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Shared Rituals through *ziyārāt* in Lebanon: A Typology of Christian and Muslim Practices*

Nour Farra-Haddad

In Lebanon, oratories, chapels, monasteries, mosques, *maqāms* and *mazārs*[1] testify to the importance of the worship of Christian and Muslim saints in local culture. Members of different religions and different religious communities have long lived and intermingled here and the history of this country is characterized by such contacts and borrowings. The theme of shared shrines has recently been seriously explored by anthropologists, in the Mediterranean region in particular by Dionigi Albera.[2] Shrines that attract the devotions of both Muslims and Jews in the Maghreb have also been studied and several inventories compiled.[3] Gebhard Fartacek's interest focuses on the shared rituals of pilgrimages in Syria.[4] Only a few studies have explored interfaith devotions in Lebanon; among them is the research of Aubin-Bolantski on the shared sanctuary of Saydet Beshouat.[5]

Popular pilgrimages have spread beyond their orthodox Christian and Muslim forms in Lebanon, giving outlet to people's piety and their need to create a relationship between their daily existence and the eternal. Muslim, Christian, Druze,

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* We decided to refrain from scientific transcription of the numerous places and names that are mentioned in this article. Instead, we opted for a spelling based on the current pronunciation that would enable the reader to find the places on maps or to ask about them in Lebanon. For the etymology of Lebanese toponyms and the problem of their interpretation cf. Stefan Wild, *Libanesische Ortsnamen. Typologie und Deutung* [1973], Beirut: Ergon 2008.

1 *maqām*: A place that is filled with the blessing of an extraordinary person; *mazār*: any extraordinary place which is visited to receive a blessing.

2 Dionigi Albera and Maria Couroucli, *Religions traversées: lieux saints partagés entre chrétiens, musulmans et juifs en Méditerranée*, Arles: Actes Sud 2009; Dionigi Albera, "'Why Are You Mixing what Cannot be Mixed?' Shared Devotions in the Monotheisms", *History and Anthropology* 19 (2008), 37-59.

3 Louis Voinot, *Pèlerinages judéo-musulmans du Maroc*, Paris: Larose 1948; Issach Ben Ami, *Saint Veneration among the Jews in Morocco*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1990; Emile Dermengham, *Le culte des saints dans l'Islam maghrébine*, Paris: Gallimard 1954; Moncef M'Halla, "Culte des saints et culte extatique en islam maghrébin", in: *L'Authorité des saints: Perspectives historiques et socio-anthropologiques en Méditerranée occidentale*, Mohamed Kerrou, ed., Paris: IRMC-MAE 1998, 121-131.

4 Gebhard Fartacek, "Rethinking Ethnic Boundaries: Rituals of Pilgrimage and the Construction of Holy Places in Syria", in: *Ritual, Conflict and Consensus: Case Studies from Asia and Europe*, Gabriela Kiliánová, Christian Jahoda, and Michaela Ferencová, eds, Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 2012, 119-130.

5 Emma Aubin-Bolantski, "Miracles et apparitions de la Vierge au Liban : La preuve par l'Autre", unpublished paper, Séminaire *Anthropologie des dispositifs culturels*, Marseille: EHESS 2007; Emma Aubin-Bolantski, "La Vierge, les chrétiens, les musulmans et la nation", *Terrain* 51 (2008), 10-29.

and Buddhist[6] faiths are built around rituals. Saint worship and shared pilgrimages with shared figures of sainthood as their focus seem to have contributed to maintaining a dialogue between faith groups, even during some of the Lebanese war's most difficult moments. The coexistence of different religious Lebanese communities throughout history has been marked repeatedly by bloody conflicts, but belief in the concept of "living together" (arab.: *al-ʿaysh al-mushtarak*) has never been lost, as Aïda Kanafani-Zahar also demonstrated through her fieldwork in the Lebanese village of Hsoun.[7]

This article is concerned with the individual votive rituals shared by Muslims and Christians in present-day Lebanon. I will use results from my fieldwork begun ten years ago for my thesis in religious anthropology. My research surveys Christian and Muslim religious sites visited by both communities. In the course of my investigations and in the qualitative analysis of the data I collected,[8] it emerged that most of the devotional practices observed at the sacred sites are shared by both communities. In contrast with the codified religiosity of the mosque and church, believers have developed a less constrained religiosity in the form of *ziyārāt* (sg. *ziyāra*, visits to religious sites and saints' tombs). Some parties characterize these practices as 'popular', 'vulgar' or attribute them to 'folk religion'; they may even associate them with superstition. Official spokespersons of Christianity and Islam severely criticize such rituals and preach against their development. Ernest Gellner would identify such distinctions within the framework of the socio-anthropological concept of 'great religion' versus 'little tradition'.[9] Regardless of these biases, our observations demonstrate the importance of the *ziyārāt* in Lebanese culture and indicate the development of rituals related to votive pilgrimages. The rituals permit believers to express their piety and their need to create a relationship between their daily existence, their problems and the divine. In our field of observation what strikes us most is the piety of the believers and the sincerity of their belief in the potency of these practices.

It is all about the baraka*!*

baraka is the divine, miraculous force of blessing sent by the divine presence, sometimes through the vehicle of saints, to human beings. This force is thought to help the faithful in their everyday lives or in exceptional situations. The transmission of *baraka* operates mainly at sacred sites. For Fartacek, the transmission of *ba-*

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6 The visits of Buddhist believers at those worship sites are a new phenomenon in Lebanon, due to labour migration from South East Asia.

7 Aïda Kanafani-Zahar, *Liban : le vivre ensemble*; *Hsoun, 1994-2000*, Paris: Geuthner 2004.

8 For this field work we can count about 200 days of participant observation and 450 interviews across more than 30 religious sites, Christian and Muslim, in different regions in Lebanon.

9 Ernest Gellner, *Saints of the Atlas*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1969.

raka is at the heart of shared ritual actions performed in the context of vows in Syria.[10] Most of the shared religious sanctuaries in Lebanon have very long histories that date back to pre-Christian and pre-Islamic times and many rituals are inherited from antiquity. Despite the change of official religion, the sacred places have remained remarkably stable, or, in the words of the French nineteenth-century thinker Ernest Renan: "The sacred will replace the sacred."[11] Holy places are thought to contain *baraka* even when transferred from one religion to another. *baraka*, a sort of sacredness, remains on site and is inherited and transmitted over generations. The faithful believe that the power of the *baraka* can also increase with time. The pilgrims perform *ziyārāt* in order to receive the graces that *baraka* offers, but they also leave traces of themselves that can be observed by other visitors. It is often physical contact that is used to absorb the divine power of *baraka*: the pilgrim touches the wall of the temple, church, or *maqām* and/or touches or kisses the saint's tomb. Most of the ritual actions observed serve to transmit *baraka*. Pilgrims from all religious communities consider *baraka* to have a positive effect. The faithful look to it asking for protection in their daily lives or for help in exceptionally difficult situations. People visit holy places in order to obtain *baraka,* in order to make vows or fulfil them. To maximize the chances of a wish being granted, *baraka* must be obtained. The motives for rituals are grounded in the idea of *baraka,* as the faithful try to be imprinted with the benediction and grace of the holy site and carry the blessedness home.

Planning, preparing, and constructing a votive pilgrimage

Our observations and fieldwork led us to conclude that most pilgrimages are motivated by a vow (*nadhr*). The devotional practices observed are individual rituals, therapeutic tools meant to help the individual negotiate illness and other human problems. The individual who wishes to make the vow plans a visit to the sacred place and then promises something to the saint in case the wish is fulfilled. The vow takes the form of a contract with the saint along the lines of "if you give me that, I will give you this". As soon as the wish is fulfilled, the pilgrim must honour his or her vow pay his or her debt; this is called *fakk al-nadhr* (releasing the vow). Some clerics and faithful individuals see this approach as a commercial transaction in which the individual intends to 'pay' the saint for the graces and miracles that she or he will realize. In some cases the devotees make offerings to the religious establishment when they wish to avoid such accusations and wish to maximize the chances of their request being fulfilled. Many believers make one or more promises to the saint when they make their vows or when these wishes are granted because they feel the weight of the debt they have to repay to thank the saint.

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10 Fartacek, "Rethinking".

11 Ernest Renan, *Mission de Phénicie*, Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, Beirut: Terre du Liban 1997.

Some pilgrims call upon several saints at the same time. Devotees can make a double votive pilgrimage to two saints, motivated by the same request. Or in other cases, the faithful makes a single visit that involves several saints in his or her rituals and prayers. He or she can, for example, go on pilgrimage to a religious site dedicated to the Virgin Mary but also light a candle to the image of Saint Charbel.

Each sanctuary proposes a series of prayer initiatives to the faithful. Rites are classified in order of importance by the pilgrims depending on their potential efficacy. Several rituals may overlap or be organized to make up a single votive approach or the framework of a single pilgrimage. Often, a main rite will be associated with other ritual practices followed in order to create an atmosphere favourable to the fulfilment of the wish, like in Mar Jirjis al-Khodr described below. During the course of pilgrimages, pilgrims organize a whole series of rites according to recommendations or according to intuition (touching, ritual kissing of the tomb or a sacred object, contemplation, prayers, etc.). The devotees can mix different rituals as they please according to a referee's recommendations (the referee may be a parent, neighbour, a close friend, a priest, etc.). Small gestures, practices, and attitudes also play a role in the final organization of the actions. How pilgrimages are conducted varies only slightly between Christians and Muslims.

The architectural or natural characteristics of worship sites sometimes propose different rituals of equivalent importance to pilgrims: in the rocky grotto of the *maqām* of Nabi Yousha (the prophet Joshua) in el-Minyeh, north of Tripoli, the faithful turn around the saint's tomb (*ḍariḥ*) three or seven times while praying and performing ablutions with water that seeps from the grotto's walls. In addition to these practices, pilgrims gather sacred soil from the grotto thought to contain *baraka*, lay pieces of fabric on the tomb, burn incense and light candles. In Mar Jirjis al-Khodr (Saint Georges)[12] in Sarba, ablutions with sacred water from the grotto constitute the main rite; in addition to this practice, pilgrims light candles, kneel, burn incense, and bring water back home either to drink or to continue with ablutions according to a fixed routine.

This article will provide a brief synopsis of the phenomenon of shared rituals, suggesting a typology of devotional practices which is based on the actions performed during the pilgrimage. Most of the rituals observed can be made when the wish is formulated or in fulfilment of the vow. Before enumerating the large typology of shared rituals we will describe the few devotional practices exclusive to Christian or Muslim communities in Lebanon.

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12 In some places the names Georges and Khodr [Khiḍr] are both associated with the site; in other places, only one name is associated with the place. As is common in many Christian areas in Lebanon, 'Georges' is spelled like it is in French.

Rituals exclusively Christian or Muslim

The rite of **clothing associated with a saint** is *a priori* a Christian rite. The ritual consists of promising to wear a saint's cloth for a certain period of time. This is a ritual that can involve adults as well as children, women as well as men, and people of every social class, originating from different Lebanese regions, rural or urban. The faithful individual can promise to wear the saint's clothes for a short period or for a lifetime. The devotee wears the saint's costume for the period of the vow, everywhere she or he goes – to school, to university, to work, or at home. The most popular saint's costume is that of the Virgin Mary (blue and white). Especially in the month of May, many women and girls wearing the dress of the Virgin Mary can be seen on the streets. Other popular saints in this rite include the Lebanese Maronite saints Saint Charbel, Saint Rafqa and Saint Hardini (black dress), Saint Elijah (green dress with a red belt and scarf), Saint Francis (brown dress) and Saint Theresa (black and white). It is rare that Muslims take part in this, fearing the 'critical' gaze of the Other, as this rite forces the pilgrim to openly display his or her votive intentions.

Spreading perfume (*ʿiṭr*) in or around a sacred place is a typical Muslim practice. In general, in oriental cultures it is important to have an atmosphere for prayer that involves all the senses. Lighting candles, burning incense, touching icons and statues, and singing hymns are important ways for the pilgrims to experience a sacred atmosphere.

Offering salt is another typical Muslim practice. Salt has long held an important position in different religions and cultures. It was used by the Egyptians in the Bronze Age as part of larger offerings and was a commodity traded with the Phoenicians. Greeks also consecrated salt in their rituals. In the Bible salt features often as a symbol and Jewish temple offerings included salt. Today, salt can symbolize peace and friendship. In India, it is a symbol of good luck. For Lebanese Muslim devotees the offering of salt guarantees the fulfilment of the vow.

Muslims also frequently seal their vows by **placing a padlock** on or in the vicinity of a saint's tomb. This practice is now observed in countries around the world at secular sites such as bridges (i.e. in Moscow or Paris): lovers lock a padlock to the railing and throw away the key as a symbol of their eternal unity. Muslims try to 'chain' their vow to the saint, so that he will remember to fulfil it. If the vow is fulfilled the devotees unlock the padlock and remove it from the tomb.

The shared rituals: a broad typology

The typology proposed in this paper is based on the devotees' actions and not on the objects, the symbols or the elements that he or she will eventually use. The performed rites aim to establish, maintain, and seal communication between

individuals and saints. The faithful take advantage of all available means in order to maximize the possibility of the wish's success.

Most of the rites mentioned below are practised at Christian and Muslim sites and by devotees from both communities. Only few rituals can be practised by believers from different communities and yet only observed at sites related to a single faith community. One example would be the following practice: at numerous Christian sites of worship pilgrims of both communities try **to glue one or several coins to the walls** of the sanctuary or church or onto icons. The pilgrim concentrates and expresses his or her wish by pressing hard on the coin. It is considered a good omen if the coin sticks. Wishful pilgrims who visit the church of Saydeh in Ashrafiyya try to glue coins to the glass of the icon of the Virgin. In Mar Charbel in Annaya they try to glue coins to the marble plate on the rear side of Saint Charbel's tomb.

Walking towards the worship site is the most basic ritual that Christian and Muslims follow. This ritual comprises different elements: the distance walked, the circuit's level of difficulty (the footpath, route, stairs), and the means of approach: whether the pilgrim approaches with bare feet, on his or her knees, in a wheelchair, on crutches and so on. In Lebanon, the majority of pilgrims reach worship sites by car or by bus, but once near the worship site, the pilgrim may approach on foot. At the Mar Maron monastery in Annaya (Saint Charbel sanctuary), pilgrims walk to the Hermitage of Saints Peter and Paul or return on foot. The distance travelled varies: for example pilgrims who walk towards Our Lady of Lebanon in Harissa in the month of May often start from Jounieh (app. 6 km). A trekking trail was organized a few years ago to encourage this pilgrimage.[13] In other cases there is only a short walk from the shrine to a holy place connected to the sanctuary, such as a cave or a tree. From the Sitt Sha'waneh *maqām* in Ammiq (Bekaa valley), devotees walk towards a cave known to contain *baraka*, where the saint Sha'waneh was hidden throughout her life with a child. From the Greek Orthodox monastery of Saydet al-Nourieh (Our Lady of the Light) in Ras Shekka, worshippers walk down a narrow path with stairs to the old convent carved inside the cliff.

Simple shared rituals and gestures such as kneeling, lighting candles, burning incense (*bakhūr*), kissing and touching tombs, statues, and walls of holy place are practices common to both Christians and Muslims**.** These rituals are often practised in parallel to the main rite. Most of these gestures aim to create an atmosphere that involves the human sense faculties of touch, smell, hearing, and sight. Other gestures, including the touching and kissing of statues, tombs, and walls are intended to allow pilgrims to take *baraka* physically from the holy site. Nowadays some radical Muslims have begun to preach that the lighting of candles at religious sites is a Christian tradition that should not be practised. How-

[13] Cf. http://www.darbessama.org (accessed 12 June 2013).

ever, in many Muslim shrines in Lebanon, the lighting of candles is still a common practice.

The **prayers** that accompany the uttering of the vow vary greatly. The great majority of Christian or Muslim saints have special prayers (*ṣalāt* or *ziyārāt*) attributed to them. The faithful recite these prayers before formulating their personal wish when visiting the shrines. Most of the prayers at Christian sites are printed on small slips of paper that are distributed to visitors; at Muslim sites the prayers are generally displayed in a frame hung on the saint's tomb (*ḍarīḥ*) or on a wall nearby. Pilgrims also sometimes recite special prayers for the sick. Many of them incorporate their own votive prayers. Other pilgrims intensify their prayer requests by invoking 'powerful' saints other than the patron saint of the visited worship site, such as the Virgin Mary, Saint Charbel, Saint Rafqa and others.

The devotees may also leave a written prayer or a wish. They can write it down in the book of prayers and wishes – the 'golden book' of the shrine – and emotional notes are scrawled on pieces of papers and left in a symbolically sacred location, like the base of a statue or the frame of an icon. In the garden of Our Lady of Lourdes inside the convent and school of al-Azarieh (Ashrafiyyah, East Beirut), visitors leave a small piece of paper with their wish at the base of the central statue of the Virgin Mary. In the chapel of Saint Marina in the Qadisha valley, a 'golden book' is full of prayers and wishes written in many languages. Consulting such material is very interesting and offers insight into the pilgrims' motivations, wishes, outlooks, to whom they address their prayers and for whom. The notes testify to all manner of human suffering and needs: some express gratitude for healing, others for success in exams, for winning the lottery, for getting a job after a long period of unemployment, for finding a husband, etc.

Christians and Muslims can add faith-exclusive prayers to the 'vow-prayer' and to the shared prayers: Christians go on to prayers such as the Lord's Prayer or Hail Mary, rosaries, or novenas and, likewise, Muslims often proceed to *rakʿāt*, genuflections practised in daily ritual prayers.

Offerings or 'ex-votos' are presented at the moment of the wish-making or in gratitude for a favour bestowed. Offerings constitute a sealed pact between the faithful and the divine, an open request for help with the offering – a sort of 'down-payment'. Some clerics consider this attitude towards prayer as an exchange for services as too commercial a transaction and preach that wishes should be formulated from the heart, without any commitment to, or 'contract' with, the saint. The faithful repeat frequently how they address the saint in order to assure the shrine-keeper that in case he or she should answer the wish they will do such and such or offer the shrine such and such.

Offerings can be classified into two major types: valuable offerings and symbolic ex-votos. Valuable offerings take different forms. Financial donations constitute the most common offerings. All sanctuaries have a box for monetary donations, either a small lockbox or a large safe. These boxes accept small donations; if

a donor wants to offer a large sum he must refer to the sanctuary's religious authorities. Currently financial donations can also be made over the internet or by bank transfer.[14]

The faithful also offer valuable personal objects like jewellery, gold and silver. The emotional value of the object for the person corresponds to the intensity of the desire for the wish to be fulfilled. The miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary in the Greek Orthodox church of Our Lady of the Presentation (Ashrafiyya, East Beirut) wears a pearl necklace offered by a devotee. Objects made by the devotee or by someone else at the devotee's personal request, such as icons, carpets and frames, are intended to decorate the site. Pilgrims can also offer items for the maintenance of the site: candles, oil, soap, detergent, brooms, etc. They also often offer religious worship items like beads, gospels, Qur'ans, icons or statues of saints.

Some devotees promise to construct a place of worship, be it a small *mazār* or a large church. One of the most popular and oldest stories regarding such a vow is the story of the construction of the monastery of Our Lady of the Light (Saydet al-Nourieh). Legend has it that on a stormy night sailors found themselves in peril in Ras Shekka Bay. There are variations to the legend: some legends mention the Emperor Constantine, others the king Theodosius and others common sailors. In all versions the Virgin Mary appears illuminated in the cliff and saves the ship from drowning. To thank the Virgin for this miracle, sailors promised to build a monastery in the cliff of Ras Shekka.

In Lebanon we can count thousands of small *mazārs* or oratories dedicated to different saints. Many were built as ex-voto offerings after the attainment of a wish. Some pilgrims offer to contribute to the installations inside the religious site, providing their technical 'know how', assisting with the installation of the pavement of a church or working on the plumbing or the electricity. The construction of toilets for an oratory can be an ex-voto, like at the Shiite *mazār* al-Saydeh in S'aydeh (Bekaa valley). In the past, marble plates with epigraphs of thanks were very often offered to sanctuaries in Lebanon as in many shrines around the world. It is no longer a popular practice in Lebanon, but such plates are visible in different sanctuaries, such as in the Hermitage of Saints Peter and Paul in Annaya, at the *mazār* of Saydet el-Bzaz in Mar Mikhael (Beirut), or at the church of Saydet Khaldeh.

Some pilgrims are convinced that **leaving symbolic objects** at the holy place guarantees the saint's fulfilment of a specific demand. This rite testifies to the pilgrim's need to extend his or her presence physically to the saint, to ensure that he or she does not forget the vows made. The type of objects left and the modality of leaving them vary according to the places of worship and to the pilgrim's profile. Worshippers may leave personal belongings with a symbolic link to the vow at the site; for example a pen used for an exam might be left to ask for successful exams or a small toy car to ask for the protection of a child.

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[14] Cf. for instance http://www.strafqa.org/index1.htm#donations (accessed 12 June 2013).

Another practice that can be observed at different religious sites is the leaving-behind of fragments of clothing or fabric attached to a sacred tree or floating in the water of a sacred cave. These textile fragments may also be symbolic in nature: bras are left for breastfeeding problems, bibs for infant illness. In front of the *mazār* of the Saydeh in S'aydeh (Bekaa valley), the only Muslim religious site dedicated to the Virgin Mary in Lebanon, fragments of clothing or fabric are tied to a sacred olive tree. In Mar Antonios (Saint Anthony) in Hadath (southern suburbs of Beirut), women hang plastic bags filled with stones from olive trees. Pilgrims leave clothing or fabric in the water of the holy cave of Saint Georges al-Khodr in Sarba. Different objects such as piles of beads, elastic bands and handkerchiefs are also hung on the wall of a cave or the grill of a statue, a grave or a tomb (*ḍarīḥ)*. We can observe such offerings on the grill of the statue of Our Lady of Lebanon in Harissa. In the *maqām* of Nabi Ayla (the prophet Elijah) in the village of Nabi Ayla (Bekaa valley), the faithful attach beads, tissues and padlocks to the grill of the *ḍarīḥ*. Attaching padlocks is most commonly observed in Muslim sites, as previously mentioned.

As at other holy sites around the world after a miraculous healing which people relate to the pilgrimage has occurred, pilgrims might leave material objects such as bandages or wheelchairs at the site of the miracle. Until the mid-twentieth century devotees at Christian sites in Lebanon still asked for miracles by offering a silver charm (in the form of a crescent, a hand, a foot) out of gratitude for a wish fulfilled. This practice, however, does not exist anymore because the handmade production of such objects has been lost. We can observe some of these silver shapes around the icon of Our Lady of the Presentation in Ashrafiyya (East Beirut), or in the small cave-chapel of Saydet el-Bzaz in Mar Mikhael (East Beirut), or in the small museum area of the church of Saydet el-Taleh in Deir al-Qamar (Chouf area).

A recent practice is one of devotees leaving photos at holy Christian sites to maintain a figurative presence close to the saint, in order to remind him of his duty to fulfil their wishes. Photos may be placed at the bottom of the icon of the saint, or by his tomb. In the nascent pilgrimage to the house of the beatified Estephan Nehme in Lehfed (Mount Lebanon), pilgrims fill the plastic covering of the door of the saint's room with photos and prayers. In the cave-chapel of Mar Abda El Mouchamar in Zikrit (north Beirut), the clerics have installed a board on which the visitors may hang their photos (see Plates, figure 3). This has also been observed in the monastery of Mar Elishaa in the Qadisha valley.

Bringing home *baraka:* Almost all pilgrims bring something back from the worship site with them, something believed to contain the *baraka* or 'sacredness' of the place (soil, water, a piece of cloth, tree or plant leaves, pieces of bark or roots). They wish to maintain their relationship with the saint through such material mementos. At some religious sites, especially Christian ones, service counters are at the disposal of the devotees in order to provide them with oil and incense. Counters such as these can be observed in Our Lady of Lebanon in Harissa, the

sanctuary of Saint Rafqa in Jrabta (Jourd al batroun), the convent of Saint Joseph in Jrabta and the Greek Orthodox church of Saydet al-Nourieh, Ras Shekka. At Muslim sites the guardian of the holy place usually provides visitors with oil and incense; occasionally the pilgrims serve themselves at the sanctuary from the offerings of others. Back home, the use of these mementos varies. Some people will keep these items on a home altar or oratory and continue to seek benedictions and graces from them. Others will use them to create amulets and some will imbibe them, either directly or after having mixed them with other ingredients.

Relics of saints are also a way to carry *baraka* from the site. The pilgrims take the *baraka* of the relics by touching them directly or by touching the wall or the grill that protects the relics. The faithful sometimes can take a relic home. It may be a relic fabricated by clerics, such as the relics of Saint Charbel distributed in Mar Maron Monastery in Annaya, made by priests and monks from the remains of Saint Charbel's body following specific procedures. In some locations devotees may have the opportunity to take real relics from the remains of holy men. We can cite as an example the remains of Abouna Youssef Abi Maroun Maatouk (Church of St Michael, Serʿel, North Lebanon). The priest was considered a holy man during his life and after his death people began to take *baraka* from his remains by collecting pieces of his body or some of his hair. They could do so because his body was exposed to the open, seated on a chair in a locked room under the church where he had served. After a time, the clerics of the church decided to protect the body of the priest with a glass case and now visitors may only take *baraka* by touching the glass of the case.

Since antiquity, in thousands of pilgrimages across the world, **water rituals** have held a very important place. Water is thought to heal, rejuvenate youth, ensure life, and purify because it dissolves and eliminates impurities. Water is used in different types of rituals, external ablutions and swallowing practices among them. Different types of ablutions can be observed: ablutions can be made at the holy place directly, or brought home following a symbolic routine, or at moments of symbolic significance (i.e. the ablution of water sprinkled over a woman's belly before sexual intercourse). Holy water may be drunk at the site of collection or at home (for example women who wish to become pregnant drink holy water for nine days or a student might drink water before an important exam). Holy water can be consumed on its own or mixed with other sacred elements. Pilgrims can take sacred water from a fountain, cave, or basin at most religious sites in Lebanon.

In the *maqām* of Nabi Najjoum (Bekaa valley), there is a basin where the water level does not vary according to the season. This water is considered miraculous and the faithful come from very far to drink it or use it for ablutions. At the oratory of Mar Jirjis (Saint Georges) in al-Khodr Batyieh, Sarba, pilgrims visit the cave and with its waters perform partial or full body ablutions. At the well of Mar Nohra, Smar Jbeil, there is no longer any water, but because the water was con-

sidered miraculous in the past, people take *baraka* from the well by putting their head in it (see Plates, figure 4).

The **circumambulation rite** (*ṭawāf, ṭoufan, tatouaf*) is characteristic of certain sites in the context of votive pilgrimages and consists of circling a worship site a certain number of times (generally one, three or seven times). The site may be a tomb (*ḍariḥ)*, a stalagmite, or a tree. Multiple examples of this ritual are noted among both Christians and Muslims. At most Muslim worship sites visited in Lebanon, pilgrims make an almost systematic procession around the saint's tomb (*ḍarīḥ*), one, three or seven times anti-clockwise while reciting prayers, thereby re-enacting the Meccan *ṭawāf*.

In Mar Bandileymoun in Bijdarfel, a rite practised by childless women consists of circumambulating the church three times accompanied by a single virgin woman and a mother of several children. In front of the church of Mar Sassine (Saint Sisinus in Beit Mery), the fertility rite consists of passing three times around the roots of the oak tree in the church square.

The **incubation rite** (*laylat al-istikhāra*), a practice that still exists, consists of sleeping – sometimes for several nights and in very precarious conditions – in such places as the courtyard of the worship site, in front of the sanctuary's door, on the ground, in the sacred interior and other spots in order to soak up the *baraka* from the saint's blessing. Accounts of this rite exist for many Christian and Muslims pilgrimage sites. Until the 1950s, it was not only the faithful who slept at these sites, but also sick livestock. Now in some Christian sanctuaries, such as the convent of Mar Maron in Annaya, clerics are trying to convince the faithful to abandon this practice by closing the gates of the convent at night time, but devotees continue to sleep in front of the closed doors. In some Christian monasteries there are rooms to welcome guests but overnight accommodation is not free of charge and not all pilgrims can afford the rates (charged accommodation is offered for example at the convent of Saydet Machmoucheh in the Jezzine area, South Lebanon or the monastery of Saint Anthony in Qozhaya, North Lebanon). At Druze shrines like Nabi Bahaeddine in Sharon, Mount Lebanon or Nabi Ayyoub (the prophet Job) in Niha, rooms are available for pilgrims who wish to sleep in the sanctuary and visitors pay as much as they can in the form of a donation to the sanctuary.

The preparation and consumption of a 'remedy'. The intake of a 'remedy' can take several forms. Sometimes the pilgrim swallows something from the holy place (like sand or oil) and sometimes he or she takes the time to 'cook' a 'remedy'. Below are some examples of practices and receipts:

- Swallowing a piece of cotton soaked in blessed oil
- Swallowing a piece of communion bread soaked in blessed oil
- Swallowing soil – either dry or dissolved in water – from the worship site, or a 'sacred' stone that has been soaked
- Swallowing an image of a saint that has been soaked

– Drinking boiled water that has been blessed, along with soil or tree leaves from the worship site.

At the sanctuary of Saint Rafqa in Jrabta, nuns offer visitors soil from the tomb of the saint in a small piece of paper. Many pilgrims swallow this soil on the spot and make a wish. At the *maqām* of Nabi Ayyoub (Prophet Job), Niha or at the *maqām* of Nabi al-Jelil in Qana (South Lebanon) visitors take pieces of bark from the sacred tree believed to contain *baraka* and sometimes make infusions out of it. At the *maqām* of Nabi Berri (North Lebanon) pilgrims collect acorns from the oak trees to make infusions. Devotees are frequently observed in the area around the holy sites picking tree leaves and plants to 'cook' at home with sacred water to drink to obtain *baraka*.

Rolling boulders, sacred stones or other objects (*maḥdaleh, ḥajar)* over the body: dry ablutions. At numerous Christian and Muslim worship sites in Lebanon the existence of sacred stones is noted: Saydet Beshouat, Mar Jirjis in Amshit, Mar Boutros in Akoura, Mar Antonios in Qozhaya, Mar Doumit, *maqām* Nabi Nouh in Kirk, or *maqām* Nabi Youssef in Haytla. These boulders, called *maḥdaleh* (roller) by some or simply *al-ḥajar* (the stone), are considered to have therapeutic properties if rubbed on an injured part of the body. They can be simple pebbles, small antique columns, or concretions that come from natural cavities, stalactites or stalagmites (see Plates, figure 5).

Many times in Saydet Beshouat thieves have tried to steal the sacred stone with the result that finally the priest of the church decided to lock it inside a metal box built into the church's south wall. This protective action led to an evolution of the ritual: when the devotees could no longer pass the stone over their bodies, they began to take *baraka* by touching the stone. There are many references to a miraculous stone in the church of Saint John at the Beirut gate, but unfortunately this stone disappeared when the church was converted to Al-Khodr Mosque. The sacred stone of the sanctuary of Saydet Maghdoucheh also disappeared a few years ago and was never replaced. At the Sunni *maqām* of Imam Ouzai in the southern suburbs of Beirut, as in many other shrines, the ritual of touching the sacred stone is still practised and miracles are still reported.

Anointing with oil is an age-old tradition. Oil that has been blessed is most often distributed at Christian worship sites, but it is also found at many Muslim worship sites, sometimes offered by the faithful themselves. In most cases at Christian religious sites, the oil is presented to the faithful on pieces of cotton, or cotton sticks, in little sachets or small flasks. At Christian sites the cotton is neatly presented and clerics invest money into this presentation. At Muslim sites visitors must bring small bottles or small boxes with them to collect the oil. At the Druze Shrine of Tannoukhi in Abey, the women overseers at the gate offered me sacred oil to take home in a reused medicinal box. In Mar Elias (Saint Elijah) in Ain Saadeh, visitors may choose between swallowing a piece of bread soaked in oil or wearing a cotton belt or anointing their skin with sacred oil. Often devotees anoint

injured parts of the body with oil. Different types of anointing can be observed: anointment takes place at the holy place or at home following a fixed routine or at symbolic moments (i.e. anointing the body before a surgery).

Wearing a sacred cloth belt is as common a practice for Christians as it is for Muslims. At Christian sites of worship (Mar Elias in Ain Saadeh, Mar Charbel in Annaya, Mar Antonios in Hadath) pilgrims are provided with cotton belts or cotton threads blessed beforehand by priests. They wear them directly against their skin as a belt under their clothing, as a bracelet or put them in the car or at home for blessings. Muslims use the Christian belts or make their own at home or at the worship site, using, for example, pieces of the *sitār* (green cloth that covers a saint's tomb). If the devotees prepare a belt at home they can bring it to the shrine to be blessed by a priest or a shaykh or by the power of the *baraka* itself. At the sanctuary of Saydet Bechouat the visitors may take a thread from a bunch of cotton threads presented with the sacred oil and incense.

The manufacturing and wearing of amulets (*dkhireh, ḥjāb, ḥijāb [ḥijāb]*). Amulets are manufactured by devotees or by religious men combining different elements believed to be sacred: pieces of cloth are sewed together to hold parts of a relic, prayers, images of saints, pieces of cotton soaked in blessed oil, soil from the monastery, a tree leaf from the monastery and so forth. Among Christians, these amulets are often called *dkhireh* and among Muslims, *ḥijāb* or *ḥjāb*. They may be worn for a symbolic limited period of time or for life and may be worn on clothing, kept at home, sewed on pillows or kept in cars. The amulets can be handmade by the faithful or bought at religious sites, like at the gate of *maqām* Nabi Bahaeddine, or from shaykhs. We do not have any record regarding the manufacturing of amulets by clerks in the Christian communities but shayks in some Muslim communities do craft amulets and offer them to the faithful.

Sacrifice is an ancient ritual that has been practiced by Christians and Muslims for a very long time. All documented cases of sacrifice involve a domestic animal, more specifically a sheep or several chickens. Two kinds of sacrifices have been observed: sacrifice at or near the home of the pilgrim and sacrifice at the site of worship. Tradition requires that the sacrifice be performed in the courtyard or at the sanctuary's door *(ʿalā l-bāb)*. However, in most sanctuaries it is no longer possible to respect this tradition due to strict bans imposed by clerics for hygiene reasons. At some Muslim religious sites rooms are fitted out like slaughterhouses for such sacrifices, as in front of the *maqām* of Naba Ayla (Prophet Elijah) in the village of Nabi Ayla (Bekaa valley). Often spaces are provided for pilgrims to have a meal on site after the sacrifice. The sacrifice takes on a social dimension, grouping the faithful around a meal. In other Muslim sanctuaries there are open air altars installed in front of the shrines to allow for sacrifices, such as the set of concrete arches with a drainage system found in front of the *maqām* of Nabi Issa in Sghar (Akkar). The Christian priests encourage devotees to perform the sacrifices in regular butcheries and to come afterwards to offer the meat to the sanctuary.

Then the priests can decide to keep the sacrifice for the convent or distribute it to poor communities.

Rituals in evolution

Like beings, pilgrimages and rituals have life spans of their own: they are created, grow, evolve, and may die or disappear completely. This article will not treat the phenomenon of the life span of rituals, but some examples of devotional practices can help us to understand the development and the evolution of rituals.

With the development of technology some rituals have been created, have evolved or have been transformed. The development of photography, for instance, has permitted the creation of a new ritual that consists of leaving photographs at worship sites, on the icons themselves or on boards. Pilgrims seek to maintain their figurative presence near the saints in order to ensure that they will follow up on their vows. A few years ago it was very rare to find photos in holy places. As photos have become less expensive over the years and more accessible to lower and middle-class pilgrims, at some sites we now find hundreds of photos left for the saint reminding him or her of the vow of the faithful (e.g. in the chapel cave of Mar Abda El Mouchamar in Zikrit, the house of Estephan Nehme in Lehfed, Mar Elishaa convent in the Qadisha valley).

The development of printing houses has allowed believers to order the printing of holy images and prayers. Some devotees will promise to promote the saint within a community by distributing images or prayers in exchange for fulfilment of the vow. E-rituals, rituals performed via the internet, have also become more common. Electronic ritual practices can be observed on websites or on social networks. Believers today can light candles, recite prayers, or send a greeting to the saints through internet websites.[15]

Believers and shrine keepers can also provoke the creation of new rituals without intending to. We observed the apparition of a new ritual at the end of the *al-matraqa*[16] ritual in the Church of Mar Charbel's tomb at the Maronite convent in Annaya. A wooden hammer was exhibited in front of a window in the church of Mar Charbel's tomb and once a woman used it as *maḥdaleh*, rolling it over her injured body. Visitors watched her and imitated her and it became a ritual. From that day on at the church, we observed a line of worshippers waiting in front of the window to perform the ritual. Clerics did not appreciate this practice and took the wooden hammer away from the visitors and so the ritual survived for a few months only. In the sanctuary of the beatified Abouna Yaaqoub (the church of Saydet el-Bahr, Our Lady of the Sea) a basket is filled with small papers with quo-

15 Cf. for instance http://www.marcharbel.com/english/htm (accessed 12 June 2013).

16 A *matraqa* [*miṭraqa*] is a wooden hammer used to hit a *sonj*, a metal plate used to produce a sound like a bell.

tations ascribed to the saint. Nuns prepared these baskets to spread the teaching of Abouna Yaaqoub. Devotees, however, take these paper copies and formulate a vow or think about something in particular and read the content of the paper as a message from the saint, as a 'fortune note'.

Rituals forever and together

Given the density of the number of worship sites in Lebanon as well as the volume of visits made by the faithful of different communities, many pilgrimages go beyond that which can be classified as monolithically religious. At these worship sites, an interreligious conviviality is experienced that is favourable to the construction of local and national identities, in which so many Lebanese have trouble investing themselves.

A *ziyāra* is a visit to the saint, *ṣāḥib al-maqām* or *al-mazār*. The pilgrim hopes that the saint will listen to his or her problems and requests. He or she addresses the saints as confidants, believing that they understand his or her difficulties. In the course of their pilgrimages, believers meet other faithful individuals at sanctuaries with the same problems and difficulties. They seek the aid of the divine together.

Based on my field research (participant observation) at local sanctuaries in present-day Lebanon, I can conclude that there is evidence of *existential* or *spontaneous communitas* in Turner's sense.[17] My observation of shared pilgrimages and practices does not fit with the Durkheimian vision of pilgrimage sites that allow each religious community to affirm its own unique identity.[18] I heard often from pilgrims "*Allāh wāḥid*" ("There is only one God") and also "*Kull al-qaddisīn fiyon al-barakeh*" ("All saints possess *baraka*"). Pilgrims and sanctuary-keepers strongly emphasize that the shrines and the saints are sacred to all and that saints operate miracles for Christians and Muslims without distinction. Believers meet one another and perform the same practices without trying to hide or deny their religious identity in any way. There is no pressure at the religious sites on visitors and the religious identity of the pilgrims is perfectly preserved and respected.

My research highlights the role that these practices have today in interreligious dialogue. A pilgrimage is a path towards a sacred place that leads to an encounter with a saint, experienced through a series of rituals and devotional practices. On pilgrimages in Lebanon, an encounter with the Other, the Christian with the Muslim and the Muslim with the Christian, often occurs even when it is not an initial objective of the pilgrimage. These practices are a natural means to initiate dialogue in a convivial atmosphere.

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17 Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter 1995.

18 Emile Durckheim, *Les formes élementaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris: PUF 1960.

Figure 3: The chapel cave of Mar Abda El Mouchammar in Zikrit, leaving photos on a board or baby items (Mar Abda being a specialist on baby issues) for vows. 2011. Photo by Nour Farra-Haddad

Figure 4: The sacred well of Mar Nohra in Smar Jbeil, taking the *baraka* from the well by inserting one's head in the hole. 2009. Photo by Nour Farra-Haddad

Figure 5: The sacred stone (*maḥdaleh*) of the *maqām* of Imam Ouzai in front of his tomb. 2012. Photo by Nour Farra-Haddad