Introduction

Muslim Saints and Modernity

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I. Theory and Islamic sainthood

The common theme linking the papers in this fifth volume of the *Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam* concerns the sources and continuities of the “sacred” in various areas of modern local Islam. Indeed, the saint veneration in contemporary Islam is related to various local – and, in the case of increasing significance, global – dimensions of the modern re-construction of the “social”. More specifically, the invocations of traditions and ideas of “origin” of place, the collective performance of rituals, the vitality and materiality of interface relationships are all issues which are profoundly linked with theories of the importance of local configurations in the process of the global unfolding of modernity. It is my contention, nevertheless, that the sociological classics had a say in this and that a word on classical social theory must be allowed here. To put it clearly, it is the negativity of classical theory with respect to the enchanted world of saints which is significant, and before going any further, we should note that classical sociology approached the ideas and practices associated with “sainthood” in terms of being counter-thematic to modernity, or at least in terms of the necessity of their being transposed into sublime constructions of the modern self.

While the sociology of religion states that there is a continuity of religion inherent in modern secularism, cultural critics in both east and west claim that the modern forms of constituting the sacred remain without meaning in being confronted with a world “without God”.

We may witness the modern evaporation of the sacred, including “sainthood” and “religion”, in the form in which they are transposed into a hidden agenda of the internal constitution of the modern self: extraordinariness and habitual intellectualization in the world of the modern professional. The traditional religious “virtuoso” would depend no less on “routinization” than modern “bureaucrats”. In describing a period of transition in a *zawiya*-group in Syria today, Paulo Pinto (Chapter 10) appears to imply that “routinization of charisma” is inherent in both bureaucratization and “original” sainthood. However, he also makes it clear that new bridging concepts are imperative in the global field of sociology to make us understand the similarities and differences. The point is that the transposition of religion into a founding source of psychological order and habitual formation of modern man generates an inherent link
between religion and modernity as a whole, and indeed this is the type of “presence of religion” which is central to sociology and modern self-understanding.

Georg Simmel and Max Weber made a crucial contribution to the sociological understanding of this link between religion and modernity. A short account of this background should suffice for the rather restricted purposes of this volume. Simmel, in particular, worked out most clearly what the silent continuity of religion meant for modernity, and that modern men in general would internalize “religion” with respect to their habitual performance in society. Simmel and Weber believed that modern man’s quest for extraordinariness and their habitual qualities would, in fact, resemble the charismatic abilities of the religiously motivated or officially appointed priests, of the virtuosi and prophets of pre-modern times. For Simmel, in this very sense, “modern man has religion” (1911: 220).

This is not the correct context in which to describe in detail how in his sociology of religion Max Weber transformed the idea of the “primitive magician” and his charismatic qualities being the Ursprung (origin) of professional man into a genealogy of the human character, office and institutional governance in modernity. The technologies of this creation have developed further today. Beyond any critique of Weber’s rationality, however, quite in line with the continuous religious factuality of “professionalism”, in his contribution, Emilio Spadola (Chapter 8), gives us an account of the social and psychological ambiguities, if not disasters, related to the hyper-modern unfolding of the mediatic technicalities of “professional” healers in the urban contexts of contemporary Fez and Rabat: a rather complex stage of existence in the framework of the interplay between traditional “sainthood”, Islam and modern life. This was not at all within the scope of Weber’s view. Certainly, we are familiar with the critique of Weber’s lopsided institutional focus on rationality which becomes entirely obvious in the light of the world described by Spadola. However, Weber remains important in terms of the issues of genealogy and authentification of the modern global field. The way in which Weber affirmed “religion” in modernity remains largely decisive for all modern self-understanding (Stauth/ Turner 1988: 98-122; Stauth 1993; Stauth 1999). For Weber, rationalization of modern life is to be based on “systematic self-control” and has to lead to the abolition of any “magic form of search for the sacred” (Weber 1966: 1, 3, 111), a condition which remains basic to all subsequent processes of the unfolding machine of modernity.

There is no doubt that Max Weber, the theorist of modernity, and Ignaz Goldziher, the first international scholar on Islam, shared an enlightened concept of religion. Indeed, they both represent the times when the global consciousness’s quest for foundational principles of modernity and the modern re-invention of asceticism, rationality and discipline reached its first peak (cf. Stauth 1990). This was the time around the turn of the 20th century when Muslim thinkers began to reformulate Islamic visions and principles into their own terms of discipline, purity and science. In Egypt – which in the second half
of the 19th century became the very playground of intensive cultural exchanges between Islam and the west – thinkers like Al-Tahtawi, Al-Afghani and 'Abduh not only reflected on the need to adopt modern institutions, but also to reformulate the moral standards of individual behaviour for modern Muslims. We are well aware today that Islamic reformism and the techniques of adjustment to modernity without breach with the Islamic heritage – most notably when turned into a political project of critique and rejection of the west as by the Muslim Brotherhood – have led to the conviction that there is no “unified modern civilization, called into existence by Western Europe” (Hourani 1960: XI). Today, the situation still prevails whereby we have little knowledge of the real impact of western understanding of Islam. What happened when “orientalist” scholars like Ignaz Goldziher, the great admirer of the idea of scientific method applied to religion began “to enter the Muslim republic of thought”? In reality, we still know little more than what Albert Hourani recollects:

In Cairo too he met scholars, including the reformer Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, and he obtained permission to attend lessons at the Azhar, the great centre of traditional Islamic learning; he was probably the first European scholar to do so (1996: 38).

Do we know what the effects were when Muslim and more specifically Sufi intellectuals were confronted with Massignon’s “The Passion of al-Hallaj”, and, specifically, with his “Preface to the new edition” written in 1962 in the heat of debates at the Collège de France on existentialism, liberation and anti-colonial culture? Given the global condition of ideological and symbolic simplification, how did they read – and how would they read today – Massignon’s understanding of a Hallajian “conception of history” formulating historical time as being “a progression of pulsations of grace, karrât, oscillating like the swing of a pendulum” (Massignon 1981: lxi)? Which chains of authority would modern Muslims have, or would they still attempt to build on their own modern networks in understanding Hallaj and Massignon? What utopian lines would they draw in imagining Massignon’s development of the principle of “substitute saints (ab-dâl)” as representing a “heroic act”, an act which “is not only a solitary reaching beyond, but a sublimation not discontinuous with the (wretched) masses”? Thus, Hallaj represents a concept of “transsocial” and at the same time “trans-historic continuity”, the event of disclosing “in the perishable world, the incorruptible presence of a sacred truth” (Massignon 1981: lxi-liii). Is this a kind of conceptualized version of Massignon’s Christian Utopianism whereby he explains himself in terms of a strange event in another religion and in doing so evolves it in rather externalized symbolic and technical terms? Was this where the new Islamic Utopianism of the 1970s, 80s and 90s began?

It is common knowledge today that the issue of Islamic feast days, saint veneration and, more specifically Sufism on the whole, had been awakened, restructured and reformulated through the interest it had found in the world of orientalism and among the European and western public.
In this context, I should come back to Goldziher and his religious theory. He explains the veneration of saints in a monotheistic religion largely in terms of a polytheistic need to fill the enormous gap between men and their god and that it originated on the soil of the old pantheon (cf. Goldziher 1971: 259). Similarly, from the perspective of the founders of modern Islamology, such as Goldziher, C.H. Becker and Snouck Hurgronje, Islamic mysticism was considered as filling the function of closing the gap between law, theology and individual piety. Accordingly, Sufism was labelled as being secondary to the dominant conception of religion. Both the idea and view of the separate and subordinate position of Sufism within Islam has been strongly challenged in recent research. Sufism has come to be understood as an integral part of the cultural heritage of Islam and, as Armando Salvatore reminds me, the fact that the late Fazlur Rahman – who came from a South Asian background – had already challenged the classical orientalist view, clearly showing that Islam would not be what it is today – not least in terms of its diffusion, mobilization and integration of popular classes – without Sufism, is not insignificant. What is more significant in sociological terms, however, is that in recent years Sufism has been virtually transformed into a battlefield of “east-west philosophy” and cultural globalization.

Thus, in line with the questions raised by the founders of sociology and Islamwissenschaft (i.e. Islamology) and in terms of the trajectories of the lives of those who practise Islam today, it is, perhaps, time that we became aware that the sociological issue of “sainthood in Islam” transcends the strict boundaries of a compartmentalized field of study. A comprehensive analysis of “Islamic sainthood” and modernity would have to raise the broader issues of “political theology” and the “ascetic costs of rationality” in monotheistic religions and their claim – articulated in many different “global” ways – to update the “truth” in the context of a continuously unfolding secular machine of modernity.

The purpose of this volume is not, however, to provide answers to the unresolved questions of social theory as they emerge in the context of the ambivalent process of the re-positioning Islam in the global field of modernity. This problem will receive ongoing consideration in the future issues of the yearbook. Thus, I propose that the papers presented in this volume be seen as discrete and punctual contributions to the stimulation of an awareness of this issue.

II. Saints and modern ideology

Despite being viewed hitherto as largely separate fields of disciplinary interest, the development of doctrinal discourse, Sufi methods and ideas and the local traditions of saint veneration are all integral elements of Islam. By emphasizing the balanced and even intermingled co-existence of “high” and “low”, “official” and “popular”, “scholar” and “saint-oriented” visions and practices in Islam, recent evaluations of religious practice would appear to acknowledge this.
Others would denounce such distinctions as the obscure inventions of western orientalists. However, the distinction itself appears to correspond to conventional self-understanding among Muslims. Ibn Khaldun, for example, expresses no preference with respect to either type of religious exercise. Here, it is worth noting that he argues that “Arabs can only obtain royal authority by making use of some religious colouring (ṣīḥa diniyya) such as prophecy (nabwa), sainthood (wilaya) or some great religious event in general” (Ibn Khaldun 1958: 305, English transl. Franz Rosenthal).

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of Ibn Khaldun’s concept of religion, sainthood and Sufism with respect to civilizational re-construction and power formation. However, what is most interesting is that Ibn Khaldun’s perspective does not include the slightest “value-oriented” view that diminishes sainthood as against prophecy with respect to power consolidation or supplements any one of these categories with respect to an ideological dispute concerning diverse or competing forms of religious experience. As Goldziher puts it:

Even the Arab philosopher of history who is by no means credulous about the graves of saints, speaks in favour of the miracles performed by saints. Ibn Khaldun favours this belief in several passages of his Muqaddima and calls the stories about the pretended miracles of the adepts of Sufism, their prophesies and revelations and their power over nature a true and undeniable fact. He [...] declares that saints work miracles not because of their desire to perform them; this power of theirs is due to a divine gift of which the saints are compelled to make use against their own will. He firmly rejects the explanation of these miracles as ordinary witchcraft (Goldziher 1971: 339-40).

Of course, where – as Massignon shows – a type of supremacy of Sufi ritual practices was claimed, as was the case with early Sufism, the “primacy of the saints over the prophets” was denied, as with Ghazzali, although not really reversed to the contrary (cf. Massignon 1981). In short – and apart from individual calls for and cases of obvious suppression – if this was the state of affairs in the classical Islamic period, an overall strengthening of positions of rejection can be observed in modern times. We may argue that there are two reasons for this. Firstly, while in classical times the discussion of arguments against and dissent to conventional Shari’a-based knowledge was largely expressed through scholarly dialogue and much of the mystical literature remained hidden in largely difficult and esoteric manuscripts, modern studies on Sufism and the publication of Sufi texts contributed to the growing interest of both government bodies and groups of intellectuals in dealing with the heritage of Islamic mysticism in the context of the broader terms of social regulation, such as spirituality, rationality and social order. Secondly, contrary to orthodox legal practice, the implementation of modern forms of governance would rely on a totalized con-

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1 Arabic terms included on basis of the Cairo/Beirut edition by G.S.

The point is that the modern study of religious experience in Islam is strongly fragmented. The investigation of doctrinal development, Islamic law and theology is largely treated as a monolithic field of study in its own right and juxtaposed or even opposed to the study of Sufism and the veneration of local saints. This has not fundamentally changed in recent years, mainly, because Islamwissenschaft (i.e. Islamology) largely dissociated itself from any social and civilizational analysis. However, the influx of textual and ethnographic analysis – carried out within or inspired by disciplines outside of Islamwissenschaft – contributed significantly to the demonstration of the inherent connection between Sufism and local traditions of sainthood and mainstream Islam. Most of the essential recent writings on Sufi texts and practices and on ethnographic analysis of sainthood in Islam are referred to in the papers collected in this volume. Thus, I will refrain from providing a summary of this literature in this short introduction.

The specific interest of this volume does not lie with texts or with the – sometimes obvious – problem of the authenticity of individual saints and the written or oral traditions concerning their miracles. It is concerned with the very different and important issue of the actual practice of sainthood and with the discovery that Islamic sainthood is resistant to the classical sociology of religion and cannot be systematized into a perspective of differentiation between “extra-worldly” – mystical, orgiastic, ecstatic – experience and everyday practice governed by rational instrumental action. Whether this universalistic perspective of Max Weber, which contributes significantly to the self-definition of the everyday economic ethic of modern professionals, was ever really justified, may well be questioned. It is clear, however, that the spread of a modern professional class all over the Muslim world has contributed little to any demise of either Sufi ideas and practices or sainthood.

While the increasing hostility of the Wahhabis, modern Salafi reformists and the Muslim Brotherhood to traditional Sufism and local traditions of sainthood are contributing to the control and transformation of certain traditional practices, it is also clear that none of the recent ideological movements have actually succeeded in achieving the abolition of the ideas or practices surrounding saint veneration and Sufism. However, as clearly analyzed in many of the papers presented here, the struggle concerning “disenchantment” – to use Max Weber’s term – or sublimation of practice with respect to controlled symbolic and spiritual forms is well under way. The articles by Schielke, Andezian and Hadibi are the most significant in this context and thus deserve more detailed attention.

Samuli Schielke’s paper (Chapter 9) concerns the issue of modern control and ideological impingement on local rites with respect to the dimension of the
place/space relationship in Islamic sainthood: the modern experience of the sacred as the new local event of staged discipline and order. Schielke deals with the re-ordering of space in the celebration of the saints’ feast, the mawlid, in Egypt. Here, we encounter administrative and ideological pressures in the name of modern Islam and reformism which are dissolving the conventional lines of social interaction in and around the shrines of local saints in Tanta (Sayyid al-Badawi), Disuq (Ibrahim al-Disuqi) in the Central Nil-Delta and in Qena (Sidi ‘Abd al-Rahim) in Upper Egypt. Schielke also shows the incorporation of modern Sufi ideas in reaction to Wahhabism or “Salafi reformism”, describing the new symbolism of individual spirituality, restraint and organization in the context of Sufi performances, i.e. the hadra, the collective dhikr of orders on feast days. Here, Schielke concentrates on recently established groups, such as the gatherings around a living Shaykh Salah, the Azamiyya (or often referred to as the Abu l-‘Aza’im in the local vernacular), which was founded in 1933, and the Jazuliyya, which was founded in recent years. Schielke describes the re-ordering of space and of physical behaviour among these groups at famous Egyptian festive locations under the conditions of mass media and state and ideological interventions, and how a purified modern idea of the proper approach to sacred places, which incorporates the tastes of the new professional class, leads to the transformation or suppression of any conception of traditional ecstasies. It is interesting to note that the strategic intervention of both the state administration and reformist ideological groups would gradually lead to the abolition of what once was a carnivalesque event of both religion and joy.

In a combined account of socio-political development in Algeria and the people’s worship of saints in the city of Tlemcen and the surrounding towns and villages in the 1980s, Sossie Andezian (Chapter 6) provides a very intrinsic view of the important dimensions of micro-macro relationships in periods of intensive social change. Andezian focuses on the role of the worship of saints in local people’s religious, cultural, social and individual life in periods when radical Islam entered the public arena. She shows the different ways that people related to individual rituals in the context of political, social and religious change. In this framework, it is interesting to see the variations and different modalities of the experience of saint veneration and Sufism as a religious system of reference within a historical scenario which links the local Sufi symbolic system to different stages in its integration into the broader realm of politics and society. Obviously, Sufism played an important role in the shaping of traditional North-African identity in pre-colonial and colonial times. However, as corroborated by the evidence presented in most of the other papers in this volume, from the early 20th century, Sufism was strongly opposed by the reformist Salafiyya movement, known as the al-Islah movement in Algeria, and by more recent brands of political and militant Islam. Despite suppression – even by the colonial administration (closure of the zawiyas and banning of pilgrimages) – the post-First-World-War period witnessed the birth of a new brotherhood, namely the Alawiyya brotherhood in Mostaganem in 1920, a
brotherhood which was widely recognized and found followers in Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Europe.

Andezian focuses on complementary processes of change in institutional religion and diverse expressions of religiosity related to Sufism and popular practices. Algeria has undergone profound structural transformations and when Islam became concomitantly an issue of state power, the relationship between Sufism and popular rites happened to be the object of strong controversial reinterpretations. Andezian shows how religion takes on multiple manifestations in this context of social change. She argues that its capacity to integrate popular expressions of music and dance and hence lend meaning to new social and political contexts, makes Sufism a source of identity in times of crisis for ordinary people and, specifically, women.

Andezian then goes on to explain how this tension was particularly strong towards the end of the 1980s when Algerian Islam underwent radicalization and an attempt was made to annihilate local religious expression. In the course of the past decade the practice of Sufism in its collective forms in the region of Tlemcen has been frozen; thus also occurred at the time of the War of Liberation. However, a few signs of reawakening have been observed. Andezian summarizes these events in a too functional interpretation, believing that politicians have been responsible mainly for the violence and chaos in the country and that this was a condition of people’s new turn to supernatural men.

Mohand Akli Hadibi (Chapter 4) gives us a detailed description of the reformist influence on zawiyas in the Kabyla in Algeria and the subsequent Islamist struggle to suppress them. Taking the figure and place of Sidi Ahmad Wedris, a 14th century saint who is still venerated today, Hadibi starts by attempting to reconstitute an “authentic” local zawiya-culture in the Kabyla based on the integration of Berber and Islamic traditions. In his view the vitality of the zawiya depended largely on the plurality of social groups and of the material, psychological and spiritual needs that were articulated in the ritual and everyday events of the zawiya. Most interestingly Hadibi demonstrates a transhistorical work of Islamic reformism over five centuries operating on hostile footing with the zawiya culture of the Kabyla. For Hadibi, the traditional critique of the zawiya was transformed in the 1920s when the hard-line al-Islah movements emerged and by gradually introducing modern perceptions and subjects of teaching lead the zawiyas into the political discourse of anti-colonial struggle and Islamism. Hadibi clearly demonstrates here how nation-state bureaucratization and politicization of religious practice and discourse led to the gradual decline of a once rich and vivid local cultural scenario.

Refika Sariönder (Chapter 3) demonstrates a pattern of transhistorical interplay between saints and orders, on the one hand, and centre politics in the development from the Ottoman Empire to Turkish nationhood, on the other hand. Here, it becomes obvious that the discourse of saints and orders is very much tied to the development of a modern secular social understanding rather than solely to the “eternal” imposition of the sacred. It is interesting to note
with regard to the argument of this chapter, that, despite all sacred vocabularies, religionized politics remains secular in both outlook and practice.

III. Saints and modern society

Just one chapter, comprising almost 24 pages, of Edward William Lane’s notes to the “Thousand and One Nights”, originally published as “Arabian Society in the Middle Ages”, is dedicated to formal “religion”. The four following chapters deal with “demonology”, “saints”, “magic” and “cosmography” which, at the time, were the other quite commonly accepted disciplines in the context of the knowledge of the “otherworldly”. In reading these chapters, one gets the impression that, although intended to explain a work of fiction, these fields of “transcendental” knowledge are clear-cut, separate, simple, factual and real.

It should not come as a surprise to learn that, today, matters of saints and otherworldly knowledge in Muslim countries, the “Arabian society of the Modern Age”, are far more blurred, complicated and complex. In terms of sainthood and the “otherworldly”, Lane’s Middle Ages cannot compete with the reality of the manifestations of sainthood in our times with respect to the variety of instances, in-depth linkages, networking, mediatic experience etc. As I already stated, Spadola’s paper is of unique significance in this context.

It is a well known fact in the history of dogma, ritual and law in Islam that much freedom was given to dissent, far more, certainly, than is the case in the development of Christianity. Ignaz Goldziher was among the very few who recognized this relative tolerance not only in terms of the character of theological discourse and doctrinal differences, but also with respect to the religious and ritual practices of the ordinary people. In fact, the relation between the rule of material life and religious perception was rarely at the heart of Islamologists’ interest. Goldziher was the exception and we owe him a few interesting observations with respect to “local tradition” being associated with the maintenance of the graveyards of saints (Goldziher 1968; 1969; 1971). When he refers to the offizielle kirchliche Welt (“the world of the official church”) as caring little about the mud-brick villages of the Fellaheen and the saintly qubbas emerging all over the place (1969: 111), Goldziher is, of course, in tune with mainstream religious theory of his time. Within this framework of theological and intellectual forgetfulness, he notices that the domes of the saints signify a sort of “traditional memory of the ordinary populace” among whom the Islamic saint merely enjoys the status of “the latest bearer of a cultic momentum which reaches back to pagan antiquity” (1969: 112). He sees in the fact that an old grave of Osiris was turned into the place of a Muslim saint, a case of mythological foundation of sainthood in Islam, and characterizes it as an “ultimate metamorphosis of an Egyptian perception of god” (1969: 113). We may be very perplexed today by this intrinsic questioning of an appearance of local saints in its religious-historical and ethnographic dimension and by his quest – to my knowledge rarely im-
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implemented – to collect “the hagiological traditions from the mouth of the populace” (1969: 113).

Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen (Chapter 1) – who in a recent collection of articles develops the parallels and coincidences of hagiography and the study of “grand men”, heroes or martyrs (Mayeur-Jaouen 2002) – adopts Goldziher’s method in both conception and methodology. However, she adds the experience of ethnographic fieldwork to the combination of textual and historical analysis: the analysis of different historical sources (the history of the three dominant Sufi brotherhoods of the region, the Rifaiyya, the Ahmadiyya, and the Burhāmiyya and the hagiography of the respective local saints: one of them, Ahmad al-Badawi, being of local, national Egyptian and transnational importance), with the analysis of the rizāq ihbāsiyya records the donations of peasant families for the maintenance of sanctuaries, the following up of informants and their networks. She demonstrates the historical bondage and religious restructuring of social space in the densely populated agrarian area of the Central Nile Delta which was the cultural battlefield in the transition to monotheism. Mayeur-Jaouen shows that the importance and, in fact, the historical continuity of a local saint in the Central Delta depends very much on family networks (it is mostly local notables who maintain the material conditions of a sanctuary), on the vitality of local brotherhoods giving spiritual importance to the place and on periodical invocations of mythical saints which remain very instrumental to local interests in feasts and market days as much as in invoking the grandeur of the place with the respective importance of the myth of the saint. It is in this framework combining history with geography and ethnography that Mayeur-Jaouen provides a very clear picture on how a plurality of local saints have given meaning to a whole landscape over the past four hundred years and hence provided a livelihood for the region where the authenticity of the sacred results in the opening up of re-enforcing institutional and local cultural bondage. In her article, Mayeur-Jaouen shows that meaning and memory would not be restricted to collective practices and their incorporations or that it would depend exclusively on the signature of symbolic inheritance, but that material cultural interests and vivid practices would play a decisive role in the local collective memory.

The Egyptian experience with Sayyid al-Badawi of Tanta is also the subject of El-Sayed El-Aswad’s contribution (Chapter 7). His paper complements that of Mayeur-Jaouen in that he gives us a comprehensive description of performances of – what he calls – sanctified formal and informal networks as they developed around the sanctuary of Sayyid Ahmad al-Badawi in and around Tanta. His descriptions relate mostly to various ways in which the saint is venerated by ordinary people or members of Ahmadiyya-Tariqa. The veneration includes the ziyara, the dhikr, the hadra, the dars and the pledging of a vow, the nadhr. It is the conviction of El-Aswad that specific material and spiritual networks exist around these performances which constitute the cultural vitality of the place. He also claims that there is a certain Egyptian cosmological form related to these performances which integrate the individual into the social process be-
Chapter 5 provides an account of in-depth local relations and translocal practices and networks that depend on the veneration of a local saint. The authors, Chanfi Ahmed and Achim von Oppen, focus their observation of a commemoration of a Shadhiliyya-Yarshutiyya shaykh in East Africa on the issue of the variety in the local and translocal performance of the rituals. The simultaneity of ritual performances in different locations and the changes in the interrelatedness of the shaykh’s places is made into a field of study in its own right. It is interesting to note how various layers of memory are linked through the simultaneity of the performances in different places and within different communities.

This issue of the translocality of saint veneration, which is often strongly linked to cross-border interaction within brotherhood communities, is of utmost importance with respect to the constitution of global issues relating to Islamic sainthood. Although in this case translocality is contained within a seemingly limited regional context, the issue of spiritual cohesiveness symbolized in cross-border veneration of saints – and in many cases corresponding to claims of political cohesion and solidarity – remains of significance in many areas of the Muslim world and is of specific importance with respect to the political formation and representation of minorities. In this study, Chanfi Ahmed and Achim von Oppen have taken initial steps in an area that would undoubtedly require further comparative analysis so as to illustrate an ongoing process in the constitution of an issue of global significance.

Patrick Franke (Chapter 2) gives us an introduction into the issue of the sacred place by demonstrating the varying powers of the prophet/saint Khidr, the Green, which involve the inspiration and consecration of the locality. Khidr is distinguished with Qur’anic notability as “official” and is presented in various popular, literary and non-literary legends and sources. With reference to cosmological and cosmogonist definitions of cosmic pillar, axis mundi, provided by Mircea Eliade’s theopolitical theory of possession of land, Landnahme, Franke leads us to a sort of universal understanding of sainthood and its essential authenticating function with respect to the overall construction of a global symbolic super-centre and related sub-centres of local cults in traditional Islam. In fact, in the relationship between the mythological Khidr – the Green – and the Aya Sofya in Istanbul and with respect also to other sacred places in the Islamic world, he describes the effects evoked by the legendary presence of this wandering saint in constructing an in-depth sense of specific places, in fact a religious authorization of space and legitimization of sanctuaries. It is not surprising that Modernists and Muslim Brothers have strongly rejected the idea of Khidr altogether.

Emilio Spadola (Chapter 8) refers to a specific type of “sainthood” which is common among the poor throughout the Muslim world: the practice of magic healing. Most notably, in Morocco such practitioners are called foqaha, a term...
otherwise reserved for legal teachers. However, in contrast to the conventional study of healers, Spadola focuses on the presence of mass communication and technological media in the relationship between *fqaha* and their patients and, specifically, on the technological and media impact on renewing the social and even spiritual significance of these practices and the related imagery. Spadola’s observations are based on encounters with younger and elder *fqaha* in the Medina of Fez and in the Rabat-Salé region. Most interestingly Spadola develops the current appearance of *jinns* as a parallel to the mediatic encounter with the stranger, as the modern emergence of a political culture facing the foreign.

Adopting a conceptual critique of Max Weber’s “charisma” as being inapt when it comes to the charismatic authority of Sufi saints, Paulo G. Pinto (Chapter 10) describes the various aspects of the performance of *baraka* by a local *zawiya* shaykh in the Syrian town of Aleppo. Pinto focuses on the notion of religious persona, i.e. the construction of a spiritual vision of a shaykh, as stemming from the process of his practical detachment from the Sufi community (illness, death). This process includes the intensification of ritual practices which enabled a real “virtuoso” from the community to gain the status of the leader (*khalifa*) of the *zawiya*, despite his inferior rank in terms of age and lineage. In this context it is interesting to note that although the dynamics related to the death of the shaykh include a kind of spiritual objectification of his authority into a sort of “impersonal institution”, in this case an institutionalised chain of successors, which in Weber’s terms of “routinization” would be the necessary consequence of the process, did not emerge. It is here that Pinto observes a particular character in the performance of sainthood in Sufi communities – with specific reference to Syria and Aleppo – in that they allow for the transmission by the shaykh of his charismatic authority with no imperative for “routinization”.

IV. Coincidental analysis issues

This volume deals with local saints and religious spirituality in Islam, albeit in a far more restricted sense than in the theory discussed above. Thus, by bringing together a limited range of subjects of factual analysis, we propose to approach our topic as a sociological investigation into various fragments of the pantheon of Islamic sainthood. It is not that we believe that “grand issues” are diminished or shrunk when confronted with factual analysis. On the contrary, it is our aim to make complex issues explicable – step by step – in empirical contexts. However, there is also an intermediary level of conceptualization, which includes some broader social issues.

Firstly, a general importance attaches to the “place of the saint” and this is evident in almost all of the papers in this collection. At an initial glance, this statement sounds very clear and concrete; however, it could prove rather ambiguous since the location of saints is often linked with their spiritual capacity
to “move”. Whatever the nature of the presence, their appearance in concrete social places, which often relates a given “transhistorical” religious landscape to the forms of their “historical” appearance and maintenance, are of great importance with respect to local social reconstruction.

Secondly, and coincidentally to the appearance in place and space, a variety of symbolic expressions and practices exist on the different “platforms” of saint veneration which all relate to both institutional strategies of order and perceived symbols of order in local social life. Action on this level is largely dependent on the permanent mutual exchange between government and the populace.

Finally, a third dimension which is of modern significance is the quest that exists for sacral solutions in the elementary actions of everyday life – long since part of the general code of Islam as a religion. This has witnessed a particular change in intensity and meaning in the context of the increased expansion of modern lifestyles and expectations.

This later issue is related to the impinging of ritual practice on communal self-understanding and is awarded special significance in the contributions by Schielke, Ahmed/von Oppen, Pinto and El-Aswad. As we can see in these papers, the communitarian function of rites relates to both processes of individual power formation and processes involving the control and order of local public space. Here the state seems to operate through the challenging presence of institutional power from behind the scenes to suppress certain expressions or to interfere in any process of ritual performance. On the other hand, in the broader historical terms developed in the case of saints relating to Ottomanism and Turkey by Franke and Sariönder, the historical entity of the state and power politics remain inherently linked with the selective issues of modern symbolic representation of sainthood. The local historical continuity of the saint’s place and how this relates to collective memory and communitarian practice in local societies is an issue which also warrants special attention in the papers on Egypt by Mayeur-Jaouen and El-Aswad; the paper on East-Africa by Ahmed/von Oppen develops this topic with an analysis of “ritual practice per se”.

As can be seen in the papers by Andezian, Hadibi and Schielke, the issues of place and ritual take a more specific turn when the challenges of politically inspired “reformism” and modern ideology become involved. However, modernism operates – in a much more sophisticated way than by strategic intervention – from within cultic practices resulting in drives for modern self-transgression and the re-construction of the idea of the sacred itself and of Islamic sainthood as such and thus immediately inspiring the social and political action of people (Ahmed/von Oppen; Spadola). This is a dimension which plays a specific role in all forms of representation of re-constructions of Islam, the sacred, and Sufism.

I have ordered the papers approximately on the basis of a “hidden agenda” ranging from “history” to “space” to “performance”. Some of the readers may have preferred to see one or other paper in a different place or in a different context. It is true that these issues are generally related and, indeed, feature to
varying extents in all of the collected papers. However, my intention was to
stress these points in relation to the specific variations in the subject of study
and approach and in relation to the specific forms of their interconnection. At
this point I would like to express my own concerns very clearly.

What we see here is the general dimension of material culture as related to
the local performance of cults in both rural and urban contexts and their net-
works and institutions. Although there is local and ethnic colouring in practice
and spiritual range, idea and practice are universal in Islam.

In a first step we may reduce this general perplexity with respect to the
diversity in emphasis and form to a problem of “topography” and the authentic-
ity of place and landscape. Natural characteristics, pre-Islamic cultic reality,
local events and mentalities are often stronger witnesses of the “authentic”
grave – the place of the saint – than historical “reality” would possibly reveal in
upholding a critical view on the very place of life and death of the saint. It is the
– stated, experienced, maintained, defended – presence of the saint and the
belief in his broader capacities that lend sacredness to the place of veneration,
locations or landscapes. Practices and social needs related to the perpetual
invocation of this presence are perhaps best described in the chapter by Cath-
erine Mayeur-Jaouen.

As already discussed in relation to place, space and order, sainthood and
the celebration of saints incorporate certain transitions between social material
and “transsocial” principles and visions which generally represent the main
problem for a modern understanding of the sacred and related religious practi-
ces. Modernity supposes the transgression of collective norms into individuali-
ty, of ethical inclinations into knowledge and of wisdom into individual action,
in other words the ever more self-responsible methodization of everyday life.
The question that may be asked in this context is whether “saints” and “Sufis”
open up a specific modern way of individuation and an alternative to western
individualism. This volume does not provide an answer to this question. How-
ever, I feel the need to stress its present importance, specifically with a view to
inviting reflections and analysis for future issues of this yearbook. The point is
that – as discussed at the outset – since the genealogy of modernity is so intrin-
sically linked with asceticism and the religious roots of modern dialectics of
inwardness and power construction, we need to understand why the Islamic
adherence to saintliness would reject any ultimate dialectic between inwardness
and externality – a point I owe, here, to my discussion with Armando Salvatore.
Furthermore, the question must undoubtedly be extended to the various pat-
terns of east-west cultural exchange today: What would it mean if we were to see
how this fundamental issue in the genealogy of modern individualism, inter-
linking inwardness with affirmative powers of self-construction, is converted
into a perpetual tool for a re-construction of collectivism?

Massignon was not perhaps aware of the sociological range of such ques-
tions. However, he was the first to really embark on this field of analysis. With
respect to sainthood the experience of transgression is reserved to the extra-or-
ordinary: the saint and the event of the sacred. Within the framework of this contention there remains always the contradiction between the inner method of achieving knowledge and collective practice. A close look at the “legal consequences” for Islamic discourse in response to what we may today call the self-identification of al-Hallaj with the truth of God and his subsequent martyrdom – as shown by Massignon (1981) – would suggest that whatever type of self the individual consciousness of God would have produced, it can be Islamic only through collective appreciation and celebration. It is at this point that Muslims would affirm the vision of individuality only with respect to a vision of collective experience. Today Islamic spirituality is figured out as a specific case among world religions which forbids the believer to “share” (shirk) in the knowledge of, i.e. identification with, God. Nevertheless, the testimony and realization of the grace of god is individual. As Massignon has shown, by disclosing “in the perishable world, the incorruptible presence of a sacred Truth” (Massignon 1981: xiii) “[the saint] ties his ‘transsocial’ experience to the liturgical cycle that is communitarian and real” (Massignon: lxii). In his various this-worldly experiences in disrespect of bodily sufferings, and his rank in the extra-world through his “theopathy” on earth, the saint remains the real substitute for the Muslim community. In this sense the continued practise of sainthood is both a source of individual and collective spirituality based on visionary and ritual approaches of the momentum of redemption. Paradoxically, all this is to limit any absolute claim of knowledge of God on the part of the human being. However, at the same time, the absoluteness of God also seems to invite a methodized way to the “transsocial” experience of God.

I am again rewording Massignon’s (and Hallaj’s) conceptualizations of history in terms of “political theology”, the presence of the sacred and the modern location of the individual. Massignon makes us aware that the problem of power and politics is related to the varying issues and re-emerging practices of veneration of saints. There is a relationship between legitimacy of power and sainthood that goes beyond the saints’ “unity with” and/or “knowledge of God” as substituting the community of ordinary believers. The control of communal practice by the state approaches the problem of the legitimacy of rites and forms of symbolic expression, and in a broader sense – as demonstrated by Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen – it enters the problem of controlling – or as in the case developed by Ahmed/von Oppen re-inspiring – the collective cultural memory. There can be no doubt that the game with, perhaps, nostalgic sentiments and archaic resurgence is most prevalent here. The engagement of ideas and technologies of symbolic reconstruction, Sufism and the celebration of saints often trigger archaic visions and rites, if not – as Goldziher demonstrated – turning to archaic places.

However, although it shares common ground with the question of modern individualism, the issue of individual transgression and performance goes much further: it opens up to perspectives of repositioning of the self in a global order (Robertson/Chirico 1985: 236). Certainly, it is an issue that transcends the
concern with Sufi groups and their places, instruments, methods and organizations; it relates in a very strong sense to the modern significance of saints as masters of performance and models for re-locating individuals. In this sense, saints are not treated as mythological figures, “sacrificers”, inventors or discoverers, but as “professional” performers. Although this is an underlying theme in all of the papers, this dimension is most strongly developed in the accounts provided by Spadola and Pinto.

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Readers should be aware that this is the work of sociologists, historians, anthropologists and specialists in Islamic Studies. The intensity with which the intricacies and rules of transliteration of Arabic are observed, varies according to region of research or descent and discipline of the authors. We have generally observed conventional rules of English transliteration. Please note that ‘ain is rendered through ‘. Hamza is rendered as ’ in the middle of the word, like fada’il while it is absent at the beginning and at the end of a word.

References


