

# Lieux Saints Partagés: An Analytical Review

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Over the past decade a series of workshops, conferences and publications have examined, from various perspectives, the practices of inter-communal interactions around what are generally termed ›shared‹ holy places.<sup>1</sup> Many of these have focussed on regions which had previously been under imperial rule, and one active field of study has investigated shrine sharing in the Mediterranean Basin, particularly in its southern and eastern parts. The present contribution takes a recent exhibition as a starting point to discuss, from an anthropological perspective, how intercommunal interaction could unfold in the Ottoman Empire, and how the decline of imperial rule and post-imperial developments led to its eventual erosion.

*Keywords:* shared sacred places; religious identity politics; Ottoman Empire; Judaism; Christianity; Islam.

Between 29 April and 31 August this year, the *Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM)* mounted a substantial exhibition highlighting these practices of inter-communality around sacred sites with a specific focus on those linked to the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The exhibition, entitled *Lieux saints partagés*, covered a full floor of MuCEM's spectacular new extension and directed visitors through four thematic areas (reflected in the four main sections of the catalogue): ›*Dans les pas des prophètes*‹ (focussing on sites dedicated to Old Testament figures and shared by Christians, Muslims and Jews); ›*Marie la Chrétienne, Marie la Musulmane*‹ (presenting Marian sites of mixed Muslim-Christian devotion); ›*À la rencontre des saints*‹ (exploring ambiguous saints – *La Ghriba*, George and the Seven Sleepers – and the locales of their reverencing); and ›*Témoins et passeurs*‹ (displaying religious officiants and acolytes promoting shrine sharing).

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1 Contemporary interest in the topic of shrine sharing seems to have been consolidated by the debate kicked off by Hayden, *Antagonistic Tolerance*; and the responses to it published in *Current Anthropology*. Subsequent academic gatherings around the theme include the March 2006 *Les Lieux partagés du religieux et les pèlerinage interconfessionnels en Méditerranée: Approches anthropologiques* (Université Paris Ouest – Nanterre), Columbia University's February 2008 ›Sharing Sacred Space: Religion and Conflict Resolution‹, Boğazici and Columbia's ›Choreography of Sacred Spaces‹ (Istanbul, May 2010), PRIO's ›Shared Spaces and their Dissolution‹ (Nicosia, October 2011), the Pontifical University St. Thomas Aquinas's ›Interdisciplinary Conference on Sharing Sacred Space: Legal, Theological, and Sociological Perspectives‹ (Rome, December 2011), Friedrich-Alexander-Universität's ›Geteiltes Gedenken. Parallelnutzungen von Sakralorten in interreligiösen und -konfessionellen Kontexten‹ (Erlangen-Nürnberg, February 2013) and, most recently, ›Lieux saints partagés: Colloque International. Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée‹ (Marseille, June 2015). Significant collections, often emerging from these gatherings, include Albera and Couroucli, *Religions traversées*; Albera and Couroucli, *Religiones entrecruzadas*; Albera and Couroucli, *Sharing Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*; Albera and Couroucli, *Luoghi sacri comuni ai monoteismi*; Barkan and Barkey, *Choreographies of Shared Sacred Sites*; Bowman, ›In Dubious Battle on the Plains of Heav'n‹; Bryant, *Shared Spaces and Their Dissolution*; Cormack, *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*; as well as the catalogue of the exhibition discussed here (Albera et al., *Lieux saints partagés*).

The term *passeurs* in the fourth section should be translated not as ›smugglers‹ but as ›ferryman‹, and it is this function which makes sharing possible. In the literality of the exhibition the *passeurs* are those who facilitate the commingling of distinct communities of worshippers around shared sites: peripatetic Sufi saints such as Djalâl ad-Dîn Rûmî and wandering religious savants such as Louis Massignon and Paolo dall'Oglio feature along with the cohabitation they promoted and supported. While these border-bridgers are the corporeal agents who facilitate the sharing of religious sites and practices, in analytical terms it is the plurivalence of the sacred objects – be these places, images, or practices – that function as *passeurs*, making possible the events and locales which bring denominationally distinct visitors together. They do this not by signifying the same to different communities but by manifesting meanings connecting with communities' particular practices and beliefs *in the same places* and sometimes *at the same times* as they embody variant meanings for present members of other communities. As the exhibition makes clear, encounters can happen through the mediation of figures or stories common, but variously told, to two or more traditions (as, for instance, with Old Testament stories of Abraham and Isaac, Moses, Rachel and others who figure in the religious traditions of Jews, Christians and Muslims) but can also occur when the figures themselves are ambiguously defined (such as *La Ghriba* – ›the stranger‹ – a woman of unknown confessional provenance whose tomb in a synagogue on the Tunisian island of Djerba is worshiped by Jews and Muslims) and thus able to address quite distinct bodies of addressees. In all these instances of so-called sharing what is shared is not the meaning of the figure, event or place but these entities as signs signifying meanings particular to the communities which feel themselves hailed<sup>2</sup> by them. Different communities, and certainly different groups within particular communities, can read the same sign differently with or without being aware of the potential for incommensurability.

Overlooking the multivalence integral to *sacra* at moments of seeming sharing can lead to the simplistic idea that shrine sharing is a manifestation of religious syncretism through which the engaging communities *become the same* in the act of communion.<sup>3</sup> As the exhibition, and the scholarship around shrine sharing, make clear, this is far from the case. While different communities may cohabit times and spaces, thus giving the impression of commingling, interaction is in many cases, when not overtly antagonistic, minimal. I'm reminded in the latter case of Edgar Allen Poe's unsettling description of an uncanny stream of something like water found flowing in the negative utopia which provides the setting of the final pages of his *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838):

›the whole mass of liquid was made up of a number of distinct veins, each of a distinct hue; ... these veins did not commingle; and... their cohesion was perfect in regard to their own particles among themselves, and imperfect in regard to neighboring veins. Upon passing the blade of a knife athwart the veins, the water closed over it immediately, as with us, and also, in withdrawing it, all traces of the passage of the knife were instantly obliterated. If, however, the blade was passed down accurately between the two veins, a perfect separation was effected, which the power of cohesion did not immediately rectify.<sup>4</sup>«

2 Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*.

3 This is the assumption underlying Victor Turner's conception of *communitas* in ritual and pilgrimage practice (Turner, *Communitas*, and Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*). It was ethnographically criticised by Michael Sallnow (Sallnow, *Communitas Reconsidered*; Sallnow, *Pilgrims of the Andes*) in the context of pilgrimage, and genealogically dissected by Robin Horton even before *communitas* entered into popular currency (Horton, *Ritual Man in Africa*; see also Stewart and Shaw, *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism*).

4 Poe, *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, 151.

I recently quoted this in my analysis of inter-communal interaction in Jerusalem's *Anastasis* or Holy Sepulchre during the Holy Fire ceremony<sup>5</sup> and suggested that Poe's fictional depiction, not unlike Robert Curzon's literal description of the deadly fervour of the Holy Fire ceremony of 1834,<sup>6</sup> counterposes the Turners' *communitas* – a »relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities«<sup>7</sup> – with evidence of the potential of a more alienated and violent rending of sharing holy space by the eruption of identity politics.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless there is substantial evidence in this exhibition as well as in the ethnographic literature<sup>9</sup> of not only past and contemporary coexistence around mutually revered sites but as well as of amicable collaboration between nominally distinct sectarian groups. It is the range of potential responses to the mixing of populations around holy sites that forces us to question what are the forces operating to found, maintain or fracture that communality, and this question brings us back to the theme of this volume – Empires: Elements of Cohesion and Signs of Decay.

### *Shrine sharing in an age of empire*

The majority of sites examined by the *Lieux Saints Partagés* exhibition were, while that empire existed, located within the bounds of the Ottoman Empire. It is also true that the majority of sites presented have in recent years seen sharing diminished, placed under threat or extinguished. To take just a couple of examples of sites engaged by the exhibition and catalogue, Rachel's Tomb near Bethlehem has become a fortified Jewish settlement<sup>10</sup> while the synagogue of *La Ghriba* in Tunisia was bombed by *al-Qaeda* in April 2002 and has since been transformed into a militarily protected enclave ›sold‹ by the Tunisians to an international, largely Jewish, clientele as an icon of putative ›multiculturalism‹.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the Middle East shared shrines have been the targets of aggressive state reshapings and attacks by sectarian activists who find inter-communalism apostatic. The literal *passeurs* discussed in section four of the catalogue have suffered commensurately: the *Bektashi* sufi order, noted for its bridging of Muslim-Christian practices and beliefs, has seen its important *Baba Arabati Tekke* in Tetova, Macedonia aggressively and progressively usurped by Salafists since August 2002<sup>12</sup> while the aforementioned Paolo dall'Oglio, who'd rebuilt and promoted the shared *Deir Mar Musa al-Habashi* monastery in Syria, was kidnapped and killed by IS militants in August 2013. What these attacks and developments share in common is their motivation by identity politics shaped by the desire to exclude or exterminate difference.

5 Bowman, »In Dubious Battle on the Plains of Heav'n«, 376.

6 Robert Curzon's 1850 *Visits to Monasteries in the Levant*, quoted in Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, 188-191.

7 Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 250.

8 This potential for violence has been the focus of the work of Robert Hayden and his associates since the above cited article in *Current Anthropology* (see Hayden, *Religious Structures and Political Dominance in Belgrade*; Hayden and Naumović, *Imagined Communalities*; Hayden *et al.*, *Byzantine Mosque at Trilye*; Hayden and Walker, *Intersecting Religioscapes*; also Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds*; Hassner, *Pessimist's Guide to Religious Coexistence*). Although I disagree theoretically and empirically with this perspective on the foundational and atemporal identity underlying inter-communal antagonism, I can only concur that in certain contexts and historical moments identity-based violence can be induced in sites previously characterised by seeming amity.

9 See for instance Assayag, *Confluence of Two Rivers*; Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred*, on India; on former Yugoslavia see Baskar, Komšilik; Henig, »Knocking on My Neighbour's Door«, and Bowman, *Orthodox-Muslim Interactions*, all offering counterexamples to Hayden's chosen locales of ›antagonistic tolerance‹.

10 See Bowman, *À l'ombre de Rachel*, and, in English, Bowman, *Sharing and Exclusion*.

11 Carpenter-Latiri, *Ghriba on the Island of Jerba*.

12 Schwartz, *Harabati Baba Tepe*. During a visit to the *tekke* in May 2006, I observed the expropriated »Kubeli Meydan«, the hall where *Bektashi* rituals had previously been performed, from which I was harassed by a Salafist militant (see also <https://www.flickr.com/photos/nygus/6144379427/>; retrieved on 28 October 2015).

The salient questions then are ›what in the context in the Ottoman Empire promoted and protected amicable inter-communal interactions, both in everyday life and in the domains of religious sites?‹ and ›what changed?‹. Karen Barkey, in her important *Empire of Difference: the Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, writes that ›toleration emerged ... in the first three centuries of Ottoman rule, both from the top down by the state and from the bottom up by communities where each shared an interest in the maintenance of inter-communal peace and order‹.<sup>13</sup> Although the state was clearly an Islamic entity insistent on the superiority of Islam, it was also, as Barkey phrases it, ›an empire of difference‹<sup>14</sup> in which the heterogeneity of its inhabitants, and the various contributions they could make to the furtherance of the empire, were recognised and fostered. Codes of conduct, grounded in religious differences, distinguished communities by legislating differential dress, residence and modes of transport and in so doing made clear positionings in a field of diverse social relations, simultaneously enforcing and protecting difference. Such clarification, combined with the *dhimmi*-system of intra-communal self-governance, vastly reduced the space for inter-communal conflict whilst ensuring that payment of taxes and adherence to the overarching Ottoman law were maintained. Difference was here subsumed within the unity of the state.

As Barkey,<sup>15</sup> Masters,<sup>16</sup> Doumanis,<sup>17</sup> Makdisi<sup>18</sup> and Greene<sup>19</sup> have shown, definitional integration structured from the top down both gave rise to and supported local inter-communal interaction:

»Much of the relationship between communities occurred in the market, in the production and consumption transactions that members of the different communities engaged in daily. Jews, Christians and Muslims not only bought and sold from one another, but they also formed business associations, dissolved them, and committed fraud and crimes that required the arbitration of [their separate, autonomous but somehow interactive] courts....[T]he more they bought and sold property from each other, the more they intermixed in their urban living space.«<sup>20</sup>

What Anna Bigelow, speaking of life in the Indian town of Malerkotla, refers to as ›practices of everyday pluralism‹<sup>21</sup> characterise the melange of activities and interpretations generated by these ›mixed‹ areas, regardless of whether they were urban or rural.<sup>22</sup> In these

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13 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 114.

14 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*.

15 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*.

16 Masters, *Christians and Jews*.

17 Doumanis, *Before the Nation*.

18 Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*.

19 Greene, *Shared World*.

20 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 147-148.

21 Bigelow, *Sharing the Sacred*, 217.

22 Masters argues that in the Ottoman cities religion was ›the primary basis of identity... [but that] this was less the case in the region's thousands of villages where more heterodox religious traditions prevailed and the casual intermingling of people of different faiths was common before the hardening of sectarian boundaries in the nineteenth century‹ (Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 39). I would note, further to my work in Macedonia as well as Palestine, that local coexistence of shrine visitors is not necessary for sharing reverences of holy places; what is required is the circulation of assumptions about the efficacy of visits to those places. Both Sveti Nikola in Makedonski Brod (Bowman, *Orthodox-Muslim Interactions*) and Mar Elyas between Bethlehem and Jerusalem (Bowman, *Nationalizing and Denationalizing the Sacred*) gathered Muslims and Christians from towns, villages and countryside around the site, and Sveti Nikola – located in a purely Christian town – was visited by Muslims from a substantial catchment area who knew through tradition and hearsay of the power of the site.

people engage in what Mauss calls »prestigious imitation«<sup>23</sup>, emulating the actions of others that, through observation or the testimony of those others, they have reason to believe are efficacious. The multivalence, or »slippage«, of these actions which I have discussed above allows a form of mimicry which enables them, as well as the religious officiants of the holy places, to avoid violating their own confessional regimes.

To speak for a moment in the ethnographic present (which I think is justified by the existence, in parts of FYROM, of practices which appear analogous to those of the long past period of Ottoman hegemony over the region), I will describe a couple of recent events illustrating such »mimicry with a difference«. Each of these show the mix, in both beliefs and practices, as well as the means by which both visitors and officiants avoid violating their own religious precepts. The first is, I suspect, fairly common as I've watched analogous performances in West Bank Palestine.

In an Orthodox church in Kicevo two local priests testified to the fact – which I and my colleague subsequently observed – that local Muslims (Kicevo is half Orthodox and half Muslim) come to the church not only for holy water and to ask for blessings but also to request that the Christian ritual of baptism be carried out, for instance, when a Christian man has converted to marry a Muslim woman but nonetheless wants their child baptised or when the parents of a sickly Muslim child want the child baptised so as to augment its spiritual protections. In these cases the priest prays over Muslims before the iconostasis with a special prayer – that designated in the prayer books as being for the unbaptized – and instead of laying his cope over their heads raises it in front of them before sprinkling holy water over them; the Muslims in turn kneel before the priest, bowing their heads before him and his sacramental cope, but neither kissing his hands or the bible nor crossing themselves.

The second instance is perhaps more exceptional. Outside of Kicevo is the monastery of *Sveti Bogoroditsa Prechista* (the Holy Mother of God Most Innocent). In the course of examining the context of shared shrine practices, I and my Macedonian colleague interviewed the imam of the local Sunni mosque. He, trained in the renowned Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo, responded to our queries about Muslims attending the *Sveti Bogoroditsa* monastery by asserting strongly that he had never gone there, and never would. He nonetheless went on to explain that he would advise congregationists to go to the monastery for help with particular problems because »the world of demons, like our world, is made up of Christians and Muslims. When someone is afflicted by a Muslim demon I can deal with the problem, but when someone is troubled by a Christian demon there is nothing I can do, so I send them to the church.«<sup>24</sup> The imam's sense of a parallel world of Muslim and Christian demons that demographically duplicates the sectarian heterogeneity of his own locale is manifested in his own (heterodox) advocacy of shared Muslim-Christian shrine practices. Similarly Muslims who go to churches for blessings manifest in their activities the circulation through their communities and networks of relations of stories of the efficacy of the shrines and rituals of sectarian others.<sup>25</sup>

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23 Mauss, *Body Techniques*, 101.

24 Interview in Kicevo, 30 April 2006.

25 It is far more unusual to find Christians going to Muslim holy places for blessings unless, as with the case of the Husamedin Pasha Mosque in Stip, Christians can convince themselves that the mosque is built over the site of an earlier Christian church. Insofar as Islam historically follows Christianity and, in Islamic thought, corrects and clarifies Christian interpretations of revelation, Muslims are able to attend Christian sites that, although manifesting an imperfectly understood divine revelation, are nonetheless informed by revelation. For Christians Islam is a heresy or deviancy, and attendance at a Muslim site is effectively blasphemous. As Hasluck points out »a mosque, unless it has been (or is thought to have been) a church, is rarely, if ever, taken over as a church by the Orthodox« (Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam I*, 104).

*After empire: the twilight of sharing*

The dissolution of that ›mixed‹ worldview in most contemporary sites is a consequence of the separation of populations, both demographically and ideologically, and this separation is effected both through local activity and activity ›from above‹. Barkey, following her earlier statement regarding tolerance in the first three centuries of Ottoman rule, indicates that

›important transformations of state-community boundaries and relations occurred in the eighteenth century...[when] it was clear that the empire was not sustainable and that all constituent parts were experiencing lowered ›expectations of many future interactions‹.«<sup>26</sup>

These perceptions and transformations were to a large degree the eventual result of the corrosive effects of the Capitulations<sup>27</sup> which, following the French agreement with Suleiman the Magnificent of 1535, permitted the designation as *beraths*, or protégés, of eminent members of sectarian communities seen as affiliated with European nations. These persons, while formally remaining subject to the sultanate, enjoyed the same juridical and commercial rights as their foreign patrons which, in most cases, were in excess of those granted to Muslims and members of other communities. In time this ›extraterritorial‹ status was (at least nominally) extended to all members of the protected communities (most notably the Catholics for the French and the Jews for the British; the Russians, in their patronage of the Orthodox, were relative latecomers to the game) corroding the commercial, juridical and, to some extent, demographic connections between communities while strengthening, particularly in the public sphere, the sectarian identities of the groups affected (not only the berath but as well the Muslim majority which came to see their former neighbours as distinct and unjustly empowered competitors living in what increasingly came to seem ›enclaved‹ quarters).

Simultaneously foreign intervention not only in the affairs of these communities but as well as in the politics of the state in its relation with them pushed the communities increasingly to imagine themselves as potentially distinct from the empire and drove the Sultanate to increasingly see these sectarian groups as posing threats to the coherence and order of the state. From the mid-eighteenth century on, particularly in the border territories of the Balkans and the east, the state engaged in substantial exemplary violence (usually massacres) against Armenian and Greek Orthodox minorities seen as threatening the state's rule and coherence. In time this state action became increasingly sectarian in its assertion, and by the late nineteenth century Sultan Abdül-Hamid, ruling an empire threatened by uprisings in Bulgaria and invasion by Russia (allegedly to protect Orthodox Christians there), »employed the rallying cry of a politicised Islam to try to save his empire«.<sup>28</sup> His »playing of the Islamic card... could only be repellent to the empire's diverse Christian minorities«<sup>29</sup> and increased religious polarisation in Anatolia while, albeit temporarily, comforting Muslim elites in

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26 Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 114. This closing phrase is drawn from Fearon and Laitin, *Explaining Interethnic Cooperation*.

27 The Capitulations were bilateral commercial agreements between the Ottoman Sultanate (the ›Sublime Porte‹) and France allowing Europeans rights of residence and trade under the protection of France and extending to Europeans resident in the Empire (and to members of sectarian communities taken under France's protection) the protection of that state's extra-territorial jurisdiction (Groot, *Historical Development; Masters, Christians and Jews*). Further Capitulations were later negotiated with other European states and even companies. Masters points out that those ›taken under protection‹ by France, and later Britain and Russia, could in eighteenth century Greater Syria be numbered in the low hundreds but would, by the mid-nineteenth century, be counted in their thousands (Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 125).

28 Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 170.

29 Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 170.

the Arab provinces in its assurance that Christians would be dissuaded from continuing to attempt to usurp political and economic positions traditionally granted to Muslims.<sup>30</sup> In both regions the ›practices of everyday pluralism‹ were eroded while ›expectations of future interactions‹ were increasingly of antagonistic, rather than commensal, relations.

With the collapse of empire in the opening decades of the twentieth century the space of a discourse of inter-communal amity – a discourse already substantially eroded by the developments sketched out above – was effectively closed down by the loss of an overarching state and its replacement either by national sovereignties (in the Balkans) or by protectorates which continued to differentially treat religious communities. Woodrow Wilson's conception, influential in the Versailles negotiations, that small ethnic groups should have their own homelands (›each nation should have its own state‹) led to the construction of ethnic states – often based on religio-ethnic categories – throughout not only the Balkans but also territories previously under the Austro-Hungarian Empire.<sup>31</sup> In the Southern Mediterranean and Middle East most ›liberated territories‹ were placed under protectorates which carried on the traditions of sectarian distinction and differential patronage. As Michelle Campos demonstrates, the place for an already etiolated public sphere of ›Ottoman brotherhood‹ was terminally eroded by the policies of the British Mandate that applied very different systems of education, political participation and economic resourcing to Jews, Christians, and Muslims.<sup>32</sup> In Palestine the fact that the Mandate brought the territory under the sovereignty of a single European state meant that intra-communal distinctions between lay Christians became far less significant than they had been when different confessional groupings were patronised by different states. This was not the case in the remainder of ›Greater Syria‹ (Lebanon and Syria) where distinctions between communities and sub-communities were maintained in the distribution of power and influence. This laid the foundations in Israel/Palestine for the eventual emergence of a popular (but not ecclesiastical) Christian nationalism opposing both Jewish and Muslim nationalisms<sup>33</sup> while in Lebanon and Syria the continuance of fostered distinctions between Shi'a (including Alawites) and Sunni and Catholic (Maronite) and Orthodox made for far more complex, and fractious, identity politics in the practices of politics and of shrine sharing.

### *Conclusions: the future of sharing?*

The identity politics that emerged in the latter years of the Ottoman Empire and were consolidated in the wake of that polity provides a partial answer to the question posed above of ›what changed?‹. As the spaces of mutually beneficial interaction were turned into domains for aggressive and sometimes threatening competition so did the borders between those territories become strengthened by a politics of ›us‹ and ›them‹. Sharing of public space became increasingly competitive and this, in the case of previously shared holy places, could in certain circumstances lead to the attempts by one of the sharers to assert exclusive ownership of the site.<sup>34</sup> Identity and property are mutually dependent terms.

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30 Masters, *Christians and Jews*, 170-171.

31 Knock, *To End All Wars*.

32 Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*; see also Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire*.

33 In the case of Palestine, antipathy by Christian and Muslim Arabs to Jewish nationalism, a movement based on sectarian ethnicity, drew the communities together into an amity already sketched out by earlier movements of Arab nationalism against Ottoman hegemony. ›Palestinian Arab unity‹ is contextual and tenuous and has, from the Mandate Period on, been threatened by confessional (Christian and Muslim) identity politics (Bowman, *Constitutive Violence and the Nationalist Imaginary*)

34 Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam* I, and Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam* II.

Moreover, as sectarian, or ethnonational identity became increasingly significant, so too did the importance of propriety. The *passeurs* discussed in the opening paragraphs of this paper – those plurivalent *sacra* allowing a play of interpretation and able to ›haik‹ persons of different religious affiliations – need either to be fixed in their meaning or expelled. Fixing entails a double movement; on the one hand the sacred objects or performances must be ›properly‹ defined through association with the body of belief and ritual appropriate to the worshippers' confessional allegiance and on the other hand the subversive presence of others, or their traces, which open the *sacra* to alternative definitions must be expurgated. This is the function of religious functionaries who, particularly in urban regions, ›protect‹ religious sites from the threat, or temptation, of heterodoxy (the Macedonian priests and imam described above would be termed ›outlaws‹ by the guardians of orthodoxy).

As the exhibition, and my own fieldwork experience, show, there are still practices of shrine sharing taking place in the Mediterranean world, most often outside of urban areas but also in some cases in the urban periphery (such as that of the *Marariyeh* in Cairo). These are under threat, often from religious purists of any of the Abrahamic faiths and sometimes (as with the *Ibrahimi Mosque* [the Cave of the Prophets] in Hebron) by sectarian militants aligned with ethno-religious states. Certainly in the thirty years I have worked in Jerusalem and West Bank Palestine I have watched the seemingly inexorable reduction of shared shrines both through state machinations of demographics and through the turning of local people away from these shrines, either because of their condemnation by religious leaders or because of an increasing scepticism about ›archaic‹ superstition. The contexts which foster shrine sharing are, in other words, disappearing as a result both of local developments and activities from ›above‹.

Intriguingly, however, the same post-imperial mechanisms (particularly global internet connectivity and commercial integration) which militate against the common use of holy places through promoting trans-national conceptions of religious identity and ideologies of modernist secularity are also generating ›expectations of many future interactions‹ between wide and dispersed groups of persons and communities open to the possibilities and promises of engaging difference. What sort of ›sacred sites‹ these future sharers might produce is not a topic raised by the *Lieux Saints Partagés*-exhibition or its catalogue but, in a world seemingly on the cusp of transition from the age of the nation state into something more global, the question of what *passeurs* will build the bridges that allow us to cohabit amicably after the nation is one worth addressing.

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