

## **Religion, Cults, and Moslem Holy Graves in Galilee**

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### **Abstract**

Pilgrimage as Christian derived concept, relates mostly to Catholicism, is tied to repentance and forgiveness of sins and is bound up in acts of devotion and cult that aims to find the roots and strengthen beliefs.

An important local characteristic connected with grave of holy men is the adoration of sacred trees. Historically, the Terebinth tree was sacred by Canaanites nations who lived in ancient Israel, and somewhere in history, the oak tree was joined to the terebinth. A pair of an oak and a terebith, a mixed wood or a group of the same specie, can be found at or around several sanctified sites. This tradition survives Judaism Hellenism, and all cultures that dominated the area since, including Islam.

**Key Words:** Cults, Pilgrimage, Islam, Palestine.

### **Introduction**

Pilgrimage, admiration and cultivation of graves and other "holy sites", is a behaviour found among faithful of diverse religions. Reverence and cultivation of graves is practiced since ancient times in many Moslem societies. In the Near East, the custom exists for millennium, and always played a central role in the lives of the inhabitants regardless of their professed religion. In most countries in the area, this tradition is still present, holy sites are still honoured and holy men are still revered.

*The phenomenon has been studied by scholars of different disciplines including: historians, sociologists, psychologists, priests, anthropologists, and geographers. It is possible to see it as a clear interdisciplinary subject* (Bowman, 1988; Bowman, 1985; Coleman & Elsner, 1995).

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An important local characteristic connected with grave of holy men is the adoration of sacred trees. Historically, the Terebinth tree was sacred by Canaanites nations who lived in ancient Israel, and somewhere in history, the oak tree was joined to the terebinth. A pair of an oak and a terebith, a mixed wood or a group of the same specie, can be found at or around several sanctified sites. This tradition survives Judaism Hellenism, and all cultures that dominated the area since, including Islam.

In fact, this ascribed sanctity saved these trees from the axe, and when the country was barren and neglected, pilgrims to holy sites could always find shade and relative comfort under huge ancient sacred trees. Today, all oak trees and few specific other trees [olive, cypress, Atlantic terebinth, certain type of acacia and chestnut] are protected by law, and cannot be cut down or moved without permission.

In addition, it worth mentioning that in time, the identity of the holy man can change: a grave admired by previous residence can receive new identity, become the focus of new tales, be attributed different powers and attract new and different rituals.

### **1. Islam and the worship of holy men & holy sites**

From the dawn of its existence, monotheistic orthodox Islam has undertaken a stubborn stance against the worship of holy sites, a custom perceived to be of pagan origin

The Prophet Mohamed instructed the believers to build modest graves; not to elevate them as monuments and not to build the mosques above or around them.

*"These acts are the acts of the ancient peoples, who did not go in the right way, by building mosques above graves of holy men (Jabber, 1978: 11).*

Some scholars suggested that tradition of Pilgrimage to local easy accessible holy sites derived partially from pre-existing local tradition, partially from influence of other religions, and partially to provide for social and spiritual need of the common people who seek solace in pilgrimage to a nearby site which they believe is blessed by the presence of the holy man's grave.

It is imperative to note, that although both Islam and Judaism oppose the idea of "holy people" and that in both religions there is an official single holy site [Mecca in Islam and Jerusalem in Judaism], history, tradition, social needs and political interests led believers of both religions to embrace and glorify additional sites where people come not only to pay their respects, but also to worship, pray, be blessed, take an oath, and express their humble devotion,

In fact, the practice of Islam had opened the door for this tradition, as in addition to the *Hajj*, which is a religious duty, Islam allows another pilgrimage form; the *Ziyarah*, which is a voluntary pilgrimage to holy sites and holy people.

Meri (1999) whose article deals with criticism of the *Ziyarah* by Islamic scholars, discussed the religious behaviour associated with these two types of pilgrimages. He describes religious behavioural patterns in that period when supporters of the *Ziyarah* tended to reduce the dimension of the holy man mediation and stressed the appeal to God. Meri concludes that these additional pilgrimage forms do not derive from external influences, but from internal developments in Islam.

Early Muslim Theologians, such as the fourteenth-century Syrian theologian Taqi El-Din Ibn Taimiya, preached fanatically against the cult of the holy men and spoke out against pilgrimage to grave of the Prophet Mohamed, in the city of Medina in Hijaz. However, in the eyes of believers, the pilgrimage was a lofty commandment which complemented the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Several scholars, such as Goldziher, Jabber, Sivan, and other leading scholars of Islam and anthropological aspects of Moslem societies, observe that despite its foreign concept, the cult of the holy men developed at great speed, and spread throughout the Moslem world. According to Goldziher [1927], it is possible to say that the cult of holy men penetrated the depths of Moslem religion and seeped into its monotheistic foundations.

The Moslems found ways to mediate on miracles, *Karamat*, which was bound up in *Oliaa*, and between the principles of Islamic beliefs. At the beginning of the twelfth century, the belief in the holy *Wali* was not considered as heresy to the religion and to Allah.

The rapid spread of the cult of holy men was accompanied by the phenomenon of the *Ziyarat*- the visit to the holy place. . Visits to the graves of the dead were prohibited in the early days of Islam, but they were permitted during the Crusades, and they became more widespread (Jabber, 1978: 7). The *Ziyarat* differs from country to country, from one society to another, from one place to another, and from *Wali* to *Wali*. However, usually it includes a ceremony, prayer, and often making sacrifices, for example, slaughtering a beast such as a sheep or a goat.

In his book "The Hajj", [the pilgrimage] Moslem sociologist and philosopher, Ali Shariati, explains that when a person goes on a pilgrimage, it is not only a matter of reciting certain texts and performing certain rituals, but he goes through a mental

transformation providing him a unique spiritual experience: the pilgrim detaches himself from his daily life, he starts the endeavour with a prayer to purify his soul and wears pure clean white attire before he begins his mission. These acts symbolically elevate him to a higher sphere and this feeling intensifies when he reaches his destination.

As the pilgrim is already in a different state of mind, when he makes the contact with the holy man, or fulfils his duty to the holy site, he reaches spiritual elation which is the closest to holiness a mortal can achieve. (Shariati, 1980).

In Palestine, the admiration and cultivation of prophets and holy men graves has a long history, and was actually common since the Ayyubid period (1187–1250), although some say the cult existed in the ninth century but in a less complex form (Meir & Finkerfeld, 1950: 10–11; Goldziher, 1927: 81). Popular traditions also ascribe sanctity to the people who lived in the country before Islam, and many places were sanctified in their honour.

The graves of the holy men can be divided into two types: holy men according to Islam and after Islam. The former include Lot, Jacob, Isaac, Nabi Salah, and Moses, and the latter chiefly include Moslem military leaders and their grandsons who died and were buried in the country.

The Moslems viewed Palestine, in addition to Hijaz in Northwest Saudi Arabia, as a sanctified and blessed country, the place of residence of the prophets and their followers. In the Koran, it is called 'the Holy Country'.

*Many priests and saints lived and died in the country, and the graves of holy men are found throughout the Holy Land- Palestine. It is possible to say that holy places are found in every place in Palestine, in villages or in towns (Canaan, 1927: 2).*

A saying is considered more powerful if it was attributed or actually used by a saint or a holy man. The faithful believe that even after the death of a saint, his burial place retains the powers he professed during his life. Thus, the phenomenon of holy places developed in Islam as it developed in other religions. Almost every Moslem village hosts a *Maqam*, a grave of a prophet or a holy man attracting pilgrimage. The visit of the faithful designed to draw the attention of the holy man who will act to answer the needs of the visitor.

Over time, local inhabitants wove legends and told miraculous tales around graves of saints and travellers were drowning to visit the sanctified graves. Scholars went to these sites and described the cult and miracles attributed to each site. The

phenomenon intrigued several scholars, Moslem and non-Moslem alike. Thus, we have several learned accounts of such practices.

Following is a brief reference list of scholars who studied this phenomenon, visited sites, described the cult and recorded the tales they heard about them from the locals.

- 1- El-Harawi Abu El-Hassan ben Abu Bachar lived in the seventeenth century and wrote the book *El-Asharat Elia Maaraft El-Ziyarat (The Signs for Recognition of the Visits)*. El-Harawi described graves of holy men he visited in his journeys in Moslem countries, including Palestine. He mentions graves he visited in Acre and Tiberius and the miracles that he was told about. For example, he describes his visit to the village of Manda in Lower Galilee where “the grave of Zippora, the wife of Moses” and the well from which Moses gave a drink to the daughters of Midian are shown to visitors. He also describes his visit to the village of Kabul located near Acre, in which the locals show the graves of Reuben and Simon, sons of the patriarch Jacob (El-Harawi, 1953: 20).
- 2- Al-Sheikh Abed El-Gani ben Ismail El-Nablesi (the end of the seventeenth century), became famous for his voyages to Islamic countries, especially in Syria, Egypt, and Hijaz. He described the graves of saints and the visits of the people to these graves in his essay ‘El-Hakika Wael-Majaz Fi Rahlat Balad El-Sham, Masr Wael-Hijaz’ (The Truth and the Metaphor in a Journey to Syria, Egypt, and Hijaz). For example, he mentioned the grave of Nabi Salah in Acre and other graves of saints in the villages Shfaram and in Mashhad (Jabber, 1978: 113–114).
- 3- A. Goldziher, a Jewish academic orientalist, who studied the cult of Moslem holy men, discovered many facts connected to graves of holy men all over the Moslem world. He discussed such graves and holy places in Palestine. For example, he described how the Moslems in Acre<sup>1</sup> invented a prophet by the name of ‘Ac’, after whom apparently the town of Acre<sup>1</sup> is named and how they paid him the same respect afforded to the rest of the holy men (Goldziher, 1927: 262–340).

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<sup>1</sup> Acre, is an English form to the port city Akko, an ancient Phoenician port referred to in Egyptian writings and in the Hebrew bible. Its glory days were during the crusades, and during the Ottoman regimes

- 4- In 1927, Tawfik Canaan, an ethnographer and researcher of folklore and archaeology, published a book on the subject of graves of holy men and holy places among the Moslems in Palestine. He names many of these, especially those found in the centre of the country around Nablus and Jerusalem (Canaan, 1927).

## **2. The Wali and the powers ascribed to him**

A Moslem holy man who gained the appellation of Wali is perceived as a man who has influence with Allah. He is [supposed to be] capable of changing form, travelling long distances, speak many languages, read thoughts, and see what occurs in distant places, he knows the future, and even able to resurrect dead people. The Wali controls the forces of nature. He can cause rain to fall and stop at will, and can cause plants to grow. He is also capable of flying through the air or walking on water. Due to this control of the forces of nature, the Wali is perceived by some as a ruler of the world (Jabber, 1978: 19).

Despite all these abilities, one should not believe in a Wali magician except when his acts suit the commandment of the Koran. Only a God- fearing holy man is capable of performing miracles. He asks from God, thanks God, obeys him, and praises him all the time.

This is the reason that Allah helps him in his acts and gives him the capacity to perform miracles (Ibid: 20). It is worth noting that this is additional proof that no contradiction exists between the person's monotheistic belief and the pagan actions accompanying this belief.

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The faithful believe that after his death the spirit of the saint hovers above his grave, and therefore, he has the capacity to serve them as an advocate. There are those who believe that the saint stays alive within his grave and that he is closer to Allah than when he was alive because his spirit is not disturbed by the follies of this world. As noted by Jabber (1978: 27), "*The holy man is like a sword in its scabbard, he will not draw it after his death*".

Not all holy men are alike. Certain holy men are capable of curing specific illnesses, whereas others are capable of returning sight to the blind or putting paralyzed people back on their feet (Ibid: 406; Marx, 1978: 15). Other holy men

profess qualities tied to property: they can return stolen goods or lost property to their owners or to ensure economic prosperity by the birth of a male child.

An additional trait ascribed to holy men is the spotting of perjury. A man is known to have committed a felony but did not confess to doing it and there was no tangible proof against him could be brought to the grave of the Sheikh and swear to his innocence. If he perjured himself, the act will raise the anger of the holy man, and would bring about his death.

News of the successes or failures of holy men is spread by word of mouth. Therefore, the people do not turn to the nearest holy man, but to the one 'specializing' in a certain problem with which they need help. Thus, in the eyes of the people, all holy men, wherever they are, have similar value to the true faithful.

*The capacity to perform a miracle is a trait given to a holy man as distinct from a normal mortal, as long as he does not use it as proof of his power and charity but only for the strengthening of the belief in Allah. Some differentiate between the miracles that a prophet performs and those that a holy man performs, whereas others do not see a difference between them\** (Jabber, 1978: 23–24).

*It is not difficult to understand the strong need of simple people to believe in miracles, especially in countries where oppression and poverty prevail. When the belief of the Moslem in a human government is lost, he looks for compensation in a divine government with hidden powers that can rescue him from his plight (Ibid: 29–30).*

### **3. The goals of the *Ziyarah*: the pilgrimage to the graves of holy men**

"Besides its theological and social definitions, a pilgrimage is defined in geographic terms as the movement of a population to a place considered as holy" (Birks, 1978). The latter definition points to the cyclicity of movement, with the pilgrim setting out from his house and returning to it.

From 1960s onwards, several scholars began to investigate the connection and interaction between the environment and Man (Zube, Brush, & Fabos, 1975). These authors claim that the foundation of national parks and nature reserves in the world points to an awareness of the symbolic relations existing between humans and their natural environment. As stated by Nolon and Nolon (1989), "...it seems today that humans need to go to a natural environment to feel inspired and free".

The location of pilgrimage sites is one of the geographic characteristics discussed in the overall framework of 'holy sites and places' and 'holy spaces' where communication is possible between this world and the next world. These places are considered as 'the centre of the world' and the 'the axis of the world'. The Axis Mundi even passes through the centre

Holy place is perceived as the basic axis for the formation of the world and as the centre of the universe. The holiness of such places Mecca, Jerusalem, and Nazareth derives from their position as religious centres, as is the holiness of certain sites in towns and villages. Hence, pilgrimages are also made to these places.

The tradition of pilgrimage emphasizing the connection between Man and his environment, originated in pagan traditions. Thus, many sites of pilgrimage today connect to natural features including: mountains, water, trees, stones, and caves. Various studies have noted the symbolism of such features: caves symbolize the bosom of earth, water are the essence of life, holy mountains and trees can be perceived as connectors between heaven and earth, and mountains representing conservation and protection of their trustees on their slopes (Nolon & Nolon, 1989).

The reasons a pilgrim sets out on a *Ziyarah* are many and varied (Suwaed, 1996; Collins-Krieger, 1994: 16; Canaan, 1927). They may include one or more of the following:

- A. Fulfilment of a religious commandment and an act of worship to be close to a site with religious significance or to a place in which miracles took place.
- B. Meeting with 'a religious instructor' or 'a holy man'.
- C. Pilgrimage to a place in which it is possible for a sin to be forgiven and to receive a pardon to erase the sins.
- D. Pilgrimage for specific needs such as being cured from diseases of body or mind for which no remedy has been found.
- E. Religious family ceremony, for example, making vows. In times of trouble, the people would call for the salvation of the saint and say vows connected to him. They would then make a pilgrimage to his grave to maintain the vow, which included holding a dinner in his honour or decorating, a tree dedicated to him with colourful pieces of cloth.
- F. Joining others in a visit to 'a folkloric-religious' site.



- G. Appeasing a divine body in such situations of bad luck as: hardship, or crisis or ask for his help in coping with consequences of natural disaster.
- H. Identifying forthcoming disasters.
- I. Thanking or making requests. Women in the Galilee like in the rest of the world make a pilgrimage to holy graves to thank the holy man or make a request, for example, to find a bridegroom, to be blessed with a child, or to seek cure for herself or a relative.

One of the reasons for the development of the belief in holy men is the fact that a person has no control over various things that happen in his life. People tend to believe that these holy men mediate between man and God from afar because they know no other way to reach him (Marx, 1978: 14).

The people believe that the holy men transmit their prayers and their requests to God. They hope that the mediation of the holy person will help their requests to be accepted willingly and to be fulfilled. Therefore, they do not worship the holy men as divinity, but see them as mediators between themselves and a distant God to whom access is difficult.

This perception should not be considered as deviation from orthodox Islam, which does not recognize partners to God, but as a popular phenomenon that prevails throughout the Islamic world.

#### **4. The graves of Moslem holy men in the North of Palestine: a partial list**

Holy graves are some of the most widespread features of the landscape of Israel. They are found everywhere, including Galilee. Most of the graves are within villages or close to them. Many villages have several such sanctified graves.

The graves comprise a square and relatively simple structure, with one or two rooms. They are roofed with a white dome.

The history and the circumstances in which a given site received the status of sanctified grave are not always clear, but most scholars agree that not all of them are ancient. Some sanctified graves were founded or renewed during the Mameluke period in the thirteenth century for military and political reasons; designed to increase Moslem presence in given sites at the time of Christian holidays.

The Mamelukes who replaced the Crusades, from the thirteenth century onwards, encouraged an Islamic revival in the land, in which they founded and renovated many religious structures. The fear of renewed invasion by the crusaders motivated religious

leaders to support the rulers' initiative since they viewed this as a means for religious revival (Canaan, 1927).

The graves of holy men are known by different names: '*Nabi*' (prophet) is used to denote an influential historical figure, mostly from pre-Islamic era; '*Sidna*', (our Lord), is a nickname for ancient ancestor or an important Moslem holy man. '*Wali*', (the beloved or holy), usually refers to the structure of the grave itself;

The 'grave of a Sheikh', is a very important concept, and it indicates the burial place of a spiritual leader or a very aristocratic personality. '*Maqam*', (place), is a holy site, which is not always a burial place, but a token for the late distinguished person; '*mazar*', (a place that is visited, a holy grave), comes from the verb "*zar*" which means visit in Arabic, the intention here is a place people visit.

Moslem Arab who settled in the country had been influenced by religions and traditions that preceded Islam in the area, such as Judaism and Christianity. Stories and legends were spun around prominent figures from the Hebrew Bible. For example, according to Palestinian Arab tradition, the *Maqam* of Adam can be found in Nablus. Adam is also mentioned in Hebron, Jerusalem, Jaffa and Acre.

The Western writer Conder noted that Adam and Eve are also said to be buried in Mecca in Hijaz and that after they were expelled from the Garden of Eden they lived by a water spring near Hebron. This conjecture is based on legends recited by local inhabitants (Conder & Kitchener, 1881: 261).

Table 1 specifies a number of graves and holy places where Moslem inhabitants hold cult ceremonies, or used to have public rituals and festivities in the past.

**Table 1: Central holy places in the Galilee**

No.	Location	Name of the grave/ <i>Maqam</i>	History and the <i>Maqam</i> /grave
1.	The village of Dir-El Assad, Central Galilee	Sheikh Mohamed El-Assad	The <i>Maqam</i> is sacred not only to the inhabitants of the village, named after him, but to the whole Moslem population around it. Sheikh El-Assad came to the North of Palestine from Damascus in the sixteenth century and died in 1569. The Sheikh was considered as a close associate of God and as somebody to whom miracles happened. The family tree of the Sheikh goes

			<p>back to Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Mohamed. The traits that bestowed upon him were: adherence to the Koran, scholarship and prayer for many hours a day, a large number of descendants (his family today amounts to 8,000 people). His grave features a vastly proportioned and impressive gravestone, and a mosque was built beside it.</p>
2.	The village of Kochav Abu El-Hijaa, Lower Galilee	<i>Maqam</i> Abu El-Hijaa	<p>The <i>Maqam</i> commemorates the name of a Moslem military leader by the name of Husam El-Din, a Kurd by origin. He joined the army of Saladin the Ayyubid and participated in battles in Acre, Jerusalem, and elsewhere. He visited Galilee in the 1180s. Saladin gave Abu El-Hija and his descendants' territories in the north of Palestine, including the site where the <i>Maqam</i> is located today. Abu El-Hija died somewhere on his way northwards from Baghdad to Khorasan, and the graves in Kochav are apparently are of two of his descendants who lived in the area. The grave is in a cemetery belonging to the Abu-El-Hija family. The structure of the grave is divided into two sections: the visitor enters from the north to an eastern room designated for prayer; to the side from the west, there is another room containing two tombs. Between these, there is an elevated yard where there is a bed with many covers. The rooms are decorated in 'henna', and the floor is covered with carpets. The place also contains candles, olive oil, and incense. Books of the Koran are kept in niches around the building, which is roofed with two pale blue-coloured domes. There is a yard to the northern side containing two rooms for the family of the guard, and also for those who come to make a vow or to be cured. People continue to visit the grave to date, especially in rainless years when they visit to pray for rain (<i>Istisqa</i>) (Araf, 1993; Hussein Abu El-Hijia, 2011).</p>
3.	Hawsha	Nabi Hushan	<p>The building is new, and the grave is not under the dome. The grave is in the cemetery of the Khualed tribe and the Suwaed tribe.</p> <p>According to tradition, it is the grave of the Jewish prophet Joshua [Hoshea?], who is also revered by the</p>

			Jews. The tradition also says that Nabi Hushan knew how to walk with the devils. The Bedouins used to stay overnight with their sick babies in the place, and the holy man would transfer their diseases to the devils (Mabdoul).
4.	Bethlehem Haglilit	Laham	This is a holy grave within a cemetery. According to tradition, the Bedouins of the region buried their dead there.
5.	Bir El-Maksour	El-Mazira	The inhabitants claim that he was a devil who appeared in the form of a woman wearing white clothes. The grave lies within the cemetery of the Hajirat tribe.
6.	The village of Shibli	Hamazar trees	These are two ancient oak trees, standing in the centre of the village. These trees became famous as they protect people who visit them from the evil eye and cure also sick people.
7.		Aldakruri	According to the tradition of the Shibli tribe ( <i>Zaviah</i> ), this is a grave of a holy man, and they hold <i>Ziyarah</i> ceremonies for him, chiefly privately.
8.	Acre	<i>Maqam</i> Nabi Salah	There are several places in Palestine connected with the name of the Prophet Salah: in Acre, Nazareth, the Tulkarm region, Hebron region, and Gaza region. The grave of Nabi Salah in Acre is in a Moslem cemetery east of the wall of the ancient city. It features a domed structure, divided into two sections. The northern section containing the tomb is covered with coloured cloths. In the southern part, mats and carpets contributed by visitors are spread on the floor and used by the believers visiting the tomb. The tomb of Nabi Salah is still used for active worship; people pray there on Thursdays and Fridays when the women visit the nearby cemetery and on holidays ( <i>Eid al-Fitr</i> and <i>Eid al-Adha</i> ) and on the birthday of the prophet Mohamed.
9.	Manshiya Zabda	El-Zabdawi	This is an ancient grave found under an oak tree, which was burnt in the early 1960s by a shepherd.
10.	Khalaf (Beit Zarzir)	Mohamed	The grave is located in a cemetery. There are ten oak trees around the grave.
11.	Ilabun	Nabi Yesha (Yosha)	Located west of the village, surrounded by the cemetery of the El-Hib and Hamuasi tribes. Jews visit the place and claim that it is the tomb of Rabbi 'Matya

			Ben Hirish', and this inscription is engraved on the <i>Maqam</i> .
12.	Wadi Salame	Oum Iyash	This is a tomb of a holy man under an oak tree, which fell recently. The members of the Suwaed tribe bury by the grave children who die younger than seven.
13.		Nabi Khaled	The grave is located at the western end of the village. The tomb is situated beneath a small wood of five oak trees.
14.		Sheikh Mahmoud	This tomb is situated under an oak tree. According to tradition, the tomb is that of a holy man who came from Egypt in the nineteenth century (apparently with the Egyptian conquest of Syria in 1831).
15.		Oum Riha	This is a sanctified tree honouring the memory of a holy woman whose identity is unknown. The inhabitants of the village Wadi Salama held Ziyara ceremonies in the site, vowed vows and hung coloured cloths on the tree. One has to keep the vow otherwise you will be punished (an evil spirit (Ruach) will descend on the offending person).
16.	Hula Valley	El-Wakatz	The <i>Maqam</i> is located near Kibbutz Ayelet Hashahar. It serves as a cemetery for the Suwaed Karad Ganame and El-Heib tribes. The site is named after the Suwaed tribe's founding ancestor (Saad ben Avi Wakatz). The <i>Maqam</i> was mentioned by Ahmed Beck in a letter dated May 1, 1556, sent to the Ottoman capital. Beck, who was governor of the <i>sanjak</i> [district] of Safed, sought to transfer the lands of "the Wakatzia Wakf to the <i>Maqam</i> of Saad ben Abi Wakatz" (Heyd, 1960: 159–160).
17.		Tombs of Bnot Yaakov [Jacob's daughters]	Situated beside the Bnot Yaakov bridge, a site frequently visited by Bedouins of the region. They used to bring their herds with them to be blessed and to get rid of diseases.
18.	Halsa (Kiryat Shmona)	The ten trees	Known today as Hurshat Tal, or Hurshat HaArbaim, which is a wood containing approximately 40 large ancient oaks and several younger trees surrounding a large pool. The holiness ascribed to this wood derives from a legend associated with the most ancient ten trees, which are said to have grown from the pegs of tents that accommodated ten Moslem saints who

			received a message saying they would enter Paradise whilst they were still alive. The names of those saints are unknown.
19.	Tuba-Zangaria	Mohamed Hati	Members of the Zangaria tribe bury children who die under the age of seven near the <i>Maqam</i>
20.		Ahmed El-Mantar	The <i>Maqam</i> is located northwest to the village, inside the cemetery of the El-Hib tribe. According to local tradition, the <i>Maqam</i> is the resting place of a Moslem commander who fought against the crusaders in the Hula region.
21.	Kfar Dahi-Jezreel Valley	Nabi Dahi	<p>The grave is situated on a hill, overlooking the Jezreel Valley. According to popular literature, the interred, Dahia ben Khaliffa El-Kalbi, was a friend of the prophet Mohamed. According to legend, he was a crop merchant who went to Jordan to buy wheat. On the way there, he lost his money. He filled his bags with earth, and on his return home found them full of fine wheat.</p> <p>The grave of Nabi Dahi served people living in Dahi, village as place of worship before they had a mosque. The village mosque was built in 1978. However, the village inhabitants still bury their dead around the grave.</p>
22.	Beit-Shearim-Western Yizrael Valley	Sheikh Abrik	<p>The site is situated on high grounds east of Tivon and overlooks the Western part of Jezreel Valley.</p> <p>The legend says that the late Sheikh Abrik worked in the service of a wealthy man and ploughed his fields. Several times a day, the man kept a jug of water at his disposal and used to purify himself whilst he bent for praying. One day, the landowner arrived on the spot and expressed anger for the wasting of precious time on prayer instead of devoting himself entirely to his work, and smashed the jug in anger, hence, the name Abrik, or jug. The legend says that where the jug was broken, a spring, the 'El- Ishakiya' burst forth, and created a wonderful marsh which was endowed with curative properties: everybody who bathed in it was cured of sickness and pain.</p> <p>The grave of Sheikh Abrik contains a tomb set inside a three rooms building roofed by three domes. Today,</p>

			<p>the dome of the eastern room is partially collapsed.</p> <p>Jewish tradition ascribes this site to the burial place of the Biblical warrior Barak son of Avinoam.</p>
23.	Tarshiha, Upper Galilee	Sheikh Jamal El-Din Ali	<p>Sheikh Jamal El-Din Ali was one of the Moslem warriors who fought the crusaders in Kakoun in Samaria and was killed in 1264 AD during the period of the wars between the Baibars and the crusaders in Hirbat Dir Ashair, northwest of Tulkarm. Arab tradition commemorates his heroism in fighting the crusader enemy, and perpetuated his memory with a tombstone laid in Tarshiha. In certain point in history, the inhabitants of Tarshiha began to bury their dead around the grave of the hero, and a number of houses were also built in the vicinity.</p> <p>Moslem tradition even ascribes the name Tarshiha to Jamal El-Din Ali.</p> <p>The site includes a single relatively small room containing a humble tombstone.</p>
24.	Found in tens of sites in Galilee and the rest of the country	El-Hadir	<p>El-Hadir, is the Moslem parallel to the Hebrew prophet Elijah and the Christian St. George (Jiris), possessing the properties ascribed to these two revered persons, and is considered to be a person admired by the faithful of all three religions. In Islamic folklore, El-Hadir is connected to sources of water due to his ascribed ability to bring rain. Festivities in his honour usually take place, in the spring.</p> <p>El-Hadir is a legendary figure who was endowed with unique traits. He appears as a saviour and performs acts of charity. The appearance of El-Hadir is unbound to time and place. Nevertheless, his most frequent appearance are said to occur on the night between Friday and Saturday, which is his favourite time to offers help to the needy.</p> <p>Many sites around the country are sacred to El-Hadir. Some of them are sacred to him alone, while others are also sacred to Elijah and St George. Some of the better known places in the country associated with El-Hadir are the village of El-Hadir south of Bethlehem, along with sites near Ashkelon, Lod, Jerusalem, and Mt. Carmel. The grave of El-Hadir is in a cave by the</p>

			<p>village of Dir El-Assad in Upper Galilee.</p> <p>Popular tales ascribe to El-Hadir many traits and the performance of many miracles, including his famous capacity to bring rain and fertility to Man and to land and his capacity to cure sick people (Araf, 1993vol. 2: 159–186; Canaan, 1927).</p>
25.	Eastern Upper Galilee	Nabi Joshua	<p>Joshua son of Nun, the Biblical leader who conquered the land of Canaan is also admired by the Moslem Arabs of Palestine, According to the Book of Judges; Joshua died at the age of 120, and was buried in Mt. Ephraim, north of Mt. Gaash. Joshua is not mentioned in the Koran, but appears in many legends told in places where he is believed to be buried. Popular stories have been woven around him. For example, in the second half of the eighteenth century, Nazif ben Nasser was a leader of Jebel Aamal. At that, time Mohamed Abu El-Dahab came from Egypt to fight with the Bedouin Sheikh Daher El-Omar against the Ottoman government. Nazif feared for his hegemony in the mountainous region. Therefore, he made a vow by lifting his hand, stating that if his status would not be harmed he would rebuild the grave of the prophet Joshua. Indeed, on that night, Abu El-Dahab died suddenly, his soldiers escaped, and Nazif's status and life were saved. He fulfilled his vow and rebuilt the <i>Maqam</i>.</p> <p>In honour of the event, a local poet, Ibrahim ben Yihie, wrote the following poem:</p> <p><i>"The Maqam of a saint is now on its way to a star The friend Nasser is drunk with victory A saint who defended under the auspices of the deceased Builder, he who was buried will dwell"</i>.</p> <p>According to Araf, (1993, volume 2: 137). The inhabitants of the region arrive in their masses every year to hold a <i>Ziyarah</i> ceremony in the place.</p> <p>Shiites of Lebanon consider Nabi Joshua as their patron saint, and ascribe great importance to his grave Until 1948 they used to make pilgrimages and hold festivities at a site they believed to be the grave of</p>



			<p>Nabi Joshua which is situated in a castle on the Naphtali Mountains in Eastern Upper Galilee, during the last four days of the month of Ramadan.</p> <p>Mokadsi (985 AD) was the first to describe the festivities held in the place in honour of Nabi Joshua. He noted that the Naphtali Mountains are sacred to the Shiites because of it. (El-Mokadsi, 1906: 188). The members of the Shiite Gul family were responsible for building the grave, and they lived in rooms built east and west of the grave. The rooms served the custodian of the place and his family and guests. In the Ottoman period, they were exempted from taxes, including taxes for the agricultural lands they cultivated, as the land was considered as Moslem sacred property (Araf, 1993, volume 2: 136).</p> <p>In addition to the residential rooms, the site includes two prayer rooms. The rooms of the grave are roofed with durable domes, but the place itself is neglected. A paved yard is set north of the grave. The place also contains a water well, which has dried up, and features a walnut tree and a number of Palestinian oak trees. Recently, religious Jews began to visit the site.</p>
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(Source: Field work, January 2010–May 2012; Suwaed, 1996: 131–136; Araf, 1993; Canaan, 1927)

### 5. The ‘Ziyarah’ ceremony (the visitation)

Graves of holy men and the customs that developed around them were not viewed favourably by the religious sages, who considered them heresy against the monotheistic religion. However, the simple Moslem believer felt a deep religious and emotional attachment to the local holy man. For such person, the holy man was an abstract object and a concrete figure. He visited his grave to spread his hardships or to seek cure and to express his religious devotion.

The pilgrimages to holy men graves sites in Galilee occurred regularly until the 1980s. Since then, their popularity had diminished due to the social developments such as the growing ratio of urban educated population and the rise of the Islamic movement, the enlightenment, and the growing popularity of religious preaching.

Special importance is ascribed to pilgrimages to particularly famous distinguished graves on certain dates. The customary ceremonies involve tens of thousands of the faithful

The status attributed to graves of holy men in Sunni Islam and the ritual activities that developed around them are a clear expression of popular religion. The distance between God and his believers in the framework of institutionalised religion, in which ceremonies and rites are organised in a fixed order, fail to provide for the needs and expectations of the simple believer who tends to seek a direct, simplified way to reach God, which leads to the adoption of the mediator medium.

For the simple person, it is easier to approach a lesser entity, a sanctified personality known to be favoured by the divine and ask him to act as his advocate. Thus, he shows his devotion and piety by performing the rituals, in hope to receive blessing and answers for his desires in daily life. A similar phenomenon had developed in other religions when the perceived distance between the believer and God in the framework of the institutionalised religion gave rise to the evolvement of parallel system of popular religion. In the case of Islam, popular religion developed alongside institutionalised religion as alternative way to connect God and his faithful.

Sayings and deeds were designed to bring the desires of Man closer to God. In this context, it is worth to note the following:

1. **Manipulation of the occult in reading:** By uttering certain versions where the aim is to bring about a change of reality (*Duaa* or reading), *Duaa* has a magical character. In reading, the believer influences the unseen to do as he wills, by using texts exerted chiefly from canonical literature (the Koran and Hadith in the Moslem prophetic tradition) that convince the divine to act on his behalf. Foundations for supernatural deeds can be found in the Koran. For example:

- Verse 255, chapter 2 in the Koran (*Surah Al-Baqarah-the Cow*):  
“Allah! There is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him. Unto Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he that intercedeth with Him save by His leave? He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will. His throne includeth the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous”.
- Chapter 113 in the Koran (*Surah Al-Falaq-The Daybreak*):

“(1) Say: seek refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak;(2 ) From the evil of that which He created;(3) From the evil of the darkness when it is intense;(4) And from the evil of malignant witchcraft;(5) And from the evil of the envier when he envieth”.

Chapter 114 in the Koran (*Surah An-Nass-Mankind*):

“(1) Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind;(2)The King of mankind;(3) The God of mankind;(4) From the evil of the sneaking whisperer;(5) Who whispereth in the hearts of mankind;(6) Of the jinn and of mankind”.

In reading the verses and the chapters, the person seeks to persuade the Creator to protect him from all evil deeds, including possible actions of Satan.

2. **The operation of the unseen by means of the place:** This phenomenon is one of the most widespread expressions of popular religion. Indeed, the *Maqam* expresses a physical reality, enabling the believer to feel the holy experience of contacting the Wali who serves as mediator, transmitting the requests of the believer to his Creator. The *Ziyarah*, or the visit to holy place, is one of the most widespread ceremonies in Islam. *Ziyarah*, ushered various customs which penetrated orthodox religion and aroused the discontent of the clergymen who believe that worship of holy men harms the purity of religion.

The *Ziyarah* can take place in a limited family format or in the company of many people with whom a family or the entire tribe hold a public visit. The ‘zur’ often bears a festive character, with tents erected around the tomb of the sheikh, horse and camel races held, and the shouts of joy of women heard (Bar-Zvi, 1993: 42).

An example of a mass *Ziyarah* in Galilee is ‘the *Ziyarah* of the ten trees’, The event takes place at a site known today as Hurshat Tal east of Kiryat Shmona. This *Ziyarah* was held there regularly during the British mandate (1918–1948) every year on the three last days of August. Pilgrims from Syria, Lebanon, the Hula Valley and the Golan came to participate, alongside local Bedouins and villagers. Ceremonies took place under the auspices of the British mandatory regime, which delegated responsibility for the ceremony on the Bedouin Sheikh Kemal Hussein.

It seems that the mandatory regime promoted the culture of holy men in order to socialise the tribe. In addition to the religious ceremonies, it was also customary to hold a fair in the site, as part of the festivities. Events also included a celebrated prizes carrying horse race (provided by the mandatory government).

*The holiness of the place in which this Ziyarah was held derives from the legend of the ten trees. Another mass Ziyarah was made to the grave of Nabi Joshua in East Upper Galilee. Until 1948, inhabitants from Lebanon, Hula, and Upper Galilee used to make pilgrimage to the place and hold festivities there. The mass Ziyarah was held on a fixed date, and it was celebrated on the four last days of the month of Ramadan (Araf, 2010).*

Mass visits were also held at the graves of Sheikh Mohamed El-Assad in Dir El-Assad and the grave site of Abu El-Hija in Kfar Cochav (Hijazi, 1984; Abu El-Hijaa, 2011).

The causes for these homage ceremonies are different and diverse, but they always connect to the need to be helped by the spirit of the holy person. Needs might include: resolution of a difficult problem, help in realisation of an ambition, relief from sickness or pain, curing a child from mortal illness, to be blessed with sons, safe completion of a dangerous voyage, successful harvest, etc. The general custom obliges the person to make a vow that if his desire is fulfilled, he will make a pilgrimage to the grave of the holy man and thank him for his help.

Choice of a given Sheikh tomb depends on the reason for the visit and the availability and accessibility of holy site. Each region has a preferred grave, to which they pay much more homage than to others. The most recommended day for a *Ziyarah* is Friday, but they are also held on other days (Hijazi, 1984: 74–77; Levy, 1987: 406; Kassem, 1978: 16).

The appropriate time for such visit is during the afternoon. The rites are performed at night; the visitors sleep in the place and depart on the following morning.

As mentioned above, the aim of the ceremony is to elevate the visitor to a level of holiness which will enable contact with the spirit of the (holy) *Wali*. When he reaches the level of spiritual elevation, the visitor merges with the spirit of the holy man by means of a series of actions completed in a fixed order (Marx, 1978; Hijazi, 1984; Tamari, 1979; Canaan, 1927):

#### **A. The procession,-the *Fatihah* and the *Tuaf* (the encirclement of the *Maqam*)**

The Imam, or the priest, opens the ceremony by reading loudly a specific phrase from the *Fatihah* (the first chapter in the Koran-*Surah Al-Fatihah*: The Opening). He opens with the words: “For the ascent of the souls of all the Moslem men and Moslem

women and for the soul of the person under whose auspices we are...” after which, another person reads the *Fatihah* in silence.

1. In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. 2. Praise is to Allah, Lord of the Worlds. 3. The Beneficent, the Merciful. 4. Master of the Day of Judgment. 5. Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help. 6. Show us the straight path. 7. The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; Not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray).

The celebrators then read aloud with him then everybody who read the chapter put his right hand on his face and brow, and the procession for the encirclement of the *Maqam* begins. The procession is accompanied by musical instruments, drums and cymbals, and waving of flags.

Then the procession exits from the main eastern yard and continues in the streets around the mosque and the *Maqam*, from left to right. The procession is led by the flag bearers, they are followed by the musicians, and they by the rest of the participants. The Imam marches alongside the musicians. He sings religious songs, and the crowd answers him.

The procession advances slowly, in accord with the rhythm of the singing and drumming. Women participation in such ceremonies is not permitted. They walk behind the men, singing common secular songs but make religious requests. The songs praise the holy man asking for his willingness to accept the vows.

In the past, the ceremony obliged the procession to encircle the *Maqam* three times. Today, it is usually encircled just once. In family or private ceremonies, there is no need to execute the *tuaf* (the encirclement).

#### **B. The sacrifice-the *dachr* and the *dbiha* (slaughtering an animal)\_**

Before the sacrifice, another short ceremony is held: the *dachr* (homage and praising of Allah, the Prophet Mohamed, and the holy Sheikh). The elders and the priests stand in a circle and recite praise accompanied by cymbals and drums. Afterwards, the Imam reads the *Fatihah* again. This ends the verbal part of the ceremony, and the practical part begins: the snipping off forelock of the person making the vow or the hair of the child the vowing is on his behalf.

The sacrifice takes place after these rituals. Before performing the actual sacrifice, leaders sanctify the animal to be offered as sacrifice with incense smoke. The person charged with sacrificing brings the animal close to the grave, and says: “Alas, you

[name of the holy man], this goat/sheep is yours. We put him under your protection, as you have protection with your lord, God”.

The request for protection comes natural to people in relations conducted between a person and a person superior to him, who is also expected to present this request to God on his behalf.

Eating the flesh of the sacrificed animal is a magical act, dignifying the food and the holiness of the holy man.

Goldziher wrote that the sacrifice of animals in the Oliaa ceremony recalls the sacrifice of victims to pagan gods in pre- Islam era-God-*Jahaliya*.

"...*They sacrificed the animal on the threshold of the main entrance to the yard. They give one-third of the flesh of the animal to the poor and to servants of the holy men, and they took home the rest of the meat after they paid the price*" (Goldziher, 1927: 316).

### **C. The meal**

Prior to the meal, participants sip coffee and tea while the flesh of the animal is being cooked; the greater the number of people attending the feast, the higher the value of the *Ziyarah*. Anyone who happens to be present considers it an honour to participate in the meal.

When a person cannot remain at the site sufficient time required to cook the meat of the sacrifice animal, he cuts off the animal's ear and sprinkles the blood on the tomb. When he returns to his place of residence, he will slaughter the maimed sacrifice animal and cook it. Anthropologists explain the sprinkling of the blood as making a contact of life between the symbolic sacrifice and the sacrifice animal, as according to the ancient conception blood, is the essence of life (Bailey, 1988).

### **D. The incense and the prayer**

Burning incense (the *bakhor*) possess magical meaning. At the top of every tombstone, there is a niche for brazier or incense container. Later generations adopted the practice of lighting scented candles.

Ritual aids are regularly found in Sheik's graves. A thick tin frying pan (*Mabkhara*) with a long handle is used to burn incense. Coals are placed on the brazier and incense is placed on top. In Galilee, they used an incense resin extracted from Persian

terebinth tree (*Pistacia*). Today, the people use commercially prepared incense (Hijazi, 1984: 77–85, Levy, 1987: 391, 406–407).

### **E. The merger**

A further custom connected with the *Ziyarah* is picking a branch of a broom plant, or any other fragrant bush, and inserting it between the stones of the tombstone or within a structure made of three stones installed before the tomb. “The laying of the branch was designed to remove the secular partitions and transfer the visitor to spheres of spiritual elevation. In this way, the person merges with the spirit of the holy man (Levy, 1987: 404).

Another merger involves the sand by the grave. At the end of the visit, the people tend to take sand from a pit by the top of the grave. They scatter this on their heads and the heads of their children, and even on the heads of their beasts. In doing so, they believe that they take with them a part of the experience of the holy man (Ibid: 407–408).

At the end of the ceremony, the Imam cuts a narrow strip of the cloth, the ‘*stara*’, covering the grave of the holy man; the cloth is usually green (in oral tradition, green symbolises Paradise). The *stara* is tied to the wrist or the neck of the person who made the vow. He wears it until it falls apart. The cloth is entrusted with keeping the blessing and banishing trouble. Generally, every object connected to the *Oliaa* carries a blessing with it (Goldziher, 1927: 322). This custom also recalls a custom that prevailed in the past during the pilgrimage to the Kaaba, when the pilgrims received a strip of cloth from the *kiswah* of the Kaaba (the cloth that covers the Kaaba). The wearing of the *stara* signals the end of the *Ziyarah* ceremony.

After the ceremony pilgrims sleep the night in the holy site. Before they retire to sleep, they burn incense again and read the *Fatihah*. The holy man can appear in a dream and instruct believers what they must do regarding the problem they need help with. On leaving a holy site, visitors tend to leave valuable objects on the grave as an expression of their desire to remain in contact with the holy man. These may be refreshment items, like flour and sugar (destined for use by further pilgrims), fruit of the season, and also material tokens like coins, etc.

Over the years, many objects have accumulated on the tombstones of holy men. Nobody touches these (Bailey, 1988).

The idea of a pilgrimage as a phenomenon crossing cultural and religious borders was first emphasised in key studies conducted by the sociologist Victor Turner in the seventies and eighties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Turner, 1974; Turner, 1978; Turner, 1985).

He also studies societies in Mexico and in Africa, and his findings supported his previous observation that pilgrimages, universal religious behaviour as its central aspect appears to be the voyage to the holy place and the customs related to such visits, including the tradition to stay over and perform certain departure rituals.

According to Barber, [1993], today's literature, reveals surprising uniformity among different religions, places, and beliefs. Thus, it is possible to see a pilgrimage to the grave of a holy man as a phenomenon with a culture of its own, crossing religions and borders.

### **Dicussion & summtion**

Grave sites of holy men are characteristic feature in Palestine. The Galilee is connected to several stories concerning Jesus, and several sites, especially in Lower Galilee, draw Christian pilgrims from all over the globe, and there are also impressive remains and monuments from the time of the Crusades that Christian pilgrims pay homage to. The Galilee was also the home and resting place for Israelite Biblical personalities, and for several Jewish Rabbis and Scholars. There are also graves of military heroes in the Galilee, but these graves have no religious connotation, they are respected but not sanctifies.

It is important to note, that the people of the Galilee respect all sites commemorating the memory of outstanding people, regardless of their faith and religious affiliation; no one desecrates a site revered by other nations or another religion. Most Christian and Moslem revered graves are sanctified, while grave sites important to Jews, including those attracting festive pilgrimage, are not considered holy; the pilgrimage to these sites relates to celebration of the person's memory, which stands for other cultural values.

Moslem graves of holy men in the country have unique characteristics which are quite different from other tombs in adjacent countries, regarding their structure, form and cultural importance.

Orthodox Moslem religion recognises only one God. Therefore, anyone who worships someone other than Allah is considered a heretic. Even heralds and angles are simply messengers of God. The Koran opposes the idea that a man can become a subject of



worship. Priests have never been comfortable with the popular custom of worshipping men.

In contrast to the pilgrimage to Mecca, known as the Haj, which is a duty for every practicing Moslem, the pilgrimage to grave sites of holy men is not required and certainly not a religious duty. Pilgrimages to holy men graves reached its peak in times of uncertainty, when people felt detached and needed mediator between themselves and Allah. The reasoning may have been that since holy men lived as mortals, they are capable of understanding human emotions and will act on behalf of the petitioner.

Thus, people swear in their name more than in the name of Allah. They perceive most holy men as miracle workers able to execute supernatural actions such as curing diseases, ensuring the return of lost property, or causing the rain. They also believe that prayers of holy man are always granted.

Visitors pay homage to graves of holy men mostly to gain their blessing. This is not a normal blessing, but a grace the holy place bestows on everyone who establishes contact with it. To gain such blessing, the visitor touches the grave, its cover, or objects connected to it. Before he leaves the site, the visitor obtains an item considered belonging to the site, usually a piece of cloth, which he ties on his hand. In this way, he maintains contact with the holy man when he leaves.

In recent years, with the Islamic renaissance in Israel and in the world, the cult of holy men which still exists among the Arab population in Galilee, lost some of its popularity, as recent Islamic teaching, as part of the current Islamic renaissance, preach against the popular custom of pilgrimages to holy sites, such as graves of holy men.

Learned teachers tend to emphasize that this custom is incompatible with the uniqueness of God. They explain that it is a form of heresy regardless of the fact that people do it in good faith being unaware of the contradiction. Thus, current Islamic teaching strongly recommends that pilgrimages to graves of holy men should be abandoned. Religious leaders recite verses from the Koran in their sermons to convince the people that this custom is invalid and must be terminated.

The Islamic renaissance, the intensive teaching and other contemporary developments mentioned above, have considerable social and cultural impact. Thus, the importance of this traditional custom has significantly declined. Today, most of those who visit the graves of holy men do so in private. There are no mass visits, like those performed

in the past. Developments in education have also contributed partly to the decline of this once popular custom. Nevertheless, holy sites are revered and respected; most sacred trees are still standing and the authorities help local municipalities to keep and maintain historical and religious sites, including graves of holy men and sites commemorating legendary miraculous events.

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