

# Pilgrimage in North Africa and the Middle East. Introduction

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## **PILGRIMAGE IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST**

### **Public spheres, spaces for the public**

#### **Introduction**

From the westernmost point of the Maghreb to Pakistan, innumerable holy places are frequented every day, particularly on Fridays and Sundays, and even more so on certain anniversary dates, by worshippers and simple believers from nearby villages as well as faraway regions. The pilgrimage, a near-universal phenomenon, is widely practiced in the lands of the Near East, the cradle of the monotheistic religions, and on its margins, in the Maghreb and in central Asia.

The study of pilgrimages, especially Christian pilgrimages, has produced a wealth of publications. For the Middle East however, although Christian pilgrimages in the Middle Ages have received attention (Maraval, 1985), their contemporary aspects remain in shadow. And for Islam, the centrality of the *hajj*, the classic pilgrimage to Mecca, has long obscured the many lively local pilgrimages. Colonial historiography largely focused on the phenomenon of brotherhoods and the cult of saints, in which local pilgrimages would have figured without becoming the subjects of specific studies. Most of the work that followed carried on in the same vein, dealing with pilgrimages only through the study of saintliness or Sufism, or of holy places, the term pilgrimage being used to designate the place and not the event itself. Today, these secondary pilgrimages are at last beginning to attract the interest they deserve, in the Maghreb (Andezian, 2001; Berriane, 1992; Moussaoui, 2002) as well as Egypt (Madoeuf, 1995 and 2001; Mayeur-Jaouen, 2004) and Palestine (Aubin Boltanski, 2004). Strongly associated with the *hajj* in their rituals, they present complex and diversified practices which are evidence of the variety of ways in which the encounter with the sacred is manifested; these practices are being rediscovered today because of a rise in interest in popular Islam, long obscured by the primacy accorded by academic studies to political Islam. Although they are religious phenomena, pilgrimages are also much more, and it is both as specific subjects of study and as complex events that they will be treated here.

### **THE MAGHREB AND THE MIDDLE EAST, LANDS OF PILGRIMAGE**

The vast region that extends from the Atlantic to central Asia has inherited from its long history a complex religious stratification. Long one of the major centres of Antiquity, the Near Eastern core is also the birthplace of Christianity. The new religion spread quickly to its margins in the Maghreb and India, first in the cities, then in rural areas, especially through monks and holy men, hermits and stylites, who left architectural evidence of their presence, monasteries and basilicas. The birthplace of Christianity was also a land of adaptation that concentrated most of the doctrinal quarrels of the first centuries. From these quarrels and divisions, oriental Christianity inherited many faces; it is divided today into a dozen different communities, to which are added the Protestant churches established by 19<sup>th</sup> century missionaries. Unlike the Maghreb, where Islam was imposed totally, there remain, from Egypt to Iraq, large Christian communities which because of political events and religious tensions have partly withdrawn into the protective isolation of mountainous regions (Lebanese mountains, Qalamoun in Syria, etc.). The Druze and the Alawi, Muslim minority sects that branched off from Shia Islam in the Middle Ages, found refuge in the mountain ranges of Syria. A tumultuous religious history has thus made the region a complex mosaic of communities, Christian and Muslim, which share in different forms the same attachment to faith in a single God, to whom are also attached a large number of secondary sacred figures.

The advent of the monotheistic religions in the region established a new type of relation to the sacred and modified religious polarities. Although Christianity was oriented towards Jerusalem and Constantinople, the arrival of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century caused a profound upheaval in the religious topography of the region. Being affiliated to the religions of the Book, Islam venerates Jerusalem, henceforth thrice holy. But Jerusalem is exceeded in sacredness by Mecca and Medina, which led to a displacement of the centre of religious gravity towards the south-east, in the Hejaz, in lands lying far from the Mediterranean, cradle of the different religious strata that had preceded Islam in the region. Christianity, drawing from an ancient background, became superimposed with a religiosity inherited from Arabs of the gentility.

Christians and Muslims share the same veneration for the biblical prophets, for whom Palestine is the land of predilection; it is here that sanctuaries dedicated to the most important of them have been built. Muslim believers accord a sacred character to the prophets in spite of the fact that the notion of sainthood itself is absent from the official doctrine of Islam, which recognizes only the holiness of God and has no place in principle for intermediaries between God and men. But this distance established between the human world and the divine became little by little filled with the popular aspiration to address an intercessor that is closer and less intimidating than the hierarchical figure of God, and to draw near to one an abstract sacredness situated in a faraway land, the Hejaz. The prophet Mohammed, at first considered to be exclusively human, was thus given a new status, half human, half divine, possessed of supernatural powers, and with him the members of his family (*ahl al-bayt*) and his Companions (*al-sahâba*) in the first period of Islam. This recognition of the saintliness of the prophet led in turn to the sacralisation of his tomb at Medina, as well as the tombs of those closest to him, and then at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the establishment of the commemoration of his birth (*mawlid al-nabi*).

In an even larger movement, the reverence held for Mohammed and the biblical prophets extended to numerous saints, whether humble local mystics or prestigious founders of Sufi brotherhoods of international influence, often promoted to saintliness by popular initiative and later taken over by political and religious powers. It was recognized that certain human beings possessed a quality of perfection and supernatural powers that placed them in the position of intermediaries between a far-off God and imperfect men. The development of Muslim mysticism, Sufism, beginning in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, gave a definitive impulse to the cult of saints. The cult of these personages, often revered in their lifetimes, continued after death around their tombs or cenotaphs. However, the interest in saints does not have the same intensity everywhere. Rich in prophets, Palestine does not much venerate its saints, but the farther from it the more the cult of saints is alive and diversified (Geoffroy, 1995). Egypt and Morocco in particular harbour intense forms of this cult.

The cults of saints and prophets are of course not exclusive to Muslims; Christians are also fond of them, and all over the Orient may be found the same attachment to the figure of the holy man as defined by P. Brown (1996). From the Christian perspective, Palestine plays a central role, but everywhere else in the Bilâd al-Shâm monuments invested with popular piety flourish, especially monasteries, of which many contain the tomb of a saint. Muslim minorities themselves participate in the vitality and diversity of the cult of saints.

Today the creation of saints continues. Although some originate in the most ancient history of the region, others have appeared in the modern period. Ahmad al-Hârûn, one of the most popular saints of Damascus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, died in 1962, when he was buried next to sheikh Arslân, patron of the Syrian capital. Then more recently, in Egypt, the sheikh Cha'râwî, famous for his televised sermons, was elevated to the rank of saint at his death in 1998. Orchestrated by one of his sons, a cult of the new saint developed in his native village, which houses his tomb, to which pilgrimage is made, especially during the patronal feast-day that commemorates the anniversary of his death (Chih and Mayeur-Jaouen, 2002). A young woman, Myrna, living today in the Christian quarter of Soufanieh in Damascus, has received visits and messages from the Virgin since 1982. She has carried stigmata several times and her body exudes holy oil. Certainly, Myrna is not (yet?) a saint, but her presence sanctifies her home and its neighbourhood which have become places of intense religious activity visited by both Catholic and Orthodox Christians, from Syria and elsewhere, as well as by Muslims (Agius, 2004).

The rich religious history of this region where Islam predominates has bequeathed a very dense network of holy places, from the most modest cenotaph to the most prestigious urban sanctuaries, which spread from the two radiating poles of Jerusalem, the holy city shared by the

three revealed religions, and the Mecca-Medina of the Muslims. The farther into the east of the region, the more the religious landscape becomes complex. In the Maghreb, Islam reigns almost completely, except for a few Christian and especially Jewish survivals. In Egypt, Islam mixes with a large Copt minority, and in the Bilâd al-Shâm, the Sunni majority coexists as much with the many Eastern Christian churches as with Muslim minorities. In Pakistan, an Islam that is itself diversified coexists with the Christian, Sikh and Hindu religions. At the heart of the network of holy places born of these many religious traditions, hierarchies are established, pilgrimage itineraries emerge, and the whole constitutes a sacred geography, at the intersection of religions, which greatly contributes to structuring and guiding the representations belonging to the inhabitants of this vast region.

It is mainly in the context of the cult of saints that the practice of pilgrimage, generalised in the region, belongs. To the codified religiosity of the mosque and the church, believers have added and developed, around these many holy places, a less constrained religiosity, often joyous, even exuberant, which offends the purism of the doctors of the Law but which also creates spaces of liberty (Chambert-Loir and Guillot, 1995). The act of pilgrimage has a genealogy that goes back to Jewish tradition and was then taken up by Christianity, which slipped into the ancient practice of the cult of the patron saint; the saint only becomes closer because human (Brown, 1996), and it is by visits that one shows one's friendly attachment, that one seeks the presence of the saint. Islam in turn borrowed from traditions already present in a Near East that was rapidly conquered, and placed pilgrimage at the heart of dogma by making the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, an obligation and the supreme act in the religious life of every pious Muslim. However, as it is often inaccessible, the canonical pilgrimage became replaced in popular practice by one or two secondary pilgrimages to the holy places of saints or prophets. In all cases it consists of a journey, a quest. It is true that travelling is a fundamental feature of Muslim civilisation, which was constructed on the moving frontiers of an empire. Moreover, the absence of figured representations or relics imposes a "dictatorship of the place" (Mayeur-Jaouen, 2000); it is necessary to approach the saint, go to his sanctuary, encounter him "in person" and request his intercession.

Thus, in the same way that they "visit" the Virgin, Christians visit the tombs of numerous saints to ask for intercession or healing, becoming imbued with the sacredness, the miraculous character of sacred oil or icons. In Islam, it is first of all the *baraka* of the saint that the believer has come to seek, to imbue himself with this and ask for intercession, as in Christianity. Intercession involves a ritual sequence that includes acts of purification, prayers, circumambulations, offerings and sacrifices. Certain requests are traditional, such as the desire for pregnancy or the wish for a good husband. Others evolve with the demands of the modern world: success in examinations, a better job, money to buy a car or apartment. But among these materialistic requests is sometimes heard the desperate plea of parents who have come to ask that their sick child be healed. The Shiites accord particular importance to visiting the tombs of the members of the family of the Prophet and the Imams, and the rituals that take place are carefully codified and recorded in guides. The Druze, whose religion has no liturgy and no ostentation, nevertheless practise pilgrimages to the numerous cenotaphs that crown the heights of the Jebel. They ask for the intercession of the saint to obtain a grace, usually recovery from illness, and in exchange offer sacrifices and ex-votos (Bouron, 1930). The Alawites also visit sanctuaries and even replace the pilgrimage to Mecca by visits to the tombs of the guides of their esoteric doctrine (Geoffroy, 1995). Whatever the importance of the wish, this need for encounter and intercession, which emanates from all the faiths, has woven an intense network of pilgrimages in the region.

Although the practice of pilgrimage is shared by all the religions and faiths of the Maghreb and the Near East, and although there are many similarities, the forms are diversified, as seen in the richness of the vocabulary used to designate the different types of pilgrimage. The term *hajj*, which carries the meaning of "to yield to", is used to designate the great canonical pilgrimage to Mecca only, the *'umra* is the lesser pilgrimage that can be made at any time of year. The word *mawsim* designates the markets of ancient Arabia, which generally occurred at the places of pilgrimage, and developed also into the meaning of season, which in turn evokes the cycle of pilgrimages and of feast-days, especially those of religious character. The term, from which the French word *mousssem* originates, designates the patronal feasts, so frequent in the Maghreb, which associate religious ritual, fair, and funfair around a sanctuary. This type of event is called *mouled* in Egypt, a dialectical derivation of the word *mawlid*, meaning anniversary, and designates in principle the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammed above all. Besides these

collective pilgrimages are pilgrimages by individuals or small groups, called *ziyârât* (visits). These generic terms are accompanied by more precise designations, particularly for processions (*mawkib*, *zaffa*, *tawâf*, *âda* and *arâda*), indicating both the polymorphism and the importance of this ritual in the sequence of the pilgrimage.

## PILGRIMAGES, A POLYMORPHIC PHENOMENON

Collective pilgrimages are those that concern us here. The yearning for the encounter with the sacred gives rise to intensive population movements, whether to the holy cities of Islam and Christianity, to large urban sanctuaries or modest rural mausoleums. Also, with such a density of holy places, and the level of enthusiasm for pilgrimage shared by all the faiths, there are factors in play around pilgrimages that go beyond just the religious. It is however almost exclusively in religious terms that the phenomenon of pilgrimage has been considered, as much by historians (Dupront, 1987) as by anthropologists (Turner 1974 and 1990). Considered to be a progression towards a holy place, which leads to an encounter with the sacred experienced through a series of rituals, it results in a return to the point of origin crowned by a change in status, on the model of rites of passage (Van Gennep, 1981). But the attention given to the sacred sequence, which probably forms the hard core of pilgrimages, often hides the many levels of the social realm that are also concerned and transformed by the act of pilgrimage. Indeed, pilgrimages are social phenomena of great magnitude, if measured only by the numbers of people concerned: two million pilgrims visit Mecca every year, certain great *mouleds* in Egypt concern nearly a million faithful, and on a national scale, a country such as Morocco counted no less than 700 annual *moussems* in the 1980s (Reysoo, 1991). Without ignoring the religious aspect, we wish to observe here what happens on the margins of this aspect in the phenomenon of pilgrimage, based on the hypothesis that a pilgrimage constitutes a particular space-time where the sacred and the profane interpenetrate each other in a complex and dynamic way.

Pilgrimage is movement, mobility. In the Middle East, commerce, knowledge and religion have been inseparably linked since the Middle Ages, giving rise to important fluxes of population movement. Although today pilgrimages perpetuate this tradition of mobility, the conditions of travel have changed considerably, as much in the means as in the duration. The slow caravan has given way to motor vehicles and the airplane. The globalised world of today has profoundly recomposed, especially from an economic point of view, the conditions and procedures of travel; moreover, pilgrimages appear more and more to be one of the hubs for the development of tourism in certain countries (Miossec, 1994).

Whatever the means of transport used, any trip constitutes a break in space, of course, but also in time. The event of the pilgrimage occurs in a space, usually a city, as it is the urban sanctuaries that attract the largest crowds, of which the pilgrim is not a native, and it progresses in an irregular and cyclic manner, in a time which is not that of the everyday. Thus the pilgrimage is an “extra-ordinary” event, in which particular conditions of the social realm or current social practices may be revealed, but are experienced exceptionally in a different way.

The pilgrimage moment is also an ephemeral crossroads. Within a limited lapse of time, humans meet as well as goods and ideas, which spread with the return of the pilgrims, leading to important and often durable material, political and even psychological transformations.

The gigantic intermingling of populations brought about by pilgrimages has always presented a major problem for public health, particularly complex when pilgrimages have an international dimension. Political and health authorities have thus always had to face the danger related to the possible diffusion of infectious diseases. They also often also feel responsible for the defence of morality, especially in regard to prostitution, a common occurrence in the context of the gathering of crowds. But on the other hand pilgrimages can also have a therapeutic role, and the quest for healing remains a central motivation for many pilgrims.

Bringing together crowds which can sometimes be immense, pilgrimages in general can present a challenge to public order. The mixture of people of different origins, danger to health, wild festive behaviour, confrontation of religions, all create conditions of disorder. However, pilgrimages “work” and although accidents occur, they are still relatively few considering the crowds involved. In fact, the event of pilgrimage comes under tight organisation and adheres to

certain social norms; the society formed by a pilgrimage has to deal with the government of a state. Pilgrimages are thus events involving order as well as disorder.

In short, it is a place in which a collective being is recreated that lives in a conviviality that is as festive as it is religious, even political. The event of pilgrimage, for example, is favourable to the strengthening and the restructuring of identities, and to the meeting of different faiths. The society formed by a pilgrimage, itinerant, ephemeral and festive (Dupront, 1987), is probably, in this out-of-the-ordinary moment, capable of social innovation.

Thus characterised, pilgrimages can be looked at from an angle that is not exclusively religious. Other dimensions, generally neglected but no less integral parts of the phenomenon, become evident. This is true for the economic dimension. Traditionally, since the earliest times, pilgrimages have also been the occasion for great commercial fairs. This was the case for Mecca until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and for most of the great *mouleds* of Egypt until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These fairs have lost their importance, but the pilgrimages retain strong economic factors that have changed from traditional commerce to more diffuse forms. The organisation of a pilgrimage is based upon a large financial activation, and transport, hotels and the production of craftwork for the pious momentarily transform the face of the local economy. Moreover, in a context of acceleration of trade, pilgrimages form points of support for commercial networks. And they often give rise to an economy of charity.

A second important dimension is the political. As they are gatherings of crowds, pilgrimages may be perceived as propitious for propaganda and political mobilisation as well as the imposition of social norms intended to “discipline” these large movements of people. Because of its great importance, the pilgrimage to Mecca is particularly imbued with many political factors; this is also the case for many *mouleds* and *moussems* that can serve as bases of support for present-day election campaigns or constitute one of the arenas where official Islam, Islamic brotherhoods, popular Islam and Muslim fundamentalists confront one another.

The impact of pilgrimages on areas and territories, rural and urban, is also an important factor. On the regional scale, we have seen how much pilgrimages contribute to the creation of itineraries that reinforce the coherence of a sacred geography. Very often in Antiquity, pilgrimages were at the origin of the creation of cities. Even today, sacred areas to which pilgrims are attached can create or recreate cities. The promotion of such a sacred place, because of a religious or geopolitical event, can lead to the emergence of a city around an isolated sanctuary, or the profound transformation of an earlier urban fabric, by the addition of access roads and infrastructures for the visitors.

A final theme to take into account is the festive dimension, which is very discreet in the great pilgrimage to Mecca, taken over and transformed by Wahabism, but central for the *mouleds* and *moussems*. For the populations of the Maghreb and the Near East, which have serious economic difficulties and are subject to strict political and social control, festive occasions do not occur often. Pilgrimages are a time of festivity and entertainment, which create a social tie for the pilgrims. Derision in particular is expressed, for example in scenes created on floats paraded during *mouleds*, mocking political figures or certain social or professional categories linked to those in power.

All these dimensions are experienced in close relation to the religious dimension. Certain political and social changes that affect the regions of the Maghreb and the Near East may be observed, and it is perhaps precisely this dynamic that can contribute, during pilgrimages, to the transformation, even the construction, of a form of public space.

The term public space, the intensive use of which may lead to problems of definition, is understood here according to two acceptances. In one sense it designates the physical space in which the pilgrimage occurs, that is, often a city. But the sacred as well as the “profane” dimensions of the pilgrimage have an important visible impact on the spatial organisation. In this sense, it would appear necessary to follow the transformations that the event of pilgrimage applies to the urban public space, defined as “a place of meeting and gathering (which) as such imposes on institutions and ordinary citizens the obligation to understand and to manage complex social situations” (Joseph, 1998). Being the place of contact with authority, the public space can also be the place where public opinion is expressed, where a transaction occurs between individuals and the state (Habermas, 1993). By clearly defining these two aspects, but associating them mentally, we can use here this notion of public space as a tool that may clarify the polymorphic phenomenon of pilgrimage.

It is around this set of issues that a collective and multidisciplinary research project was established, initiated in 2001 and ended with a conference held at the Institut Français du Proche-Orient at Damascus in September 2003<sup>1</sup>. The contributions to this conference form the present work. The contributors seek to reconstruct, through research in the field, in areas with which they have long had familiarity, social practices through which different aspects of pilgrimage may be observed in their specificities and their complexity. Moreover, as pilgrimages – festivity, crowd and movement - are eminently visual phenomena, most authors have also developed the use of images, produced by a photographer who is often the researcher himself, or through old photographs, to capture in another way the social practices as well as the interactions between the participants that are established during pilgrimages. It was necessary however to go beyond the purely ethnographic approach in the use of photography, that the “folkloric” or “exotic” character of the subject can induce, to participate in a general consideration of the use of photography in the social sciences. In this sense, the photograph is not seen as an expression of the representation of the real, but as a pertinent tool of observation, analysis and restitution of a social reality (David and Delpal, 1993). Finally, the case studies brought together in this work, which of course present only a very small number of examples compared to the great number of pilgrimages in the Maghreb and in the Middle East, enable by their wide regional sweep to clear the way for comparison within the region and in regard to other situations, particularly that of Europe, which has so far been the better known.

## **SOME FEATURES OF PILGRIMAGES IN THE MAGHREB AND IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

### ***UNIVERSALITY OF THE PRACTICE, REGIONAL DIFFERENCES***

We have stressed that pilgrimage is a generalised phenomenon and an intense practice throughout the region. Moreover, it is not, as in the Christianity of Europe, a ritual which has gone through a pause before experiencing an increase today, but a durable, constant phenomenon; and it is not rigid as it has gone through changes and developments that differ according to the region.

In the Muslim Maghreb, the remoteness of the holy places of Mecca and Medina have probably contributed to the proliferation of intermediary saintly figures, and has made the cults devoted to these particularly active, especially the pilgrimages to their mausoleums. The *mawlid*, the birthday of the Prophet, is celebrated more festively than elsewhere, and often occurs locally at the same time as the patronal feast-day of the local saint (Moussaoui, 2002). The practice of local pilgrimages as substitutes for the *hajj* is widespread in the Maghreb, as in another marginal region, the Balkans, where the Bosnian pilgrimage of Ajvatovica, for example, is considered to be the “Ka’aba of the poor (Clayer and Popovic, 1995). In Egypt, popular religiosity takes forms that are particularly festive and exuberant. Every village has its *mouled*, and certain saints situated in towns, such as Ahmad al-Badawi at Tanta, Ibrâhîm al-Disûqî at Disûq, and the *mouleds* of Hussein and Sayyida Zaynab in Cairo, give rise to immense pilgrimages that combine religious rituals and funfairs. Palestine resembles Egypt in its forms of religiosity. The large pilgrimages to the tombs of the prophets (called *moussems* as in the Maghreb, and not *mouleds* as in Egypt) in the past combined ritual, feast-day and commercial fair, although today, under the occupation, these pilgrimages are mainly reduced to their political dimension.

In the Bilâd al-Sham, like Iraq, pilgrimages have a particular character. Apart from the great Shiite pilgrimages, Iraq does not have collective *moussems* for local saints (Massignon, 1988). It is the same in Syria where visiting saints is mainly an individual practice (*ziyâra*) that characterises the Druze and Alawite minorities rather than the Sunni majority. However, the processions (*‘arâda*) that occur for certain religious holidays and collective visits to the tombs of saints were common in Syria until just before the Second World War (Lecerf and Tresse, 1938). The political upheavals that have occurred since in the country, the secularization movement imposed by the Baath party as well as the state of emergency, maintained for forty years, that prohibits gatherings in public places, have discouraged collective demonstrations. However, a similar political situation in Egypt

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<sup>1</sup> This program received financial backing under the ATIP-young researchers (ex APN) of the CNRS from 2001 to 2003.

has not brought about the same consequences. A few types of processions do survive in Syria, especially among the Christians. In the Christian village of Maaloula, near Damascus, the two communities, Catholic and Orthodox, organise in turn a procession for the feast-day of their respective saints, Sergius and Theclous. A common demonstration brings them together the day of celebration of the Holy Cross. Leaving the church where mass has been held, the cortege with the standard of the saint at its head is led by the young men of the community, who call out at stops along the way near the houses of the village, during which they hail the inhabitants and offer good wishes in Arabic and Aramaic. The procession is joyous and lively; arak, the local anis alcohol drink, circulates widely, clearly signifying the takeover of the public space of the village by the Christian community. Finally, in Pakistan, pilgrimages are marked by the collective dimension, so characteristic of the religious practices of the Indian sub-continent.

Although local pilgrimages still manifest great vitality, they have been eroded little by little by recent shifts in the religious domain, tighter and tighter political control, the renewal of Sufism and the decline of local identities. Also, the very meaning of these events tends to change. The comparison between Egypt and the Maghreb, equally inclined towards collective demonstrations, is particularly clear. In Egypt, local pilgrimages do not appear (yet?) to have found an efficient formula for renewal. In the Maghreb, however, some of them have been energetically taken over by the political authorities, who seek to promote their folkloric aspect to attract international tourism as well as the emigrated population. Thus, the date of a *moussems* may be modified to place it at the heart of the summer period, when emigrants return to their country. It is this process of making these events folkloric and the closer and closer association of the pilgrimages to tourism that also explains, for example, the success of *moussems* on the seacoast of Morocco (Beriane, 1992). Very often, a pilgrimage is only an episode in a diversified sequence of festivity, qualified by the general term of *marhajân* (festival). This is probably a phenomenon close to certain processes of reinvention of traditions that flourish in Europe. In France, for example, many patronal feast-days in villages, from which the fabrication and parade of flowered floats or the presence of groups of majorettes have disappeared, now have "modernised" manifestations which seek to borrow from local traditions and are often termed festivals (tomato festival, stamp festival, record festival, etc.). In the Maghreb, this form of recovery appears to affect more readily the most important pilgrimages, and more so the urban pilgrimages than the rural ones.

## **EVENTS THAT CREATE MOBILITY**

Pilgrimages are the cause of great movements of populations in the Maghreb and the Middle East, especially in Islam where the structure of the sacred gives rise to migrations. Certainly, these movements possess a particular nature: they always depend upon a deliberate choice, are above all guided by a gesture of faith, and they remain for the most part temporary. These movements occur on very different scales, from the most local pilgrimage that attracts at most the inhabitants of neighbouring villages, to the *hajj* that today brings together Muslims from all over the world.

On the local and regional scales, pilgrimages lead to forms of local tourism that intensify under the growing demand for leisure activities from the developing middle classes, a demand that is often not satisfied by the governments or public institutions. The relation between pilgrimage and leisure activity is established more conclusively when the religious event is accompanied by a particular attraction (seaside bathing, equestrian demonstrations) or the possibility of strengthening family ties. Certain Christian pilgrimages enable the maintenance of family networks and religious identity beyond frontiers, especially in Syria and Lebanon. Each weekend, buses discharge at the main Syrian monasteries, such as at Saidnaya, Lebanese pilgrims who come to have a pious but joyous retreat, where they often meet a Syrian branch of their family. The holy places are moreover attractions in themselves, aside from any aspect of pilgrimage. The saint creates the leisure activity: next to a *qubba*, a place charged with meaning, the pilgrims settle down, with a sense of privilege, for a picnic. The sites of certain holy places in a grandiose natural environment attract visitors of all faiths in a situation that mixes faith and leisure. For example, there are many Muslims who on the Friday, the weekly day off, visit the Catholic monastery of Mar Moussa in Syria, thus combining a pious visit with a happy walk and a picnic.



On a larger scale, including all the region of the Maghreb and the Middle East, pilgrimages create collective itineraries which have a certain impact, whether from a political or an economic point of view. Thus, the collapse of the ideological barrier that cut off the Muslim populations of the ex-USSR from the natural centre of the expression of their faith has enabled them to reintegrate into the circulation related to religion, especially the pilgrimage to Mecca, from which they had been almost completely excluded. The reactivation of networks that are sometimes very ancient can be detected at times of pilgrim movement. This gives rise to processes of re-finding identity, as well as the resumption of traditional commercial exchange, for example between central Asia and the Middle East. The surging geography of the Shiite pilgrimages is a particularly good example of the dependence of this phenomenon on geopolitical situations. The interruption of Iranian pilgrimages to the holy cities of Najaf and Kerbala, in Iraq, since the war between those countries during the 1980s, and the obstacles set up by the regime of Saddam Hussein to the religious practices of the Shiites, shifted the pilgrimage itineraries of Iranians towards Syria, draining the touristico-religious tides that benefit the economy of the country. But this new sacred geography of Shiism, which favours Syria at the moment, can itself become modified by the potential reopening of the holy cities of Iraq when conflict ends.

The pilgrimage to Mecca is of course the main cause of religious migrations on an international scale. The flow towards the holy sites of Islam has continued to increase since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because of improvement of transport and the decrease in its cost, but also because of a general increase in religious practice. Since the beginning of the 1990s, groups of pilgrims to Mecca have been swelled by the presence of Muslims from the old Soviet republics, and they are more and more numerous from countries of immigration, especially Europe and the United States. The latter have moreover undertaken to organise and supervise the pilgrimage of Muslims living in their countries, as did the colonial nations of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The *hajj* visa is strictly temporary, but still today, as it did in the past, the pilgrimage may lead to definitive settlement, in the holy cities themselves as well as along the itinerary followed by the pilgrims. Moreover, the pilgrimage feeds a part of illegal immigration in Saudi Arabia, especially among the population from south-east Asia. Finally, although the great fairs that accompanied the pilgrimage before no longer occur, it always leads to large flows of international commerce. This is often carried out on the margins of legality, and is evidence of a larger phenomenon of alternative globalisation, put together around commercial, personal and religious networks, that occurs mainly in the south-south flows.

According to A. Dupront, it is the ordeal of the journey that makes the pilgrim. In the Maghreb and the Middle East, however, especially in Islam, the test of the journey is less important than in the Christian West. What counts is the point of arrival, the sacred encounter and the intercession requested of the saint. In a world that was for a long time nomadic, departure does not represent such a clear break as in the Occident; the pilgrim is never completely a stranger on his journey, and as long as he has not arrived, he remains a traveller like any other. Moreover, although the Latin term *peregrinus*, from which the word pilgrim derives, first meant stranger, such a connotation is not found either in the word *hajj* or in the term *ziyâra*, in which we discern an idea of closeness, of familiarity. Similarly, although the test of the journey is certainly not without meaning, Islam does not have the mortifications that the Christian pilgrim imposes on himself, such as advancing on one's knees. On the contrary, new methods of transport have always been adopted rapidly and with enthusiasm, and often in evidence today are jolly buses emanating the sound of musical instruments and songs that take the pilgrims to the sacred place.

## **PLACES FOR THE REARRANGEMENT OF IDENTITIES**

Many holy places are centres where individuals or groups come to find their roots, and thus redefine their identities. Each village, each quarter, each town tends to tightly link its identity with its patron saint, and the visits to the saint are also a means to reaffirm belonging. During pilgrimages, certain processions that move around (*dawra*) the village are emblematic of this sealing of local identity. On other occasions, pilgrimages can cause temporary substitution of one identity for another, the borders between urban and rural especially tending to become blurred or to shift about. Thus, on the occasion of the celebration of a religious feast-day, the urban space may be invaded by a rural or tribal population, who for a certain period of time recreate their own

world, or an urban group moves from the city to establish itself temporarily in a rural space, near a modest sanctuary, for example. The feast-day, which is accompanied by pilgrimages, plays a fundamental role in the process of going back to roots, of remembrance of identities. When after a long eclipse due to the prohibition of religious feast-days by the socialist state of Yemen, the *ziyârât* (which in Yemen designate not only the visit to a saint, but also the collective commemoration of the saint) were resumed, the staging which they have adopted clearly reflects the repossession of local identities (Camelin, 2001). This fundamental factor of feast-days is moreover highlighted by the fact that political authorities often seek to create alternative demonstrations, national commemorations or those in honour of the leader, in order to impose other types of identities, whose national referent is in exact opposition to the local dimension of religious feast-days and pilgrimages. Today, the facility with which collective events such as processions and pilgrimages can be captured as images, thanks to video, can serve to prolong this moment of strengthening of local identities. In September 2004, the great inter-denominational procession that occurred during the feast of the Holy Cross in the Syrian village of Maaloula was entirely filmed, and projected the next day on a giant screen in the central square of the village.

Besides the going back to roots in local identities, during pilgrimages attachments to larger identities are established, especially denominational. The places of pilgrimage certainly sometimes provide the occasion to create inter-denominational encounters, but most often there are signs, visible in the public space, by which each religion, each faith, is recognizable. This denominational affiliation appears in two forms, one material, the other of an imaginary character. For the minority faiths especially, the places of pilgrimage, and more generally the holy places, appear as refuges, stops that create a reassuring geography linking the faithful between them. This is often the case for monasteries, in an environment dominated by Islam, but these refuges are not exclusive and can also receive the "Other". On the other hand, in the absence of possibilities of movement, or because the network of sacred places is too large, on a regional level or that of a religion, this sacred geography takes on an imaginary dimension. The faithful extend in imagination their attachment to the holy places related to their religion, thus delineating a sacred Jewish, Christian or Muslim landscape, each reinforcing religious identities.

This does not necessarily mean that pilgrimages provide the occasion for withdrawal into a single identity, whether local, denominational or even broader. We know the way in which Victor Turner qualified pilgrimages, borrowing from the definition of rites of passage proposed by Van Gennep. According to him, the pilgrimage is a moment of liminality, of in-between, where the feeling of an essential overall social tie is alive, called *communitas* as opposed to a structured, differentiated and hierarchised system. Many of the authors of texts in the present work have come across this feeling of fraternity in the course of their research. It is however never experienced exclusively and does not totally erase social or ethnic divisions, or differences of opinion or representation, which exist and continue to be expressed in the context of pilgrimages. These are complex moments, during which many identities combine in different ways that cannot be reduced to *communitas* alone. The polysemy of processions is particularly revealing of the many allegiances experienced simultaneously, or according to context.

## **DISPUTED PLACES**

Pilgrimages are space-time events where people and ideas meet, and are of course affected by political factors. These frequently come into play around the holy places themselves, objects of rivalry in their appropriation by different authorities, and around the promotion of pilgrimages attached to these holy places. The *impresarii* who take them over therefore possess a possible channel of mobilisation. In this sense, pilgrimages and the spaces in which they occur are disputed places. However, these types of situation do not attain the force that they can have in Europe where each country can boast of only one or two important sites of pilgrimage, around which power struggles are concentrated. The pilgrimage of Czestochowa, in the context of the communist regime, became for example a symbol of a free and Catholic Poland (Michel, 2003), and the Virgin appearing at Medjugorje was used by the actors in the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Claverie, 2003). In the Middle East, the considerable number of pilgrimages disperses such forces over many places, and such an intensity of political mobilisation around pilgrimages does not occur, except perhaps in Palestine

However, political power is present at each of these pilgrimages, if only to ensure order during events that may be conducive to extreme behaviour. This is why the political authorities seek to channel the crowd by making sure that it carries out its actions in the public space, kept in order for example by including parks where the crowd can spread out, but also be controlled. Furthermore, pilgrimages can even provide a stage for the political power, which can use the occasion to reaffirm its pre-eminence and its strength. Processions, here again, play a fundamental role. Established according to a ceremonial that is usually highly codified, they demonstrate the hold that the political and religious powers intend to keep over these events.

In spite of the takeover of pilgrimages by the political and religious powers, they still remain spaces of liberty, where the public (in the sense of the *'amma*) can express itself. But this space of liberty is not as radical as it can be in similar situations in Europe. As A. Dupront has pointed out, pilgrimages appear to be events in which religious institutions are certainly manifest, but of which they are not necessarily the masters. The public expresses itself in ways which are its own. Thus in Islam, religion may be weakly institutionalised, and the dichotomy that operates in the Occident between strongly institutionalised and weakly institutionalised religious events (pilgrimages for example) does not have the same force.

Although the presence and the circulation of speeches of a political nature may sometimes be observed, even the existence of political activities (slogans, mobilisation for elections...) in certain pilgrimages in the Maghreb and the Middle East, no event has so far occurred that contributes to the emergence of a public space, such as may be observed in Iran, for example (Adelkhah, 1997). In a context of lack of democracy, the particular moment of the pilgrimage does not (yet?) appear to give rise to the emergence of public demand for dialogue with the state. On the contrary, in that they present a need for intercession, pilgrimages evoke the traditional methods of politics in the region, especially the strength of populism. One visits a saint to obtain a favour, to realise a wish, which is often expressed by writing on a piece of paper which is left at a sanctuary. This is similar to ordinary political practices. For example, during lively political meetings in Egypt, at the time of campaigns for legislative elections by particularly powerful or influential candidates, a movement towards the foot of the platform may be seen as individuals slip personal requests written on pieces of paper into the very hand of the candidate or one of his aides. This is a context very close to seeking intercession by a saint, also very personalised, but far from a situation open to the expression of a public opinion.

## **SOME INDICATIONS FOR INTERPRETATION**

A pilgrimage is an experience associated with a journey, as are the contributions which make up this work. All of these accounts cast beams of light on the subject as they follow pilgrimages over a vast geographic area, from Morocco to Pakistan, as well as from one place to another – from Chad to Mecca, Armenia to Jerusalem, Israel to Morocco - as well as around the Mediterranean, in countries where diverse communities are mixed together, especially Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon.

This collective exercise is an attempt to take account of situations observed here and there, in different ways, by using diverse sources and methods borrowed from disciplines from which the contributors come or by which they were inspired: history, sociology, geography, anthropology, and ethnology. Pilgrimages seen from the point of view of social sciences are glittering objects, their attractiveness resulting from the various perspectives and different lures that dominate the researchers, who have contrasting types of appropriation and investigation. The result favours general outlines, instantaneous moments captured in snatches, follow-ups of complete sequences, and focuses based on thematic investigations.

These accounts can be understood either as drawn-out segments or samples taken in an irregular way, some being related or affiliated while others are more autonomous in appearance. But all are to be read together, as they provide, from different academic, temporal and spatial registers, meaningful information on a common subject.

As this text is intended as an introduction to the work presented in this book, it would seem evident to ask, if not answer, the initial question: what is a pilgrimage? What practices define a phenomenon that is a fact, an event, an act, but also a place and a time, a collection of individuals who have become a crowd and a demonstration of religiosity? A pilgrimage is a composite

experience that is both personal and collective, both corporal and spiritual, a polymorphic situation, and cannot appear as a defined practice, unanimous and transposable. "There is a spiritual geography of the world, but this geography is dynamic, and it is in situating the meaning of these movements that we may characterise the final value for ourselves. All human movement with a spiritual value can be defined as a *pilgrimage* and the goal of such movement as a *holy land*." (Massignon, 1942, p. 7).

This is a question of pilgrimages in the plural, and of *the* pilgrimage, because although some express this in the plural as in *mouleds* and *moussems*, the *hajj* represents more than a simple noun in the singular, it represents uniqueness; this distinction cannot be omitted, as it derives from the status of an obligation as a principle in the expression of a faith and an identity. Without going into a hypothetical evaluation of the degrees of sacredness of pilgrimages or into the hierarchy of their supposed value, it is clear that among Muslim pilgrimages, the *hajj* occupies the primal place. Also, many pilgrimages are passed off as the "true one", the "great one" in complement or in parallel; many of these are humbly defined, in comparison, as "pilgrimages of the poor". The *hajj* is the model pilgrimage, as may be seen in the rites of substitution or imitation in other Muslim pilgrimages; several of these together can equal the pilgrimage to Mecca, or they may be required to precede it. Permanently implicit, as the Venice of the *Invisible Cities* of Italo Calvino, the *hajj* is both incomparable and a latent reference to other Muslim pilgrimages, which it perhaps outshines but also motivates and even legitimises when they are presented as complementary.

The perspective on pilgrimages favoured here is that of a general questioning initiated by the idea, also controversial, of the public space. Concerning the public space, one may retain from an initial discursive reading deficiencies and incompleteness, but the emphasis is underlying, without forced analysis but through an elucidation oriented towards the collection of combined data on spaces, times and personages. This approach is perhaps excessively expansive, but tends to avoid the "scenes and types" sort of transcription that has long prevailed in the accounts of these events. Meaningful crowds and crowds of meaningfulness: pilgrimages are by their very nature landscapes in the making, with many compositions, each original, characterised by the near-simultaneousness of the creation and the dissolution of their elements. We stress the difficulty of placing the pilgrimage between the category of a public practice and that of a private practice, in specifying that the "extimate" (from the French term *extime*, Lévy and Lussault, 2003) does not suspend the intimate, which is not reduced to the private. The existence of the self adapts to the transfer of one category of space to another.

It is also from this point of view, attentive to the advent "of potential spaces of appearance between speaking and reacting humans" (Arendt, 1972), that certain contributors wished to take account of the expression and modulation of words; thus many of the words and speeches collected in the various contexts have been emphasized. This rich survey produces a condensation, a mist of volatile words, sampled from the rhythms of these events and from the types of language: citations of phrases known by heart, prayers and incantations, songs and poems, exclamations, proclamations and petitions, questions and trivial exchanges, even logorrhoea, when a pilgrimage becomes a spillway of emotions.

The forms of trade developed during pilgrimages can be unusual. The animal traditionally sacrificed during the *hajj* has today become an element of virtual trade, the price of the animal exchanged for a paper coupon having the value of a sheep, which will be offered to the poor. A pious image, a candle or an *ex voto* may be offered for the realisation of a wish, a pain suffered for a good deed, a meal of couscous or a glass of tea for the presence of a guest, etc. Other measures and evaluations of values appear, other forms of gifts and counter-gifts, in a system that renders wishes, objects, foodstuffs, words and actions fair and exchangeable.

Spaces of common ownership are analysed here, spaces created by ties, itineraries and common occurrences; these fulfil certain stipulations of co-presence, such as those related to the expression of intermingling, genres, groups or situations. The pilgrimages studied here are distinguished for the most part by the massive and active presence of women, which would seem to go against custom concerning the public space in Arabo-Muslim societies. In the same way, there is no need to enter into an inconclusive discussion on the transposition, supposedly impossible or partial, of certain terms concerning the idea of the public space in the areas presented here, but to explore, without watering down, "a question that by its anthropological extension is an almost universal question" (Navez-Bouchanne, 2001, p. 120).

To borrow the words of Pierre Sansot (1973), the public space both “decrees itself and does not decree itself”; it is the same, it seems to us, that in the modes of expressing it, in putting the acts that occur in it into words, is it absolutely necessary to authenticate and proclaim it as such or can we not just present it to be read and interpreted? It is this last option that we have adopted; this public space that is sometimes spoken of, sometimes formulated in other terms, or simply suggested is to be understood in practice through words, acts, scenes and situations.

A pilgrimage is born of a coincidence, that of a time and a place, a conjunction whose adjustment becomes a balance on which investment can take place and action can be based. Pilgrimages are accompanied – for the most part – by a feast-day, they are festive celebrations, and this other level of reality reshapes their general sense, without increasing it. The two English terms feast-day and pilgrimage come together in the Arabic terms *mouled* and *mousseem*, which refer to a totality, a generic connotation that does not dissociate this duality. Many joyous feast-days are evoked in this work, enthusiastic demonstrations that show the vitality and the perennial character of the relation between communities and places, clear illustrations of the love of place, a happy use of space; but presented also are bitter celebrations, such as among Armenians who miss their land of Palestine or Morocco, for whom sharing such celebrations illustrates above all regrets, frustrations, the exposure of the weaknesses of a group, and attempts to sublimate loss or separation.

As seen particularly in the work of Richard Sennett (2002) on the urban history of western cities, *Flesh and Stone*, it is as much the gathering together of bodies as of ideas that causes groups to form a socio-spatial community. It appears, at the end of our investigations, that festive activity and discussion are parts of the same expression of wanting and needing to be together, and of the never-satisfied search for conditions to accomplish this. Aside from the obvious reasons for pilgrimages, it is thus perhaps these implicit motivations that explain the success, in terms of attendance and investment, of most of the events investigated in this work.

The pilgrimage exists only through a sum of virtualities, among which are those caused by changes that affect many existential landmarks (especially values, measurements and evaluations of space and time) and make the world of the pilgrimage so unique. The virtuality is also that of an event that appears as a declination of densities, those of human presence, of the meaning of place, of material forms. When the pilgrimage is a feast-day, the overcrowding becomes abundance, with decorations, signs, goods, lights, constructions and animations added. This plenty, made of juxtapositions and accumulations, creates combinations of dense shapes, reassuring aesthetics of profusion, and the staging of situations of opulence, opulence of objects, beings and meanings.

Humanity itself has a horror of the empty, of material emptiness and above all emptiness of ideas; it invests space, marks it, ceaselessly gives it additional forms and fills it with meanings.

In parallel, in most human societies, the search for self, an individual or collective self, is often expressed in movement from one place to another, to seek oneself elsewhere, as one does not find it where one is. In this dynamic of meaningful movement, although the individual wishes to depart, the group wishes to return, instituting, realising or imagining the “cities of return”, such as Toubé (Gueya, 1999) or Jerusalem.

## **VIRTUAL WORLDS**

The pilgrimage to Rabbi Yahya Lakhdar, a Moroccan Jewish saint of the region of Casablanca, illustrates a yearning for place and the expression of a regret, of an “impossible return to Morocco”, for those who have already departed, for Israel or elsewhere, and for those who probably will depart and already anticipate their future nostalgia, but also for those who are to stay in a world where memories take them towards the future (H. Dakhama). It is a community in the process of dissolution that finds itself again, in a stage of transformation where emotion takes a verbal form; it is necessary to talk, to exchange, different languages mixing, news of those present and those absent flowing, connecting and taking on meaning. The words spoken and woven, around the sanctuary, in this special space, create the identity, both past and present, of those who call themselves, here and at this moment, Jews of Morocco.

The pilgrimage to Nabî Mûsâ, a sanctuary that is cut off, situated in an Israeli military zone eight kilometres from the village of Jericho, is a fleeting event in which intense crowding occurs in an enclosed space (E. Aubin Boltanski). This tiny spatio-temporal concession by the Israeli

authorities is transformed by the Palestinians into an event that is experienced densely and intensely. Nabî Mûsâ is “isolated”, a pilgrimage that is a caricature, direct, abrupt, with no detours or lingering, a single route to visit this place once a year, when the pilgrimage is authorised. However, in spite of the prohibitions and restrictions, the breakaways and virtual substitutions cannot be controlled. To be here because one cannot be there, to come here to feel that one is in the other longed-for place, Nabî Mûsâ is an indirect reflection of Palestine and its emblem: Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, a city torn apart by its representations and territorialities, the Armenian diaspora is made up mainly of “settled” refugees and pilgrims (S. Andezian). Thus, the holy city is nourished by mobility related to pilgrimage, and takes its tithe from this population that today occupies, or at least represents, an authentic quarter of the old city. Pilgrimage attracts, stirs together and sometimes keeps; the Armenians of Jerusalem are thus perpetual and virtual pilgrims, “pilgrim-inhabitants” of the holy city, and every year around their church demonstrate their dual affiliation, to the city and to their community, in a political context that for them is doubly uncertain.

In another geopolitical context, the rapprochement of Iran and Syria at the end of the 1980s, the town of Raqqa, situated in eastern Syria, was given by Iran a large Shiite mausoleum dedicated to two companions of the Prophet, killed at the battle of Siffin, some forty kilometres from the town (M. Ababsa). This sanctuary is for Iranian pilgrims a substitute for the holy sites in Iraq that are inaccessible to them and is part of a Syrian itinerary that includes the holy places in the cities of Damascus, Sayyida Zaynab, Aleppo and Hama. However, these mausoleums remain unrecognized by the population of Raqqa; although enormous and visible in the urban panorama, they are not taken into consideration. These tombs are “invisible”, as in the medieval legend that recounts that the tombs of the companions of the Prophet became, like mirages, invisible when approached.

Highly visible and mysterious at the same time, the pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the largest, - if not the largest - of human gatherings, is an event that by its size and its echo has given rise and gives rise to many fantasies (S. Chiffolleau). For the colonial powers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its representation was based on suspicion, and it was perceived as a phenomenon of paradoxical character because it is both an area of exhibition and a secret territory. An ambiguous space, thus a space of virtual confusion, because of lack of observation and direct control *in situ*, this event was analysed as a source of risk and subversion, from which there would be contestation of the colonial order and the production of a consensual Muslim public opinion.

## JOURNEYS AND ITINERARIES

The building of the Hejaz railway at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century represents an important turning point in the transporting of pilgrims to Mecca and Medina and caused considerable upheaval in the management of the territories concerned (K. Ezzerelli). Aside from the change in transport from caravan to train, it was also the entire experience and reality of the pilgrimage and the journey itself that changed. The spaces and the duration of the journey were no longer the same, nor were the itineraries. At the same time, this new factor redefined the economic and political issues related to the passage of pilgrims and reconfigured the control of and the setting up of networks in the lands concerned, which led on many levels to a number of conflicts.

The pilgrimage to Mecca involves economic stakes more than ever, an example being the appearance at N'Djamena, since the 1980s, of a group of “pilgrim-merchants” who deal mainly in travel by air in a business that has become so voluminous and so active that it has generated a zone of activities near the airport of Chad’s capital (K. Bennafla). The products of this commerce (fabrics, jewellery, watches, vehicles, minibuses, hardware, etc.), facilitated by the presence of a Chadian community in Saudi Arabia, are traded across the country and even as far as Cameroun, competing with manufactured goods imported from Nigeria.

On the other hand, in an area centred on itself, in the rural region of Chiadma in Morocco, the *daour* of the Regrega is a pilgrimage that lasts 39 days, a journey over a territory that is experienced in an almost meticulous way, with some fifty stops at sanctuaries, beginning at the spring equinox (M. Pénicaud). This walk into nature, just before the season of renewal, seeks a fertility that is never obtained. The Regrega are responsible for the awakening of nature,

abundance comes from their movement, the pilgrimage becomes a rite of regeneration. From the mobility of the *daour*, the territory is made up of an assemblage of places that is reconstructed every year, and the sedentary way of life of a peasant society, in terms of the journey, is reaffirmed.

On an even smaller scale, the pilgrimage processions organised in Egypt were numerous, as seen in the words used to describe them, the varieties of their forms, the itineraries taken, the protagonists involved and their complex organisation (C. Mayeur-Jaouen). Although today they are marginalised events of the Muslim *mouleds*, sometimes divested of their religious meaning, in the past these processions were the principal highlights; Copt or Muslim, they defined a social space, gave voice to the representations of a story and affirmed identities.

### **PILGRIMAGES AND COINCIDENCES: "SPACE FACTORS" AND SHARED PLACES**

Saints make the city and they make it ideal, getting rid of its vices, protecting it from danger; thus the *mouled* of Sayyîd al-Badawî, which appeared at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, modelled, structured and gave impetus to the city of Tantâ in Egypt, making it what is called today a regional urban centre (D. Pagès-El Karoui). It was the presence of a saint called "the Bedouin", also called the "saint of the country people", that contributed to the development of this city and an associated urban citizenry in the heart of the region of the Delta. Tantâ is a *mouled* city and the public authorities mobilise the event to affirm their presence, seat their power and diffuse and apply social norms.

Another form of the utilisation of a pilgrimage, of its space and its image by the public authorities: at Sidi Amor Bou Hajla, in Tunisia, there is a pilgrimage of semi-nomad Bedouins, the Jlàss, who served as a founding element of a festival participating in the advancement and edification of an urban and modern Tunisia (I. Ruiz). This quiet place has become the centre of a leisure area associated with an equestrian spectacle and an exhibition fair. At the end of the 1950s, the administrative promotion of this area to the rank of a municipality was based around the souk and the *qubba*. In the pragmatic *Plan for urban design* of 1998, the terrain of the zaouïa is "a leisure park for the use of families", the procession is called "folkloric", the saint is henceforth a local regional symbol and the emblem of urbanism in construction; he contributes to the setting up of tourism and modernity in this locality. The pilgrimage is used here as an urban marketing tool in the construction of an administrative entity, the promotion of a region and its integration into the national space.

In another register, the pilgrimage of Sehwan Sharif in Pakistan also illustrates the polysemy that can clothe an event of this type (M. Boivin). This pilgrimage is organised based on a principal sanctuary and a series of secondary sanctuaries, where intermingling occurs in competitions for influence between different groups in power. The pilgrimage is a scene in which minorities and majorities, representatives of religious movements, state institutions, and minor social orders appear, come forward and become animated. It becomes an area of expression where various groups assess each other and jostle for position, and where individuals, whether part of or not part of these groups, may change. The political stakes are obvious, and the Shiites, seeking ways of representation, are omnipresent and sometimes play the role of spoilsports, in the confusion of rivalry for appropriation of the symbolic and spatial capital in play. It is a tumultuous pilgrimage that expresses the *'urs*, the mystical marriage of the saint with God, a pilgrimage that can occur in the plural, in that the processions, the temporalities, the rites and the protagonists use differing ways of commanding visibility, and in that the meanings of the symbols present are subject to interpretation.

An expression of another type of stratification, the celebration of the *mouleds* of Sayyida Zaynab and Hussein in the ancient central quarters of Cairo, has given rise to a metamorphosis of the urban space and of usages and practices in the city (A. Madoeuf). The city is thus feast-day and the feast-day is urban. Through both subtleties and inventiveness, original forms of investment and appropriation of places are made to work, as much by the inhabitants as by the pilgrims. In a landscape made of superimpositions, the many "arts of doing" of the participants can be observed in their designs or their productions, even in the ways in which they integrate into the collective

body of people, by contacts or avoidances, that enable everyone to place themselves in front of others and with others.

Another illustration of the relation to otherness is that of mixed pilgrimages to “ambiguous” sanctuaries, shared centres of pilgrimage, which exist and/or have existed in many countries bordering the Mediterranean (D. Albera), especially in Lebanon (N. Farra Haddad). In a historical and comparative approach, based on an inventory of facts and places, these many interfaith pilgrimages pose the question of the supposed impermeability of the monotheistic religions and are evidence of confluences and intersecting histories.

By their nature as events of limited duration but also never-ending, pilgrimages can be considered to be full intervals which allow a glimpse into a different world, reduced to basic actions. A pilgrimage is a meaningful journey in space, in time and in another dimension, that of representations. To participate in a pilgrimage is to experience the sacred, and at the same time, the profane. Case by case, whether ordered or confusing in appearance, pilgrimages lend themselves to be seen as social mechanisms. However, the analyses carried out at the level of particular observations should not hide the fact that pilgrimages, in a larger sense, generate mobility and urbanisation, which indicates that they are among the most characteristic vectors of developments in the contemporary world.

Finally, although particular places, particular times and particular aspects of feast-days and pilgrimages are presented in this work, the pilgrimage as an intimate experience, as part of the life cycle of those who live it or those who aspire to do so, will remain one of the hidden dimensions – among others – of this story. The pilgrimage involves a single human being or a group, but it is also a shared story, a strange non-exclusive experience whose modes combine various levels of delegation, a complete social experience integrated into the course of life.

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