henna, and jewelry, were always a part of ethnic festivals, but are now tailored to suit the international tourists. The Imlilchil fertility festival is a tourist "must" for photographers. Rolling Stones member Brian Jones popularized "*Jojouka*", the Amazigh trance music for saint's tomb ecstatic worship (Jones, 1971), which first attracted hippies, but has since grown into a popular, internationally attended music festival. The popular/ethnic Islamic pilgrimage festivals will not be abandoned in 21st century Morocco, but they are changed. The formal Islamic Hajj continues to grow, and can be a mark of social prestige and modernity as well as spiritual elevation.

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