Religious Practices and Beliefs in Wadi Mousa between the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries*

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Abstract

This paper investigates some social, cultural and religious aspects of the Wadi Mousa area during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It focuses on the religious practices associated with the visits of sacred places either tombs or trees and tries to shed more light on their historical origins. The study is based on various sources which include the accounts of the European travellers who visited the area during this period, the interviews that have been made with old men and women, as well as the writings of amzah al-'Arabī who visited Wadi Mousa and Petra in 1924 and wrote his notes in his partially published book entitled; 'Jawlah Bayn al-Athaār'.

Keywords: Wadi Mousa, Intangible cultural heritage, Religious practices and beliefs, Late Ottoman period.

Introduction

Wadi Mousa: short historical introduction

Wadi Mousa is located approximately 230 km south of Amman and it forms the main entrance for the Nabataean capital, Petra. The area witnessed human occupation as early as the prehistoric periods (Fino, 1998: 103-111). It prospered during the Nabataean period as it was the capital of the realm and flourished during the Roman and Byzantine periods. Our understanding of the early Islamic Wadi Mousa is very limited. Archaeological fieldworks conducted in Wadi Mousa and its vicinity have provided ceramic materials as well as some inscriptions dated to this period (‘Amr and al-Momani, 2001: 265). Recent archaeological surveys conducted within the greater Petra area uncovered dozens of villages dated

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particularly to the Mamluk period (Lindner, 1999: 479-500; Lindner and Hübl, 2000: 163-181). Archaeological explorations have shown a decline of settlement in Jordan and Palestine during the Late Mamluk period, which can be shown by the abandonment of many of the inhabited medieval villages and the decline of the architectural activity. This is attributed by some scholars to the plague "the Black Death" which spread throughout the region during this period. It has been argued by some scholars also that the fifteenth century witnessed withdrawal of urban settlements in addition to an economic decline and, as a result; many sites and villages were abandoned (Walker 1999: 214), even though historical sources do not allude to such an abandonment of urban settlements.

The Ottoman rule in the area started in AD 1516, after the battle of Marj Dabeq. Unfortunately, Transjordan did not witness any administrative organization or reform between 1516-1850. This caused social and economic decline in the whole region. The bad political and historical situations during this period initiated the issuing of the Ottoman *Tanzimat* system. According to this system, new administrative divisions appeared in order to facilitate management as well as to organize and regulate tax acquisition. The situation affected the pattern of life in our region negatively. During the period between the Mamluk up to the Ottoman periods, the Syrian Pilgrimage Route formed the backbone of Transjordan commerce. Historical records confirm that there were conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and the Bedouin tribes who raided and pillaged many pilgrimage caravans (Bani Younes, 1997). Accordingly, the Ottoman Sultans were keen to protect the caravans from the Bedouin raids and therefore several protective and defensive procedures were adopted by the Sultans; this is represented in the extensive and intensive fortification along the Syrian Pilgrimage Route. The pattern of life in the area remained as it was during the centuries that preceded the Ottoman period and did not change. Because Wadi Mousa and its vicinity were not located along this road, it did not gain enough attention from the Ottoman Sultans.

The Swiss explorer Burckhardt1 visited Petra and stayed in Wadi Mousa in 1812

1. Johann Ludwig Burckhardt was a Swiss explorer (1784-1817). He visited Egypt, Syria and Arabia between 1809 and 1813 and published some books about his travels including *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*. He died and was buried in Egypt.

and his notes and observations are preserved in his book entitled; *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*. He says that the town of Wadi Mousa "*is surrounded with fruit trees of all-kinds, the produce of which is of the finest quality. Great quantities of the grapes are sold at Gaza, and to the Bedouins...They pay tribute to the Howeytat and carry provisions to the Syrian pilgrimage at Maan, and to the Egyptian pilgrims at Aqaba. They have three encampments of about eighty tents each. Like the Bedouins and other inhabitants of Shera, they have become Wahabis, but do not at present pay any tribute to the Wahabi chief*" (Burckhardt, 1930: 433).

Between 1838-1839, the Egyptian government sent a party of troops to Petra. Kinnear says that after the party departed from Aqaba, they entered Wadi Mousa without opposition but without seeing a single peasant. Kinnear talks about Petra saying "*for several days the valley appeared to be entirely deserted, and, but for the little cultivated spaces among the ruins, a peared as utterly desolate as if it had remained for ages unoccupied*" and the party returned without achieving any success" (Kinnear, 1841: 161-162). It seems that the party did not encounter any people here as the troops did not find any person. It is most likely that the dwellers during this attack take refuge in a hidden and unknown place. It is worthy of saying that it was the custom of the inhabitants of the area to retreat and hide themselves when they were attacked, taking refuge in an area that was not known to foreigners. This happened during the Nabataean period. Diodorus and in referring to the Seleucid attack on the Nabataeans says "*They -the Nabataeans- are exceptionally fond of freedom; and whenever a strong force of enemies comes near, they take refuge in the desert"* (Diodorus Siculus; *Library of History*, II, 48).

By the end of the 19th and beginning of 20th centuries the Ottomans undertook several initiatives to protect the southern part of Jordan from the British expansion which reached Egypt. Therefore, they constructed the Hejaz railway with sub-branches leading to Aqaba, Ras an-Naqab and Shoubak. During the Late Ottoman period, Wadi Mousa was administratively a directorate (*Mudyriah*) which was attached through Maan District to the W*ilayat* of Syria. *Nahiyat* Wadi Mousa, which was established in 1911 and was attached to Maan District. During this year, an administrative building *Saraya* was constructed in Wadi Mousa (Al-Tarawneh, 1992: 304). During the Great Arab Revolt, Wadi Mousa witnessed one

of the decisive confrontations with the Turkish army which led consequently to the victory of the Arabs and their allies (al-Majali, 2003: 143-155).

After the First World War (1918-1921), the whole Levant was divided into military areas, and Transjordan was covering the Eastern part which extended between Maan in the south and the Syrian borders in the north, and this region was under the rule of King Faisal. During the early 1920s, the District of Maan-Aqaba was considered part of the Kingdom of Hejaz, and after two years, the area under consideration became part of the Transjordan Emirate when the government appointed an administrative governor to Wadi Mousa and Shoubak (al-Mathy and al-Mousa, 1988: 248-252).

During the 19th and 20th centuries, Wadi Mousa was inhabited by the Layāthneh who are broken into four major tribes: 'Baydīyeh, 'Alāyā, Banī 'Aṭā and esh-Shrūr and these were divided into sub-tribes. These were originally semi-nomads and settled peasants. The origin of these Layāthneh is still a questionable matter. This has been discussed in detail by some researchers[2].

The Layāthneh were mixed agro-pastoralists who used initially to live in tents and caves, and later on, probably by the end of the 18th century, they chose to construct their villages and houses in the places of the ancient human settlements that were one day inhabited. They were directly involved in semi-transhuman animal husbandry and agriculture. Their main source of income was based on agriculture and husbandry. Gertrude Bell who visited Wadi Mousa on March 1900 said that the inhabitants of Wadi Mousa "*had not so much as milk*" (Letter dated to 29/03/1900). She mentions in her diaries that "*the village of Wadi Mousa is set in gardens and fruit trees*" (diary 29/03/1900). (www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk)[3]

Religious Practices and Beliefs in Wadi Mousa

Intangible heritage elements contribute a considerable quantity of information about religious practices and beliefs in Wadi Mousa during this period. During the middle ages, the inhabitants of southern Jordan in particular and the southern

2. For further discussion see (Nawafleh 2004: 84-85)

3. This website is the only available source that contains all the unpublished diaries, letters, photographs and archives of Gertrude Bell.

Levant in general were not practicing Muslims in the exact sense of the word. They practiced the required obligatory daily rituals but some of their daily rituals were pagan and contradicted with the core religious Islamic values. Masterman said more than a hundred years ago: "*the Bedouins are the most conservative race under the sun; their habits and traditions have been unchanged for millenniums. Their religion, through nominally Moslem, is probably much as it was long years before Mohammad or Christ or Moses- a superstitious paganism*" (Masterman, 1901: 276-291).

Pagan religious ideas had a clear influence on the monotheistic beliefs in the region during this period. From the Mamluk period onwards, people used to pay more attention to shrines of important persons who were messengers between the people and their creator. Visiting the shrines and tombs of specific persons and veneration of the holy men was a common religious practice throughout the region. These shrines and sacred tombs are still having some of the traditions which are inherited from older generations.

The religious attitude among the dwellers of Wadi Mousa was not strong. Most of the surveyed traditional villages that were inhabited during that period did not have mosques. There was a mosque in the city centre near El-Jī where the inhabitants of all the villages that are scattered in the vicinity of Wadi Mousa used to gather to pray Fridays and events prayers. Another one was constructed in Banī'Aṭā village.

Some daily traditions were mere pagan, and some were borrowed from non-Islamic cultures. Interest, for example, which is not allowed in Islam, was common also (Interview with Mousa al-Masha'leh, 1997[4]).

Burckhardt mentions that there were about twenty families of Greek Christian origin in Wadi Mousa and they retired to Kerak (Burckhardt, 1930: 420). After the penetration of the Wahabii doctrine and its spread in the area on the fringes of the Levantine, Badia Christen families living in the area moved northwards and these included 'Akasha, Bawālasa, Masā'da and Zayadīne who are living nowadays in

4. Mousa al-Masha'leh, a native of Wadi Mousa, was 93 years old when he was interviewed in 1997. He was interviewed because he used to participate in all of the religious activities associated with the visits of sacred places in the region.

Kerak and claim that they were the descendents of the Nabataeans who converted to Christianity and had a bishop and church in Petra (Zayadine, 2004: 441). Other Christian families emigrated to several areas in Palestine. Christians therefore are not living in the area any more.

Dedications and offerings formed an integral part of the religious rituals practiced during this period and these might be traced back to the pre-Islamic period. The Arabs honoured their houses with sacrifices and used to pour blood to prevent them from the evil spirits and this was common in southern Jordan during the period under consideration.

There were several shrines and religious places in Wadi Mousa that were regularly visited and venerated during that period and there are special rituals associated with visiting the places associated with religious and cultic characters. Visitors go normally to these places in specified periods burning incense, lighting fire, sacrificing animals and making supplications. Lights were obtained by dipping green or white cloth inside olive oil and then placing it in the niche and these practices are accompanied by supplications.

Saints cults and sacred trees veneration were common religious traditions throughout the world, but widely popular in the Middle East (Miettunen 2004: 4). Additionally, the high places which were located on hills, are associated with cultic practices in most of the ancient Near Eastern cultures and they continued to exist in our region throughout history. Interestingly, Canaan associated modern shrines with the ancient high places. In his studies of the cultic shrines in the Levant he concluded that 70% of these shrines were constructed on the hills and high places (Canaan 1924: 6). It was believed that these shrines and trees were visited and invoked to cure sickness, send rain, solve problems, control evils, raise blessing and inflict misfortune.

The visits of high sacred places could be linked with the visit of high places in the region during the Nabataean period (between the fourth century BC and the second century AD). Such visits formed an integral part of the Nabataean religious rituals. In these high places there are normally steps leading up to a small flat area where rituals were normally practiced. High places consist of a courtyard surrounded by benches and there is a raised platform. Sometimes there is an altar

for libations and sacrifices furnished with channels. Water was normally provided to such installations for purification.

Below we will deal with these shrines; they include Jabal Hārūn, el-Hasenī shrine (el-Hsainī), el-Jarrāsh tombs, 'Aṭāyā tree as well as Zignānat esh-Shrūr (see Map 1).

a) Jabal Hārūn

Jabal Hārūn is the most prominent sacred place in the vicinity of Wadi Mousa. It is 1270 m above sea level, situated about 5 kilometres south-west of Petra and it is the main Islamic attraction in Petra.

Archaeological fieldworks in the site have revealed that the site witnessed an intensive settlement during the Byzantine period till the 8th- 9th centuries. Ceramic finds uncovered in the Jabal Hārūn area indicate that the site was occupied from the Nabataean until the Ayyubid/Mamluk period (Lavento, 2002: 124). Islamic inscriptions from different periods have been founded in the site and they confirm the sanctity of this area during these periods (al-Salameen and Falahat, 2007: 258-264).

This mountain is considered by most scholars to be the burial place of Aaron (Hārūn), Moses' brother[5]. Some narratives recorded by earlier explorers such as Canaan and Robinson as well as other oral narratives suggest that Hārūn died either in Wadi Araba, particularly at 'Ain al-Weibeh or on the top of Jabal Hārūn (Frosen and Miettunen, 2008: 10) . The Holy Bible mentions that Hārūn died on the top of Mount Hor (Numbers, 20:22-29) and this has been identified with Jabal Hārūn in Petra. At the summit of Jabal Hārūn there is a shrine *Maqām* or *Weli*, rectangular in shape measuring 9.5 x 11.27 m^2 and there is a semi-circular dome surmounting the building and on its entrance there is an Arabic inscription dated to the region of the Mamluk Sultan al-Naser Muhammad (AD 1293-1309) (see Plates 2 and 4). It is a commonly-held opinion that this *Maqām* is memorial and the real burial chamber is located in the cave which lies below this *Maqām* and can be reached by descending steps to the west-north corner of the cave.

Inside the *Maqām* there is a rectangular cenotaph raising approximately one

5. For more details about Aaron (Hærýn) in the Hebrew Bible, the Jewish-Greek sources, early Christian literature, Byzantine and Islamic sources see (Frosen and Miettunen, 2008: 5-25)

meter from the ground and its length is approximately 1.25 m long. There are also few Hebrew inscriptions of the cenotaph that contain names of visitors who come to the shrine during the late 19th century. The cenotaph is normally covered by a cloth whose colour is either white, green or red (Miettunen, 2004: 37). These colours were adopted as colours of flags by Islmaic dynasties. The most used cover is the green one. It is mentioned in the Holy Quran that the inhabitants of the paradise will wear green garments made of silk (Surah 18:31). Dafni said that the green symbolizes the continuity of the good life and the colour of angle cloths and white colour symbolizes purity and good intention (Dafni, 2002: 317). Gertrude Bell mentioned in her diaries that "at the top is a modern mazar with a tomb in it covered with green stuffs and strings of rags" (diary 30/3/1900).

The green is the favourite Shiite colour as it was the colour of the Fatimides (969 AD to 1071 AD) who ruled southern Jordan. There are some Shiite cultic traces such as some behaviours when hearing the call for prayers. Old women and men used to say "by the name of Mohammad and by the name of Ali". Others say "Allah and Ali with you".

There is a black obsidian stone in the *Maqām* (see Plate 3). It is belived that this stone was placed over Moses spring by Moses and was brought later to the shrine. Yāqūt al-Hamawī (574-626 AH/ 1178-1229 AD) said that when Moses and the Israelites exited their wilderness he was carrying a stone which he used to knock the rock when water came out (*Mu'jam al-Buldan*, ³ūr Hārūn). This stone was left near the spring. Yāqūt al-Hamawī quoting from a well-known and reliable judge that he had seen the stone near the spring and it is in the size of the "goat's head" and claimed that there was no stone similar to it in the area. If this story is correct; the description fits the black stone found inside the *Maqām* which was normally kissed by visitors who come to the shrine, comparing it to the black stone in Kaʿbah.

The stone is called "Mirror of prophet Hārūn "by the local inhabitants. It is believed that this "*possesses considerable virtue in the cure of diseases, and to have formerly served as a seat for the prophet*" (Robinson, 1930: 26). Similar black stones were sacred also in pre-Islamic Arabia and were placed also in specified shrines and kissed normally by pilgrims and visitors (Ali, 2006: 341).

It is a commonly-held practice that the visit to Jabal Hārūn was made twice a

year. One on the beginning of October which corresponds to the beginning of winter and another visit in the spring. These two seasons were considered sacred and are of remarkable significance. The veneration of the beginning of these two seasons is rooted in the region and may be traced back to the Nabataean period and continued through ages even after the spread of Islam.

An interesting Nabataean zodiac relief was discovered in Kh. Tannur and it represents a panel divided into two clockwise and counter clockwise halves (Glueck, 1952: 7), contrary to other non-Nabataean zodiacs which are arranged in one direction. Nelson Glueck suggests that these marked two New Year divisions, the one being a new year which began with spring, and the other being a new year which began with autumn. The first one which starts with *Nysn*=Aries corresponds to the vernal equinox. It is known that many ancient and modern eastern groups celebrate the arrival of spring season (Saggs, 1969). The second important date in the Nabataean calendar is the autumnal equinox which corresponds to the second division of the Nabataean Zodiac at Kh. Tannur. The clockwise direction of the zodiac starts with Libra, late September /early October. This month marks the beginning of the autumnal equinox and the end of the summer months. These two occasions were honoured by various nations (Coote Lake, 1933: 94).

The visit to Jabal Hārūn was made via special routes designed either for animal riders or for those going on foot. The main route is known as *Darb al-Nabī Hārūn* "Prophet Hārūn Route". This route passes via al-Siq-Petra-Pharaoh column, al-Thughra- The Snake Monument and then to Jabal Hārūn. The visit was accompanied by rituals whose type and narratives depend on the purpose behind it. There were many reasons behind the visit of this shrine: sickness, rain, troubles and spiritual problems and as a result of an oath. [6]*Amm al-Ghaith* "The Mother of Rain" was a major ritual procession practised by the inhabitants of the region which was organized during the dry seasons.

During the drought season, and because water is so vital for the inhabitants, the village of Wadi Mousa had special rituals to be adopted to ask God to provide water and these include the visit of Hārūn shrine and *Amm al-Ghaith* procession.

6. The inhabitants of Wadi Mousa say "*Amm*" = mother instead of the fluent Arabic *"Omm*"

It seems that this was not restricted to Wadi Mousa and was a regional ritual. Musil (Musil, 1927: 10-11), for example, wrote the following lyrics he heard from the Rwala Bedouins, and these correspond to *Amm al-Ghaith* song of the inhabitants of Wadi Mousa which indicates that this procession was a major Bedouin and Arabian procession:

Oh Mother of the Rain ! Rain upon us; Wet the mantle of our herdsman, Oh Mother of the rain! Rain upon us; With pouring rain allay our thirst, Oh Mother of the Rain! Rain upon us;

Amm al-Ghaith procession is done normally by old and pious women and ladies as well as children who sit together at the beginning of the rainy season and this gathering was led normally by a respected and pious lady. The ladies bring a white male garment of the head of the village and they put inside it a wooden cross to form a human symbol and then they cover the head of the mannequin with a white cover and they start moving in the village repeating the following song:-

"Oh Mother of the Rain, rain upon us, wet the forehead of our shepherd, Oh Mother of the Rain, Oh you are Eternal, Rain and wet our seeds, and make the floods run in the valleys"

And after that they return while repeating these verses and the respected lady led them carrying the dummy and they knock on the doors of the village and they take handful of wheat from every house and they start baking bread afterwards. This bread is normally divided among the ladies and distributed to the by-passers.

It has been narrated by some informants that after the *Amm al-Ghaith* procession rain falls. People are so glad for the rain and while its raining they repeat verses such as "*rain more and more, our house is of an iron, our uncle is Attalah*". Sometimes they repeat verses in which they talk to the clouds and fogs and they beg the cloud to move to the place where they plough and cultivate, and they say for example "*to Qsaib and thunder there*".

Customs similar to the *Amm al-Ghaith* procession were performed in various localites in the Levant and Arabia. It was performed in Arabia as mentioned above (Musil 1927: 10-11) as well as in Syria (Gaster, 1938: 365).

The narratives of the visit to Jabal Hārūn are as follows: after the official declaration for the visit, visitors wear the best of their clothes, take bread and pass

via a specified route toward the shrine. When the visitors ascend the mountain they sing *: "Oh Hārūn we are coming thirsty to you, in the summer heat we are driven by thirst, Oh Hārūn the great star, the father of the high planets"*. As soon as the visitors reach the summit of the mountain during the evening, they prepare tea and coffee and bring chicken and eat. They sit around the fire singing, shooting and ululating during the night. In the following morning, they prepare their breakfast which includes tea. Afterwards, they ascend to the shrine to light a fire while singing and supplicating. Visitors either men or women should practice ablution in advance and they should be clean and the shoes and sandals must be taken off before ascending to the shrine. Rituals practiced in the shrine include lighting fire in specified places and burning incense and lighters are placed inside niches in walls. Lights are obtained by dipping green or white cloth inside olive oil and then pacing it in the niche; which practices are accompanied by supplications. After finishing the prayer and supplications, the visitors return backwards while they are facing the tomb. The visitor usually returne up facing the tomb all the way. Then, a goat or sheep is to be sacrificed and the sacrificed animals were eaten by all visitors.

Then they enter the mosque, pray and leave the shrine. After that they leave the whole area to a place where they will have a horseracing in al-Jmeed area in Wadi Mousa near El-Jī village where visitors from all the surrounding areas come to see this festival. After that, everybody goes home and there is a sacrifice during the night called dinner of the Prophet Hārūn '*Ashā an-Nabī Hārūn*". Sweets baked normally in caly ovens *ʾābūn* were made. During this dinner, every family should sacrifice a goat[7] in honour of this communal festival and celebrate. The sacrificed goat or sheep is called *fadw* which had normally been chosen at the beginning of spring and was dedicated to the prophet.

Burckhardt refers to a custom adopted by the inhabitants of the area. He said that those who made vows to slaughter a victim to Hārūn thought it sufficient to proceed as far as the shrine from when the shrine is visible, and after sacrificing their animals they threw a heap of stones over the blood which flew to the ground (Burckhardt, 1930: 420). Gertrude Bell, who visited Jabal Hārūn on 30 March

7. The most common animal in the Petra region is the goat.

1900 talks about this tradition and about the *Maqām* saying: "*it's a geat Mohommadan pilgrimage place; all about this country wherever the summit of Mount Hor (Jabal Hārūn) is visible you can see heaps of stones piled up on which the Arabs have sacrificed a lamb to the Prophet Aaron*" (letter dated 30/ March 1900) (www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk).

Its worth mentioning that Burckhardt pretended to have made a vow to slaughter a goat in honour of Hārūn and sacrificed a goat with his guide who repeated several times the following supplication:- "*O Harun, look upon us! It is for you we slaughter this victim. O Harun, protect us and forgive us. O Harun be content with our good intentions, for it is but a lean goat. O Harun, smoothen our paths, and praise be to God, Lord of the worlds"* (Burckhardt, 1930: 419, 430). Burckhardt also tells "how *the day of visiting the saint's tomb becomes a festival for the whole tribe, and all the neighbours. The women then appear clothed in their finest dresses.."* (Burckhardt, 1930: 260).

Cooking utensils are available on site and these were seen by Burckhardt who narrated that he saw three copper vessels on the mountain (Burckhardt, 1930: 431) and of these utensils is the so-called the cooking pot of Prophet Hārūn "*Qedr en-Nabī Hārūn*". There is a local story regarding how this pot was acquired. Informants informed us that there were struggle and fights between the Layāthneh and Banī ʿAtiah who tried to occupy Wadi Mousa and its proximity during the 17th century, and on their way to Wadi Mousa their armed forces camped near a sacred tree called Buṭmat al-Minyeh (see below) near Wadi Mousa. One of the Layāthneh shepherds saw them and heard their negotiations regarding attacking the Layāthneh, he went to his group informing them what has already been planned against them. The Layāthneh attacked Banī ʿAṭīa troops, forced them to retreat and took loot that included a huge cooking pot which was dedicated to Prophet Hārūn.

Visitors to this shrine come normally from Wadi Mousa and the neighbouring areas. Crawford (Crawford, 1930: 261), for example, quoted from the custodian of the shrine in 1907 the following: " *from two to three hundred come up to this mountain to sacrifice every year; from Shaubak, and Maan and Alji; many from Alji. No one, however, from across the ʿArabah, and only occasionally one from Kerak"*. Various Arabic inscriptions have been found in Petra referring to visits

made by persons who came from outside Wadi Mousa, most likely persons who were participating in the annual gatherings dedicated to Hārūn (al-Salameen and Falahat, 2007: 258 – 264).

It was the custom of the Layāthneh to bring their new born children to the shrine to be seen and blessed by Prophet Hārūn. Afterwards, it was seen by the rest of the joining visitors.

The custom of lighting while performing pilgrimage or visit to a holy shrine was common among pagan and monotheistic traditions. Weightman says that "*light symbolizes holiness and is a common element in sacred visions... natural light deftly manipulated, reveals, clarifies and structures emanations of the divine in sacred places... fire symbolizes creation, destruction, transformation, transcendence, purification and renewal"* (Weightman, 1996: 59).

The inhabitants of Wadi Mousa and the neighbouring areas paid much attention to this shrine. It is said that during the visit of -Hamzah al-ʿArabī that around 40% of the water of Moses spring with what is related of the lands of the valley were dedicated to the shrine of Hārūn. During the Ottoman period, these dedications were well-protected and organized by a special person who used to levy its incomes and spend them on the services of this shrine to cover the maintenance costs as well as to buy the needed items such as wax, oil, furniture and lamps. Later and after the departure of the Ottomans, the residents of Wadi Mousa captured all these dedications and divided the water rights that were allocated previously for Hārūn shrine between themselves (al-ʿArabī, -Hamzah, Part 2, The Unpublished Part of the Manuscript, 101-102).

-Hamzah al-ʿArabī[8] mentions that the custodian of the shrine used to go to the presents to take the first of their cereals and fruits in honour of Hārūn. The custodian used to go to Tafilah also to bring from its first olive and oil to light the shrine twice a week on Monday and Friday (al-ʿArabī, -Hamzah, The Unpublished Part of the Manuscript, 427-429).

Hārūn was considered by the Layāthneh as a healer and protective for the living

8. „amzah al-ʿArabñ (1315-1382 AH/ 1893-1962 AD) was a judge in Maan in the 1920s. He visited Wadi Mousa and Petra and his notes are preserved in his book *Jawlah bayn al-athār.* The first section of this book was published in 2002 and the second one, which provides some information about Jabal Hærýn and its regular visits, has not been published yet.

people as well as the dead. Interestingly, Crawford mentions that the bodies of those who were buried near the shrine are laid with the face directed not to the Kaʿbah but to Jabal Hārūn (Crawford, 1930: 291). He adds that "*at the town of Wadi Mousa there may be seen in one large cemetery, part of the graves constructed east and west, in the orthodox fashion, and others, strange to say, running nearly north and south as to recognize the supremacy of Nabi Hārūn"* (Crawford, 1930: 291).

b) El-Hasenī shrine

El-Hasenī shrine was one of the major shrines in Wadi Mousa that had a holy character (Plate 7). It was called el-Hseinī also and was dedicated to el-Hasenī, the forefather of the -Hasanat tribe. This shrine was visited by Canaan who says that this shrine "*is a simple room kept on a bad condition. ...The saint-pious man appears at times in the night as a reverend old Sheikh clad in green and white. He belongs to the irritable class of awliā, for whosoever swears by him falsely is severely punished within three days. The sick are placed in his maqām in order to be cured"* (Canaan, 1929: 207).

The early history of the shrine is not known yet. The reuse of stone blocks as well as the scattered pottery around the shrine indicate that the monument was built over buildings dated to the third and fourth centuries AD (Amr, 1998: 503-48). The shrine itself is a simple room, built of semi-dressed stones, its roof was built of wood and the ceiling rests on two vaults of stone (Plate 5). The room is measuring approximately 6 x4 m, the interior wall is plastered by mortar mixed with hay which was mixed with straw. The floor is unpaved made of beaten earth and the shrine is abandoned these days.

The visit to this shrine was made calmly and this was accompanied by supplications, burning incense and lighting (Falahat, 2003: 24-29). There are specified places (niches) inside the interior walls where candlesticks were placed and remains of their soot are still visible (Plate 6). Some visitors offer the first of their animal and trees' products. The first fruit and first-born animal were normally dedicated to god in pre-Islamic Arabia (Ali, 2006: 149).

There was no custodian for this shrine and it was open to all; used by all tribes,

contrary to other sacred places within the region which were venerated by particular families.

c) El-Jarrāsh tombs

El-Jarrāsh tombs are sacred places also. This shrine contains the tombs of Sulaiman and Salem the grandfathers of al-Mashaʿleh tribe. These tombs were surrounded by a wall furnished with a door but the shrine was destroyed while constructing modern buildings.

The Tombs of el-Fuqarā

The tombs of el-Fuqarā, is the only sacred place between Wadi Mousa and ³aybeh in an area called ʿAin Amūn nowadays. This area was inhabited by el-Fuqarā tribe whose members were well known for curing diseases. They died because of drought and were buried in this area. These tombs were normally visited by some families and female groups and these visits were accompanied by lighting and sacrificing goats in honours of these Fuqarā. Cannan states that "*the 'Awlia buried at the sanctuary of el-Fuqarā at Ein Amūn are also called el-Bauwat*" (Canaan, 1930: 179). Within the shrine there are two tombs and there were many outside. The sick was placed normally there, left alone and then taken on the following day, when he/she leaves the place he/she mentions what he saw during sleeping there. Legendary stories were normally narrated by the sick persons who were placed there. Amm Hani[9] narrated that the place was visited once a year. She said "*the females of the Layāthneh gather themselves normally in a place. Bread was made, oil, fat, white cloths and incense were taken. As soon as they approached the place, the cloths were cut into small fragments, dipped inside the oil and then lighted and then they start supplication of the things that they require*". (Interview made with Amm Hani in 2002)

There is also another sacred place in Bayda. The tomb of Abu Hmeidi the ancestor of ʿAmarīn is located there, venerated and visited by members of the Bdūl tribe.

9. Amm Hani, a native of Wadi Mousa, was 64 years old when she was interviewed in 2002. She was interviewed because she used to participate in the *Amm al-Ghaith* procession and used to visit some of the sacred placed in the region.

Sacred Trees

Ritual veneration was not restricted to tombs. Some trees were sacred and were venerated therefore by the Layāthneh. It should be pointed out that this was common in other parts of the Levant and Arabia whose inhabitants believed in trees divine power which is attributed to ancient and deep-rooted pagan traditions (Moscati, 1973: 66). This was converted later into adoration of prophets and saints (Dafni, 2007: 1). Philo Byblius (64 - 141 AD) alludes to an ancient belief that plants of the earth were esteemed as gods and honoured with libations and sacrifices (Quoted from Wood 1916: 124). In Canaan, the cedar was sacred to El, the supreme deity of the Canaanites and Phoenicians (Gaster, 1938: 342).

This pre-Islamic Arabians venerated the trees. The inhabitants of Nejran in south western Arabia used to worship the tall palm-tree prior to the rise of Christianity and they had an annual festival when they hung upon it the best garments (Ibn Hesham, 2006: 33).

Quraīsh tribe as well as other pre-Islamic tribes used to venerate a great green tree known as Dhātu Anwāt under which they stayed for a day suspending their weapons to its branches and offering sacrifices beneath it (al-Azruqī, 2000: 130).

It was believed that such trees have supernatural powers and characters such as punishing the tree violators, granting a divine blessing, punishing for false oaths, protection of properties deposited underneath and cure of illness (Dafni, 2007: 3).

There were four main sacred trees in Wadi Mousa and its vicinity that were venerated and honoured by the Layāthneh. ʿAṭāyā tree is one of these examples (Plate 9). Its name "*ʿAṭāyā*" refers to its function as it means "gifts" in Arabic. *ʿAṭāyā* is considered the grandfather of Helalat. The tree grew over a tomb. Canaan (1929: 207) mentions that this is considered to be a less powerful one. This tree which grew near El-Jī village does not exist any more. This was visited mostly by members of al-Helalat tribe. It was thought that the tree was inhabited by a saint "*weli*" (Interview made with ʿAṭīeh al-Masāʿdeh[10] in 1998). Informants mentioned a legendary story about a treasure hidden beneath the tree, connected

10. ʿA*f*ñeh al-Masæʿdeh, a native of Wadi Mousa, was 108 years old when he was interviewed in 1998. He was interviewed because he used to participate in all the religious activities associated with the visits of sacred places in the region.

with the tree and guarded by a camel and servant. This treasure, according to a legend will be found by a person called either Salem, Sulaiman or Abdullah (Interview made with Sulaiman al-Salameen[11] in 2008). Some informants mentioned that the first spring products such as the milk and butter were presented firstly to the tree. It was not allowed to eat from these products before offering their first products to the tree. These offerings were known in the Levant, Arabia as well as in biblical traditions.

Butmat el-Minyeh is a tree approximately 1000 years old which is located at el-Minyeh southeast of Wadi Mousa and grew in a very high place (Plate 8). Its name "el-Minyeh" refers to its function as it means "death" in Arabic. Its was believed that death will be the penalty of anyone takes from the leaves of this tree. Others believe that anyone cut a branch from the tree will not have children at all. It was regularly visited by persons, especially those who required secular religious help and was visited mostly by some members of Banī ʿAṭā tribe but mostly by esh-Shrūr (Interview made with Sulaiman al-Salameen in 2008). This tree was the place where Banī ʿAṭā confronted with Banī ʿAṭīa during the 17th century. The big cooking pot known as *Qedr al-Nabi Hārūn* was taken as a loot from this place (Interview made with Sulaiman al-Salameen in 2007).

A sacred tree grew near ʿAin Mousa, which was surrounded by a simpler covering a cave. The Layāthneh used to place beads and cloths ribbons inside the room which was damaged later on and the tree was uprooted (Interview made with Mousa al-Mashaʿleh in 1998). ʿAṭīeh al-Masāʿdeh refers to Ma™hār el-Kūr near ʿAin Mousa where light were lighted, hairs from the dear child or the dear goat were placed inside the room that was built over the spring.

Ziqnānat esh-Shrūr is a sacred tree located at ³aybeh and was venerated by esh-Shrūr who used to hang beads and cloths fragments on it. It was burnt later on by one of them. It is narrated that this tree was inhabited by evil spirits "*Djen*" who "*used to sing there, visited normally by males and females who hang beads on it and pour oil on its ground. Quran verses were not recited because it was inhabited*

11. Sulaiman al-Salameen, a native of Wadi Mousa, was 90 years old when he was interviewed in 2008. He was interviewed because he used to participate in all the religious activities associated with the visits of sacred places in the region.

by a Djen" (Interview made with Sulaiman al-Salameen in 2008).

The custom of tying threads, hair and personal items on sacred trees exists in most of the ancient cultures including the Middle East, Africa as well as South East Asia (Dafni, 2002: 315). This custom existed in Arabia. Doughty refers to this custom in Arabia saying " *in the filed and town, in the Arabic border-countries, trees, places of accepted prayers, are found thus garnished in the open lands from Syria to Morocco: every returning worshipper suspends a rag for his prayer which was heard in that place ..I Have visited two groves of evergreen oaks, which are wishing places for peasantry"* (Doughty, 1926: 450).

In Iran, the Iranians usually pledged themselves through attaching piece of textiles, some chains or locks to the sacred trees. If their wishes are fulfilled, religious ceremonies including sacrificing, cooking and feeding the needy in its vicinity were made (Khaneghah, 1998).

Rix says that the root idea of the custom of tying threads and pieces of textiles on sacred trees symbolizes offering a part of the dedicator to this sacred tree (Rix, 1907: 53). It was widely used among the Moslem Bedouins and peasants who used threads, cloths or rags and tied them to shrines, tombs or trees in order to get the divine blessing (Canaan, 1929: 136-218). The colours of these rags or threads were either green or white. In his discussion of the reasons behind this tradition, Dafni concluded that there were five reasons and these are: breaking an oath, marking a blessing tree, marking the road to a blessed tree, asking for permission to pick fruit and putting rags for needy people (Dafni, 2002: 325).

All these practices are rooted in the pagan ancient Near Eastern cultures. Among the Semites, such as the Phoenicians for example the cult was usually practiced in the mountains, near the waters, trees, and rocks which were considered sacred (Moscati, 1973: 65).

From the aforementioned discussion, it is evident that the veneration of sacred places either tombs or trees played an integral role in the beliefs of the residents of the area. This was a common practice in Wadi Mousa and other parts of the southern Levant during the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. Ghalib Anabsi in his studies of similar contemporary practices in Palestine concluded that "*traditions concerning pilgrimage and saint worship in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods*

reflect a popular need, which found an outlet in pilgrimage to holy sites and in saint worship, despite the opposition of certain Islamic jurists to this practice" (Anabsi, 2008: 59).

Sacred Times

The Layāthneh had sacred times as well as some honourable creatures whom they are used to respect. They are always optimistic by the beginning of the lunar month and they talk to the moon for its first appearance at the beginning of the month asking it to bring good luck and to remove misfortune away. Celebration for the first appearance of the moon had analogies in the ancient Near East also (Wood, 1916: 60).

After the death of a person and on the same day they used to sacrifice a goat called *weneset el-maīyet* "the cheerful companion of the dead" which is believed that it accompanies the soul of the dead in his loneliness.

Khamīs el-Amūāt "Thursday of the Dead" is a blessed day also. Before the coming of this day, it should be declared for the whole people. The day occurs normally in the spring and during that day goats and sheep were sacrificed for the souls of the dead.

The beginning of the spring coincided with the beginning of the new year in the ancient Near Eastern civilizations. The date of April 23rd is important as a link between the cult of St. George and ancient Hellenistic cult of Baal-Zeus and it is mentioned that Seleucus Nicator made his sacrifices to Zeus on Mount Kasios on the 23rd of April (Haddad, 1969: 28). *Akitu* festival was celebrated in Babylonia during this time. The feast of the New Year was celebrated also in Palmyra in the first eleven days of Nisan (April), the month which is included in the spring equinox (Teixidor, 1977: 137). Healey noticed the concentration of the tomb inscriptions of Hegra, which are dated mostly to the month of Nisan which "*suggest a preference for this month in the dedication of the tombs*" (Healey, 1993: 105). Annual spring festivals existed in Pre-Islamic Arabia (Healey, 2001: 161). Hajj in pre-Islamic Arabia may by identified as visiting holy places in special periods. Jawad Ali and after reviewing many accounts regarding festivals and celebrations among the pre-Islamic Arabs concluded that Arabs celebrate

pilgrimage twice a year when they visit their holy places once in the middle of the spring and another time in early winter (Ali, 2006: 273-274).

Evil spirits were believed to exist in most parts of the Levant. Special places such as some valleys, water springs and water channels were thought to have been inhabited by these hidden creatures. Examples of these sites within Wadi Mousa are ʿAin es-Sader ʿAin Raydān and al-Hamrā. Evil spirits "*Djen*" appear in the form of humans either males or females as well as some animals such as goats, cats, horses and dogs. They were seen in the form of frogs also as narrated by some informants (Interview made with Sulaiman al-Salameen in 2008). Beads and necklaces were used as protective amulets throughout the history of the region (Ali, 2006:145). Beads were suspended around the necks of the males, females, animals and trees (Coote Lake, 1933: 94).

The areas that are inhabited by evil spirits are avoided by the dwellers especially during nights, sunrise and sunset times (Nawafleh, 2004: 214). These spirits leave immediately upon lighting a fire (Interview made with Sulaiman al-Salameen in 2008). The Layāthneh used to sacrifice animals when they dwell a house or dig a well for example to purify it from the *Djen*. This was common in pre-islamic Arabia and the sacrifice was known as *Dhbī...et el-Djen* "Sacrifice of the evil" and it was after that prohibited in Islam (Ali, 2006: 344).

It is obvious that local religious beliefs were mingled with pagan traditions and legends and this initiated the appearance of the so-called traditional medicine. Spiritual medicine gained significant attention among ancient societies which is attributed mainly to the lack of knowledge and the occasional success of few remedy cases.

Continuity of ancient Near Eastern cultic practices may be seen in our community and this includes the veneration of the sun, which was worshipped in different places of the Levant and Arabia. Places that are thought to have evil spirits are avoided normally in certain times such as during the sunset and sunrise as well as during the nights. When the temporary teeth of the children are uprooted they are thrown towards the sun saying "*Oh sun come and take from me the teeth of the donkey and bring me the teeth of the gazelle*".

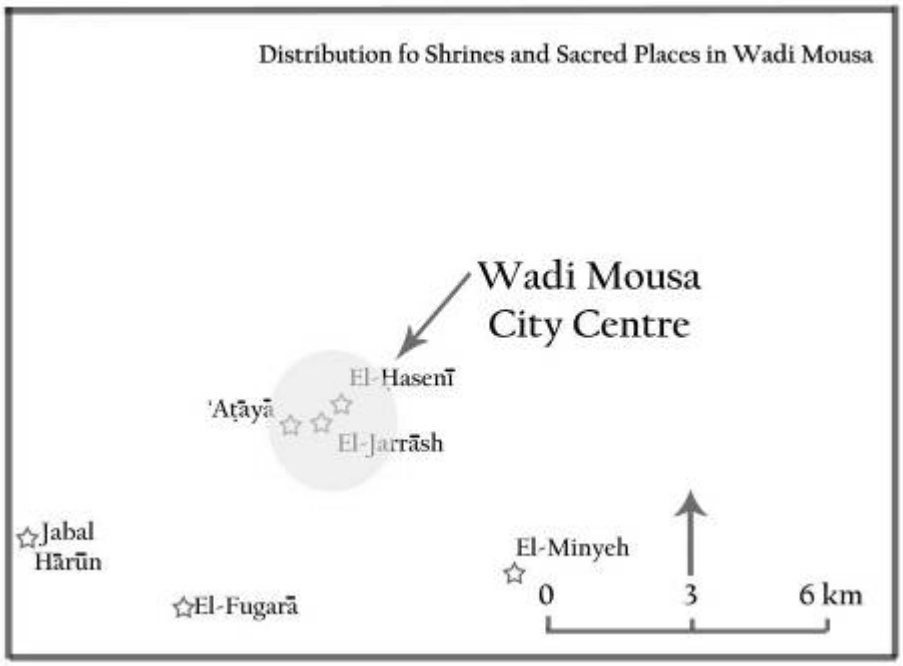
Local veneration included waters also, a custom that is deeply rooted in the

history of the oriental beliefs. Nielsen states that the "*Bedouins from far away make "pilgrimage to the spring of Moses* ʿAin *Mousa, to Mount Hor (Jabal Hārūn) and other holy places in the neighbourhood of Petra to offer their sacrifices*" (Nielsen, 1929: 201). Canaan mentions that Moses spring was accounted holy by the Bedouins who offer to it incenses and light and they bring their sick to be cured and place them near the water (Canaan, 1929: 208). Running water was considered sacred in some parts of the ancient Near East (Wood, 1916: 18). The Phoenicians sanctuary of Aphka, for example, was in the Lebanese mountains at the source of the river Adonis (Moscati 1973: 65). In Syrio-Palestinian belief, the rivers had yearly to contend with the god of the rains -Baal- at the beginning of the rainy season, in early autumn (Gaster, 1938: 339). The Nabataeans perceived water as sacred just as several religious icons, inscriptions and sanctuaries are found in association with springs, catchment pools, and channels in Petra and its vicinity (Bedal, 2002: 230).

Conclusions and recommendations:

The inhabitants of Wadi Mousa during the Late Ottoman and the period of the Emirate of Transjordan adopted the same cultural, social and architectural practices known in the area through ages. They continued to practice some pagan rituals alongside the Islamic ones. During the middle ages, the inhabitants of southern Jordan in particular and the southern Levant in general were not practicing Muslims in the exact sense of the word. They practiced the required obligatory daily rituals but some of their daily rituals were pagan and contradicted with the core religious Islamic values.

Oral history should be an integral part of any heritage documentation and study initiatives. There are several intangible cultural heritage materials from this period that are worthy of recording. These are disappearing gradually due to the rapid change in the pattern of life.



Map 1: shows the distribution of shrines and sacred places in Wadi Mousa

Plate 1: The custodian of the Hārūn shrine in 1900 (Taken by Gertrude Bell)
(www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk)

Plate 2: Arabic inscription on the cenotaph

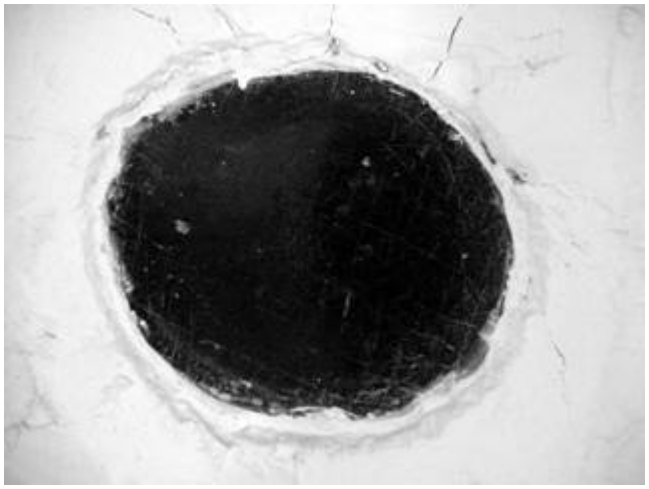


Plate 3: The black obsidian stone inside the shrine

Plate 4: General view of Hārūn's shrine

Plate 5: The interior of el-Hasenī shrine

Plate 6: Lamps and candles places inside the shrine

Plate 7: The main entrance of el-Hasenī shrine

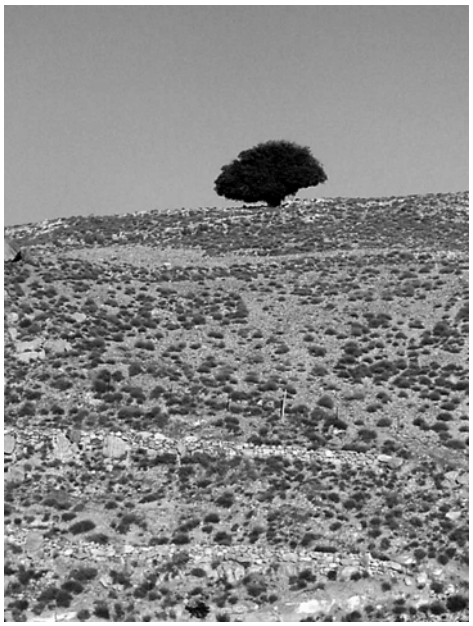


Plate 8: Buṭmat el-Minyeh

Plate 9: General view of ʿAṭāyā tree

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الممارسات والمعتقدات الدينية في وادي موسى خلال الفترة ما بين نهاية القرن التاسع عشر وبداية القرن العشرين

زياد السلامين* وهاني الفلاحات**

ملخـص

تناقش هذه الدراسة بعض المظاهر الاجتماعية والثقافية والدينية في منطقة وادي موسى خلال الفترة ما بين نهاية القرن التاسع عشر وبداية القرن العشرين، حيث تركز الدراسة وبشكل أساسي على الممارسات الدينية المرتبطة بزيارة المزارات الدينية سواء أكانت قبورا أم أشجارا، وتحاول إلقاء الضوء على الجذور والأصول التاريخية لهذه الممارسات. لقد اعتمدت الدراسة على كتابات الرحالة الذين زاروا المنطقة خلال تلك الفترة، كما اعتمدت على بعض المقابلات الشخصية التي أجريت مع بعض المسنين في المنطقة، بالإضافة إلى كتابات الشيخ حمزة العربي الذي زار وادي موسى والبتراء عام ١٩٢٤.

الكلمات الدالة: التراث الثقافي غير المادي، وادي موسى، الممارسات والمعتقدات الدينية، الفترة العثمانية المتأخرة

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