

THÈSE DE DOCTORAT

De l'Université de recherche Paris Sciences et Lettres

PSL Research University

Préparée à l'Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales

Saint Georges: "Un Saint Partagé" en Méditerranée? Approche historique et anthropologique du pèlerinage (Turquie et Liban)

Ecole doctoral en°150836

CESOR

Spécialité Anthropologue

Soutenue par

Mustafa Yakup DİKTAŞ

Dirigée par

Bernard HEYBERGER

COMPOSITION DU JURY :

Mme. Chantal Verdeil (professeur, INALCO), Rapporteur

M. Dionigi Albera (Directeur de recherches, CNRS/ IDEMEC, Aix/ Marseille), Rapporteur

M. Emma Aubin-Boltanski (Directrice de recherche, CNRS / IFPO (Beyrouth), Membre du jury

M. Alexandre Toumarkine (professeur, INALCO), Membre du jury

Mme. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Directrice d'études, EHESS (CeSoR), Membre du jury

M. Dionigi Albera (Directeur de recherches, CNRS/ IDEMEC, Aix/ Marseille), Membre du jury

Mme. Chantal Verdeil (professeur, INALCO), Membre du jury



**Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales
Centre d'études en sciences sociales du religieux (CéSor)**

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Thèse de doctorat

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Directeur de thèse
Prof. Bernard HEYBERGER

2018

To the ones who still believe in dreams...

To Firuze.....

Acknowledgements

Undertaking this PhD has been a truly life-changing experience for me and it would not have been possible to do without the support and guidance that I received from many people. I would like to first say a very big thank you to my supervisor Bernard Heyberger for all the support and encouragement he gave me. Without his guidance and constant feedback this PhD would not have been achievable.

I am indebted to my beloved friend Ana Munteanu who has been by my side throughout this PhD, living every single minute of it, and without whom, I would not have had the courage to embark on this journey.

I greatly appreciate the support I received during my field work – thank you to Deacon Nadim Challita from Sarba St George Parish for his endless support. Without him I couldn't have completed my fieldwork. I would also like to say a heartfelt thank you to all inhabitants of Sarba who were always so helpful and provided me with their assistance throughout this journey. I am especially grateful to Marc Tarazi for believing in my research and for cognitive and emotional support. I am also very thankful to Nour Farra Haddad from whom I got the inspiration to work on Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh.

Finally, very special thank you to my Mum, Dad: Songül and Selçuk for always believing in me and encouraging me to follow my dreams. And my brother Inan for helping in every way he could during this challenging period.

Saint Georges: "A Shared Saint" in the Mediterranean ? An Historical and Anthropological Approach to Pilgrimage (Turkey and Lebanon)

Abstract

The people of the Mediterranean basin share ways of living and practicing their faith, which resist religious divisions and political manipulations. The religious landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean is more complex and is marked by forms of inter-confessional convergence. This thesis is an anthropological gaze towards a reading of political and cultural changes that affect sanctuaries and recent transformations of rites around two ambiguous shrines. Although this thesis pays attention to two case studies in particular, namely Aya Yorgi in Turkey and Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh in Lebanon, it draws on multi-disciplinary research in order to set a broader context. These places are explored deeply through qualitative analysis, while at the same time taking note of parallel work concerned with other sites such as Lod, Edirne and Athens. Ranging from the search for spirituality around the sites dedicated to St George, my findings that include spiritual as well as secular aspirations suggest a deconstruction of poles of meaning such as sacred and profane, movement and place, religion and secularity, community and individual. This methodologically diverse study argues that, contrary to perception, traditional forms of religious rituals are not necessarily incompatible with late-modern consumer culture. Through consumer culture, religious traditions are being revitalized. The renewed popularity of pilgrimage today demonstrates how some religious landscapes and spaces of Aya Yorgi and al Batiye have remained important through political and religious movements, by literature, media, specialist tourist markets and private enterprise. Finally, this study reveals a picture of noticeably wide variety of groups and individuals visiting them

Countries in Middle-Near East and Balkans have a similar concept of sainthood, and parallelism in shrine policies, naturally, as a result of long centuries of common history and interaction. Common history which is a four centuries of Ottoman domination in the region is not the major focus on or the main rationale behind this study, yet, shared social history and the regional proximity of modern day locations of these two shrines are the primary factors why I selected them as fields of study. Despite the "deep rooted kinship" of the territorial resemblances of modern Turkey and Lebanon, for almost one hundred years, they have been evolving in their own separate lines and pace. Turkey has almost managed to become a nation state after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, less heterogeneous in terms of religious confessions and growing prevalence of Sunni Islam in public and private sphere along with ambivalent secularism. However Lebanon on the other hand is a small country in the region with sectarian political structural system where the confessions sometimes act like different ethnical entities and creating a nation is still a goal matter. Therefore via this study I aim to clarify if the difference between two countries' demographic, linguistic, and socio political constructions have impact on the attribution of meaning to recently popular anthropological research area: "shared sacred sites" The shared sacred sites that I am scrutinizing throughout this study are both dedicated to Saint George - an outstanding saintly figure all around Middle East, Europe and Balkans: Aya Yorgi is the Turco-Greek name for Saint George and Mar Jirjes (Jiryes, Gerges) is the name given to the same saint in Lebanese Arabic. These sites are also popular pilgrimage spots that receive a great number of pilgrim-tourists throughout the year either in daily basis or for certain calenderical rituals. Saint George and Khidr are seen as two counterparts. Their relation with each other has been frequently questioned by a number of academics or clerics since the beginning of 20th century as in the example of Husluck, Kanaan and Ocak. The attempts to understand the connections between these two holy figures and the ritual practices around the shrines dedicated to "two saints in one body" have not been concluded yet:

Khidr who has drunk of the Water of Life and teaches hidden knowledge to the prophet Moses according to the hadith literature, St George, Christian martyr and a dragon slayer. They seem to be standing in the opposite poles of a continuum. Ambiguous identification of such different personages with each other still causes confusion in the hearts and minds of researchers and the ordinary believers. No matter what was said before, in modern times defenders of “religious dialogue” and “coexistence” frequently refer to the common aspects of these two saints and embrace such unification as a symbol of common way. Others who are cautious about religious overlapping reject this commonality. To be precise, in contemporary Middle East and Anatolian context, in reality, not many people know much about these saints once considered being the same figures with different names. Many people even do not have slight idea about what do they stand for. Whereas it is somehow true that in Lebanon there are some people who still link al Khidr with George.

In the thesis, I also examine the relationship between place, healing and spirituality in the context of healing and well-being. Through a discussion of fieldwork at two sites in Turkey and Lebanon a framework is proposed for the investigation of pilgrimage sites of spiritual significance, detailing features such as connection, renewal, reproduction, participation and expectation. Water is an important ritual and healing element both at al Batiyeh and Aya Yogi. As it has already been shown in this study, the cult of Saint George as another major world spread hierophany includes the symbolism of water in itself. St. George is related to the beginning of summer, to rains and fertility. Also he carries the fame of being the savior of the maiden and the one who gave the water back to people killing the dragon. A connection between St George and the masculine principle of water which falls from the skies and comes as an active principle fertilizing the soil wouldn't be therefore too exaggerated. If water has been seen as a masculine and feminine principle as well, then the patronage of St George over the oratory cave of al Batiyeh offers a complex approach upon people's beliefs enhancing the power of the two symbols.

As my research shows, Aya Yorgi has become a site where ‘power and resistance find expression’. I found out that through Aya Yorgi visits and pilgrimages, secular women resist the power of the authorities determining how to practice Islam. Although informants were from different confessions of Christianity and expressed their diverse and sometimes contradictory views and rituals, Aya Yorgi offers a space where their worlds can converge. Against the disciplining presence of the Diyanet or ‘official’ Islam at the shrines and mosques by saying what is acceptable and what is not, women appeared to enjoy the greater sense of freedom of expression and the possibilities inherent in conducting their ‘internal’ worship or prayer in an environment free from the somewhat ‘threatening’ presence of males and the often judgmental male gaze. My fieldwork confirms that ‘whatever the vagaries of official positions, women’s worlds of custom and ritual have a vitality and resilience that continues to be fueled by their participants’ search for self-expression and. Aya Yorgi also turned into a ‘sacred’ space through rituals carried out by people who separate themselves from daily routine tasks albeit briefly.

In the case of Lebanon the co-existence in common sphere, explains why it is quite possible that a pious (or not) Muslim may come to pray at the Christian places of worship. There, Christians and Muslims live side by side with similar intentions. I would, however, hesitate to speak of sharing. There is a real but limited sharing: everyone remains what he/she is and acts in accordance with his own tradition. At al Batiyeh there is, however, a juxtaposition of the two beliefs. But even here the lines of demarcation are present and felt by all. Precisely this common background of popular devotion has entered into the very heart of the faith of one and the other. I have pointed out throughout the thesis that the interest in places or persons considered sacred is directed at the power of the sacred without regard to the personality and life of the person thus invoked. It then looks very much like an occult force, without face or identity. It is easy to recognize many elements of magic in the religious practices at the shrine. And the resulting mixture does not invite me to talk about sharing, even if there are no compartments. I have tried to demonstrate from examples that there exists a popular religiosity which crosses the lines between religions. I have limited myself to examples of practices of Christians and Muslims. I am convinced that if we broaden the scope, we

will find the same elements. This substratum of religiosity which ignores differences makes possible to explain why, in certain circumstances, the believer can go to places of worship of another religion or address holiness of figures belonging to a tradition that is not his own. The fact that different people come to seek in the same place what they need establishes nothing but a form of neighborhood. Customers who come to shop in the same store share practically nothing. But they can meet, greet each other, and perhaps create friendly human relationships. The fact that such neighborhoods are possible and can be observed quite frequently does not mean that the rituals of a popular religion always lead to this type of encounter. In an attempt to draw final conclusions obviously, the beauty of the locations is a matter of interest for the touristic trips but it is more than that. As in any act of perceiving the sacredness there must be the awareness of its existence and, if not that, then a belief in magic and in unexplainable by reason events. It is not a syncretism, as I showed above, but a bricolage of religious and unreligious attitudes corresponding to the human belief and hope that our life must not be only what we see with our eyes, what we get by our limited senses, what we understand with our limited knowledge. There must be something more as the first cause and the last effect remain unknown to the human mind. And in the search for that something more people follow paths that sometimes intersect with the paths of different others.

Key words: Turkey, Lebanon, Saint George, Mar Jirjis, saints, pilgrimage

Saint Georges : “Un Saint “Partagé” en Méditerranée ? Approche historique et anthropologique du pèlerinage (Turquie et Liban)

Résumé

Les peuples du bassin méditerranéen partagent depuis multimillénaires des manières de vivre et de pratiquer leur foi, qui résistent aux divisions religieuses et aux manipulations politiques. Le paysage religieux de la Méditerranée orientale est plus complexe et marqué par un foisonnement de formes de convergence interconfessionnelle moins éclatantes. Certains sanctuaires ambigus convoquent parfois les fidèles des trois religions monothéistes. Cette thèse souligne les transformations récentes du religieux et la conversion du regard anthropologique vers une lecture plus sensible aux changements économiques, politiques et culturels qui affectent rites et sanctuaires.

Bien que cette thèse porte sur deux études de cas particuliers, à savoir Aya Yorgi en Turquie et Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh au Liban, elle s'appuie sur une recherche multidisciplinaire pour définir un contexte plus large. Ces lieux sont explorés en profondeur grâce à une analyse qualitative, tout en prenant en compte des travaux parallèles concernant d'autres sites tels que Lod (Israël), Edirne (Turquie) et Athènes (Grèce). Partant de la recherche de la spiritualité autour des sites dédiés à saint Georges, mes découvertes révèlent des aspirations spirituelles et séculières et suggèrent une déconstruction de pôles de sens tels que sacré et profane, mouvement et lieu, religion et laïcité, communauté et individu. En s'appuyant sur diverses approches méthodologiques, cette étude arrive à la conclusion que, contrairement à la perception commune, les formes traditionnelles de rituels religieux ne sont pas nécessairement incompatibles avec la culture de consommation moderne. À travers celle-ci, les traditions religieuses sont en train de se revitaliser. La popularité renouvelée du pèlerinage aujourd'hui montre comment certains paysages et espaces religieux comme ceux d'Aya Yorgi et d'Al Batiye sont restés importants grâce aux mouvements politiques et religieux, à la littérature, aux médias, aux marchés touristiques spécialisés et à l'entreprise privée. Enfin, cette étude révèle une image d'une grande diversité de groupes et d'individus qui les visitent.

Dans le monde universitaire occidental moderne, le sujet des saints et des pèlerinages « partagés » semble avoir été le plus clairement mis en évidence par un archéologue britannique vivant au début du siècle dernier et poursuivant des recherches à la British School d'Athènes, où il s'est concentré sur des sanctuaires ambigus dans les anciennes possessions ottomanes, principalement dans les Balkans et en Anatolie, avec un intérêt supplémentaire pour la Syrie et la Palestine. FW Hasluck (1878-1920) a étudié ces sites avec un regard particulier sur la religion populaire turque et le transfert de sanctuaires de tradition religieuse à une autre, en plus des cas de parrainage multi-religieux continu et fluide sur un même sanctuaire, comme c'est aussi le cas dans cette étude. Son œuvre, portant sur le christianisme et l'islam sous les sultans, est la plus complète de ce genre. Depuis les dernières décennies du XXe siècle jusqu'à nos jours, l'intérêt pour le pèlerinage partagé s'est accru, notamment à partir de la nouvelle théorie anthropologique de la tolérance antagoniste proposée par Robert Hayden et dans l'ouvrage collectif *Religions Traversées: Lieux saints partagés entre chrétiens, musulmans et juifs en Méditerranée* sous la direction de Maria Couroucli et Dionigi Albera. Cet ouvrage couvre la pratique de lieux sacrés partagés autour du bassin méditerranéen, des Balkans à l'Égypte et à l'Afrique du Nord avec diverses formes de pratiques spatiales, une multiplicité de peuples, de religions, de motivations, d'opinions, de gestes, de récits,

d'aspirations. Par conséquent, inévitablement, une gamme d'intentions et de dynamiques communautaires.

Notre étude sera une contribution essentielle aux études du pèlerinage et à l'anthropologie sociale. La bibliographie à ce jour montre que les pratiques de syncrétisme et les cultes à Saint George et Hızır en Turquie ont été fréquemment étudiés par des chercheurs en histoire et en théologie. Mais peu d'études ont été réalisées en appliquant la méthode anthropologique et ethnographique (Couroucli, 2012 et Turk, 2010). En outre, je n'ai retrouvé aucun autre article universitaire portant principalement sur Aya Yorgi (Büyükada), mis à part celui de Maria Couroucli (2012). Pour cette raison, cette étude ne sera pas une répétition de ce qui a été fait auparavant, mais elle sera un éclairage de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur de ce site de pèlerinage partagé. Quant à Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh au Liban, à part quelques lignes dans l'étude de Haddad (2009), personne n'en a jamais spécifiquement parlé. L'analyse détaillée de ce sanctuaire pourrait donc mener à d'autres études connexes. La particularité de cette étude réside dans le fait qu'elle mène une comparaison entre la Turquie et le Liban. Aucun chercheur jusqu'ici n'a comparé deux sites de pèlerinage dédiés à saint Georges et à Hızır, qui se développent dans deux pays distincts, comme la Turquie et le Liban.

Méthodologie

En tant que phénomène complexe, l'espace sacré est chaotique, d'un côté, souvent rempli d'acteurs individuels opérant de différentes manières, tout en répétant ses motifs, ce que je cherche à démêler et à décrire ici. Afin de créer un contexte plus en profondeur (similaire à la notion de «thick description» de Geertz, rendant l'explication plus compréhensible au niveau culturel), j'adopte une approche ethnographique.

Pour mener une analyse de la pratique spatiale il faut connaître l'histoire, le lieu et les lieux que l'on cherche à comprendre et les analyser à travers une lentille particulière qui fournit au chercheur et au lecteur les outils nécessaires pour commenter les pratiques et les espaces de pèlerinage et de dévotion multi-religieuse en Turquie et au Liban.. Dans la deuxième étape, la rencontre directe avec le (s) site (s) est mise en évidence, en appliquant une méthode en trois étapes. En d'autres termes, (a) un cadre d'interprétation est défini en même temps que l'entrée dans le domaine et en préparation de celle-ci et (b) une interprétation de l'importance des données est déjà fournie (allant légèrement au-delà du territoire de la troisième partie). du cycle, l'application des connaissances acquises (c) qui est finalement synthétisée dans la conclusion.

Les études de cas se concentrent sur les pratiques d'Aya Yorgi, comparées à celles du sanctuaire de Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh. Dans notre approche, nous tentons de répondre à une série de questions: qu'est-ce qui rend ces lieux sacrés? Quel est le rôle de leur beauté et de leur attrait esthétique? Qu'est-ce qui est partagé sur ces sites: espace, religion ou magie? Quelle est la place de la magie dans les rituels religieux dans ces sites? Est-il possible de parler de syncrétisme ou d'hybridité dans ces deux cas? De quelle manière la construction politique, historique et religieuse de deux pays affecte-t-elle la formation du pèlerinage ? Pourquoi les musulmans pénètrent-ils dans le territoire chrétien en visitant leurs sanctuaires, tandis que les chrétiens font rarement l'inverse? Quelles sont les lignes rouges et les frontières religieuses? Peut-on parler de *communitas* au sens de Victor Turner? Quels sont les signifiants culturels en termes de pratiques rituelles à Sarba et à Büyükada? (Le parallélisme entre les deux pèlerinages, les deux lieux, les sites, les gestes, avec toutes les différences et les similitudes). Quelle est l'importance du culte de l'eau dans les deux sites? Cette dévotion est-elle exclusive pour eux? Quels autres sites sacrés visitent-ils? Quels sont les antécédents et les histoires des pèlerins? Quels sont les motifs derrière eux pour faire le pèlerinage?

Comment pouvons-nous analyser le contenu et le style des souhaits écrits sur le papier dans Büyükada? Peut-on appliquer une analyse sémiotique sur les souhaits écrits? Peut-on considérer ces textes comme un nouveau genre linguistique? Peut-on s'interroger sur les motivations des écrivains, leur sexe, leur âge, leur statut social, leur niveau d'instruction de manière sociolinguistique? Quel est le rôle du clergé et du cadre institutionnel (prêtres et autres)? Comment ces sites sont-ils représentés dans les médias sociaux et télévisés? Quels sont les souvenirs des lieux particuliers et pourquoi? Ces lieux inspirent-ils l'émotion religieuse à cause des souvenirs qu'ils évoquent? Quelle est la signification de l'architecture religieuse? Ces lieux sont-ils remarquables en raison de la valeur symbolique de leur forme ou de leur structure? Quel est l'élément interreligieux de la fréquentation des sanctuaires? De quelles communautés viennent les pèlerins? Comment parviennent-ils à partager les lieux sacrés, à pratiquer spatialement aux mêmes endroits? Quels sont les récits autour du lieu, y compris ceux qui ne sont pas directement liés à la pratique, mais se rapportant à la scène culturelle plus large? Enfin, en quoi ces espaces se comparent-ils ou s'opposent-ils?

Les pays du Proche-Orient et spécifiquement « méditerranéen » à la suite de longs siècles d'histoire commune et d'interaction entre chrétiens et musulmans, partagent une même conception de la sainteté et montrent des similitudes dans les politiques du sanctuaire. L'histoire commune, qui représente quatre siècles de domination ottomane dans la région, n'est pas l'objectif majeur ou la principale raison de cette étude, mais l'histoire sociale partagée et la proximité régionale de ces deux sanctuaires les ont désignés comme champs de recherche. En dépit de la « parenté profondément enracinée » des ressemblances territoriales de la Turquie et du Liban modernes, ils évoluent depuis près de cent ans dans leurs propres lignes et rythmes. La Turquie a presque réussi à devenir un Etat-nation après la chute de l'Empire ottoman, moins hétérogène en termes de confession religieuse avec une prévalence croissante de l'islam sunnite dans la sphère publique et privée, parallèlement à une laïcité ambivalente. Le Liban, d'autre part, est un petit pays de la région doté d'un système politique structurellement sectaire, où les confessions agissent parfois comme des entités ethniques différentes, et la création d'une nation y reste un objectif à atteindre. Par cette étude, je cherche donc à savoir si la différence entre les constructions démographique, linguistique et sociopolitique de deux pays a un impact sur le sens à attribuer à un domaine de recherche anthropologique récent: « les sites sacrés partagés ». Tout au long de cette étude nous nous consacrons à deux sites dédiés à saint George - une figure sainte exceptionnelle dans tout le Moyen-Orient, l'Europe et les Balkans: Aya Yorgi est le nom turco-grec pour saint Georges et Mar Jirjes (Jiryes, Gerges) en arabe libanais. Ces sites sont également des lieux de pèlerinages populaires qui accueillent un grand nombre de touristes pèlerins tout au long de l'année, soit quotidiennement, soit pour certains rituels fixes dans le calendrier.

Table des chapitres

Le premier chapitre traite de la manière dont, dans les temps anciens et modernes, la spiritualité et la géographie ont souvent été étroitement liées. Des exemples tirés de Büyükada et Sarba montrent comment certaines formes de paysages façonnent les systèmes de croyances à différentes échelles. Dans ce même chapitre, les paysages d'Aya Yorgi et d'Al Batiyeh sont également traités dans une perspective historique comme des manuscrits sur lesquels est inscrite l'histoire culturelle de la région, avec quelques traces du passé. Les thèmes clés comprennent l'apparence physique générale du paysage, les eaux, les roches et les rives de la mer qui jouent un rôle dans le culte et fournissent les signes les plus visibles de l'impact du paysage sur la religion.

Le deuxième chapitre porte principalement sur Saint George et secondairement sur Hızır (Khidr) et Elijah. Il tourne autour de deux axes. Le premier concerne l'association étroite entre l'oral et l'écrit, dans l'hagiographie des saints et les récits de miracles. Dans le deuxième axe, le culte de ces saints a été examiné et certaines des différences ont été mises en évidence. Il est possible d'examiner les similitudes entre les modèles narratifs trouvés dans les contes des deux traditions en Turquie et au Liban. Le chapitre explore également les thèmes entrelacés des visites de sanctuaires avec des témoignages et des réminiscences des cultes de saint Georges et de Hızır dans l'ère moderne, soulignant les similitudes et les différences dans quatre endroits ou événements consacrés à ces figures saintes: Aya Yorgi, Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh, Festival Kakava Hıdırellez à Edirne et en Israël (Lod et al Khader). Prises ensemble, ces observations offrent une perspective sur la manière dont une approche anthropologique peut contribuer à la compréhension des pratiques de pèlerinage modernes profondément enracinées. Il vise également à montrer comment la relation entre la modernité avec tous ses problèmes et la pratique religieuse peut être conceptualisée. Plusieurs parties du chapitre traitent directement de la manière dont la politique et l'organisation sociale modernes affectent la matérialité des sanctuaires, la survie et la continuité des cérémonies de pèlerinage et les pratiques qui les entourent.

Le troisième chapitre abordera d'abord théoriquement les phénomènes de pèlerinage, puis examinera les principales caractéristiques et les changements radicaux des pèlerinages d'Aya Yorgi et de Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh au cours de la période moderne, notamment dans le cadre de la transformation de la société turque et libanaise. Tout en discutant du pèlerinage et de la modernité, les impacts nationaux sur le comportement religieux sont explorés. La dernière partie du chapitre élargit la question en tenant compte des tendances de consommation et de l'éthique séculière de la culture et de la politique modernes en Turquie et au Liban.

Dans le dernier chapitre, la question principale est: aujourd'hui, au Liban et en Turquie (post) «séculier» et basé sur la confession, pourquoi et avec quelles motivations les gens vont-ils encore sur ces sites? Alors que cette question se concentre sur le retour des nouveaux pèlerins dans la culture populaire et les médias sociaux, elle aborde et met également en évidence les contextes sociétaux plus larges dans lesquels cette vulgarisation a lieu. Agissant comme un «baromètre» socioculturel, comment les sites de pèlerinage d'Aya Yorgi et d'Al Batiyeh reflètent ces différences et comment leur appréhension prend-elle de nouvelles formes? Et comment la religion, la migration spirituelle, la foi, la consommation, la santé, le tourisme contribuent-ils aux nouveaux mouvements religieux et à l'évolution des environnements de lieux de pèlerinage?

Aya Yorgi & Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh: un saint deux sanctuaires

Aya Yorgi

La principale méthode de collecte de données tout au long du processus de doctorat (2015-2018) a été l'observation participante. J'étais allé plusieurs fois à Büyükada pour des excursions d'un week-end avant d'être officiellement inscrit comme doctorant à l'EHESS. Par conséquent, j'avais déjà une petite familiarité. Cependant, lorsque le processus de recherche a commencé officiellement après mon inscription, en décembre 2015, naturellement, le lien entre moi et Büyükada s'est renforcé. En tant qu'observateur participant, j'ai examiné Büyükada pendant 4 mois afin de connaître la structure de base et l'atmosphère de l'île en tant que chercheur. Cette période couvrait principalement les mois de mars, avril et mai 2016 et juillet 2017. Comme je réside dans le district de Tuzla à Istanbul, à 20 km de distance, je visitais l'île deux fois par semaine: une journée en semaine et deux nuits le week-end pour faire l'expérience de différentes dynamiques. J'ai mené des entretiens non structurés

face à face avec des populations locales, des policiers municipaux, des restaurateurs et des cafetiers, une réceptionniste d'hôtel, des boutiques de souvenirs et des guichets de bateau à vapeur et des cochers de calèche (faytoncular). J'ai également utilisé les contacts téléphoniques comme moyen d'interviewer dans les cas où certaines discussions ne permettaient pas de parler en personne. Le chef de la communauté juive de Büyükada Verda Habib, le mufti KamilTuncel et l'auteur de la Büyükada-Bir Ada Öyküsü, Semiha Akpınar, font partie des personnalités que j'ai jointes par téléphone.

Bien que j'aie participé aux pèlerinages le jour de la fête de St Georges (Aya Yorgi), le 23 avril et le jour de sainte Thècle (Aya Thecla) le 24 septembre, avec un intérêt personnel, la participation avec un regard académique plus curieux a commencé en 2015 afin d'écrire la proposition de mon projet. Les résultats de cette thèse proviennent donc de quatre pèlerinages différents entre 2015 et 2018. Je crois que l'un des plus grands défis pour un anthropologue est d'étudier les événements ou pèlerinages folkloriques annuels. Cela ressemble à une performance qui nécessite une année complète de répétition et ensuite de la scène. C'est la seule et unique chance. Par conséquent, je me suis toujours senti tellement stressé à l'approche des fêtes. Les jours de fête ont toujours été massives à Büyükada. Je suis toujours allé sur l'île un soir avant et j'ai essayé de rencontrer les premiers arrivants et j'ai réalisé les entretiens approfondis avec ces pèlerins dans une période relativement longue. Dans la majorité des cas, je les ai rencontrés dans les hôtels où je logeais principalement et dans les cafétérias, les invitant à prendre un café ou dans le hall de l'hôtel. Je me suis toujours présenté en toute transparence, leur ai fait savoir qui j'étais et ce que je cherchais pour établir un rapport et les laisser se sentir à l'aise. Bien que j'eusse mes notes et mes questions structurées, la conversation se déroulait généralement de manière spontanée. J'ai allumé l'enregistreur vocal avec leur permission.

Les jours de fêtes, je suis allé à l'église d'Aya Yorgi pour attraper la messe du matin à sept heures, principalement avec des voitures à cheval, partageant le tarif avec les pèlerins comme des tarifs panayır (jour de fête) plus chers que la normale. Ce partage m'a permis d'avoir un contact plus étroit avec les pèlerins. Cependant, le site de pèlerinage n'est pas facilement accessible. L'espace central où se déroule le pèlerinage est large et peut être divisé en deux grandes stations et un sentier de 900 mètres combinant les deux: la pente Lunapark-Aya Yorgi- l'église Aya Yorgi. Cette division spatiale évoque les théories rituelles à trois niveaux de Van Gennep et de Victor Turner dans le sens de la séparation, du seuil et de la réunion. Par conséquent, tout au long de la journée, j'étais principalement en mode "descente et ascension":

1. Grimper le chemin rapidement pour atteindre la messe dans l'église vers 6 heures
2. Descendre à la place Lunapark avant que la foule ne s'accumule. Observer les préparatifs préliminaux des pèlerins et des autres
3. Marcher lentement sur le chemin avec les pèlerins, en prenant des pauses fréquentes
4. Au sommet

Dans et autour de l'église, j'ai répété ces étapes trois fois en 2015 et deux fois en 2016 (voir photo ci-dessous).

Mar Jirjes Al Batiyeh

J'ai rencontré l'oratoire de Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh grâce aux conseils d'une amie et anthropologue libanaise, Nour Farra Haddad, en 2013. Elle m'a présenté le site et, de manière surprenante, nous

savions qu'aucune étude académique approfondie n'avait été menée sur l'oratoire. J'ai visité le sanctuaire pendant tout le processus de recherche périodiquement. Bien que je sois allé plusieurs fois au Liban en tant que touriste, la première visite après avoir été officiellement inscrit au programme de doctorat a eu lieu la semaine du 20 au 24 avril 2016 pour observer la fête de St Georges. Puis je suis revenu du 21 au 2 juillet 2016 pour dix jours, y compris l'excursion quotidienne dans les sanctuaires du Liban. Cette visite a principalement formé le cœur de la recherche. Ensuite, une autre visite a été faite à l'hiver 2017 pour dix jours: du 25 janvier au 4 février. J'ai effectué la dernière visite au Liban entre le 10 et le 20 juillet 2017 pour conclure le travail sur le terrain. Cependant, je suis resté en contact avec les religieux et les habitants de Sarba entre-temps par des appels téléphoniques et des messages courts. Pendant le travail sur le terrain, je suis resté dans une "résidence" locale à Sarba, à quelques centaines de mètres de Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh. En ce qui concerne les entretiens, je ne me suis pas tenu à une série de questions strictes, mais j'ai surtout eu des entretiens informels avec les visiteurs des sanctuaires. Toutefois, en ce qui concerne les "personnes les plus sérieuses": les religieux, les personnalités, etc., j'ai préparé des questions ouvertes à l'avance. J'ai enregistré les interviews principalement avec un enregistreur vocal avec la permission des répondants. La photographie a été le principal instrument de documentation de cette recherche et toutes les photos ont été prises par moi. Je n'ai rencontré aucune restriction ou barrière linguistique en termes de communication car le Liban est un pays multilingue où l'anglais et le français sont largement parlés dans tout le pays. De plus, mon niveau intermédiaire en arabe libanais m'a aidé dans les entretiens avec des «arabophones» uniquement monolingues. En conséquence, j'ai rarement demandé l'aide d'un traducteur.

Terrains secondaires

En dehors de Büyükada et Sarba, j'étais sûr que je n'aurais pas pu écrire un livre fiable sur saint Georges si je n'avais pas visité Lod où se trouve sa tombe et Bethléem où une église lui est consacrée dans un village portant le nom de son homologue (al Khidr). Je ne pense pas non plus que j'aurais pu contribuer à la compréhension du culte d'Hızır si je n'avais pas participé aux célébrations de Hızirellez à Edirne. Et je ne pouvais pas être sûr des pratiques rituelles du jour de fête d'Aya Yorgi dans le passé si je n'avais pas écouté les témoignages de personnes grecques (Rum) à Athènes qui résidaient autrefois à Büyükada.

Ethnographie Numérique

Aya Yorgi est largement représentée sur Instagram avec des perspectives variées: comme lieu de vacances et de divertissement avec les plages et les clubs, comme destination de voyage et de détente pour les individus, amis et familles, lieu de pèlerinage, pour faire des vœux et prier. Pendant une semaine, entre le 14 et le 18 août 2017, j'ai analysé deux lieux d'étiquettes d'Instagram où des photos portant le label #AyaYorgi et #Aya Yorgikilisesi ont été affichées publiquement à cette époque. J'ai choisi ces deux zones virtuelles car elles montraient une grande quantité de photos représentant l'église et la fête et parce qu'elles étaient si grandes, elles m'ont offert la possibilité de tracer une fréquence de messages à temps pour pouvoir prouver une augmentation ou une diminution d'utilisateurs portant un intérêt à ce sujet.

Au moment de mon étude, #Aya Yorgi contenait/possédait 59 329 messages tandis que #Aya Yorgikilisesi affichait 2 345 messages publics. J'ai également visité d'autres lieux tels que #buyukada et d'autres plus petits comme #Aya Yorgimanastiri, mais j'ai décidé de ne pas les aborder car les images qui m'intéressaient n'étaient pas affichées de façon constante sur l'année. Néanmoins, la même image peut être vue à de nombreux endroits en même temps que les

étiquettes. Dans mon travail de terrain numérique, j'ai essayé d'éviter de compter deux fois la même image. Si je le comptais pour #Aya Yorgi, je ne le comptais pas pour l'autre tag, de sorte que le nombre de photos des deux lieux comptés ensemble puisse représenter un pourcentage de répartition correct en termes de catégories. Le nombre d'images sélectionnées et comptées des deux côtés est de 1200 au total: 537 de #Aya Yorgi et 673 de #Aya Yorgikilisesi. La durée de ces images est différente: sur #Aya Yorgi, j'ai commencé le décompte du 23 avril 2014 au 18 août 2017 alors que pour l'autre endroit, je n'ai rien trouvé avant le 22 mai 2016 alors j'ai commencé le comptage à partir de ce moment et ce, jusqu'au 18 août 2017.

Axes intersectants vs divergents d'Aya Yorgi et Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh

Dans ce chapitre, je vais essayer de montrer l'importance des paysages dans l'émergence de deux sites sacrés, en discutant des cadres conceptuels donnés par certains chercheurs. Ensuite, je vise à donner de brefs faits historiques à leur sujet. Analysons maintenant un site dont les paysages naturels spectaculaires ont été appréciés par les touristes et les pèlerins.

Dans son livre de grande envergure intitulé "Partageons les espaces sacrés de la Méditerranée" édité par Albera et Couroucli (2012), Maria Couroucli a écrit une section sur Aya Yorgi consacrée au travail de terrain ethnographique qu'elle a réalisé au début des années 90 et 2000. Je suis d'accord avec l'hypothèse de Maria Couroucli selon laquelle le sanctuaire d'Aya Yorgi a progressivement perdu ses liens privilégiés avec sa communauté d'origine, à savoir les Rhums, mais est devenu partie intégrante du patrimoine du vieil Istanbul. Cependant, je suis sceptique quant à l'attribution du pèlerinage de St George à la nostalgie croissante des Pax Ottomana? chez les citoyens turcs de nos jours. Elle déclare que:

A Istanbul, le fossé urbain / rural divise aujourd'hui ceux qui «connaissent» ceux qui ne possèdent aucun souvenir de la tradition locale. Les descendants des anciennes élites musulmanes urbaines d'Istanbul partagent une mémoire commune de la société multiculturelle de l'époque ottomane, que ne possédaient pas les migrants récents des provinces anatoliennes. On peut dire que les pèlerins à Prinkipo ont participé le 23 avril à la communauté imaginée d'Istanbul, ceux qui "se souviennent" de l'époque où la ville abritait les Turcs, les Grecs, les Arméniens et les Juifs. Ces souvenirs nourrissent une sorte de «nostalgie structurelle», des représentations et des discours actuels sur le passé en tant qu'Éden perdu.

Comme mentionné dans la section concernant les participants au pèlerinage d'Aya Yorgi, la grande majorité des visiteurs et des pèlerins qui se rendent au sanctuaire sont des musulmans laïcs et surtout des "Atatürkçü" qui suivent les idées modernistes de Mustafa Kemal, fondateur de la République de Turquie moderne. Toutes les personnalités laïques qui ont visé à la sécularisation de la Turquie sont apparues jusqu'ici opposées à toutes les conditions ottomanes. Pendant une grande partie du 20ème siècle, le terme ottoman a eu une connotation négative. L'Empire ottoman avait été «l'homme malade de l'Europe» démolé par les kémalistes pour construire l'État turc moderne. Concernant les participants à Aya Yorgi, l'État ottoman où la restauration de l'influence ottomane historique en tant que leader du monde islamique n'est rien de plus qu'un cauchemar ou une idéologie contre laquelle il faut lutter. L'État ottoman est loin d'évoquer l'idée de «Pax» ou «existence multiculturelle», mais un régime autoritaire sous la forme d'un sultan. Contrairement à ce que Couroucli a déclaré, pour les musulmans laïcs à Aya Yorgi, l'Empire ottoman est aussi un type de nationalisme à "forte dose" d'Islam, et il fait davantage appel aux conservateurs religieux. Un autre point est basé sur les témoignages des Grecs de Büyükada que j'ai interviewés à Athènes et les journaux des voyageurs qui ont visité l'île à l'époque ottomane. Je n'ai pas trouvé de preuve

historique claire de la visite d'Aya Yorgi par les musulmans en grand nombre comme aujourd'hui. Notant que les premières élites musulmanes se sont installées sur l'île vers la fin du XIXe siècle et que l'Empire ottoman s'est effondré dans la deuxième décennie du XXe siècle. Il restait manifestement peu de temps pour "chérir" la coexistence et la participation partagée à un éventuel pèlerinage à la Saint-Georges. Un des informateurs, à 87 ans, à Athènes, m'a dit que "les beaux jours de la cohabitation et de la fraternité dans l'île de Büyükada se sont déroulés entre 1923 et 1955, et pas à l'époque ottomane parce que presque tous les habitants de l'île étaient des non-musulmans. L'ère républicaine est passée "assez pacifiquement" jusqu'aux incidents brutaux des 6 et 7 septembre 1955 "

Comme mes recherches qui le montrent, Aya Yorgi est devenu un site où «le pouvoir et la résistance trouvent leur expression». J'ai découvert que grâce aux visites et aux pèlerinages d'Aya Yorgi, les femmes laïques résistent au pouvoir des autorités qui déterminent comment pratiquer l'islam. Bien que les informateurs provenaient de différentes confessions du christianisme et aient exprimé leurs vues et leurs rituels divers et parfois contradictoires, Aya Yorgi offre un espace où leurs mondes peuvent converger. Contre la présence disciplinaire du Diyanet ou de l'Islam «officiel» dans les sanctuaires et les mosquées en disant ce qui est acceptable et ce qui ne l'est pas, les femmes semblaient jouir du plus grand sentiment de liberté d'expression et des possibilités inhérentes à leur culte interne. la prière dans un environnement exempt de la présence quelque peu «menaçante» des hommes et du regard souvent nuancé des hommes. Mon travail sur le terrain confirme que «quels que soient les aléas des positions officielles, le monde des coutumes et des rituels des femmes a une vitalité et une résilience qui continuent d'être alimentées par la recherche de l'auto-expression et de l'autonomie» (Kandiyoti et Azimova 2003, p. 344). .

Aya Yorgi s'est également transformée en un espace «sacré» à travers des rituels exécutés par des personnes qui se séparent des tâches quotidiennes, souvent brièvement. Compte tenu des multiples approches et attentes des femmes dans les sanctuaires et de la variété et de la diversité des rationalisations issues de leurs récits d'Aya Yorgi, il était utile de considérer les sanctuaires comme des lieux de "mémoire sociale", récits circulant sur les merveilles du saint ou de l'espace (Louw 2007). En posant leurs propres visites contrairement à la fréquentation des mosquées par les hommes, de nombreuses femmes musulmanes semblaient suggérer que les sanctuaires étaient des espaces «féminins», apportant ainsi une compréhension sexuée de la religiosité tout en permettant aux femmes d'exprimer leur compréhension de l'islam. Des discussions de groupes et des observations de femmes au cours du pèlerinage d'Aya Yorgi ont rendu possible de connaître l'impact du sanctuaire sur d'autres aspects de la vie des femmes. La manière dont les femmes canalisent leurs expériences dans les sanctuaires pour ouvrir des espaces à une plus grande croissance spirituelle et personnelle était évidente dans les récits des femmes. D'après les riches récits personnels de certaines femmes choisies, par le biais du pèlerinage d'Aya Yorgi, les femmes ont accru leur confiance en soi, tout en incitant à repenser les relations entre les sexes, la connectivité avec des femmes partageant les mêmes intérêts et filles, femmes et professionnelles. J'ai également constaté une altération de la conscience et un engagement plus profond dans tous les domaines de la vie des femmes, défiant tous les stéréotypes de femmes en tant que réceptrices passives de discours religieux au lieu d'être leurs créateurs.

Dans le cas du Liban, la coexistence dans la sphère commune explique pourquoi il est fort possible qu'un musulman pieux (ou non) vienne prier dans les lieux de culte chrétiens. Là, chrétiens et musulmans cohabitent avec des intentions similaires. J'hésiterais cependant à parler de partage. Il y a un partage réel mais limité: chacun reste ce qu'il est et agit conformément à sa propre tradition. Chez Al Batiyeh, il y a cependant une juxtaposition des deux croyances. Il va beaucoup plus loin

que le quartier dans les lieux de pèlerinage. Mais même ici, les lignes de démarcation sont présentes et ressenties par tous. Ce fond commun de dévotion populaire est entré au cœur même de la foi de l'un et de l'autre. J'ai souligné tout au long de la thèse que l'intérêt pour des lieux ou des personnes considérés comme sacrés visait le pouvoir du sacré sans égard à la personnalité et à la vie de la personne ainsi invoquée. Il ressemble alors beaucoup à une force occulte, sans visage ni identité. Il est facile de reconnaître de nombreux éléments de magie dans les pratiques religieuses du sanctuaire. Ce sont les «forces occultes» qui menacent un être humain - n'importe qui - et contre lesquelles l'homme se défend par des pratiques mécaniques supposées agir toujours, quel que soit l'individu qui les entreprend. Dans plusieurs histoires de dévotion, j'ai rencontré à la fois la confiance et la peur. Lorsque quelqu'un est placé sous la protection de Saint-Georges, par exemple, il considère que ce saint est capable d'éliminer les mauvais esprits, de défendre cette personne en toutes circonstances, à condition toutefois qu'il reste fidèle. La force invoquée peut être bénéfique, à condition que le rituel soit scrupuleusement respecté; sinon il se retourne contre celui qui l'a invoqué. Ainsi, une certaine indifférence religieuse devient possible: chaque élément de la religion est bon à utiliser, à condition qu'il donne l'apaisement recherché. Mais dans ces cas extrêmes, on peut se demander si c'est toujours le christianisme ou l'islam. Et le mélange résultant ne m'invite pas à parler de partage, même s'il n'y a pas de compartiments.

J'ai essayé de démontrer par des exemples qu'il existe une religiosité populaire qui traverse les frontières entre les religions. Je me suis limité aux exemples de pratiques des chrétiens et des musulmans. Je suis convaincu que si nous élargissons le champ d'application, nous trouverons les mêmes éléments. Ce substrat religieux qui ignore les différences permet d'expliquer pourquoi, dans certaines circonstances, le croyant peut se rendre dans des lieux de culte d'une autre religion ou s'adresser à des personnages appartenant à une tradition qui n'est pas la sienne. Le fait que des personnes différentes viennent chercher au même endroit ce dont elles ont besoin n'établit qu'une forme de voisinage. Les clients qui viennent faire leurs achats dans le même magasin ne partagent pratiquement rien. Mais ils peuvent se rencontrer, se saluer et créer des relations humaines amicales. Le fait que de tels quartiers soient possibles et puissent être observés assez fréquemment ne signifie pas que les rituels d'une religion populaire mènent toujours à ce type de rencontre. L'hypothèse inverse peut également être vérifiée: les rituels populaires peuvent être construits les uns contre les autres et servir largement à la construction d'une identité de groupe afin de mieux les distinguer. Dans ce cas, le rituel devient un puissant facteur de partitionnement. Ce n'est pas parce que ce qui se passe des deux côtés d'une frontière a des éléments similaires que la frontière sera moins imperméable. Je veux seulement montrer pourquoi un certain mélange peut se produire, en particulier dans un pays comme le Liban, où les différentes traditions sont connues de tous.

Selon Tweed (2006), la pratique religieuse se résume essentiellement à deux forces: traverser l'espace et le lieu. Le croisement fait référence au mouvement physique, tel que le pèlerinage, certains rituels spatiaux et le voyage spirituel indiquant un mouvement dans le temps et dans l'espace. Les traits distinctifs les plus importants d'Aya Yorgi et de Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh résident dans leur situation géographique et leurs caractéristiques morphologiques. Aya Yorgi est située au sommet d'une colline sur une île, mais Al Batiyeh est située sur la rive de la mer Méditerranée. Bien qu'elles soient toutes deux dédiées au même saint (St George), Aya Yorgi est un monastère qui revêt une importance historique et architecturale, tandis qu'Al Batiyeh est une grotte naturelle entourée d'un parc public relativement récent. En raison de son emplacement difficile, Aya Yorgi n'est pas facilement accessible et nécessite une série de moyens de transport modernes et traditionnels. Al Batiyeh, d'autre part, peut être atteint beaucoup plus facilement grâce à son emplacement pratique. Cependant, Aya Yorgi accueille un nombre beaucoup plus élevé de visiteurs

et de pèlerins en raison de sa popularité quotidienne et de ses pèlerinages temporels par rapport à Mar Jiryeh al Batiyeh.

L'eau est un élément rituel important à la fois à al Batiyeh et à Aya Yorgi. Contrairement aux eaux auto-entretenues d'Al Batiyeh qui peuvent être obtenues par les visiteurs sans aucune intervention officielle, l'accès aux ayazma (eaux saintes) d'Aya Yorgi est restreint par les autorités de l'église en raison des règles de sécurité. L'eau sacrée est apportée par le gardien en bouteilles, à partir de l'ayazma qui se trouve sous le monastère à la demande des visiteurs pèlerins. Comme cela a déjà été montré dans cette étude, le culte de Saint-Georges, autre grand monde répandu dans la hiérophanie, comprend le symbolisme de l'eau en soi. St. George est liée au début de l'été, aux pluies et à la fertilité. Il porte également la renommée d'être le sauveur de la jeune fille et celui qui a redonné l'eau aux gens qui ont tué le dragon. Une connexion entre saint Georges et le principe masculin de l'eau qui tombe du ciel et qui sert de principe actif à la fertilisation du sol ne serait donc pas trop exagérée. Si l'eau a également été considérée comme un principe masculin et féminin, le patronage de St George sur la grotte oratoire d'Al Batiyeh offre une approche complexe de la croyance des gens, renforçant la puissance des deux symboles.

Comme mentionné dans la thèse, l'eau joue un rôle crucial dans la sacralisation et la popularité d'Aya Yorgi et d'Al Batiyeh. Une fois ouverte à la visite du public, Aya Yorgi a depuis longtemps fermé les portes de son ayazma pour des raisons de sécurité. Le prêtre du monastère a affirmé que les visiteurs avaient intentionnellement ou non porté atteinte aux icônes et aux murs de l'ayazma. Alors qu'Aya Yorgi restreint l'accès à l'eau bénite, Al Batiyeh enrichit et superpose sa popularité en fournissant de l'eau portable aux visiteurs. Il y a une fontaine dont tout le monde peut bénéficier indépendamment des motivations de la visite. Le 24 juin 2018, jour de la fête de Mar Youhanna (St John), Al Batiyeh a de nouveau organisé une messe après de longues années de silence pour revivifier l'une des plus anciennes coutumes du village, sous la présidence de l'évêque Paul Rohanna. la collaboration de la municipalité de Jounieh et le réveil d'Al Batiyeh. "La chorale du mouvement marial - Jawkat al Harakat al Maryamiyeh-Sarba" a chanté des hymnes et des chansons liturgiques sur le podium.

Aya Yorgi et al Batiyeh divergent en termes confessionnels. Aya Yorgi est un monastère orthodoxe sous les auspices du patriarcat œcuménique d'Istanbul. Considérant que, en termes pastoraux, Al Batiyeh est un sanctuaire appartenant à la paroisse patriarcale maronite (catholique) de Sarba et qu'il est dirigé par la fondation caritative (waqf). Aya Yorgi est une église officielle où les clercs sont visibles et présents dans les jours ordinaires, mais presque invisibles tout au long de la fête, offrant aux pèlerins un espace et un temps relativement libres pour observer certains règlements et codes de conduite. Par contre, contrairement à Aya Yorgi, Al Batiyeh ressemble plus à un espace spirituel non officiel, à une grotte de sanctuaire naturelle entourée d'un parc public, mais le sanctuaire, tout comme Aya Yorgi, permet aux visiteurs de se comporter librement. (Dans certains règlements qui protègent l'ambiance du sanctuaire) par rapport à une institution religieuse dirigée par des religieux.

Aya Yorgi et al Batiyeh sont des sanctuaires de pèlerinage mettant fortement l'accent sur les dévotions religieuses, mais avec un certain nombre de caractéristiques pour attirer les touristes laïcs. Ils fonctionnent tous deux comme centres de dévotion et d'attractions touristiques religieuses en raison de diverses combinaisons de caractéristiques historiques, artistiques et scéniques, et de lieux où les festivals religieux constituent la principale attraction, comme dans le cas d'Aya Yorgi.

Sur Büyükkada et à Sarba, j'ai observé une transition entre la fête traditionnelle de St George et les festivals modernes à multiples facettes. La journée de pèlerinage d'Aya Yorgi se transforme en un carnaval animé à travers les parodies et les représentations morales de groupes de théâtre évangéliques. Les missionnaires évangéliques atteignent la liberté de manifestation dans l'espace public malgré les conflits mineurs entre les autorités de l'Église orthodoxe. À Sabra, le jour de la sainteté est "célébré" par une association locale de la société civile en fusionnant les anciennes coutumes du village dans un format de fête moderne. Cependant, les deux festivals portent de toute évidence une nature carnalesque marquée par des manifestations d'excès et de grotesque et où certains groupes peuvent exister brièvement au-delà du contrôle de l'État et de l'Église.

Leurs contextes culturels et économiques contemporains sont quelque peu ambigus, car les frontières perçues ne sont pas claires. Ils reçoivent tous deux des touristes spirituels ou du patrimoine dont les motivations sont la curiosité, l'intérêt culturel et la quête d'un nouveau sens dans la vie, ainsi que les visiteurs traditionnels qui croient au pouvoir du sanctuaire. Il convient toutefois de noter que cette croyance des visiteurs traditionnels n'est pas ancrée dans la foi mais dans la conception personnelle, comme en témoigne leur tendance à faire des demandes spécifiques plutôt qu'à prier formellement. Pour les touristes laïcs observés à Aya Yorgi, leur voyage est une forme de divertissement qui n'est pas sans rappeler le cinéma, le théâtre ou la télévision. Ce type de visiteur apprécie son voyage car il rétablit ses facultés physiques et mentales et procure un sentiment général de bien-être. Il leur fournit également une expérience authentique, distincte de leur vie quotidienne et de la réalité sociale normale. En effet, la beauté du jardin d'Al Batiyeh et la beauté des paysages d'Aya Yorgi font de l'expérience une expérience qui, pour de nombreux visiteurs, dépasse largement leur quotidien. Il montre également comment les différentes motivations des visiteurs peuvent influencer les différentes activités des visiteurs et l'espace d'activité qu'ils définissent.

Selon Turner, le but ultime du pèlerin est la réalisation des *communitas*. *Communitas* est la «confrontation directe, immédiate et totale des identités humaines, qui, lorsqu'elle se produit, tend à faire croire à ceux qui la vivent que l'humanité est une communauté homogène, non structurée et libre» (Turner, 1973, p. 193). un sentiment fort et soudain d'être une partie unique mais égale de la race humaine. *Communitas* est le sentiment qu'un individu et ses compagnons de route pèlerins transcendent temporairement les rôles sociaux hiérarchiques qui servent souvent à les diviser dans leur vie quotidienne, ainsi que les arrangements de ces positions et statuts que nous appelons «structure sociale», phase ambiguë lorsque les conventions sociales traditionnelles sont suspendues (sinon inversées), que la sensation fugace de *communitas* émerge. C'est un sentiment d'unité et de camaraderie qui lie le groupe d'initiés, indépendamment de leur statut social antérieur, de leur pouvoir politique ou économique ou de leur appartenance à une classe; reconnaissance que malgré les différences sociales, tous sont les mêmes. Cependant, je n'ai trouvé aucun support pour la théorie de Turner, ni pendant le cas d'Aya Yorgi, qui est un pèlerinage collectif temporel, ni dans le cas d'Al Batiyeh, qui peut être considéré comme une visite individuelle quotidienne; au contraire, j'ai souvent vu le renforcement des frontières et des distinctions sociales dans le contexte du pèlerinage, plutôt que leur atténuation ou leur dissolution. Mais bien sûr, je ne veux pas dire que la notion de *communitas* ne se retrouve pas dans certains cas partiels.

Mais à Aya Yorgi, je suggère d'utiliser un terme appelé «*communitas* sous contrainte» lors de la marche silencieuse vers le sanctuaire sur la pente, car il n'y a pas d'autre moyen ou moyen de transport pour atteindre le sommet que le service des véhicules pour handicapés. Tout le monde,

quel que soit son statut, doit utiliser ses pieds pour gravir le chemin. Mais cette *communitas* contraignante pourrait se dissoudre si un système de téléphérique est construit dans un avenir proche. Pendant le pèlerinage, à Aya Yorgi et à Al Batiyeh également, différents groupes (laïcs, musulmans, chrétiens et nouveaux participants) ne se mêlent pas aux autres et se séparent délibérément des autres groupes, ce qui conduit au factionnalisme mais pas à la concurrence. En résumé, le concept de *communitas* n'a guère de valeur pour expliquer la qualité essentiellement divisante du pèlerinage d'Aya Yorgi et d'Al Batiyeh et je suggère que dans de telles circonstances, il vaut mieux voir la communauté, et non la *communitas*, comme la marque du pèlerinage. Il ne faut pas nier que certaines personnes communiquent entre elles, appelez-vous les unes les autres, frère ou sœur, mais celles-ci restent minimes, voire exceptionnelles.

Comme je l'ai illustré dans la thèse, les ex-voto d'Aya Yorgi et al Batiyeh peuvent être regroupés en deux types différents: a) les votifs constitués d'actions ou de choses matérielles qui sont vouées au pouvoir divin ou à St George pour son intercession avec le divin, en échange d'un miracle espéré, (b) des votives offertes en remerciement pour les prières déjà exaucées. À Aya Yorgi, parallèlement aux offrandes votives orthodoxes traditionnelles, nous observons la juxtaposition d'objets relativement nouveaux et inventés (*dilekliks*) et symboliques portant les résidus des traditions du temple anatolien en raison de la migration interne à Istanbul. D'autre part, à Al Batiyeh, les offres votives consistent principalement en *realia*. En plus du matériel, les ex-votos al Batiyeh reçoivent des offrandes comportementales ou performatives telles que le service du *ndr* et du sacrifice de sang pour le sanctuaire, même si cela est rare.

Les prières d'Aya Yorgi peuvent être documentées telles qu'elles sont écrites sur les papiers et en dehors de celles accumulées dans la "boîte à souhaits", beaucoup d'autres peuvent être trouvées dispersées autour du sanctuaire. Cependant, à Al Batiyeh, une telle documentation n'a pas été possible car les prières sont généralement muettes ou orales. Cependant, il n'est pas impossible de trouver des formes de prières écrites dans les creux du sanctuaire. Je me suis surtout attardé sur les témoignages oraux que j'ai recueillis pendant le travail de terrain. Ce ne serait pas faux si je suggère qu'à Aya Yorgi le but de la prière soit généralement de satisfaire des besoins matériels tels que l'argent, la maison, etc. Comme le montre le chapitre connexe, le mariage et la recherche d'une épouse sont une autre demande fréquente des pèlerines. Ils ne prient pas seulement pour leur propre bien mais aussi pour le bien des autres, les prières sont donc des motifs à la fois pétitionnaires et intercesseurs. Selon les pèlerins, il n'y a rien de mal à chercher un gain matériel à travers leurs prières, car certains soutiennent que c'est une façon "égoïste" et "inférieure" de prier. Les exemples de prière à al Batiyeh semblent quant à eux davantage liés à la qualité de la vie et proviennent surtout des cris désespérés des croyants qui se sentent "piégés" dans des problèmes insurmontables: la maladie, les difficultés de la luxation, etc.

Compte tenu de toutes ces pratiques mixtes sur les deux sites, dans quelle mesure pourrait-on parler de syncrétisme et à quoi servirait le syncrétisme dans ces deux cas? La définition traditionnelle du syncrétisme est liée au concept selon lequel la culture, la religion et l'ethnicité sont des éléments homogènes, qui peuvent être mélangés lorsqu'ils entrent en contact avec une autre culture, religion et groupes ethniques (Leopold et Jensen 2004: 2). Baird (2004: 48) déclare également que le terme syncrétisme n'est pratiquement jamais défini, même s'il est généralement considéré comme suffisamment clair. Pye (1971: 93) définit le syncrétisme comme une coexistence ambiguë temporaire d'éléments provenant de contextes religieux et autres dans un modèle religieux cohérent. Pour Vroom (2004: 110), le syncrétisme est un acte consistant à incorporer ou à essayer d'incorporer des éléments jusque-là rares et inhabituels dans les systèmes de croyances fondamentaux d'une tradition religieuse spécifique. Le syncrétisme implique la négociation et les

interfaces d'un nouvel élément dans un groupe différent. Le concept de syncrétisme est lié à la diffusion de la religion. Les éléments transmettant dans une certaine religion peuvent provenir d'autres sources religieuses ou séculières. Les causes et les conséquences du syncrétisme sont grandement influencées par les conditions culturelles, historiques, sociales et politiques existantes (Leopold et Jensen 2004: 3-4). En effet, le syncrétisme implique la coexistence d'éléments d'arrière-plan varié qui se mêlent avec discernement et constituent un caractère naturel et continu de tous les systèmes religieux. Pye (1971: 92) écrit ceci: Cela fait partie de la dynamique de ces traditions religieuses d'un contexte culturel à un autre, que ce soit géographiquement ou dans le temps. Mais comme les traditions bougent tout le temps et que le sens est continuellement remodelé, tout cas particulier de syncrétisme est nécessairement temporaire. Il n'est pas indispensable que tous les éléments impliqués dans des circonstances religieuses syncrétistes soient de nature religieuse. Certains de ces éléments peuvent être des substances politiques, philosophiques ou non religieuses (Pye 1971: 93). Cela implique un processus dans lequel "les croyances et les pratiques d'un courant religieux ou d'un monde et une vision de la vie sont adoptées par certaines personnes dans un autre courant religieux, puis assimilées ou répudiées" (Vroom 2004: 104).

Je suis profondément d'accord avec le point de vue de Pye en termes de "syncrétisme temporel" concernant les pratiques rituelles à Aya Yorgi et à Al Batiyeh. A Aya Yorgi, une femme musulmane qui récite des prières du Coran peut être considérée comme une forme subtile de syncrétisme pour une période de temps. Les éléments de l'islam (surats) et le christianisme (l'église) se rencontrent pendant une courte période, mais ils ne se mélangent pas ou ne se fondent pas assez pour créer une nouvelle forme de religiosité. L'un des gardiens du sanctuaire a déclaré avoir vu, très rarement, des femmes musulmanes voilées faire du "namaz" dans l'église car elles n'avaient pas le temps d'aller à la mosquée située au centre-ville, preuve d'un certain comportement syncrétique. Cependant, le fait qu'il ignore c'est que l'islam permet aux croyants de faire "namaz" dans n'importe quel cadre, même sans ablutions, si les conditions ne le permettent pas. Lorsque le temps de la prière obligatoire est trop court et que l'on ne peut pas remplir les conditions, faire la prière à temps a préséance sur les conditions: que ce soit un désert, un sommet de montagne ou une église. Un autre point à prendre en considération est celui des offes votives, telles que les ficelles et les chiffons, qui sont supposés avoir une connotation islamique. Ces offes sont considérées à tort comme islamiques par d'autres parce que, dans l'islam officiel textuel, de tels objets n'ont aucune valeur et sont plutôt perçus comme des superstitions. Par conséquent, les musulmans ne dévoilent pas le fil car c'est un rituel islamique ordonné mais plus précisément magique. Ils ne justifient pas que ce soit un acte religieux mais un type de magie dont ils sont même inconscients.

De même, à Al Batiyeh, les non-chrétiens visitent le sanctuaire pour obtenir des baraka ou trouver un remède non pas de Jésus-Christ ou de saint Georges, ni de Khodr, mais de l'eau sacrée. Comme l'eau est un élément primordial neutre et n'appartient pas à un système de croyance spécifique, nous ne pouvons pas relier la présence musulmane à Al Batiyeh au syncrétisme, mais plutôt parler de la transition hybride des cultes aquatiques à une religion monothéiste. Dans l'ensemble, au lieu d'utiliser les termes de syncrétisme ou de diffusion des religions, je suggère d'appliquer le terme «bricolage» lorsque le motif n'est pas tressé ou entrelacé mais construit avec des objets assemblés de manière aléatoire. Le bricolage serait plus approprié à mon avis en comparant ces deux lieux, car ce terme reflète mieux la variété et l'incongruence des éléments qui construisent l'ensemble de ces deux phénomènes.

Büyükada présente de nombreux avantages économiques là où le niveau de l'activité économique est élevé pendant la journée de pèlerinage. L'église / (des dons), les résidents locaux, les magasins,

les cafés, les restaurants, les sociétés de transport, les hôtels, les pensions, les prestataires de services de transport (phaitons) reçoivent une valeur économique inestimable le jour du pèlerinage. La journée offre une occasion exclusive aux vendeurs locaux (et aux vendeurs venant de différentes parties d'Istanbul) d'acquiescer tous les avantages financiers après une saison hivernale calme. Les vendeurs ambulants de rue sont parmi les vendeurs de souvenirs les plus répandus, avec divers degrés de légalité et différents niveaux d'interaction avec les touristes en pèlerinage. Les détaillants sont confrontés à des défis uniques pour déterminer la demande des consommateurs et soutenir les opérations. Les clients ponctuels, un seul jour de pèlerinage, des gammes de produits indifférenciées, une concurrence directe très concentrée et d'autres facteurs influencent le potentiel de réussite. Comme je l'ai dit dans le chapitre connexe, les pèlerins "mal inspirés" sont persuadés d'acheter les objets inventés. En dehors de l'artisanat et de l'art ethnique en tant que produits de base, les touristes pèlerins sont mis sur le marché. Certains produits comme les dileklikes sont considérés comme des objets tangibles, magiques, sentimentaux et précieux d'une expérience mémorable. De même, certains pèlerins les trouvent peu coûteux, peu substantiels, produits en série et kitsch. Les détaillants de souvenirs ne sont pas homogènes quant à leur taille, leur emplacement ou leur structure de gestion. Les vendeurs de souvenirs les plus évidents sont les marchands de première ligne dont le principal objectif est de vendre des souvenirs. La majorité des souvenirs sont des objets profanes sans lien direct avec l'essence du pèlerinage. Cela m'a toujours surpris de ne voir aucune icône de St George sur les étals du marché lors d'une journée qui lui est consacrée, car on peut s'attendre à trouver un boom de l'iconographie similaire aux autres sites de pèlerinage orthodoxes de la région des Balkans. Je n'ai pas non plus vu de souvenirs ayant une connotation islamique (calligraphies d'Allah, etc.). Les objets ayant une signification religieuse symbolique semblent être ignorés et à la place, l'ensemble du marché s'efforce de vendre les objets magiques tels que des bougies colorées, des fils et des dileklikes. On peut également trouver intéressant de voir une grande collection de magnets de souvenirs de personnages séculaires héroïques tels qu'Atatürk, CheGuavera et Deniz Gezmiş. En ce qui concerne Sarba, le pèlerinage étant de petite taille et non popularisé comme Aya Yorgi, je peux certainement affirmer que le bénéfice économique que le village de Sarba et Al Batiyeh tirent des visites votives ne peut être comparable à celui d'Aya Yorgi. La seule valeur que l'on peut tirer est les dons à petite échelle dans la boîte de dons et une petite partie des bénéfices tirés des ventes de bougies.

La culture chrétienne, comme beaucoup d'autres religions, connaît bien le phénomène de l'invocation des saints, motivé par la conviction qu'ils sont capables de guérir les maladies. Les saints «se spécialisent» même dans certaines maladies, affections ou parties du corps et problèmes de la terre, tandis que d'autres, comme la Vierge Marie, ont des capacités plus générales et peuvent être sollicités selon certaines hagiographies. Comme je l'ai souligné dans les chapitres sur l'histoire de l'église et l'hagiographie de saint Georges (Aya Yorgi), on pensait qu'il guérissait les troubles mentaux. De nombreux auteurs de voyages du 19ème et du début du 20ème siècle qui ont visité l'île parlent des malades mentaux qui ont été enchaînés et laissés en incubation dans l'église. Je suis tombé sur la pratique similaire consistant à enchaîner dans les églises dédiées à saint Georges en Israël et en Palestine. La spécialisation de St George Büyükada semble avoir évolué du «guérisseur fou» au «marieur» ou au «consultant financier», comme l'ont montré les documents de souhait et les entretiens approfondis. De nombreuses femmes célibataires ont également visité le sanctuaire de "Telli Baba", un "chercheur de conjoint" acclamé situé dans le quartier de Sarıyer à Istanbul et "AyınBiri / Panayia", petite église grecque orthodoxe de Vefa. Un effet curatif sur les "cœurs brisés". Al Batiyeh, par contre, était autrefois associé à la fécondité et aux enfants. La combinaison du personnage du saint et de l'eau sacrée est censée guérir les couples stériles et les enfants malades. Les registres de baptême de la fin du XIXe siècle et les témoignages de la population

locale prouvent que le sanctuaire a toujours accueilli ceux qui sont "piégés" dans la fécondité et les problèmes des enfants.

Saint George et Khidr sont considérés comme deux homologues. Leur relation mutuelle a souvent été remise en cause par un certain nombre d'universitaires ou de religieux depuis le début du XXe siècle, comme dans l'exemple de Husluck, Kanaan et Ocak. Les tentatives pour comprendre les liens entre ces deux figures saintes et les pratiques rituelles autour des sanctuaires dédiées à "deux saints dans un seul corps" n'ont pas encore été conclues: Khidr qui a bu de l'eau de vie enseigne des connaissances cachées au prophète Moïse selon la littérature des hadiths, saint Georges, martyr chrétien et un tueur de dragons. Khidr et Saint George semblent se tenir dans les pôles opposés d'un continuum. L'identification ambiguë de personnages aussi différents crée encore une confusion dans le cœur et l'esprit des chercheurs et des croyants ordinaires. Peu importe ce qui a été dit auparavant, dans les temps modernes, les défenseurs du «dialogue religieux» et de la «coexistence» se réfèrent fréquemment aux aspects communs de ces deux saints et embrassent une telle unification comme symbole de la voie commune. D'autres, prudents quant au chevauchement religieux, rejettent cette communauté. Pour être précis, dans le contexte contemporain du Moyen-Orient et d'Anatolie, en réalité, peu de gens connaissent ces saints autrefois considérés comme les mêmes personnages avec des noms différents. Beaucoup de gens n'ont même pas une idée claire de ce qu'ils représentent, alors qu'il est vrai qu'au Liban, des gens relient encore al Khidr à George. Pourtant, interrogés sur Saint-Georges et Khidr, mes informateurs ont évoqué la théologie textuelle (Coran, hadiths et hagiographies) et les déclarations officielles des clercs plus que les récits oraux. Une femme chiite que j'ai interviewée m'a dit qu'elle ferait mieux de demander à un cheikh de vérifier si le lien avec ces saints est un fait réel. De même, une femme chrétienne m'a conseillé de demander à un prêtre qui "sait tout mieux que les gens ordinaires". Malgré cette ambiguïté, il est possible de rencontrer des personnes qui accordent plus d'importance à la connaissance ésotérique qu'à la connaissance théologique. Un chrétien orthodoxe à qui j'ai parlé à al Batiyeh a déclaré qu'il était inutile de chercher "des informations" sur ces saints mutuels à travers une église ou une mosquée, car il s'agit de croyances ésotériques: "Saint Georges et Khidr sont les mêmes, ça y'est"

Ce que j'ai vécu au Liban et plus particulièrement au sanctuaire d'Al Batiyeh, le culte de Saint George-Khodr, peut être perçu comme une hiérophanie qui inclut le symbolisme de l'eau en soi. En revanche, à Aya Yorgi, à Istanbul, bien que le nom du saint soit connu et articulé (Aya Yorgi), le caractère hagiographique de Saint George n'est pas un problème commun. Les chrétiens connaissent les détails de l'histoire de la vie et des pouvoirs qui lui sont attribués tandis que les musulmans (avec toutes les subdivisions) visitent l'église et assistent au pèlerinage avec une inconscience totale et ils ne sont pas intéressés à acquérir une conscience possible. Selon les musulmans que j'ai interrogés, Aya Yorgi (Saint George) pourrait être "un prêtre", "un compagnon de roi", "un amoureux d'une ancienne princesse", "un médecin" ou "un disciple de Jésus qui aurait visité Büyükada" "un oncle bien-aimé" et ainsi de suite. Hızır (Khidr), malgré tout, est totalement absent du contexte. Il n'a pas sa place dans la géographie spirituelle du pèlerinage d'Aya Yorgi et les pèlerins tant chiliens que d'autres n'ont pas la notion d'une possible uniformité Hızır-Aya Yorgi. De plus, la vitalité folklorique des célébrations de Hidirellez (6 mai, voir la section correspondante dans la thèse) semble être très faible parmi les pèlerins musulmans d'Aya Yorgi. Le Pèlerinage des temps modernes au sanctuaire et basé principalement sur une hiérophanie autour d'un sanctuaire ambigu plutôt que sur la vénération envers une personne sainte spécifique ou à la suite d'un saint culte.

Aya Yorgi est très souvent représentée dans les organes médiatiques tels que la télévision, les journaux et aussi dans les comptes de médias sociaux des personnes qui ont visité le sanctuaire. Dans la télévision, comme le montre le chapitre connexe de cette thèse, l'interprétation du sanctuaire diffère selon les idéologies des chaînes de télévision. Certains l'approchent dans un sens neutre de la laïcité, l'assimilant à un événement festif, alors que d'autres critiquent sévèrement les "pratiques rituelles superstitieuses" observées autour du sanctuaire. Malgré les critiques, la présence musulmane dans un espace chrétien suscite l'intérêt du public et les chaînes de télévision en bénéficient et il semble évident qu'Aya Yorgi doit sa popularité en partie à la "publicité involontaire" faite dans les médias. Al Batiyeh est cependant totalement invisible dans les médias libanais. Des sanctuaires tels que Notre-Dame du Liban, Mar Charbel ou Rafka sont traités fréquemment dans plusieurs chaînes de télévision chrétiennes, ainsi que dans des chaînes relativement séculaires comme MBC. J'ai regardé un petit documentaire sur l'église St George à Bthegrine où des reliques miraculeuses d'un prêtre mort dont le corps non décomposé est affiché. Mais Al Batiyeh n'a jamais été au centre des préoccupations des producteurs de programmes avant mars 2018, date à laquelle elle a été filmée par une chaîne de télévision appelée OTV. Étonnamment, dans un pays comme le Liban où les gens sont tellement intéressés par le partage de visuels sur les applications de réseaux sociaux, al Batiyeh est mal représenté sur Instagram, à l'exception de quelques hashtags et messages.

Aya Yorgi et al Batiyeh diffèrent les unes des autres en termes de nombre de pèlerins et de répartition du nombre en fonction de leurs origines religieuses. La population turque se compose principalement de musulmans et les minorités chrétiennes sont en déclin chaque jour. Ce déséquilibre dans les pourcentages religieux semble être la raison principale et fondamentale pour laquelle les visiteurs musulmans sont plus que les autres. Le Liban, quant à lui, abrite encore un nombre considérable de diverses sectes chrétiennes et Sarba, où se trouve al Batiyeh, est en grande majorité habité par des chrétiens maronites. Bien que les chrétiens visitent al Batiyeh, il est évident que la présence de plus de musulmans ne peut pas être refusée. Malgré les différences confessionnelles entre les participants d'Aya Yorgi et d'Al Batiyeh, il existe un point de convergence commun pour les travailleurs domestiques. Le Liban et la Turquie (plus le Liban) sont deux pays qui accueillent des travailleurs immigrés employés dans le secteur du travail domestique. Le marché du travail turc est principalement composé de femmes originaires de pays post-soviétiques tels que la Moldavie, la Géorgie, la Russie et l'Arménie, mais le Liban embauche principalement celles d'Éthiopie, d'Inde, du Sri Lanka, des Philippines et du Ghana. Dernièrement, les Ethiopiens sont également visibles dans les services de ménage à Istanbul. Les sites dédiés à Saint George: Aya Yorgi et al Batiyeh servent de cadre de manifestation pour la religion de ces migrantes dans leur processus de migration transnationale, en leur fournissant un espace significatif pour vivre leur spiritualité, se réunir via leurs réseaux et sesocialiser dans les pays d'accueil. Ces femmes, pour la plupart des chrétiens orthodoxes, ont souvent certaines attentes vis-à-vis de Saint-Georges, un sauveur héroïque qui est également le patron des pays de presque tous.

Pour tenter de tirer des conclusions définitives et pour répondre précisément aux questions initialement soulevées de ce travail, quelles seraient les choses majeures qui susciteraient l'intérêt de tant de personnes appartenant à des types de croyances si différents, ce qui rend précisément ces lieux sacrés: un ensemble de certains traits de lieux, contexte politique et historique des pays dans lesquels ces lieux se situent ou peut-être tous ces faits extérieurs reflétés dans la conscience, le comportement, la tradition, les coutumes et les croyances des gens? De toute évidence, la beauté des lieux est une question d'intérêt pour les voyageurs touristiques, comme je l'ai montré dans les chapitres précédents, mais c'est plus que cela en fait. Comme dans tout acte de perception du

caractère sacré, il doit y avoir la conscience de son existence et, sinon, une croyance en la magie et une croyance en des événements inexplicables par la raison. Ce n'est pas un syncrétisme, comme je l'ai montré plus haut, c'est un bricolage d'attitudes religieuses et non religieuses correspondant à la croyance humaine et à l'espoir que notre vie ne doit pas être seulement ce que nous voyons avec nos yeux, avec nos sens limités, ainsi qu'avec nos connaissances et compréhensions limitées. Il doit y avoir quelque chose en plus, car la première cause et le dernier effet restent inconnus à l'esprit humain. Et dans la recherche de ceci, de plus en plus de gens suivent des chemins qui se croisent parfois avec les chemins d'autres différents.

Mots clés: Turquie, Liban, Saint Georges, Mar Jirjes, Aya Yorgi, Pèlerinage

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Picture 1 Map of the fieldwork: the places visited and surveyed during the study process .	3
Picture 1 View of Princes Islands by Melling Antoine Ignace's 1819 drawing	14
Picture 3. Localization of Aya Yorgi hill and pilgrimage path on Büyükada Island of Istanbul.....	15
Picture 4 Posts related with the landscapes of the island on Instagram	17
Picture 5 Route of pilgrims on Aya Yorgi pilgrimage	18
Picture 6 Location of Sarba	19
Picture 7: Mar Yuhanna Day from 1950s. Source: Municipal archive	20
Picture 8 Mar Jiryas Al Batieh sketch.....	22
Picture 9 Al Batiyeh—old gravure,.....	23
Picture 10 Illustration of the ayazma of Aya Yorgi in 1990s.....	29
Picture 11 Sacred grotto of al Batiyeh	31
Picture 12. Drinking fountain at Al Batiyeh	32
Picture 13 Tourist map of Büyükad	39
Picture 2 19 th Century Image—St George Kouduna.....	45
Picture 3 The plan of Aya Yorgi	45
Picture 16 posts related with the Church of Aya Yorgi on Instagram.....	47
Picture 17 Posts related with the Church of Aya Yorgi on Instagram 2017	48
Picture 18 Posts related with the Church of Aya Yorgi on Instagram 2017	50
Picture 19 Posts related with the Church of Aya Yorgi on Instagram 2017.....	51
Picture 4. St George's day in front of Aya Yorgi—late 19 th century	52
Picture 21 a sketch of major religious sites.....	59
Picture 5 Inauguration ceremony of chapel at Batieh, 1997	60
Picture 23 St George Shrine at Al Batieh—entrance	61
Picture 24 St George Cathedral of Sarba.....	63
Picture 25 Horse carriages on Büyükada	66
Picture 26 Al Batiyeh as a public park,.....	71
Picture 6. Icon of St George as a Roman soldier from Byzantine and Christian Museum. 14 th Century—Athens.....	73
Picture 28 Illustration of the series of tortures that St George went through	75

Picture 7 Tomb and the Church of St Georg–Lod/Israel July 2017	76
Picture 8 Tomb of Saint George /Lod 2017	77
Picture 31 Horus Cavalier –Louvre Museum.....	81
Picture 9 Icon of Saint George slaying the dragon at al Batiyeh.....	82
Picture 10 Icon of Saint George at the Narthex of Aya Yorgi Church.....	85
Picture 34 Captures from Instagram.....	89
Picture 11 Saint George with the young mounted behind him kills the dragon, 93	
Picture 36 Father and his son at al Batiyeh in front of the icon of Saint George	97
Picture 12 Riha and her grandchildren in front of the icon of St George.....	98
Picture 38 The badges from the shrines visited before al Batiyeh	100
Picture 13. Ethiopian domestic workers at Batiyeh,	102
Picture 14 Al Khidr on the fish 18th century Mughul miniature	103
Picture 15 Saint Elias, Elijah Greek Icon.....	111
Picture 16 Location of Edirne	118
Picture 43 The Poster of Hıdrellez-Kakava on the billboards.....	121
Picture 44 The gate of the festival arena	123
Picture 45 Two Gypsy girls dancing,	124
Picture 46 An invented tradition—Acrobats,	126
Picture 47 Kakava fire.....	127
Picture 48 Participants throwing their wishes into the rive.....	129
Picture 17 Icon of Saint Geoge in a Restaurant owned by a Muslim Family in Jerusalem	130
Picture 50 The tatoo of St George (al Khidr) on the arm of a Palestinian Muslim man	132
Picture 51: The chain (shackle) of Saint George in Lod/Israel. . .	134
Picture 52 St George church al Khader. . .	135
Picture 53 A Grotesque body in a performance of Yüzüyüze	137
Picture 5418 Muslim pilgrims accompanying the songs of Yüzüyüze	141
Picture 55:Dawra feast up; Mar Jirjes feast down,.....	142
Picture 56 Traditional belly dancer,	144
Picture 57 Rabitat Chabab in Carnavalesque costumes	146

Picture 58 St George`s celebration, RabitatChaba	147
Picture 59. Emblem of RabitatChabab.....	148
Picture 19 Rags tied on a tree.....	168
Picture 61 Strings unreeled on the slope of Aya Yorgi	169
Picture 62 The line in front the Church.....	170
Picture 63 Regulation of entry	170
Picture 64. Wishes on papers in wishes box at Aya Yorgi pilgrimage... ..	172
Picture 6520. Pilgrim`s food... ..	181
Picture 66 Pilgrims` food on Instagram Post.....	183
Picture 67 Posts related to Feast day on Instagram	184
Picture 68 A Muslim Shia male Pilgrim bottling water	194
Picture 69 Lamb as a sacrifice at Batiyeh,	196
Picture 70 Coins from the grotto	199
Picture 7121 The robbery at Batieh.....	202
Picture 72 <i>Dileklik</i> at Aya Yorgi pilgrimage.....	205
Picture 73 A young university candidate pilgrim (or his/her mother) writing Tıp (Medicine faculty) with sugar cubes	209
Picture 74 An afieromata in the shape of an arm	210
Picture 75 Tiny bells of Aya Yorgi	211
Picture 76 Multicolored candles.....	212
Picture 77 22 a dileklik in the shape of a house... ..	213
Picture 78 Unreeling threads on the road to Aya Yorgi Church	214
Picture 79 "Polluting the enviroment is fined (punished) in hereafter	217
Picture 8023 Ex votos in the form of bride and groom which symbolize the pilgrim`s will for marriage.....	218
Picture 81 Votive offerings at al Batiyeh,	220
Picture 82 Female pilgrims sitting on the pews at Aya Yorgi in front of the fresco od Agios Damaskinos and Agios Kleonikos	223
Picture 83. Female (Muslim) Pilgrims praying in the church of Aya Yorgi.....	229
Picture 84 Little Tony and his mother by the grotto of Mar jirjes al Batiye... ..	223

Picture 85 Woman with a picture of Atatürk on her T-shirt at Aya Yorgi pilgrimage	234
Picture 86 A Secular Kemalist woman with Turkish flag on her T-shirt distributing candles to announce that her wishes came true... ..	242
Picture 87 #Freedom #Justice #Equality	244
Picture 88 “May Tayyip be dethroned. Tayyip, Stop stealing!!”	244
Picture 89. Promoting Sahaja Yoga at Aya Yorgi pilgrimage	256
Picture 90 An evangelical with a banner in his hand at Aya Yorgi	262
Picture 91 Evangelicals at Aya Yorgi: “The one who needs miracles may come,.....	264
Picture 92: Moldavian domestic worker in the pilgrimage at Aya Yorgi	268
Picture 93 A prayer written on the carton of a skin bleaching cream and put behind the icon of saint George at Al Batiye.....	269
Picture 94 Andha Eel.....	272
Picture 95 A Buddhist domestic worker in front of the icon of St George.....	273
Picture 96 Iraqi woman in front of Mar Jirjes.....	274
Picture 97 Invitation card.....	283
Picture 98 Evangelist groups on the feast day of Aya Yorgi at Büyükada.....	284
Picture 99 Prophet Abraham and his wife Sarah are dancing with the song “Domdom Kurşunu” by Ibrahim Tatlıses on AyaYorgy feast day.....	285

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgment	xxvi
Abstract	xxvi
Resumé	xxvi
List of Illustrations	xxvi
Table of Contents	xxvi
Introduction.....	1
Format of Research	1
Methodology	2
Why do I compare Aya Yorgi and Mar Jiryes al Batiyeh? Justification of Research	2
Research Questions	3
Data Collection.....	5
Ethnography	5
Aya Yorgi.....	5
Mar Jirjes Al Batiyeh	7
Secondary Fields	8
Digital Ethnography	8
Map of the Chapters	9
CHAPTER 1	
AYA YORGI & MAR JIRYES AL BATIYEH: ONE SAINT TWO SHRINES	11
1.1. Attributes of the Landscapes	11
1.2. Aya Yorgi hill as Axis Mundi	15
1.3. Pilgrims' Route.....	18
1.4. Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh/Sarba-Jounieh.....	19
1.5. Water and Cultic Waters	24
1.5.1. Holy Springs of Orthodox Greeks in Istanbul (ayazma visitation –αγιασμός).....	25
1.5.2. Miraculous Ayazmas of Istanbul	27
1.5.3. Miraculous Waters of Al Batiyeh.....	30
1.6. Brief History of Büyükada Aya Yorgi and Sarba Mar Jiryes al Batiyeh	33
1.6.1. A History challenged by a legend: Aya Yorgi Koudunas. Then and Now.....	40
1.6.3. Emergence of a “shared sacred site”	52
1.6.3.1. Why are they in Athens?	54
1.7. Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh, then and now	58
1.8. Contested Issues and Ambiguities around Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh	64

1.8.2. “There is no place to sit for free in this city” Al Batiyeh as an example of hospitality and a free public park	67
1.8.3. The case of Jounieh Public Garden	70
CHAPTER 2: THREE FACETS OF SAINTHOOD: GEORGE, AL-KHIDR, ELIJAH	73
2.1. Saint George—Some hagiographies	74
2.2. St George of Büyükağa	85
2.3. “AyaYorgi himself”	89
2.4. Saint George of Lebanon (Mar Jirjes)	90
2.4.1. Mar Jirjes as a cure for WaladMakbous or St George as Child Rescuer.....	93
2.4.2. Ethiopia at Batiyeh or Sisterhood around St George	100
2.5. Al-Khidr	104
2.6. Elias, Elijah.	112
2.6.1. Common Attributes of Three Saints	113
2.7. Kakava: A Hıdırellez Festivity in Turkey or the Holy Union of Khidr and Elias	116
2.7.1. Is it really a shared festival?	117
2.7.2. Sveti Georgi Church—Bulgarian St George	128
2.7.3. Conclusion or Transformative features of space	129
2.8. Palestine: The land where St George and al Khidr melt into each other	130
2.9. Festivalization of Saint George Day at AyaYorgi and al Batiyeh.....	135
2.9.2. From Dawra to Mahrajanat Mar Jirjes: Feast day of St George.....	142
2.9.2.1. Dawra	143
2.9.2.2. Mahrajanat Mar Jirjes.....	144
2.9.2.3. Who is “RaabitatChabab”?.....	147
2.9.2.4. St George vs al Khodr at al Batiyeh : An Ambiguous interrelation? The discourse of the clerics and others	149
Chapter 3 DEFINING THE PILGRIMAGE OF AYA YORGİ AND AL BATİYEĖ	151
3.1. Pilgrimage : Multiplicity of Discourses	151
3.2. Pilgrimage and Tourism.	154
3.3. Theories on Pilgrimage	159
3.3.1. The Turnerian Approach to the Study of Pilgrimage	159
3.2.1.1. Analysis of Aya Yorgi Feast day Pilgrimage through Turnerian Perspective	161
3.2.1.2. Pilgrimage Stages	163
3.3. A closer look at the Petitionary and Intercessory prayers at Aya Yorgi.....	172

3.3.1. Direction	175
3.3.2. Need	176
3.3.3. Petitionary&Intercessory Prayers	177
3.3.4. Style	178
3.4. Al Batiyeh and Lebanese Shrines: Contesting the Turnerian theory.....	184
3.4.1. Pilgrimage for vow making: “Ziyarat and Ndr”	187
3.4.2. Blood Sacrifice and Charity	194
3.4.3. Excavating the sacred grotto and the donation box.....	199
3.4.4. Al Batiyeh in the memories of Lebanese Diaspora	201
3.5. Votive Offerings (ex votos) at Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh: Magic, Vernacular or Controlled Religion?	205
3.6. Al Batiyeh: Clothes, Undewears as Sacred waste	219
CHAPTER 4	
A CLOSER LOOK ON THE PILGRIMS OF AYA YORGI AND AL BATIYEH.....	223
4.1. Shrines, genders and ideologies	224
4.2. Pilgrimage for (In)fertility	231
4.3. Deconstructing the Pilgrims’ Confessions	235
4.3.1. Secular Muslims	235
4.3.2. Alawis	247
4.3.3. Sunnites (women with headscarf)	249
4.4. Another way of Sharing: Syriacs, Armanians and Greeks at Aya Yorgi	250
4.5. What about the Jews?	252
4.6. New Female Spirituality at Aya Yorgi: Sahaja Yoga followers	254
4.6.1. Sahaja Yoga.....	256
4.7. Evangelical Proselytism and New Religiosities against all “Orthodoxies”	257
4.8. New Visitors of Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh : Moldavian, Georgian, Ethiopian, Sri Lanki Domestic Workers ; Iraqi Assyrian refugees and others	265
4.8.1. Searching for <i>Andha</i> in Lebanon: Sri Lankis	235
4.8.2. Black Veils and a Military Saint: Coincidental Encounters	247
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	279
REFERENCES	295
ANNEX.....	309

Introduction

*“I am not sure I can tell the truth. . . . I can only tell what I know.”*¹

The subject of shared saints and pilgrimages in the context of modern Western academia seems to have been most clearly highlighted by a British archaeologist living at the turn of the last century and carrying on research at the British School in Athens, where he came to focus on ambiguous sanctuaries in former or current Ottoman lands, mainly the Balkans and Anatolia with an additional interest in Syria and Palestine. F. W. Hasluck (1878–1920) surveyed his locations with a distinct eye for Turkish popular religion and the transference of sanctuaries from one religious tradition’s custody to another, in addition to the cases of more constant ongoing and fluid multi-religious patronage, as in this study. His work *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* is the most comprehensive in this genre. From the last decades of the twentieth century to the present day, the interest in shared pilgrimage has increased, as seen particularly in the new anthropological theory of Antagonistic Tolerance put forward by Robert Hayden and ‘*Religions Traversées: Lieux saints partagés entre chrétiens, musulmans et juifs en Méditerranée*’ under the direction of Maria Couroucli and Dionigi Albera from the University of Aix-en-Provence. This work covers the practice of shared sacred places around the Mediterranean basin, from the Balkans to Egypt and North Africa with diverse forms of spatial practice, holding a multiplicity of peoples, religions, motivations, opinion, rituals, gestures, narratives, aspirations, and therefore, inevitably, a range of intentions and communal dynamics.

Format of Research

As a complex phenomenon, sacred space is chaotic, on the one side often filled with individual actors operating in a number of different ways, while at the same time repeating its motifs, which I seek to tease out and describe here. In order to create deeper context (similar to Geertz notion of ‘thick description’, making the culturally alien more

¹ Clifford and Marcus (1986) described an incident in which a Cree Indian testified in Canadian court about the effects of hydroelectric development on traditional Cree hunting lands. Asked to take the oath, the Cree responded with this statement

understandable through extensive explanation) I take an ethnographic approach that cycles through three different processes, a three part process, beginning with a background to the ritual subject under consideration, entering into the field to explore and a return to parts two and one for analysis in the third step. During the whole of this undertaking, I will be periodically returning to an analytical mode, of course, rather than saving it entirely for the conclusion. I will enter into further detail about each aspect further on.

Methodology

In order to conduct an analysis of space and spatial practice, the history, place and places must be known which is endeavored to understand and I must analyze them through a particular lens which conceptually equips both the researcher and reader with the tools necessary to comment on the practices and spaces of multi religious pilgrimage and devotion. This will be a three-part process of informed backgrounds and theory followed by field work and concluded with empirical reflection on the observations made on site in Turkey and Lebanon. The methodological explanation here presented illustrates these same stages. Just as the ritual itself is a product of an historical bricolage (and multi religious spaces even more so), so this work is focused on a drawing from a collage of sources in order to achieve an overall contextualized vision of the multi practiced spaces wherein Muslims and Christians (among others) meet on common ritual ground. In the second stage, direct encounter with the site(s) is highlighted, fulfilling three-step method. That is, (a) an interpretive framework is set out in conjunction with and in preparation for an entry into the field and (b) some interpretation of the significance of the data is already being provided (verging slightly into the territory of the third part of the cycle, the application of the knowledge gained(c) which is finally and fully synthesized in the conclusion.

Why do I compare Aya Yorgi and Mar Jiryes al Batiyeh? Justification of Research

Countries in Middle-Near East and Balkans have a similar concept of sainthood, and parallelism in shrine policies, naturally, as a result of long centuries of common history and interaction. Common history which is a four centuries of Ottoman domination in the region is not the major focus on or the main rationale behind this study, yet, shared social history and the regional proximity of modern day locations of these two shrines are the primary factors why I selected them as fields of study. Despite the “deep rooted kinship” of the

territorial resemblances of modern Turkey and Lebanon, for almost one hundred years, they have been evolving in their own separate lines and pace. Turkey has almost managed to become a nation state after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, less heterogeneous in terms of religious confessions and growing prevalence of Sunni Islam in public and private sphere along with ambivalent secularism. However Lebanon on the other hand is a small country in the region with sectarian political structural system where the confessions sometimes act like different ethnical entities and creating a nation is still a goal matter. Therefore via this study I aim to clarify if the difference between two countries' demographic, linguistic, and socio political constructions have impact on the attribution of meaning to recently popular anthropological research area: "shared sacred sites" The shared sacred sites that I am scrutinizing throughout this study are both dedicated to Saint George - an outstanding saintly figure all around Middle East, Europe and Balkans: Aya Yorgi is the Turco-Greek name for Saint George and Mar Jirjes (Jiryès, Gergès) is the name given to the same saint in Lebanese Arabic. These sites are also popular pilgrimage spots that receive a great number of pilgrim-tourists throughout the year either in daily basis or for certain calenderical rituals.

Research Questions

The case studies centre on the practices Aya Yorgi, contrasted and compared with similarly practiced sanctuary of Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh in Lebanon has an old and established lineage of shared holy places. Approaching these places I pose a series of questions: What makes these places holy? What is the role of their beauty and aesthetic appeal? What is shared in these sites: space, religion or magic? What is the place of magic in religious rituals in these sites? Is it possible to talk about syncretism or hybridity in these two cases? In what ways do the political, historical and religious construct of two countries affect the formation of the pilgrimage (Turkey, being secular and a nation state whereas Lebanon is sectarian and multi-confessional)? Why do Muslims cross into Christian territory by visiting their shrines or sanctuaries more than the Christians do the other way around? What are the red lines or religious borders? Can we talk about *communitas* in Victor Turner's sense? What are the cultural signifiers in terms of ritual practices in Sarba and Büyükada? (The parallelism between the two pilgrimages, the two locations, sites, gestures, with all the differences and similarities). What is the importance of water cult in both sites? Where else are the visitors of St Georges going for pilgrimage? Is this devotion exclusive for them? What other sacred sites do they visit? What are the background and stories of the pilgrims?

What are the motives behind them to do the pilgrimage? How can we analyze the content and the style of the wishes written on the piece of papers in Büyükada? Can we apply semiotic analysis on the written wishes? Can we consider these texts as a new linguistic genre? Can we inquire the writers' motives, gender, age, social status, educational level in a sociolinguistic way? What is the role of clergy and institutional frame (priests and the others)? How are these sites portrayed in social and TV media? What memories do particular places hold and why? Do these places inspire religious emotion because of the memories they evoke? What is the significance of religious architecture? Are these places remarkable because of the symbolic value of their shape or structure? What is the inter-religious element of the attendance at the shrines? From which communities do the pilgrims come? How do they manage to share the sacred places, practicing spatially in the same locations? What are the narratives around the place, including those not directly related to praxis, but pertaining to the wider cultural arena? Finally, in what way do these spaces compare or contrast with each other? More broadly, the spatial and ritual analysis of the site falls into the greater questions of how and why Muslims and non-Muslims are able to receive one another at Aya Yorgi and elsewhere.

First and foremost this study will be a vital contribution to the pilgrimage studies and social anthropology. Literature review so far shows that syncretism practices and St George and Hızır in Turkey have been frequently studied by many scholars from history, and theology. But only few studies have been carried out by applying anthropological-ethnographic method (Couroucli, 2012 and Turk, 2010) Besides, I haven't encountered any other academic paper which focuses mainly on Aya Yorgi (Büyükada) apart from the unique one written by Professor Maria Couroucli (2012). For this reason this study won't be a repetition of what was done before but it is going to enlighten in and outside of this shared pilgrimage site. Concerning Mar Jiryes al Batiyeh in Lebanon apart from a couple of lines in the study of Haddad (2009) no one has ever mentioned it specifically. Thus the detailed analysis of this shrine may lead to further related studies. The uniqueness of this study lies in the fact that it's going to a comparative study of Turkey and Lebanon. The review of literature confirms that no scholar has ever made a comparison between two pilgrimage sites dedicated to St George and Hızır which flourishes in two separate countries like Turkey and Lebanon.

Data Collection:

Ethnography

The hallmark of anthropology is the exploration of the complexity and nuances of human interactivity and culture. As a research discipline, anthropology combines humanist and social science strategies. The method that sets anthropology apart from other disciplines is ethnography, the qualitative process of exploring in depth the whys and hows of human culture, behavior, and expression. Using this ethnographic method, anthropologists can uncover unexpected insights that are best gained by studying a topic in person, in situ, over time, and from diverse perspectives. The ethnographic method uses multiple data collection techniques including participant observation, interviews, focus groups, and textual analysis to construct a holistic and contextual view of the phenomena under study.

Aya Yorgi

The primary method of data collection throughout the PhD process (2015–2018) has been the participant observation one. I had been to Büyükada many times for weekend excursions before having been officially registered as a PhD candidate at EHESS. Therefore I had already a slight familiarity. However when the research process began official after my inscription, in December 2015, naturally, the bond between me and Büyükada got stronger. As a participant observer, I surveyed Büyükada for 4 months periodically in order to get to know the basic structure and the atmosphere of the island as a researcher. This period covered mainly March, April and May of 2016 and then July 2017. As I reside in Tuzla district of Istanbul—which is a 20 km distance—I visited the island twice a week: one day in weekdays and two overnights at the weekends to experience different dynamics. I carried out face to face unstructured interviews with local people, municipal police officers, restaurant and cafe owners, hotel receptionist, souvenir shops, and steamboat ticket office and horse carriage coachmen (faytoncular). I also used telephone contacts as a means of interviewing in the cases that face to face talk was not possible due to certain limitations. The chief of Jewish community in Büyükada Verda Habib, the mufti Kamil Tuncel and the author of the *Büyükada-Bir Ada Öyküsü*, Semiha Akpınar were one of the prominent figures that I reached through telephone.

Though I had been participating in the pilgrimages on the feast day of St George (Aya Yorgi), on April 23rd and Aya Thecla Day on September the 24th since 2011 with personal interest, the participation with a more curious academic eye started in 2015 in the process

of writing the proposal of my project. Therefore the findings of this thesis come from four different pilgrimages between the years of 2015–2018. I believe that one of the biggest challenges for an anthropologist is to study the once-a-year folk events or pilgrimages. It resembles to a performance which requires a full year of rehearsal and then taking to the stage. It is your one and only chance. Hence, I always felt so stressed as the feast days were approaching. Feast days have always been massively crowded in Büyükada. I always went to the island one night before and tried to meet early comers and mostly carried out the in-depth interviews with these pilgrims in a relatively long time scale. With majority of them I met in the hotels I was staying in mostly in the cafeterias, inviting them for a coffee or in the lobby of the hotel. I always introduced myself clearly, let them know who I was and what I was researching to build rapport and let them feel comfortable. Though I had my notes and structured questions, the conversation generally went on a spontaneous way. I switched on the voice recorder upon taking their permission.

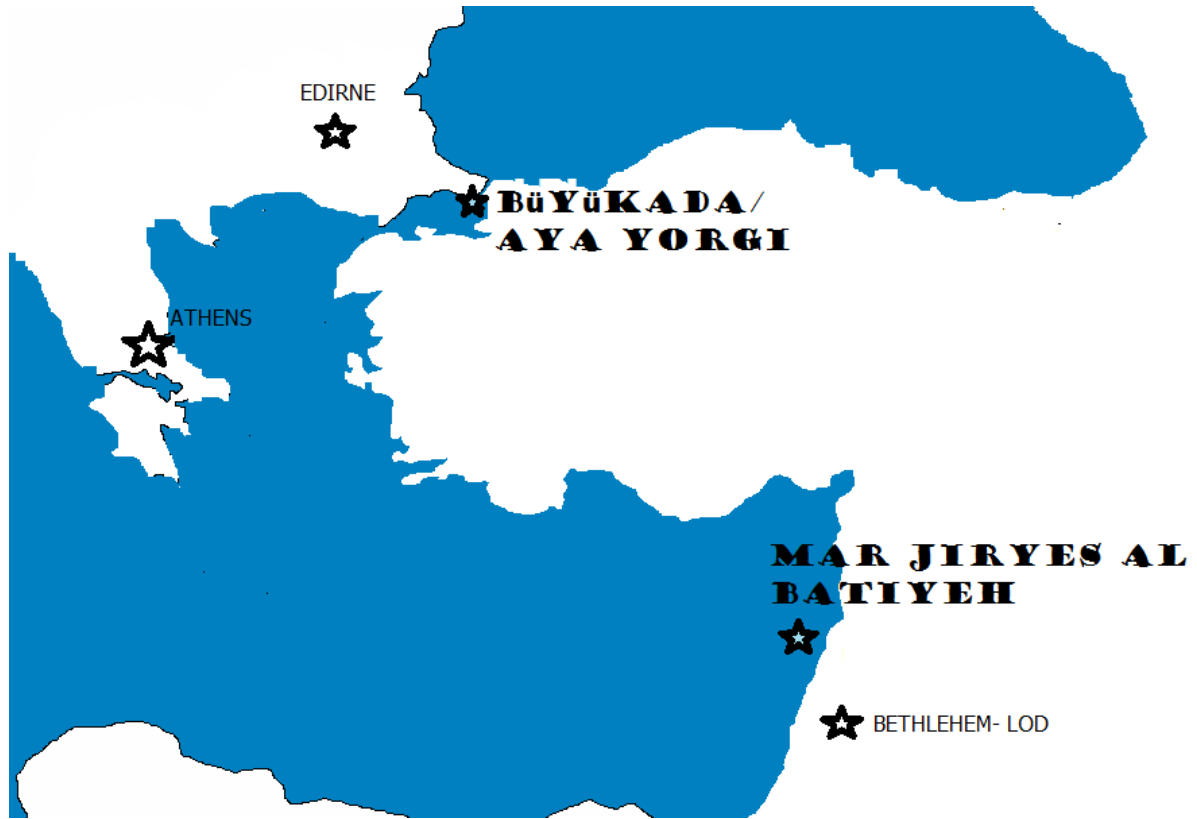
On the feast days I went to Aya Yorgi church to catch the seven o'clock morning mass mostly by horse carriages, sharing the fare with the pilgrims as *panayır* (feast day) tariffs more expensive than the normal. This sharing gave me a chance for closer contact with the pilgrims. However, the pilgrimage site is not easily reachable. The core space where the pilgrimage takes place is wide and can be divided into two major stations and a 900 meter-path which combines both: **Lunapark– Aya Yorgi slope– Aya Yorgi church**. This spatial division evokes Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's three layered ritual theories in the sense of separation, threshold and reunion. Therefore, all the daylong I was mostly in "descent and ascent" mode:

1. Climbing the path swiftly to reach the mass in the church around 6 am
2. Descending down to Lunapark square before the crowd accumulates. Observing the pre-liminal preparations of the pilgrims and the all others
3. Walking up the path in a slow pace with the pilgrims, taking frequent breaks
4. In the summit.

In and around the church I repeated these steps three times in 2015 and twice in 2016 (see picture 3).

Mar Jirjes Al Batiyeh

I met the oratory of Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh through the advice of a Lebanese friend and anthropologist Nour Farra Haddad in 2013. She introduced me to the site and surprisingly we happened to know that no in depth academic study had been carried out on the oratory. I visited the shrine throughout the research process periodically. Despite the fact that I traveled around Lebanon many times before as a tourist, the first visit after having been officially registered to doctoral program was between 20th-24th of April 2016 to observe the St George`s feast day. Then I came back in June 21st till 2nd July 2016 for ten days including the daily excursion to the shrines all around Lebanon. That visit mainly shaped the core of the research. Then another visit was done in the winter of 2017 for ten days again: between January the 25th until February the 4th. I paid the last visit to Lebanon between the 10th and 20th of July 2017 to conclude the fieldwork. However I kept in touch with the clerics and the inhabitants of Sarba in the meantime through telephone calls and short text messages. During the field work, I stayed at a local “residence” in Sarba which was a few hundred meters away from Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh. Concerning the interviews, I did not stick to a strict series of questions but mostly had informal talks with the visitors of the shrines. However when it came to the “more serious people”: clerics, prominent figures and so on, I prepared open ended questions beforehand. I recorded the interviews mostly with a voice recorder upon the respondents` permission. Photography has been the major instrument of documentation in this research and all the photos have been taken by me. I did not encounter with any restriction or language barrier in terms of communication as Lebanon is a multilingual country where English and French are widely spoken all around the country. Moreover, my intermediate level of Lebanese Arabic helped me in the interviews with solely monolingual “arabophones” as a result I rarely asked for the assistance of a translator.



Picture 24 Map of the fieldwork: the places visited and surveyed during the study process

Secondary Fields

Apart from Büyükada and Sarba, I was sure that I could not have written a reliable book on Saint George had I not visited **Lod** where his tomb is located and **Bethlehem** where a church dedicated to him is situated in a village with the name of his counterpart (al Khidr). I also do not think I could have made a contribution to an understanding of the Hızır cult if I had not been participated in Hızırellez celebrations in **Edirne**. And I could not have been sure about Aya Yorgi feast day ritual practices in the past had I not had listened to the testimonies of Greek (Rum) people in **Athens** who once used to reside in Büyükada.

Digital Ethnography

Aya Yorgi is largely represented on Instagram environment on varied perspectives: as a place for vacation and fun with beaches and clubs, as a destination of travel and relaxation for individuals, friends and families, as a spiritual place for pilgrimage, for making wishes and pray. During a week, in the time span between the 14th and the 18th of August 2017, I analyzed two tag places of Instagram where pictures tagged with the label #Aya Yorgi and #Aya Yorgikilisesi have been displayed publically at that time. I chose these two virtual areas because they showed a large amount of pictures representing the church and the feast

and because being so large, they offered me the possibility to trace a frequency of posts in time so I could possibly prove an increase or decrease of users' interest concerning this topic.

At the time of my study #Aya Yorgi was containing 59,329 posts while #Aya Yorgikilisesi was displaying 2,345 posts publicly. I also visited other tag places like #buyukada and smaller ones like #Aya Yorgimanastiri but I decided not to focus on them because pictures of my interest were not displayed with a constant frequency for every year. Nevertheless the same picture can be seen on many tag places at the same time as pictures are multiply tag labeled. In my digital fieldwork I tried to avoid counting the same picture twice. If I counted it for #Aya Yorgi I didn't count it for the other tag place so that the number of pictures from the two places counted together could render a proper percentage repartition in terms of categories. The number of pictures selected and counted from both sides are 1200 altogether: 537 from #Aya Yorgi and 673 from #Aya Yorgikilisesi. The time span of these pictures is different: on #Aya Yorgi I started the count from the 23th of April 2014 until the 18th of August 2017 while for the other place I couldn't find anything displayed before 22 of May 2016 so I started the count from that time until the 18th of August 2017.

Map of the Chapters

The first chapter deals with how, in ancient and modern times alike, spirituality and geography have often been closely related. Examples drawn from Büyükada and Sarba show how some landscape forms shape the belief systems mainly on St George at different scales. In the chapter, landscapes of Aya Yorgi and Al Batiyeh are also treated in an historical perspective as manuscripts on which cultural history of the area, with some traces of the past are written. Key themes include overall physical appearance of the landscape, waters, rocks and sea shores which serve some function in worship and provide the most visible signs of the impact of landscape on religion.

Second chapter primarily on Saint George and secondarily on Hızır (Khidr) and Elijah revolve around two axes. The first concerns the close association between oral and written modes, the hagiography of the saints and miracles. In the second axis the cult of these saints has been examined and some of the differences have been highlighted. It is possible to examine the similarities between the narrative patterns found in tales from both traditions in Turkey and Lebanon. The chapter also explores the intertwined themes of shrine visits with testimonies and the reminiscent of the cults of Saint George and Hizir in

modern era, highlighting similarities and differences in four different places or events dedicated to these holy figures: Aya Yorgi, Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh, Kakava Hıdırellez festival in Edirne and Israel (Lod and al Khader). Taken together, these observations offer some perspective on how an anthropological approach can contribute to the understanding of modern pilgrimage practices of deeply rooted saint cults. It is also aimed to show how the relationship between modernity with all of its issues and religious practice can be conceptualized. Several parts of the chapter touch directly on how modern politics and social organization affect the materiality of shrines, the survival and continuity of pilgrimage ceremonies and the practices surrounding them.

The third chapter will first discuss pilgrimage phenomena theoretically and then consider main characteristics and the drastic changes in Aya Yorgi and Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh pilgrimages during the modern period, particularly as part of the transformation of Turkish and Lebanese society. While discussing pilgrimage and modernity the national impacts on religious behavior are explored. The last part of the chapter expands the issue by taking into consideration consumer trends and the secular ethos of modern culture and politics in Turkey and Lebanon.

In the last chapter the main question is: today, in our (post) “secular” Turkey and Confession based Lebanon, why and with which motivations behind do people still go to these sites? Whilst this question focuses on the return of the new pilgrims in popular culture and social media, it also addresses and highlights the wider societal contexts in which this popularization takes place. Acting as a socio-cultural 'barometer', how Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh pilgrimage sites reflect such differences and continuities in understanding of the new ways regarding religion, spirituality, migration, faith, consumerism, health, tourism, heritage politics, and gender which also has an important role in the study of new religious movements including the dynamic environment of pilgrimage sites.

CHAPTER 1

AYA YORGI & MAR JIRYES AL BATIYEH: ONE SAINT TWO SHRINES

Countries in Middle-Near East and Balkans have a similar concept of sainthood, and parallelism in shrine policies, naturally, as a result of long centuries of common history and interaction. Common history which is a four centuries of Ottoman domination in the region is not the major focus on or the main rationale behind this study, yet, shared social history and the regional proximity of modern day locations of these two shrines are the primary factors why I selected them as fields of study. Despite the “deep rooted kinship” of the territorial resemblances of modern Turkey and Lebanon, for almost one hundred years, they have been evolving in their own separate lines and pace. Turkey has almost managed to become a nation state after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, less heterogeneous in terms of religious confessions and growing prevalence of Sunni Islam in public and private sphere along with ambivalent secularism. However Lebanon on the other hand is a small country in the region with sectarian political structural system where the confessions sometimes act like different ethnical entities and creating a nation is still a goal matter. Therefore via this study I aim to clarify if the difference between two countries’ demographic, linguistic, and socio political constructions have impact on the attribution of meaning to recently popular anthropological research area: “shared sacred sites” The shared sacred sites that I am scrutinizing throughout this study are both dedicated to Saint George—an outstanding saintly figure all around Middle East, Europe and Balkans: Aya Yorgi is the Turco-Greek name for Saint George and Mar Jirjes (Jiryes, Gerges) is the name given to the same saint in Lebanese Arabic. These sites are also popular pilgrimage spots that receive a great number of pilgrim-tourists throughout the year either in daily basis or for certain calendrical rituals.

In this chapter I will try to portray the importance of landscapes in the emergence of two sacred sites, discussing it within conceptual frameworks given by some scholars. Then I aim to give brief historical facts about them. Let us analyze now a site whose spectacular natural scenery has been enjoyed by both tourists and pilgrims.

1.1.Attributes of the Landscapes

Landscapes are imbued with different attributes and values; whether economic, aesthetic, recreational, spiritual, or otherwise, these values intersect, conflict, and change through time. The natural and supernatural properties of landscapes, and the meanings and significance attributed to them, are continually reinterpreted through the perceptions and actions of those in the present (Bradley 2002)². Past actions, events, myths and stories 'colour' the sacred properties of places such as mountaintops, islands or sources (Tilley 1994:162)³. Certain natural environments have figured prominently in humanity's dreams of the ideal world: they are the forest, the seashore, the valley and the island (Tuan, 1990: 247⁴). And, more recently, islands have become, unwittingly, the objects of what may be the most lavish, global and consistent branding exercise in human history. They find themselves presented as locales of desire, as platforms of paradise, as habitual sites of fascination, emotional offloading or religious pilgrimage (Baldacchino, 2010)⁵. Islands as sacred landscapes have ritual or societal advantages for precisely these reasons; access is restricted and land use can be controlled. The land may also be free of proprietorial, familial, or other claims but still part of a socially constructed image of nature. Islands easily fulfill the definition of liminal spaces and marginalization. In the historical period they have continued to function as special places: locations for treaty signing, illegal activities, monuments, prisons and high status burials.

For Van Gennep (1960)⁶, the concept of liminality describes a state within a rite of passage; he recognized the pre-liminal state which involved rites of separation, the liminal state which was a state of transition and lastly the post-liminal state which involved rites of incorporation. The liminal state is seen as "between two worlds" such as land and water and marked by ceremonies of transformation such as feasting or fasting. Liminal places are socially rather than geographically defined; they can be marginal or central; wherever they are they are embedded in social practice and so social spaces of otherness. The central location of islands puts them both within the domestic and agricultural sphere but also

²Bradley, Richard.(2002). *The past in prehistoric societies*. Routledge

³Tilley, Christopher Y..(1994) *A phenomenology of landscape: Places, paths, and monuments*. Oxford, UK; Providence, R.I.: Berg.

⁴Tuan, Yi-Fu.. (1990) *Humanistic geography*. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66 (2) (Jun.): 266-76.

⁵Baldacchino, Godfrey .(2010) European Islands, Development and the Cohesion Policy: A Case Study of Kökar, Åland *Islands Island Studies Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2010, pp. 89-110

⁶ Van Gennep, Arnold. (1960) *The Rites of Passage*, English trans. by M. B. Vizedom and G.L. Caffee, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1908)

outside of it hence combining the ritual and the social (Barrett 1996)⁷. They also signify power relations as places that can be seen but not touched by the majority. This liminality has been put to many and varied uses from the signing of treaties in 'no-man's' land to the location of illegal activities, transitional ceremonies to the carnivalesque. Contained within tight geographical margins, islands are places where memories are intensified and heightened. Spatially and socially marginalized, such islands become memorials to the shadowy dimensions of civilization: prisons, landfills, military bases, lunatic asylums, and cemeteries. "Places of romance, excitement and adventure, or just escape from the pressures of busy lifestyles, islands worldwide have always held a particular fascination for people" (Vogiatzakis et al., 2008: 3–4)⁸. My first focus field where Aya Yorgi is located: Büyükada, carries most of the above mentioned attributes of island. Similarly, it used to be land of prison during Byzantine era for the "unwanted princes", and an exile land even during early Republican era in 1930s for Trotsky when he was escaping from Stalin's hostility (Millas, 2013). Regarding the shadowy dimensions of a certain civilization, Aya Yorgi church served as a mad house for the mentally ill for hundreds of years which created a certain proverb "Tam Koudunalıksın!!" (You deserve to live at Aya Yorgi of Koudunas) used for the ones who were acting in abnormal way.

Büyükada in modern times constitutes a 'traditional' place in the sense that it memorializes history and celebrates tradition, like a museum fascinates visitors even before the boats approach the port. Being an island of liminalities, its landscape triggers a spiritual aura. The green nature and the charming silhouette on Bosphorus provide serenity that is not much seen in Istanbul today. When I visited the islands in my first year of master studies I was captivated by the sight. It is not surprising in this respect why the late Ottoman residents of Istanbul chose Islands as resort residences in 19th century. A recreational atmosphere attracts the traveler while the boat gradually approaches the islands. Low rise buildings within green landscape divided by promenades call for discovery. Throughout this journey what strikes most are the mansions, some hidden between the trees and some decorating the streets impress the sightseer. They are indeed the remnants of the late 19th and 20th century settlements. Although politically a part (ilçe) of Istanbul, Adalar but Büyükada in particular keeps its status as a relatively isolated and a marginal space in

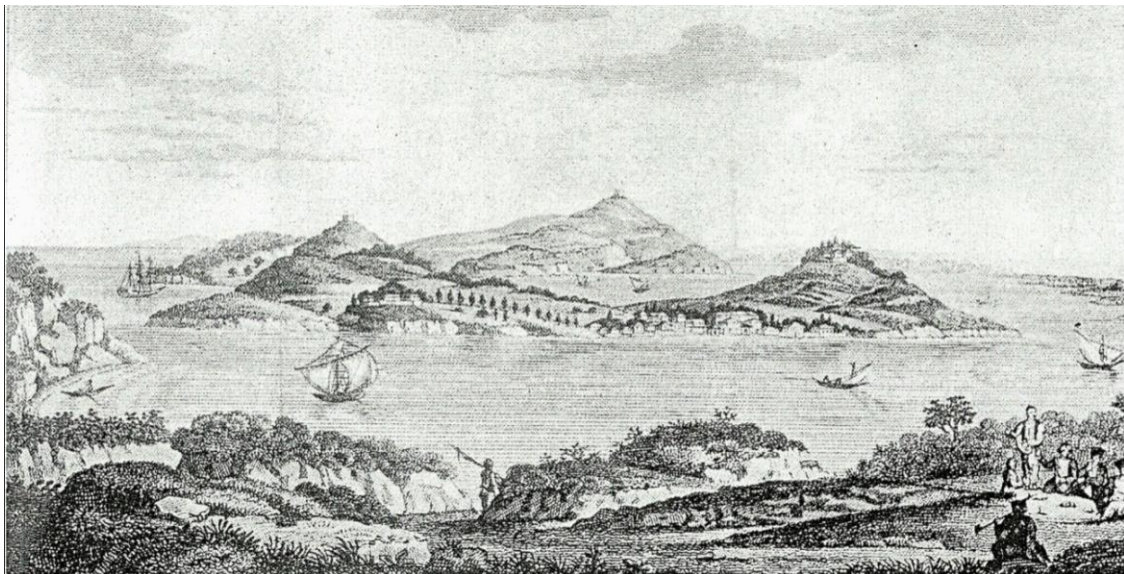
⁷Spencer C. H. Barrett (1996).The reproductive biology and genetics of island plants Phil. Trans. R. Soc. Lond. B 1996 351 725-733; DOI: 10.1098/rstb.1996.0067.

⁸ Vogiatzakis, I.N. & Griffiths, G.H., (2008). Island biogeography and landscape ecology. In: I.N. Vogiatzakis, G. Pungetti & A. Mannion, eds. Mediterranean island landscapes: natural and cultural approaches. *Landscape Series Vol. 9*. New York: Springer, pp.61-81.

many aspects. Istanbul is a cosmopolitan city, while Büyükada (despite the population change in the past 50 years skyrocketing after 2000s) is an island of relatively less heterogeneous Stanbulites and weekend tourists.

We can see the different attributes of island in some literature works and travel writings as well. S. Samuel Cox (1824-1889)⁹ an American Congressman, diplomat. and United States Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire spent most of his summer in Büyükada. Apart from being a diplomat he was very skillful in writing his memoirs in the countries that he served. In his book *The Isles of the Princes; or, the Pleasures of Prinkipo*, published in 1887, he writes about St George's monastery, about the beauty of the landscape:

But we have started to investigate St. George's monastery, the most celebrated of those located on the Princes Isles. We are hospitably received by Father Arsenius, who alone is in charge. He invites us to his cool chambers in the second story of his monastic domicile. The views through the large window are far-reaching and splendid. He shows us the images of his shrines in the old church...He invites us to see the holy spring. It is in a deep chamber amidst the rocks. He gives us a drink of its clear, cool water (p.45).



Picture 25 View of Princes Islands by Melling Antoine Ignace's 1819 drawing.Source: Tuğlacı (1995), p.95.

In order to further contextualize the attributes of landscapes appeared here, we must continue to look at another landscape form that appears in the field which is a hill. Apart from being an island and thus a space dealing with liminality, of no lesser importance is

⁹Cox, Samuel Sullivan (1887).*The isles of the Princes; or, The pleasures of Prinkipo* New York London Putham<https://archive.org/details/islesofprincesor00coxsrch>

the height of the place. As in an attempt to target the sky, Buyukada gives the impression of scrutinizing the water, the landscape, the impression of bringing the earth closer to the skies. The relief of the place gives room for a lot of symbolic interpretation in people's imaginative mechanisms and their beliefs. Pictures displayed by modern pilgrims on Instagram show how people see this place as being closer to the skies—a place which elevates the soul, the spirit and the mind through something which is more than beauty—a spiritual attribute. Also the image of the tree like a divinity watching the horizon (which is a favorite one on Instagram) connects the hill shaped place with the idea of a rising up move as in a vertical transcendence of liminality and so, an important subject matter for this study. Could Aya Yorgi be considered an 'axis mundi' due to its hill like attribute of the landscape? It is worth trying to find out.

1.2. Aya Yorgi hill as *Axis Mundi*



Picture 26. Localization of Aya Yorgi hill and pilgrimage path on Büyükada Island of Istanbul

An elaborately wrought explanation of the dialectic of the 'Sacred and the Profane' is given by the historian of religions and mythologist Mircea Eliade. In his in-depth analysis of the engagement of sacred space and 'homo religiosus', Eliade (1959)¹⁰, equipped with

¹⁰Eliade, Mircea. (1959) *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion*. Trans. by W. R. Trask. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co.

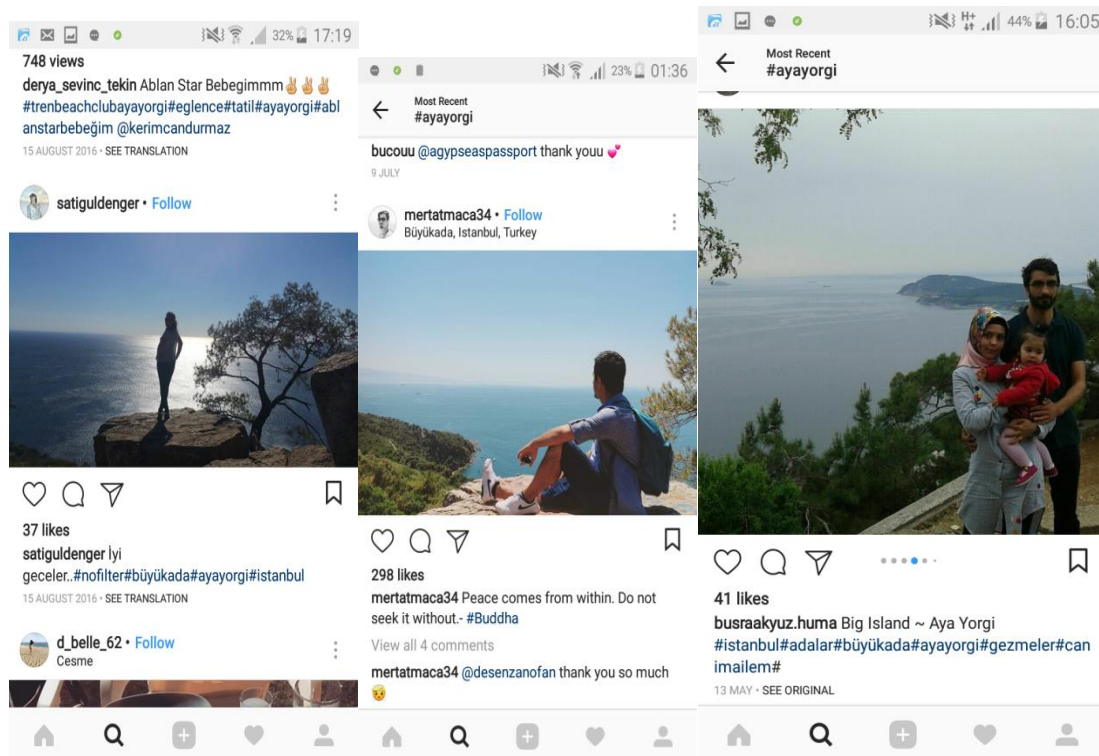
an exclusive body of vocabulary, introduced and construed a ‘thick description’, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) later coined, whereby the symbolical demarcating nature of thresholds, such as doors and gates, acting as liminal boundaries, endow space with a non-homogenous essence, where the physical demarcation separating and indicating the distance between the two modes of being, the profane and the religious. It gives birth to the ‘symbolic point of passage’ into a ‘hierophany’, the revelation of the sacred. This communicative opening into the interior of sacred space is further described as the ‘irruption of the sacred’, the cosmogonic moment where reality is revealed and ‘a world is founded’. Eliade’s¹¹ sequence of ‘religious conceptions’ grounds its centre upon the communication with heaven through which the ‘navel of the earth’, also known as *axis mundi* is expressed for it is through the centre that ‘orientation’ is made possible. Eliade’s¹² ‘centre of the world’ can be symbolically embodied in many a varied way, natural or man-made, such as a tree, a pillar, a sanctuary or a hill. Instead of a pole, pillar or tree, the axis mundi might be, say, a ladder or a mountain. Beliefs in cosmic mountains included the idea that our world is holy because it is the place closest to heaven. Likewise Aya Yorgi Hill with 202 meters is called or remembered with a couple of names such as Yüce-tepe (Holy hill) or Isa Tepesi (Jesus Hill) which have sacred connotations. Some of the pilgrims that were interviewed stated that they felt as if they were ascending to heaven while climbing up the hill.

The importance of landscape of Aya Yorgi experience was emphasized by all the respondents, both pilgrims and tourists. As one noted, “Büyükkada was a lovely day out from İstanbul, so the aim was always “a day in the country,” with the landscape playing a vital role in that experience.” For some landscape contributed to a strong sense of transcendence: “The landscape gives me great tranquility, serenity and inner peace.” “It is my first experience on Aya Yorgi hill, an overwhelming landscape that leads you to meditation and silent reflection” “Landscape, I would say, almost paradisiacal, that excites inner tranquility and peace of mind.”. For some other informants in the field, landscape provoked worship of God: “Landscape is always a way to celebrate the marvels of God’s love. Panoramic view of Marmara Sea from Aya Yorgi is a special to love and being loved. One woman said, “It is the other way round. You see the landscape before you see Aya Yorgi.

¹¹ ibid

¹² ibid

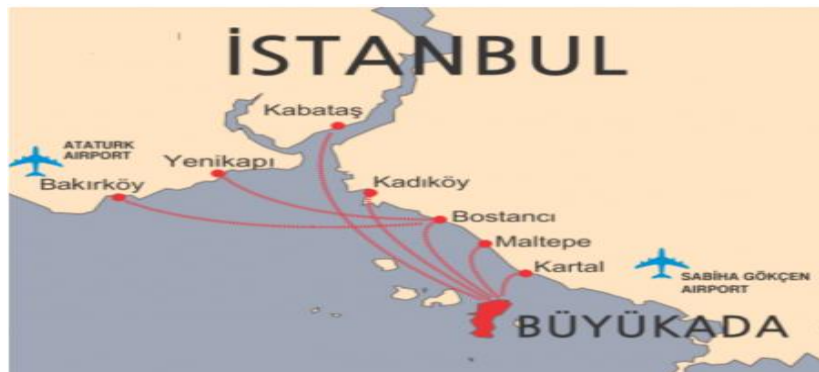
When we have a look at the pictures on Instagram related to Aya Yorgi , we can certainly observe the attribute of the landscape related with the island and Aya Yorgi church in the the posts of monderen travellers and new pilgrims. Obviously people posted the most pictures with #Aya Yorgi and #Aya Yorgikilisesi labels viewed as an extraordinary beautiful natural place, a place for relaxation and meditation. It is clear that the place is a favorite destination for travel where people go in order to have good time, to move and walk, to ride bicycle. However it is not all. Most of the posts displaying the stunning panorama view from the hill show a tree in the picture composition. This is something that grabbed my attention and made me think that people are not just having good time there. They are moved inside. The pictures, either they have a human presence or not, are very beautiful. The comments or just the labels beneath the panorama pictures are mostly containing the word huzur (peace) but also deniz (sea), blue, happiness, love, dreams and,of course, travel and nature. Many of the comments below these pictures speak about the difficult road to the church but it is generally agreed that the effort is rewarded. Young men post picture of this type as well adding comments about peace from inside and hope, even pieces of Turkish poetry. This means Aya Yorgi is more than a place for touristic travel, it is also, most of the times, a spiritual destination providing an inside touch for people who get there, mostly for young, modern people. (see pictures in annex 1.)



Picture 27 posts related with the landscapes of the island on Instagram

1.3. Pilgrims' Route

The natural characteristic of a sacred site is an integral part of a sacred place and, thus, it serve as an appropriate classificatory criterion. Environmental characteristics that might be observed are high places, springs or wells, streams, coastal protuberances, caves, or a combination of several physical features (Nolan 1987)¹³. As Aya Yorgi is situated on the highest summit of Büyükada and it is not easily accessible, it requires a long walking.



Picture 28 Route of pilgrims on Aya Yorgi pilgrimage

As the target destination of the pilgrims is located on an island, crossing the sea is the only means of reaching it. Büyükada is connected to the mainland by steamboats from seven different ferry docks as shown in the map above. Once the pilgrims arrive on the island, they have basically three options to get to the church.

1. Horse carriages (phaeton) from the port until Lunapark square (phaeton drop off). A least-effort connection, in time and ease but costly
2. Bicycle rentals
3. On foot: a challenge and a sacrifice of four km steep curvy road. For many pilgrims, greater merit can be obtained at the destination if the trip has been arduous
4. Minibus for the ones who need special assistance (very old, disabled etc)

Often, the total journey or entire pilgrimage way is usually regarded as sacred path. All pilgrims, irrespective of whether they commence and terminate at the same place or join the path at one single point, complete the prescribed fixed route. The naturally prescribed route functions as the sacred approach which prepares the pilgrim for the encounter at the

¹³Nolan, Mary Lee. (1987) Christian shrines in Western Europe and India: A preliminary comparison. *The National Geographical Journal of India* 33:370-78.

holiest place. As they approach the goal: Lunapark square, they are channeled into a single pathway, called as *Aya Yorgi yokuşu* (slope).

Now let us compare Aya Yorgi and Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh in terms of landscape attributes.

1.4. Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh/Sarba-Jounieh



Picture 29 Location of Sarba

Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh on the other hand, different than the landscape of Aya Yorgi , is located in within a triangle of the sea shore, a grotto and a monolithic rock in Jounieh. According to Cassar (2015)¹⁴ the topography of the seashore is a spatiotemporal intersection which carries religious, cosmological, social and ecological symbolism where, the sacred is revealed and experienced. The rituals of past maritime societies and the topographic features of coastal areas, fulfils the criteria for the embodiment of sacred space and the liminal seashore is a multidimensional edge where the creation of a passage into the sacred comes into being (p.15). Similarly, although not practiced lately, the feast day of St John (24th June) used to be celebrated by the sea by number of people before 1970s. Despite the fact that it is less alive in cultural memories of the locals, the aged inhabitants of Sarba still have the vivid memories of these celebrations. According to Lahdo (2005)¹⁵ during the beginning of the 60s, Mar Yuhanna feast, visiting Batieh cave and bathing in its sacred water were annual extraordinary memorable events. People used to pay a visit to such sacred place so as to keep their traditions inherited from one generation to another.

¹⁴Cassar, Grace (2015). Is the seashore an opening into the sacred? Exploring liminality of the littoral *Spica* Vol. III No. 1 Spring retrieved 25 may 2017 from : <http://www.sophia-project.net/Spica>

¹⁵BouLahdou, Wakim (2005). *Sarba, Kalat el Shir*Jounieh

People never neglected practicing such tradition having that deep belief that it was a source for their kids' protection from diseases and disabilities, a blessing and benediction for all people living there.

In our interview, Toufiq Nakhoul (99 year old man from Sarba)¹⁶, reported how once Al Batiyeh was embroidered with the maritime festivities during Mar Yuhanna day with the participation of the Muslim and Christians.

On the 24th of June, you couldn't count the people, they were numerous. They used to come by buses from different parts of Lebanon, not only Christians but Muslims too. It was impossible to find a place to park the cars. They used to come to Batiyeh first. It was like rule. Before the summer, swimming, naval season started people used to feel the need of being blessed in the waters of Batiyeh. We believed that Mar Jirjes protected us from the perils of sea. Sinking, drowning etc..



Picture 30: Mar Yuhanna Day from 1950s. Source: Municipal archive

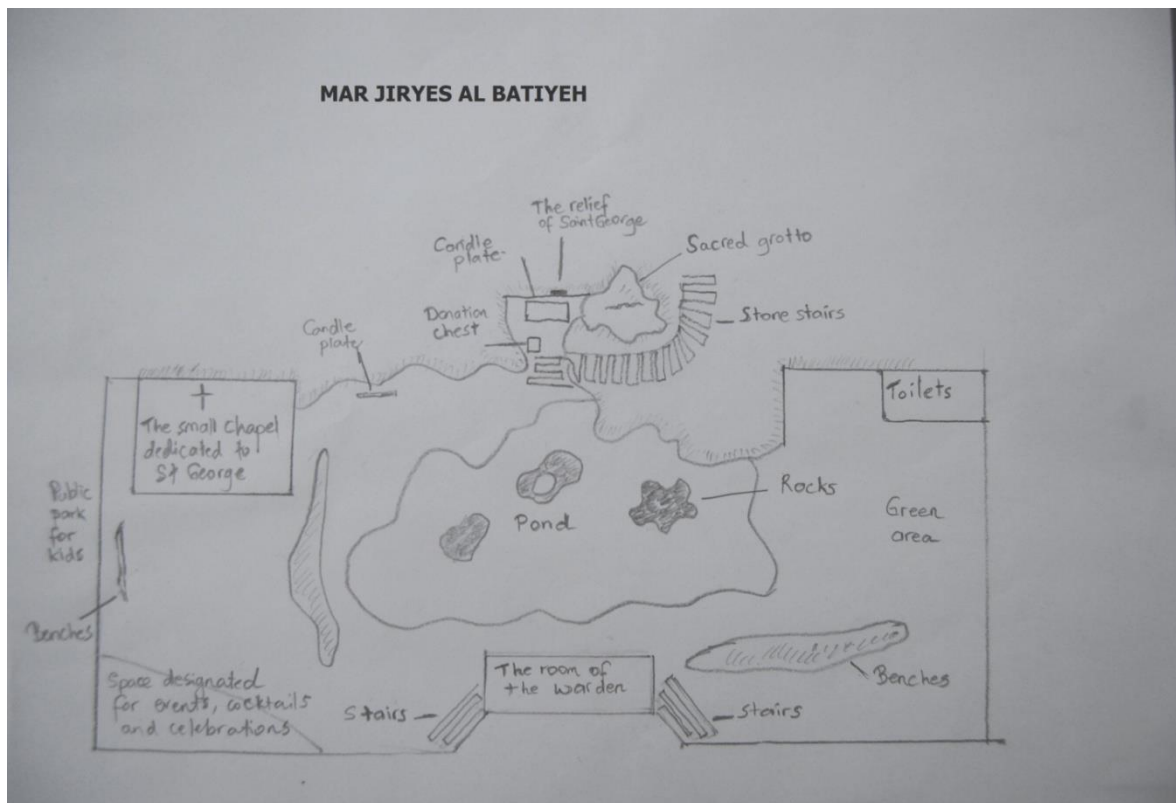
¹⁶ Personal Interview with Toufiq Nakhoul 12th July 2017 in Sarba

Sarba, a village in Jounieh, derives its name from Phoenician origin which signifies “the tower”. This name evokes the high monolith rock at the top of the hill: the “*chir el batiyeh*”. *Chir* is another Phoenician oriented name for majestic rock where there used to be an ancient fortress on the ruins of which The Monastery of The Basilian Order of Saint Saviour was constructed (Bou Lahdo, 2005)¹⁷.

Having sketched out the sea shore and rock, we can proceed to morphologically thick description of al Batiyeh and its popular natural basin-grotto. The shrine complex of al Batiyeh is immediately located around the grotto dedicated to St George, linked with the sea. On descending from the road by a rough slope and some rock-cut steps, one sees set in the cliff face the rear part of what appears to have been a rock-hewn Phoenician tomb, the fore part of which has collapsed with the erosion of the cliff. Cut into this remaining rear wall of sandstone are two niches. The main niche is semi-circular, about a meter in diameter, and covered with candle black and wax, impregnated with pebbles, with a bottle of oil and a row of burning candles on the ledge. Above on the right and left there are two small sockets which appear to have been part of an earlier construction. On the level of the top of this first niche and a little to the right of it is a modern low relief of St George killing the dragon in the second pointed niche. In front of this there are a few artificial flowers and a lighted electric bulb. Underneath and in front of both niches there is a platform, with a dressing cubicle, recently built of concrete blocks.

To the right of the platform, steps go down into an open grotto with slowly moving water passing through it. The steps form an L-shaped turn to lead down to a large stone which marks the edge of a natural basin, which used to be connected with the sea by a hole in the lower rock face, so that the water in the grotto appeared to come partly from the sea and partly from a spring in the rock. Anyone standing in the basin is directly in line with the low relief of the saint killing the dragon. On the road immediately above the shrine are several cassia trees surrounding two small cafes, Above the shrine and the cafe at the summit of the cliff face, which rises again sharply on the landward side of the road, is the tomb of a Moslem santon, dating from the period of Ottoman era. Although the shrine outwardly presents a Christian appearance, with its illuminated icon of the saint killing the dragon, since it is also associated with running water, a tomb and trees, it conforms to the traditional requirements of Islamic spaces.

¹⁷ ibid



Picture 31 Mar Jiryes Al Batiyeh sketch—Source: Nour Farah Haddad, 2008 re-illustrated by Suzan Kaymaz

What makes the natural basins or caves sacred? Throughout the world many people consider caves, or at least particular ones, to be sacred places, and in some instances inhabited by spiritual beings or forces. Yet caves may even be recognized as a spiritual or mystical place apart from any particular religion. The current, general anthropological study of caves and grottos offers insights into early customs, ceremonies, and beliefs, and indicates that caves played a significant role in religion. The evidence suggests that some caves were perceived as vital aspects of a sacred landscape and connections to the supernatural underworld (Healy, 2017 p.4)¹⁸.

¹⁸Healy, Paul F. (2007) *The Anthropology of Mesoamerican Caves Reviews in Anthropology*, 36: 245–278, online DOI: 10.1080/00938150701436636



Picture 32 Al Batiyeh—old gravure, source: John Carne, *Syria, the Holy Land and Asia Minor Illustrated*, London, 1840.

A cave is a truly extraordinary environment surface and underground interface; darkness and silence prevail; and the environment is variously alien, awesome, mysterious, and even potentially dangerous. For many people entering a cave involves crossing a threshold from the profane into the sacred. This crossing into the subterranean world may be characterized as liminal, a transitional state from the place of ordinary above ground activities into a place of extraordinary underground activities. The cave becomes a gateway into the spiritual dimension of human experience, or even into the supernatural world. It should be noted that the area around as well as inside a cave may be considered sacred (Moyes 2012¹⁹ ; Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel 2004)²⁰. Accordingly, various religious uses of caves encompass, but are not limited to, pilgrimage sites; natural sanctuaries for retreat, contemplation, prayer, worship, and/or meditation; resonance chambers for singing or chanting; and/or reliquaries and tombs.

¹⁹Moyes, H. (Ed.). (2012). *Sacred darkness: A global perspective on the ritual use of caves* . Boulder: University of Colorado Press.

²⁰ Sponsel, L. E., & Natadecha-Sponsel, P. (2004). Illuminating darkness: The monk-cave-batecosystem complex in Thailand. In R. S. Gottlieb (Ed.), *This sacred earth: Religion, nature, environment* (pp. 134–144). New York: Routledge.

In the following part I would like to continue with examining the phenomenon of water that appears in both Aya Yorgi and Al Batiyeh sites aiming to highlight the way in which water with its functions and powers in shared sacred sites are represented in people's imagination, minds and beliefs.

1.5. Water and Cultic Waters

Water plays an important role in magical and religious worldviews. It manifests as a chaotic primordial element in multiple cosmologies, the source from which the universe emerges; a great flood that wipes out an unworthy human race in the Old Testament, Quran and Near Eastern and Greek mythologies; a gate way to the 'otherworld' and site of ritual deposition in Celtic cosmology; and as a healing and purifying element in pre-Christian, Christian and Muslim religious practices. It symbolizes prosperity and enhances fertility. Mircea Eliade deemed water a 'celestial symbol' that existed before the earth. Contact with water always brings regeneration. In whatever religious complex we find them, the waters invariably retain their function; they disintegrate, abolish forms, 'wash away sins'; they are purifying (Eliade, 1959²¹). Although the salt-water oceans cover a majority of the planet, sacredness is generally ascribed to fresh water, and sites including wells, lakes, springs, rivers, and waterfalls have drawn pilgrims throughout history across vast geographical distances and from varying religious and spiritual traditions. In Anatolia and Levant, holy springs have traditionally shaped religious beliefs and practices.

In the Turkic world, caves and trees are a few of the many natural phenomena that are held sacred. Other examples include the stag, animals associated with particular saints, wells and sacred stones. Thierry Zarcone ²² has done a very interesting piece of work which gives some more detail about this surviving element of Turkish and Central Asian religion which is often identified as 'shamanic'. But on a wider scale, natural phenomena and sanctified humans are fundamental to the building of the 'sacred' and the sacred building in many different settings. In contrast to the predictable view that emphasis on the natural environment is somehow a 'pagan' or 'primitive' strand within a tradition, here I would say that trees, caves, stones, bodies of water are in fact the significant building blocks of ritual spaces, without which most traditions cannot maintain a symbolic system.

²¹ ibid

²² Zarcone, Thierry(2003) 'Stone People, Tree People and Animal People in Turkic Asia and Eastern Europe', in *Diogenes* 207 (2005) 35-46.

1.5.1. Holy Springs of Orthodox Greeks in Istanbul (ayazma visitation – αγιασμός)

The reverence of different types of water as holy or the attribution of various degrees of sacredness to water have caused controversies between the religions. The change from traditional folklore or tribal religions to Christianity or Islam, or syncretistic variants of the religions as well as the replacement of Christianity by Islam or the mutual co-existence, interdependence and influence of different religions and traditions highlight the structuring role water has in societies as a deep and resilient element and fundament in humans' understanding of themselves and their place in the cosmos. Although this basis of social and religious core values has always been changing throughout history, the ontology of water has been and still is part of the fundament in society and religion. Importantly, water beliefs and rituals often overlap and transcend dogmatic beliefs and rituals in “great traditions” or world religions. Ancient practices or relics of traditional rituals and cosmologies have to a large extent been interwoven into Christianity and Islam by the believers. Thus, syncretic practices and beliefs are often anchored in perceptions of water, and “high religions” incorporate former water rituals and beliefs as part of the religion's central beliefs and core values. It is therefore crucial to see water not only as a physical substance, but as an actively incorporated agency in the dynamics of change in culture and religion in history, since it has had a fundamental role in people's beliefs, value systems and identities (Oostergaard, 2010 p. 12)²³. Some of the wells and springs were used for divinatory purposes, or for seeking blessings upon oneself and one's family. The majority of wells and springs, however, had role in healthcare, and the commonest attributions of their powers were to the curing of eye problems, children's diseases and infertility. The link between water and wellbeing and fertility led to a number of wells gaining a reputation for curing illnesses and childlessness.

Like many shrines in the Near East, the church's healing power is also linked to its fountain. The following in other churches is similar but is sometimes difficult to document because of the informality of individuals and small groups coming to Christian shrines, apart from as I have seen in the Church of the Theotokos of Blacharnae, Balıklı Ayazma in Istanbul, amongst other places. Official churches and shrines are not the only places of commonly held sacrality in the encounters between religious traditions. In fact, in the

²³Oostergaard, Jesper (2010). A topographic event: A Buddhist Lama's perception of a pilgrimage cave. *Social Analysis*, 4 (3), 64–75.

context of the formerly Ottoman world and similar surrounding societies, we find a number of interesting examples of the way that human communities construct sacrality, like a web, around natural sites deemed important for their basic power and then go on to categorize them through the lenses of a particular inherited religious tradition. Ayazmas are one of these examples

In Istanbul a large number of water springs, having been "sainted" by the Church, became places of pilgrimage connected with the cult of a saint. 'ayazma αγίασμα' is a Greek name for these sorts of sacred water sources. Many wells and springs had suitably Christian legends attached to them during the 7th and 9th centuries; the main centuries of the struggle between the Christianity and paganism. Reşat Ekrem Koçu mentions nearly two hundred ayazmas in the Istanbul Encyclopedia (Istanbul Ansiklopedisi)²⁴. Today, the number of ayazmas have decreased significantly. Most of them have been destroyed as a result of building constructions or road works. The metropolitan municipality's cultural inventory lists fifteen, six of which are in Sarıyer, five in Fatih, three in Beşiktaş and one in Çatalca. On the other hand an Ankara University thesis written by Demet Kılınc (2010)²⁵ talks about twelve ayazmas. According to Turkish ethnologist Mehmet Bayrı (1953)²⁶ as a result of Istanbul being frequently seized, water couldn't be brought from outside Istanbul but was provided instead from such small springs as these and these springs have protected the public from drought and many of them were used for religious visits as well as devotional purposes. Virtually all of the healing wells had their rituals which had to be performed in order to 'activate' the power of the water. This usually involved visiting the place only on certain acknowledged days. The Christianized or 'sainted' wells are visited on the saint's day or in daily basis. The practice of making offerings at (or to) bodies of water appears to be a very ancient one. There is a tendency to throw a few coins into the water (a practice which had been very common in Roman times), though traditionally one left either a piece of clothing tied to a nearby tree or some other evidence of the cure anticipated. The tying of rags is the most common of these practices and is still widespread almost all over the region today.

²⁴Koçu, Reşat Ekrem (1960). Istanbul Ansiklopedisi, Vol.3, Istanbul: Istanbul Ansiklopedisi ve Neşriyat

²⁵Kılınc, Demet (2010). *Halk inançları Açısından İstanbul'daki Kilise ve Ayazmalar* Unpublished masters thesis Ankara University

²⁶Bayrı, M. Halit (1953) İstanbul İlinde Yer Adarı-Bentler, Sukemerleri, Ayazmalar, Kaynaklar" *Türk Folklor Araştırmaları*, Yıl: 4, Cilt: 2, Sayı: 45, İstanbul, 1953

1.5.2. Miraculous Ayazmas of Istanbul

Sacred fountains can be found, with different meanings attributed to them, at both Muslim and Christian sites. In Istanbul there is much devotion to water flowing from the fountains of the churches as explained below.

Surp Hreshdegabet Ayazma Սուրբ Հրեշտեղատապետաց Եկեղեցի (Balat): A former Greek church given to Armenian community in the 18th century. The name day is on September 25th and water is believed to cure the paralyzed and deaf-mutes with the condition of blood sacrifice; sheep or hen .**Hagia Andonios Ayazma (Karaköy):** The water is believed to cure mental illnesses, skin problems and rheumatic diseases.**Balıkli Ayazma (Yedikule):** also called as “Zoodohos Pigi in Greek: the source that grants life. The spring is in the church of Virgin Mary and has a long history that dates to the second half of the fifth century and beyond. According to a story, the spring got its name of Balıklı (with fish) when a man who lived here was frying fish and was told that the Turks had taken Istanbul under Mehmet II in May 1453. Upon hearing the news, he answered, “I would believe this news if the fish fried in this pan come alive and jump out of this pan.” And then the fish came to life and jumped out of the pan as the all the news was true. The descendants of these miraculous fish have been jumping in the spring ever since. The water has the reputation of curing ophthalmic (eye) diseases. **Aya Demetrius Ayazma (Kuruçeşme):** In order to reach the main spring of the ayazma, one needs to pass through a vaulted passage that is 150 centimeters wide and 140-150 centimeters high. Its walls are wet and have taken from of women’s breast. It can be seen that people have written the wishes they made and painted pictures on these formations..”Don’t let my mother in law intervene,” “God, please provide livelihood and order in our home,” “Let me lose weight in a healthy fashion,” “Let me be in luck,” “Let me own a house”. In the past, votive objects such as socks, undershirts and handkerchiefs were hung near the spring, coins would be fixed on the little holes on the walls. Later on, such acts were prohibited. On the feast day of St Demetrious, the 26th of October, the priest reads from the holy book in this hand to the public, which has lined up in front of the fountains below, and places one of his hands on the head of the owner of the wish. After the reading is over, he places the cuffs he is holding on his hand, on the neck, arm and head of the person and then asks the person to kiss the cuff. It is claimed that this cuff was affixed on the neck of Hagia Demetrius when he was tortured. It is frequently visited by women with breast cancer, the paralyzed, the

stammers, deaf-dumb children and their mothers and the depressed. (Değer, 2010²⁷, Bayrı, 1953²⁸) **Aya Haralambos Ayazma (Fener):** Since Hagia Haralambos is known to be the “protector of the seriously ill” (cancer), the waters of the ayazmas are preferred by such patients. **Aya Catherine Ayazma (Moda):** This ayazma is now under the Koço restaurant on the Moda cape. It can be entered through the door next to the restaurant. It is visited by the people of Anatolian side of Istanbul both by Muslims and Christians. **Aya Kyriaki Ayazma (Kireçburnu):** The ayazma is open to visitors everyday for all kinds of illnesses and wishes. **Aya Kyriaki Ayazma (Tarabya):** it is open only one day each year, on July 7, the name day of the patroness. In the Istanbul Encyclopedia, Hakkı Göktürk describes the ayazma with the following words: “*Its ceiling is made of wood and the floor is tiled with malta stone. There is a deep well on the left of the entrance and a marble ring with flower engravings. In front of the well is a bowl.*” **Aya Margaret Ayazma (Tarabya):** In the past, people used to come here for skin diseases. Currently, the ayazma is closed. **Panagia Ayazma (Yeniköy):** It has no church. And ayazma has no water. However, water is sanctified here on the first day of each month through prayers. The person who wishes his/her wishes to come true, writes the names of his/her family members on a piece of paper and comes here with five loaves of bread. After the priest says his prayers on the loaves, they are sliced into pieces and distributed to the visitors. Visitors eat from this bread, which has been read upon, and drink from the sanctified water. **Aya Panteleimon Ayazma (Kuzguncuk):** dedicated to Hagia Panteleimon, who was a healer or a doctor, lived under the reign of Emperor Diocletian during the end of the 3rd century and the beginning 4th century. Diocletian beheaded him for his Christian beliefs. The Orthodox Church commemorates him on July 27. According to the hearsay, one day a crippled came to him Doctor Panteleimon and the patient started to walk.

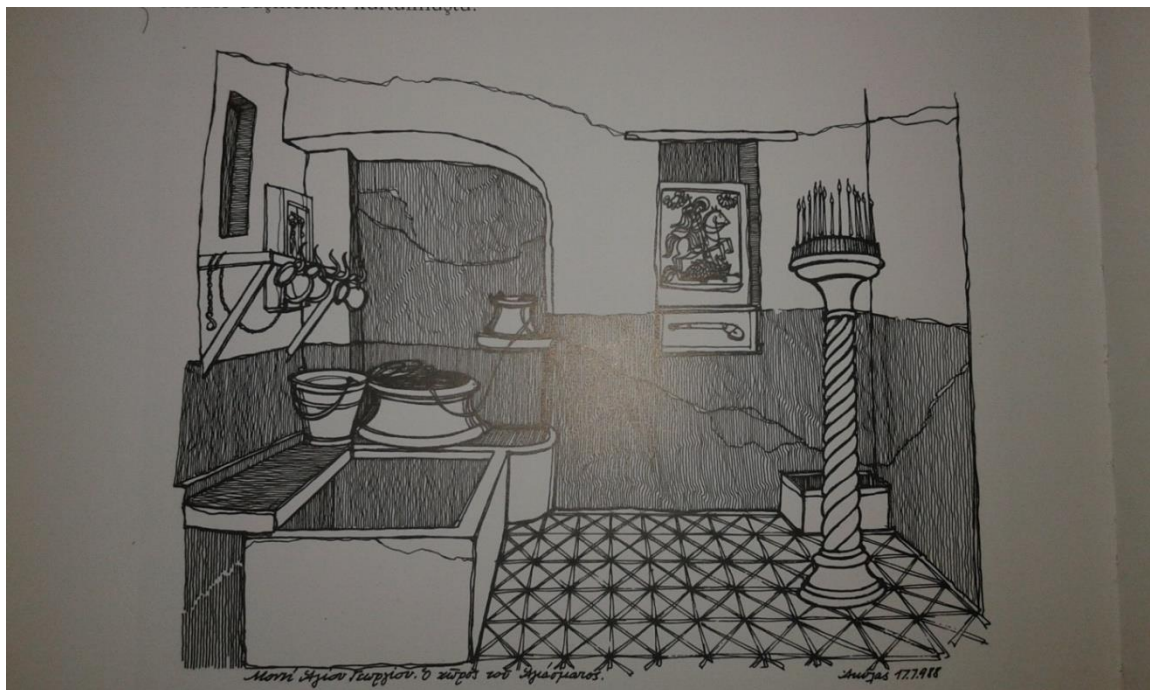
Aya Paraskevi Ayazma (Büyükdere): It is located right next to the church building in the garden of the Paraskevi Church on in Büyükdere. Istanbul Encyclopedia states that once there were 37 ayazmas dedicated to Hagia Paraskevi in Istanbul. Water is believed to cure eye diseases. **Hagia Thrapon Ayazma (Sirkeci):** The ayazma is open to the public on Mondays and Fridays. **Aya Vlaherna Ayazma (Ayvansaray):** The name day of the ayazma starts on July 2 and lasts for a week. During these days, and also on daily basis throughout the year Muslims and Christians encounter around the sacred water. The water

²⁷Değer, Mebrure (2010). *Istanbul'un Şifalı Suları*. Istanbul Avrupa Kültür Başkenti Yayınları: Istanbul

²⁸ Ibid

is said to cure the meningitis. **Vefa Ayazma (Aynbiri)**: also called the Panagia ayazma. Even though the ayazma is open everyday, it is visited by Muslims and Christians on the first day of each month. Hence it is also known as *ayınbir* (the first day of the month). Water is believed to have miraculous effects on sterile women (Değer, 2010)²⁹.

Water plays crucial role in sacralization and popularity of Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh as in above examples. Once open to public visitation, Aya Yorgi long ago closed the doors of its ayazma due to the security reasons. The priest of the monastery claimed that visitors either intentionally or not gave harm to the icons and the walls of ayazma, by doodling their wishes or marking their names on them. One has to have a special permission from the Greek patriarch in order to enter. Nowadays, the wardens descend to ayazma and bottle the water by themselves without permitting others accompany them then they distribute it to the ones who request. However according to one of my informants Fıstık Ahmet³⁰, a “restaurant owner” at the age of 75 and local, the real reason for this prohibition is somehow different than what it is said. He claimed there were rumors that the water of ayazma has been dried up and the church authorities apply such a regulation in order to preserve the “reputation and the honor” of the cultic ayazma by deterring other see the “desperate reality”.



Picture 33 Illustration of the ayazma of Aya Yorgi in 1990s, AkilasMillas (2013) p.538

²⁹ ibid

³⁰ Personal interview with Fıstık Ahmet 12 .11.2016

1.5.3. Miraculous Waters of Al Batiyeh

“In one drop of water are found all the secrets of the oceans.” Khalil Gibran
(Lebanese poet)

There are different types of mazars (shrines) in the Lebanon. Most of them can be divided into two groups. The first one includes the sites where the central shrine is a saint's grave. These are burial places. The other group consists of holy sites where the tomb is absent, or there is a structure resembling a vault or a mound that imitates a grave. These are so-called 'fictitious' graves. *Mazars* of this kind have a number of specific features. Trees, caves, other natural objects can be mazars (shrines) and water-springs. In Lebanon a large number water springs, having been "sainted" by the Church, became places of pilgrimage connected with the cult of a local Saint. Many wells and springs had suitably Christian legends attached to them during the 7th - 9th centuries; the main centuries of the struggle between the Christianity and paganism. Virtually all of the healing wells had their rituals which had to be performed in order to "activate" the power of the water. This usually involved visiting the place only on certain acknowledged days. The Christianized or "sainted" wells are visited on the saint's day or in daily basis. The practice of making offerings at (or to) bodies of water appears to be a very ancient one. There is a tendency to throw a few coins into the water (a practice which had been very common in Roman times), though traditionally one left either a piece of clothing tied to a nearby tree or some other evidence of the cure anticipated. The tying of rags is the most common of these practices and is still widespread almost all over the region today. Some of the wells and springs are used for divinatory purposes, or for seeking blessings upon oneself and one's family. The majority of wells and springs, however, had role in healthcare, and the commonest attributions of their powers were to the curing of eye problems, children's diseases and infertility.

Being one these venerated water source, al Batiyeh has deep lexical connection with water cults and carries the connotation in itself. There are two possible etymological roots for toponym "Batiyeh". The term might be derived from the word "*bata*" which means glass container for drinkable water (*bouwat* in plural). This attribution is due to the reason that the water of the Mediterranean Sea inserts into the grotto of St George. The researchers think that it derives from the Semitic compound word "*Bet Tawweye*" which can be translated as "the house for the sad" a place for weeping over the God Adonis. Some other experts assume that the word comes from French "Baptême" or

“baptism”(Freiha, 1985³¹ cited in BouLahdo, 2005³²). In his two articles: *Survivals of Ancient Semitic Religion, The Ancient Religion of Syria in Centers of Moslem and Christian Influence* (1904)³³, Samuel Curtis mentions the landscape of Batiyeh and as a water based shrine frequently visited by Maronites and others:

At Juneh, in the vicinity of Beirut, beyond the Dog River, there is a curious case of syncretism, where the ancient religion connected with an artificial cave by the sea, called el-Batiyeh, dominates the Maronite church, known as Mar Jirjis (St. George), some distance away. The cave is thought of as belonging to St. George (Curtis, 1904 p. 12)



Picture 34 Sacred grotto of al Batiyeh photo by the author 2017

At the oratory, the water of the cave is considered to have miraculous properties and pilgrims perform a series of acts to acquire the beneficial effects of water. The ablutions with sacred water from the grotto constitute the main rite; in addition to this practice, pilgrims light candles, kneel, burn incense and bring water back home either to drink or to continue with ablutions according to a fixed routine. It is sometimes that some pilgrims even immerse themselves entirely in the water.

³¹ Freiha, Anis. (1985) *Al-qaria al-lubnaniah: hadharah fi tariq al-zawal* [The Lebanese Village: A Civilization on the Road to Extinction] (Beirut: Jrous Press, 1989, 2nd edition

³² BouLahdou, Wakim (2005) *Sarba: Kalat al Shir*, Jounieh Municipality Press

³³ Curtiss, Samuel. (1902), *Primitive Semitic Religions Today*, Fleming Company: Chicago

While Aya Yorgi restricts the access to holy water, al Batiyeh is enriching and layering its popularity by providing portable water for the visitors and others. There is a drinking fountain which anybody can benefit regardless of their visit motivations.



Picture 35. Drinking fountain at Al Batiyeh photo by the author 2017

Drinkable water pipes were installed approximately in 1980s, and water was brought from a village nearby (the name is unknown) which has tasty fresh water resources. Although the water is not sanctified, everyday hundreds of people stop their cars in front of the shrine and take several big barrels of water either because they believe in its sacredness or only because it is free, tasty and safe. There is no doubt that some Muslim pilgrims are aware that the role of the holy water fonts are for crossing oneself. However, if we look with the eyes of basic sacrality, we see that such things as water may be seen as neutral sacred elements to be drawn upon in each individual way. Whether the person is Christian, Muslim or non-religious as often pointed out to me by pilgrims at Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh, water is an example of a consistent element (in both the generic and specific sense of the word) in the basic sacrality of spaces which can be visited by members of traditions that are otherwise more mutually exclusive in belief or practice. Water can be both sacred and non-sectarian because it cannot be physically inscribed with religious symbolism, nor can it be claimed as the exclusive property of any one community. At the same time, it is intimately associated with healing traditions and is revered by many cultures because of its

role as the basic support of physical survival. Water is life and water is healing. Water is basic enough to be held skillfully in the hands of syncretic hybridity

Having grasped the heightened significance of water, one can enter into the histories of Aya Yorgi and al Batieh shrines.

1.6. Brief History of Büyükada Aya Yorgi and Sarba Mar Jiryas al Batiyeh

According to Byzantine historians the earliest settlements known in the islands were the convents built around the 8th century. The archeological evidence however indicates that Princes Islands were inhabited in the Roman period as well. Traces of Roman convents found in Burgazada and Prinkipo (Büyükada) are dated to 3rd century. The Roman settlement consisted of small farms and some religious structures and was inhabited by fishermen, villagers, Roman priests and clergymen. In the Byzantine period more convents and mansions were built and the settlement expanded (Millas, 2013, p. 332)³⁴. During the Byzantine rule, the islands became exile places for descendent prince and princesses, who were tortured and deported from their palaces. During the Iconoclastic period between 726–842 AC. several religious people, emperors and their families were sent to and tortured in the Islands. They were known as isolated sanctuaries and remote exile places located in the middle of the Marmara Sea. The first known exile took place in Yassıada. Nerses and his commission of ten people were sent by the Armenian King as ambassadors to Constantine the Great were exiled to the island. The exiles continued with Atterik, who was charged with treason sent to Büyükada in 637. Queen Irini sent her son Constantin and her granddaughter Efrosini to the convent, which was built on Iustinos's palace in Büyükada. At the end of her reign she herself was exiled to Midilli (Lesbos) and buried in the graveyard of the same convent in Büyükada. The emperor. Romanos Diogenis likewise was tortured and sent by his family to the convent in Kınalıada which was built during his reign (Türker, 2004)³⁵.

Princes Islands came under the rule of Ottomans shortly after the conquest of Constantinople by Fatih Sultan Mehmet. During the siege of Constantinople in 1453, Kınalıada, Burgazada and Heybeliada surrendered while Büyükada was conquered by the navy general Baltaoğlu Süleyman. Following the Ottoman conquest the convents became

³⁴Millas, A. (2013). *Büyükada*. Adalı Yayınları

³⁵Türker, Orhan (2004). *Prinkipo'dan Büyükada'ya: bir Prensadasının hikayesi* Sel: Istanbul

deserted and the residents migrated to Istanbul and the neighboring villages, except the priests. The Greek population later returned to the islands.

The Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi who visited Heybeliada, Tavşanadası, Burgaz, Kınalıada and Büyükada in 1641 noted in his Seyahatname that the villages in the islands consisted of 100-200 houses and that the residents were occupied by fishing and farming. Evliya Çelebi describes Büyükada as such:

The island is a prosperous one. It is in 20 miles length. About two hundred Greek houses exist. It is called ‘Kızılada’ (Scarlet Island) due to its red mountains. It (the island) is close to Üsküdar lands. It has its church, orchards and gardens, rich fish garths surrounding it in four sides. These (Princes Islands) are seven islands, big and small in scale. All are supervised by palace gardener bostancıbaşı and all belonged and reserved to the general of the navy Kaptanpaşa. Each island has security officers and a janissary sentry. These seven islands are eighteen miles from Istanbul.

Armenian historian Eremya Çelebi Kömürcüyan visited the islands during his journey to Bursa in 1653 to meet with Grand Vizier Köprülü Mehmet Pasha. In his travel diary, Kömürcüyan wrote that the Princes Islands were beautiful and that they were occupied by Greeks. In some of them, priests live, while in some religious areas, domed churches and convents with magical gardens exist. All of these belong to Greeks. In the villages that are built in seashore, facing each other, the villagers live. In the 19th century the islands became known as serene and comfortable vacational areas for the Ottomans and non-Muslim residents and foreign visitors of Istanbul. The Turkish population started to increase following the establishment of the Naval School at Heybeliada in 1824. The permanent residents of the islands however were mostly Greeks and Armenians (Tuğlacı, 1995)³⁶.

About the ethnic character of the islands, Millas asserts that after the conquest of the islands by the Ottomans, new—though Greek inhabitants were brought from the ‘coastal villages and towns from the Black Sea’. Historians mention the migration of the Greeks from the beginning of the eighteenth century till the second half of the nineteenth century who came either from north Aegean islands like Chios, Imbros, Tenedos and Mytilene or from further islands in the southeastern or western coast of Greece; they were mainly running away from the conflicts and warfare at their homelands and were looking for better living conditions and job opportunities. These immigrants quickly settled in their new homelands and continued what they knew best for living: they planted vines, opened

³⁶Tuğlacı, Pars (1995). *Tarih Boyunca İstanbul Adaları* 1 Sal Yayıncılık: Istanbul

stores, constructed masonry. The transportation from the city was to be carried out by row boats, and people were coming to the islands for sightseeing, recreation and to spend the summer. In the early nineteenth century there are several examples exposing the ways that the island participated in the lives of those people (p. 245)³⁷.

In 1884 French historian Gustave Schlumberger visited Turkey and Princes Islands. In his book *Les Iles des Princes* he described the islands and wrote:

“The coffee houses, that are high above, alongside the seashore are never vacant. Behind this active and lively front, houses and rich mansions; that are framed by oleander trees which grew nowhere as lavish as they do around Istanbul, and all kinds of trees, ivy and flowers, jasmines, judie trees, stem straight up to hill sides”. (p.44)³⁸

Concerning the diversity in population in the islands, Kemal Karpat(1985)³⁹ notes the range in population according to the census reports in 1906/7 and 1914:

Census of 1906/7			Census of 1914		
Communities	people	%	Communities	people	%
Muslims	5360	39,8	Muslims	1586	14,3
Greeks	6137	45,6	Greeks	8725	78,7
Armenians	740	5,5	Armenians	596	5,4
Jews	191	1,4	Jews	79	0,7
Latins	56	0,4	Armenian Catholics	56	0,5
Bulgarians	31	0,2	Latins	8	0,1
Armenian Catholics	23	0,2	Protestants	6	0,1
Protestants	23	0,2	Greek Catholics	5	0,0
Foreigners	905	6,7	Syrians	5	0,0
Total	13466	100	Serbians	21	0,2
			Total	11087	100

Table 1 Census report in 1906/7 and 1914

In the 18th and the beginning of 19th centuries the transportation between Istanbul and Büyükada was also maintained by rowboats. The increase in the population in Büyükada in 19th century necessitated the establishment of steam boat services. In 1846 ferry services were put into operation from Kadıköy by *Seyr-i Sefain*, *Fevaid-i Osmaniye*, *İdare-i Aziziye*, *İdare-i Mahsusa* and *Şirketi Hayriye* companies. The first steamboat service for Princes Islands was provided by *Fevaid-i Osmaniye* in 1846 (Akçura,2010 p. 58)⁴⁰. By the

³⁷ İbid

³⁸ Schlumberger , Gustave (2000) *Prens Adaları* trans. Haluk Çağlayaner İletişim:İstanbul

³⁹ Karpat, Kemal H.(1985) *The Ottoman Population 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics. Madison: Wisconsin University Press*

⁴⁰ Akçura, Gökhan (2010) *Ada Sahillerinde Bekliyorum. AdalarMuzesiPublising*

initiation of ferry services, establishment of a port became necessary in the island. In this respect, a wooden port called *Debarcadere* was built in front of Plaj Hotel in 1899 and served for about a century. (Tuğlacı,1995)⁴¹. Büyükada attracted wealthy families from Beyoğlu as a resort settlement, like those in Yeniköy and Anatolian shores. The hotels, restaurants, beaches and mansions with flowered gardens together with social events like tours and balls attracted visitors. Popular touristic activities were touring by donkeys and horse carriages within the island, sailing around the islands by motorboats visiting Dil, Yörükali beach, Güvercin cave, Tavşan and Sedef islands, tracking, bicycling and religious visitations. The activities and social gatherings were mostly organized in the popular hotels and clubs located were the two promenade streets; Yirmiüç Nisan and Çankaya streets (Millas, 2013)⁴².

After the Republic of Turkey was established Büyükada continued its popularity as a touristic district. Many visitors such as former Russian royalties and foreign government officers visited and stayed in the island. During the 20th century, the active social life was further cherished with the participation of Atatürk. During the Second World War, social events continued and the island preserved its resort status despite the fact that the country was in poverty. In this period the island also became the exile residence of Bolshevik revolutionists of the Red Army. Leon Troçki had lived in Büyükada in Con Pasha's Mansion after the war. (Akpınar, 2014 p. 85)⁴³. In the years following the unilateral termination of the Greek-Turkish residence treaty, the Cyprus Extraction (1964) and the September 12 Military Strike (1980), there has been a sharp decline in the island population. A large part of the non-Muslim population is lost due to these three events by external migration. The numerical change of the population in the Islands during these periods can be handled as follows with the help of Table:

Year	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	2000
Population	↑19834	↓15219	↑17600	↓13171	↑18232	↓14785	↑19413	↓17760
Type of migration	External Migration	Internal Migration	External Migration	Internal Migration	External Migration	Internal Migration	External Migration	Internal Migration

Table 2. Numerical change in population in the Islands

⁴¹ Tuğlacı, Pars. (1995) *Tarih Boyunca İstanbul Adaları I*. İstanbul: Say Yayınları,

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Akpınar, Semiha. (2014). *Büyükada: Bir Ada Öyküsü*. AdalıYayınları

Although the average total population has generally been declining over the years as a result of internal-external migration, the cultural differences of the new comers have led to profound changes in the socioeconomic and cultural structure of the island. In Büyükada the non-Muslims constituted the majority of the population until the 1960s. After the Erzincan earthquake that took place on December 27, 1939, Alevis origin Turks and Kurds migrated to Istanbul and then to Büyükada .It can be said that the adaptations of the citizens to these social structures in the islands are successful. “Warm and open-minded” Alevis (according to the Mukhtar in our face to face interview⁴⁴) have entered into positive interactions with the Greeks and adapted in the island culture in terms of productivity and social life.

After 1950s, those who migrated to Büyükada from the other parts of Turkey due to economic reasons started to work as apprentices with Greek tradesmen in businesses such as restaurants, carpentry, tailoring etc. and they adapted to the social texture of the island in all these years. However, after the 1980s, the ethnically conscious migrants from the east part of Turkey have led to a sort of ghettoization. The Nizam Quarter for example, which covers the inner parts of Büyükada, received a lot of external migration especially after 1980. 31.6% of the people living in this region are from the Black Sea Region and 23.8% from Eastern Anatolian Region. According to the records of Nizam Neighborhood House, the first five provinces with the highest population by birth place are as follows; Erzincan: 170, Sivas: 134, Van: 80, Malatya: 60, Tokat: 52. We can find concrete examples of this situation in Kırathaneler (coffee houses) case, as each migrant groups have their own Kırathane: Sivaslılar Kırathanesi, Malatyalılar Kırathanesi, Vanlılar Kırathanesi, etc. whose numbers are approximately twenty in Büyükada⁴⁵.

<u>Religion</u>	<u>Maden quarter</u>	<u>Nizam quarter</u>	<u>Total</u>
Muslim	4662	2449	7111
Christian	110	101	211
Jewish	54	65	119
Total	4826	2615	7441

Table 3. Distribution of the population by religion Source:
Büyükada Maden and Nizam Mukhtarlık⁴⁶ Archives

⁴⁴ Personal Interview with the mukhtar 20.04.2017

⁴⁵ Personal Interview with the mukhtar 20.04.2017

⁴⁶ (in Turkey and some Arab countries) the head of local government of a town or village

The urban development of the island was affected by newly settled society who populated the island especially after the increased transportation facilities. The increase in population and established port created a town center and introduced new building types such as pier building and tourism establishments. The internal transportation means influenced the development of the town center and the expansion of residential neighborhoods. The physical environment of the island was shaped by the routes and streets. A main transportation artery which surrounded the island became a route for touring an important social event. The main transportation vehicles within the island were horses, phaetons and bicycles in the 18th and 19th centuries, and no vehicular traffic was allowed beyond the port. The main transportation routes also serve for the popular social activities such as the evening tours with horse carriages. Wealthy families owned their own carriages and stables, while others hired carriages. Two types of carriage tours were organized in the island. *Küçük Tur* started from the Clock Tower, passed from Nizam street to Lunapark continued from Maden neighbourhood to Kumsal region and came back to the tower. *Büyük Tur*, included visiting the forests. In addition touring around the island from the sea was also possible in these tours rowing boats and yachts were used (Akpınar,2013 p. 47)⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ ibid



Picture 36 Tourist map of Büyükada

Büyükada can be characterized by economic monoculture, where the local economy is dependent on only one activity, which is tourism. The island is a popular tourist destination for daily excursions especially during the summer months and is very popular for tourists from the Gulf and elsewhere in the Arab world. The population starts to rise in April (Aya Yorgi feast day 23th April) and reaches its peak, 150,000 (Büyükada–65 000), during July–August, accompanied by a daily visitor flow of some 100,000 at weekends (Demiroglu, et al 2007)⁴⁸. the Princes' Islands are not typical touristic island destinations like the Caribbean or the Canaries, because of the difference in terms of their developmental scale and not being physically isolated enough to be perceived as exotic venues but rather are the settlements of a metropolitan city, Istanbul. Additionally the islands could be described as an urban-rural fringe also referred to as ex urban or peri-urban location. The urban rural fringe is characterized by a 'transitional zone between space that is more clearly urban and space that is more clearly rural' (Weaver, 2005, p.

⁴⁸Demiroğlu, Canan. and Cetin, G. and Izgi, T. Mehmet . (2007). Sustainable Development Of Tourism For Islands: Case Of Buyukada – Istanbul”, Canakkale, International Tourism Biennial.

23)⁴⁹ and with particularly characteristics such as tourist shopping villages, recreational visits to natural or historical sites and different organized tours around the islands (Weaver, 2005)⁵⁰.

Now I would like to steer away from the Büyükada Island in general into more specific focus on the sanctuary of Aya Yorgi tied closely to ritual and concept of spatial practice. As it will become clearer, while there are a number of geographical, cultural, religious and theoretical strings in this study, they are not only connected but intimately interdependent and at times barely distinguishable from each other

1.6.1. A History challenged by a legend: Aya Yorgi Koudunas. Then and Now

According to the tradition, the Monastery is a little over a thousand years old, built in 963 AD, at a time when the glorious and most devout Nicephorus Phokas reigned over the Byzantine Empire. Its miraculous holy icon of Saint George is believed to be a gift from the islands monastery of Empress Irene of Athens, a nunnery erected by Kuropalates Justinus the second and later renovated by the Empress herself. In an imperial edict of Emperor Manuel Komninos dated 1158 Princes Islands and the monasteries there were mentioned. It also gave a reference to Monastery of Kodonos which according to the historian Manuel Gadeon is no other than the Monastery of St George Koudunas.

According to Gustave Schlumberger (2000)⁵¹, regarding the origins of monastery everything is dark and unclear. However it is almost certain that upon the beginning of monasticism there had been here monastic settlements. In his work on the “The holy Monastery of St George Koudunas in the islands of Prinkipo, Malechko (cited in Schlumberger p. 21) states that monastery was deserted either in 1204, due to the pillage of the Christian crusaders, which left Istanbul and its surrounding region devastated; or 1302, during the pirate attack against the island led by the Venetian admiral Giustinianni, who burnt down its buildings and plundered the treasures of the monasteries. According to local tradition, during the plunder the monks took the holy icon of St George with its innumerable offerings and buried into the ground covering it with the holy Altar of the monastery’s church is an attempted to avoid its robbing and desecration by the invaders.

⁴⁹Weaver, Dennis. (2005), The distinctive dynamics of exurban tourism. *Int. J. Tourism Res.*, 7: 23–33. doi:10.1002/jtr.521

⁵⁰ ibid

⁵¹ ibid

The holy icon of St George remained unharmed for many years until its miraculous discovery. After many years of this tragic event, Aya Yorgi (St George) appeared in one shepherd's dream and told him to climb way up the hill and dig in the soil where he hears bells ringing. Although the shepherd did not take this dream seriously, after dreaming the same dream three nights in a row, and climbed up to the church barefoot and in silence. What he saw in his dream became reality. As he reached closer to the top, he could hear the church bells ringing. He began to dig in that exact spot and found those buried icon adorned with a "string of bells and holy objects. Astonished, he found them as new as the day they were buried and reestablished the monastery. Ever since those bells have been given out as a blessing from the saint and perform miracle (Millas, 2013, Akpınar, 2014)⁵²

Samuel Cox⁵³ talks about the legend of Aya Yorgi in his memoirs

... The legend goes, that many years ago, a shepherd tending his flock on the summit, where the monastery stands now, went to sleep one hot afternoon. In his sleep he has a dream. In the dream he is advised to dig in a certain spot close to where he is lying and "he would hear of something to his advantage." He digs and finds a horseman mounted on a beautiful white charger, with bells hung round the animal's neck. The horseman makes a behest to the sleeping shepherd. He is enjoined to dig again, according to directions. He digs and finds an old picture. It represents exactly the horseman whom he had seen in his dream, even to the bells round the horse's neck. A superstitious importance is attached to the discovery. This is strengthened by the fact that the shepherd, who previously was quite an imbecile, the moment he touches the picture becomes possessed of the most extraordinary knowledge in all matters. The picture is recognized. It represents St. George. From the fact of the bells round the horse's neck not being painted but real bells, the picture, when it was discovered by the shepherd, was and is still called "St. George of the Bells." (p. 112)

British anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner, in their thought-provoking book *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (1978)⁵⁴ give structural analysis about the foundations of holy shrines in Mexico by referring to the work of de la Fuente. De la Fuente puts forward the term 'The shepherds cycle' (el ciclo de los pastores). It refers to a body of legends, current between the ninth and tenth centuries which describe the miraculous discovery of images of the Virgin Mary, mainly by shepherds, cowherds and farmers. Numerous local traditions are recorded varying in detail, but all of them exhibited a strikingly uniform thematic structure. The holy images are found in the ground by

⁵² ibid

⁵³ ibid

⁵⁴ Turner Victor, Turner Edith. (1978). *Image and pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, New York: Colombia University Press

knocking a dirt clod aside, in caves while fetching a lost sheep, in ponds, in streams on islands and in trees (de la Fuente cited in Turners, 1978 p. 47)⁵⁵

Very often the shepherd is led to his discovery by a miraculous happening, such as the appearance of the virgin in a vision; an unnatural light and unexpected noise. This narrative genre comfortable and, had a very wide distribution in medieval Europe. Mysterious lights, celestial harmonies, demonstrations of adoration and respect by some animals in a rustic and little frequented place, doubts and vacillation by the favored shepherd, attempts to carry the image and worship it privately, incredulity on the part of the people of the town when the miraculous vision is reported, attempts to carry the image to a more accessible place return by the image two or three times to the site of the vision, resolution to build a church in the designated place and frequent veneration of the image there by the people of the town (Turner and Turner, 1978)⁵⁶.

For instance, the shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe was the most important Marian shrine in the medieval kingdom of Castile. It is revered in the monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe, in today's Cáceres province of the Extremadura autonomous community of Spain. The shrine houses a statue reputed to have been carved by Luke the Evangelist and given to Saint Leander, archbishop of Seville, by Pope Gregory I. According to local legend, when Seville was taken by the Moors in 712, a group of priests fled northward and buried the statue in the hills near the Guadalupe River in Extremadura. At the beginning of the 14th century, the Virgin appeared one day to a humble cowboy named Gil Cordero who was searching for a missing animal in the mountains. Cordero claimed that the Virgin Mary had appeared to him and ordered him to ask priests to dig at the site of the apparition. Excavating priests rediscovered the hidden statue and built a small shrine around it which evolved into the great Guadalupe monastery (Turner and Turner 1978 p. 57)⁵⁷.

Levi Strauss (1976) ⁵⁸ gives us the notion that the same structural elements can be found in various myths. The same element recur but with different relationships. In Aya Yorgi legend we can observe a striking similarity between with the above mentioned examples in the way of discovery of the holy image of St George by a shepherd. However the tradition aside, based on the written sources, the historian Manoel Godeon dates the reestablishment

⁵⁵ *ibid*

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

⁵⁷ *ibid*

⁵⁸ Claude Levi-Strauss (1976) *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1, (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 146-197.

of the monastery in 1628, while Raymond Janin says it is in 1625 under the reign of Sultan Murad 4th. However, according to Millas (2013)⁵⁹ based on patriarchal letters, such reconstruction must be between 1751 and 1752. According to a patriarchal letter of 1760 eight years prior to this issue, the monastery was erected by a certain monk named Isiah who wanted to keep the monastery free from the influence of the local bishop, asked the ecumenical patriarchate to include it under the stavropegic monasteries. His request was granted. The monastery remains in the operating to this day under stavropegic⁶⁰ status. Monk Isaiah erected the monastery's old Catholicon (church), just above the holy fountain in the name of Saint George. He adorned it with a marble icon stand that is visible upon entering the shrine of the Holy Fountain before descending the staircase. The icon-stand preserves his name as "founder of the Monastery" in a carving dated 1754. In 1830 abbot Theophanes restored the existing marble iconostasis and the Holy Altar. This last iconostasis is adorned with Byzantine style icons thanks to the efforts of the priest monk Joacim Cahtzidakis who he passed away 1996 (Millas 2013 p. 487)

Between the years of 1751 and 1760 in addition to the church of St George, monk Isaiah built a chapel in the name of the Most Holy Theotokos, which is known today as Pagania Vlacherna. It is situated to the left as one descends to the lower ground of the Holy Fountain shrine. The chapel is actually underground today, since in 1905 a new church was built above it. As testified in the aforementioned patriarchal letter, Monk Isaiah also constructed cells while the chapel of St Haralambos⁶¹ was built later on.

When he was faced with a difficult financial situation, monk Isaiah, having obtained the approval of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, asked for financial support from the great Lavra Monastery on Mount Athos which then willingly responded to aid the monastery placing it under its protection. A little later when the interest of the Great Lavra faded the monastery was supported by the Association of Grocers of Constantinople until 1781 when the monastery of St Lavra in the Peloponnesus placed it under the protection constituting its metokion⁶². In 1826, when monastery of St Larva was destroyed, the ecumenical

⁵⁹ ibid

⁶⁰ A stauropegic monastery, also rendered stavropegic, stauropegial, or stavropegial (from Greek: σταυρός stauros "cross" and πῆγνυμι pegnumi "to affirm"), is an Eastern Orthodox or Eastern Catholic Christian monastery subordinated directly to a Patriarch or Synod, rather than to a local Bishop. The name comes from the Byzantine tradition of summoning the Patriarch to place a cross at the foundation of such monasteries

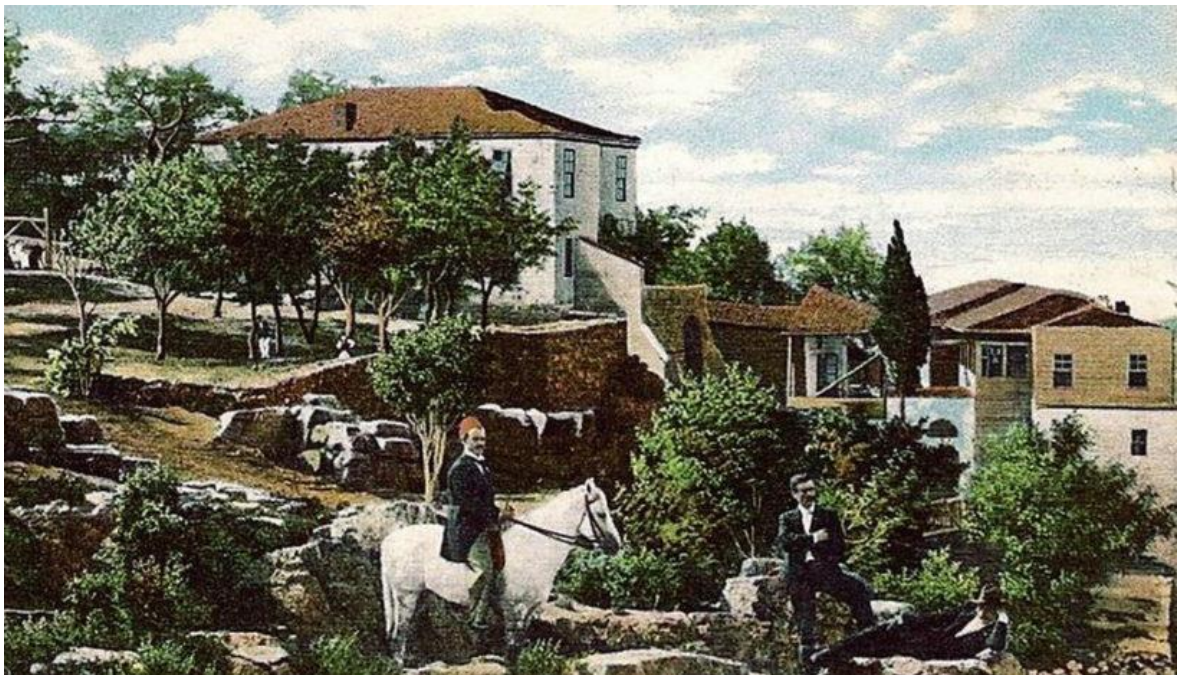
⁶¹ St. Haralambos, the Hieromartyr of Magnesia. He was an early Christian bishop in Magnesia(Manisa),

⁶² In Eastern Orthodoxy, a metochion (Greek: μετόχιον or μετόχι) is an ecclesiastical embassy church, usually from one autonomous church to another. The term is also used to refer to a parish representation (or dependency) of a monastery or a patriarch

patriarchate undertook the supervision of the monastery of St George until 1852, when the Ottoman Sublime Port (Bab-ı Ali)⁶³ allowed the Lavriots to send an abbot again (Millas,2013)⁶⁴.

Aya Yorgi unlike the other churches in Ottoman territory was privileged being allowed to ring its bells. Memories of Samuel Cox⁶⁵ verify this:

When Mohammed II. captured Constantinople, although he granted many privileges to the Greek Church, he prohibited the use of bells. The bells annoyed other populations; but he allowed them to be used in the churches and monasteries of the Isles of the Princes. There they still remain. These islands were then exclusively inhabited by Greeks. No other people were disturbed by the resonance of the bells. There seems to have been much prejudice among certain sects in the East against the use of bells. I have seen in Jerusalem a heavy resounding oak board, which, being struck by a metallic bar, calls the religionists to prayers. In the interior of the court of the old Greek monasteries, there is often seen a monk who calls the congregation to prayer, not as the Moslem does, from the minaret with his shrill appeal to Allah, nor by the bells which were permitted to remain upon this island, but by a bit of board called the Simandro, which is generally used instead of bells during worship. After a small contribution to the good father, and many farewells, we mount our donkeys and go home by the moonlight that now floods the isle. It is too late to make a visit to the other monastery. That is reserved for a promenade on foot, as it is near our villa.(p. 159)



Picture 37 19th Century Image–St George Koudunas (source: Celik Gulersoy archive, 1997⁶⁶)

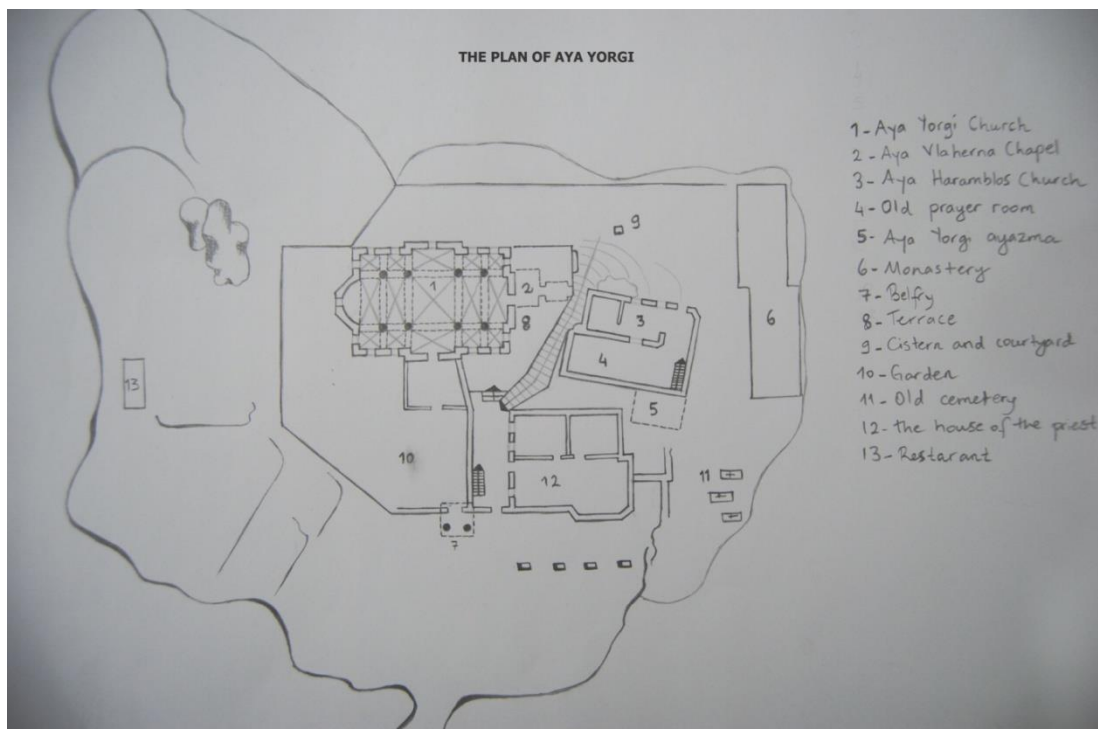
⁶³ Ottoman Porte or High Porte (Ottoman Turkish: باب‌عالی Bâb-ıÂli or Bab-ıali, from Arabic: باب ,bāb "gate " and Arabic: عالي ,alī "high(", is a metonym for the central government of the Ottoman Empire, by reference to the gate giving access to the block of buildings that housed the principal state departments in Istanbul. Today, the buildings house the provincial Governor of Istanbul.

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Gulersoy, Çelik (2017). *Büyükkada. Yesterday* Çelik Gulersoy Foundation: İstanbul

In 1867, the priest monk Serapheim Georgiu built the chapel of the holy apostles, next to what was then the monastery's entrance near the holy fountain. In 1884 another priest monk, Arsenios Rofougales built the existing abbot house, as we see engraved on a marble epigraph above its entrance. Ten years later during the great earthquake of 1894, the monastery's church, its chapels and cells, all suffered major damages and the monks attempted to prop them up with wooden beams. However its next abbot, the ever memorable archimandrite Dionysos Paikopulos, a highly educated and gifted man, erected a new magnificent and larger church in a prominent place reminiscent of the church of St Lavra where he was originally from. By testimony of a marble epigraph over the backdoor of its sanctuary, the church was built in 1906 and was consecrated in all stateliness on September 10 1908. The following year the belfry was built thus concluding the set of buildings as found today (Millas, 2013)⁶⁷. A great fire in the summer of 1986 burned down four storey cell complex that once stood on the large terrace which remains today. Nine years later the abbot house also destroyed by fire. In 1997 the Patriarch Bartholomeos, the abbot house was restored while the church of St George, along with all the chapels and surrounding grounds, were all embellished to the state we see the today (Akpınar, 2014)⁶⁸.



Picture 38 The plan of Aya Yorgi (Source: Semiha Akpınar, reillustrated by Suzan Kaymaz)

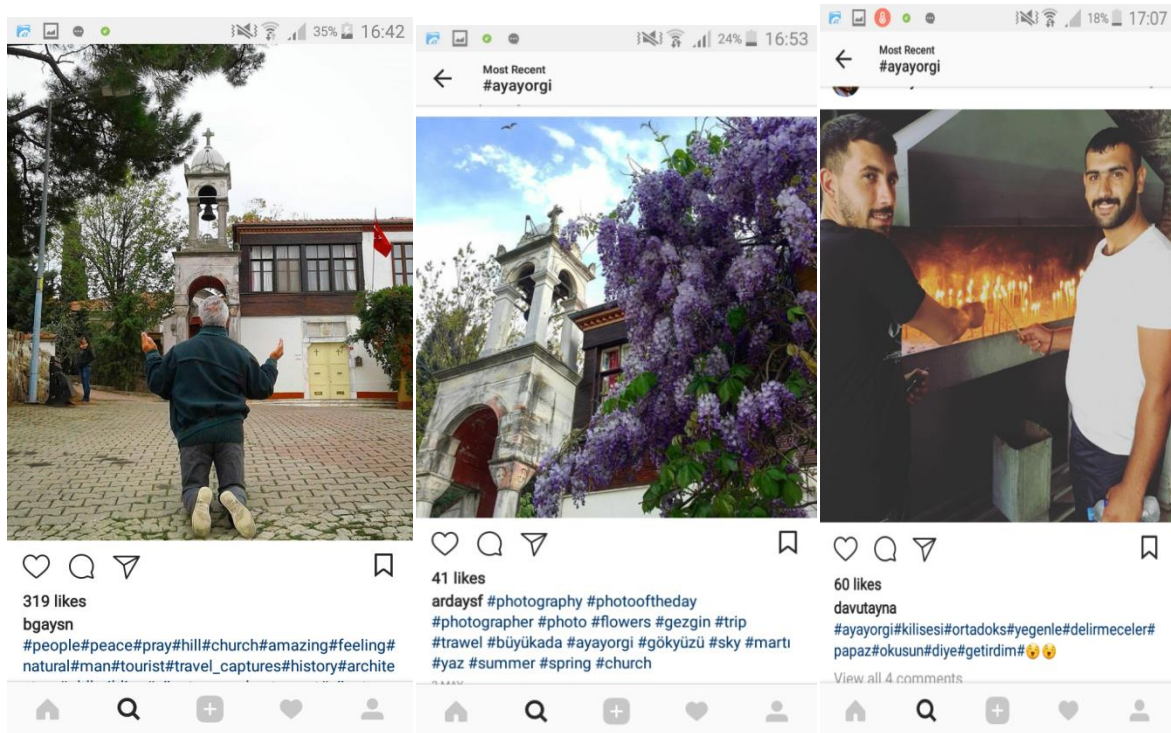
⁶⁷Ibid

⁶⁸Ibid

Due to its geographical and commercial characteristics, Buyukada has been also a destination for travel, leisure and relaxation. In modern times it functions like a museum in which the layers of history and tradition are preserved in physical evidences (buildings, places) and in its spiritual aura. This resulted in a considerable increase of population number which skyrocketed after 2000s. Modern times demonstrate that Buyukada is a more desired place than it was in the past. As it was demonstrated before, travelers like Samuel Cox, Evliya Çelebi and historians like Eremya Çelebi Kömürcüyan pictured this place as a beautiful one with a notable Greek presence. Things are presented and explained in the old times by the use of the supernatural sustaining thus the aura of sacrality. This aura has not faded away completely in the contemporary times although the Greek population decreased in number. Modern days brought modern changes: developing of transportation, commerce, tourism. Travelers and historians in ancient and old times had a small audience, few people could find out about the marvels of Buyukada from their writings. As people travelled more and more, driven by political, social and economical reasons, tourism also flourished supported by the economical factor.

With the era of communication, starting with the development of media and, lately, social media, the way people learn about reality has changed. As people are now consumers and producers of media, the speed, the amount and broadcast of information has increased to an extent which has a major impact on the popularity of a place, person or event. As the old times writings showed Buyukada and Aya Yorgi through the eyes of only few travelers and historians, the impact on the targeted audience was very small. For the modern audience these sources are not easy to be found therefore they might be appealing only for researchers. Media operated a major shift not only in terms of quantity but also in terms of quality of information. Angles of seeing Aya Yorgi now are as numerous as the lenses which capture it. If the depiction of old times travelers were grounded on direct observation, legends and stories, it would be more than challenging to see how modern travelers picture it out now. Assimilated by Facebook-the most popular social media platform- Instagram shows varied approaches of modern travelers towards Buyukada and Aya Yorgi Church revealing social, cultural and political traits of the contemporary world. How is the church of Aya Yorgi perceived by its visitors in modern Turkey? Let's have a look at the huge corpus of pictures on Instagram. Pictures showing the church of Aya Yorgi and sometimes the road to , represent 30% of all the pictures I analyzed which is an impressive amount. The most part of these pictures are taken from outside the church. The

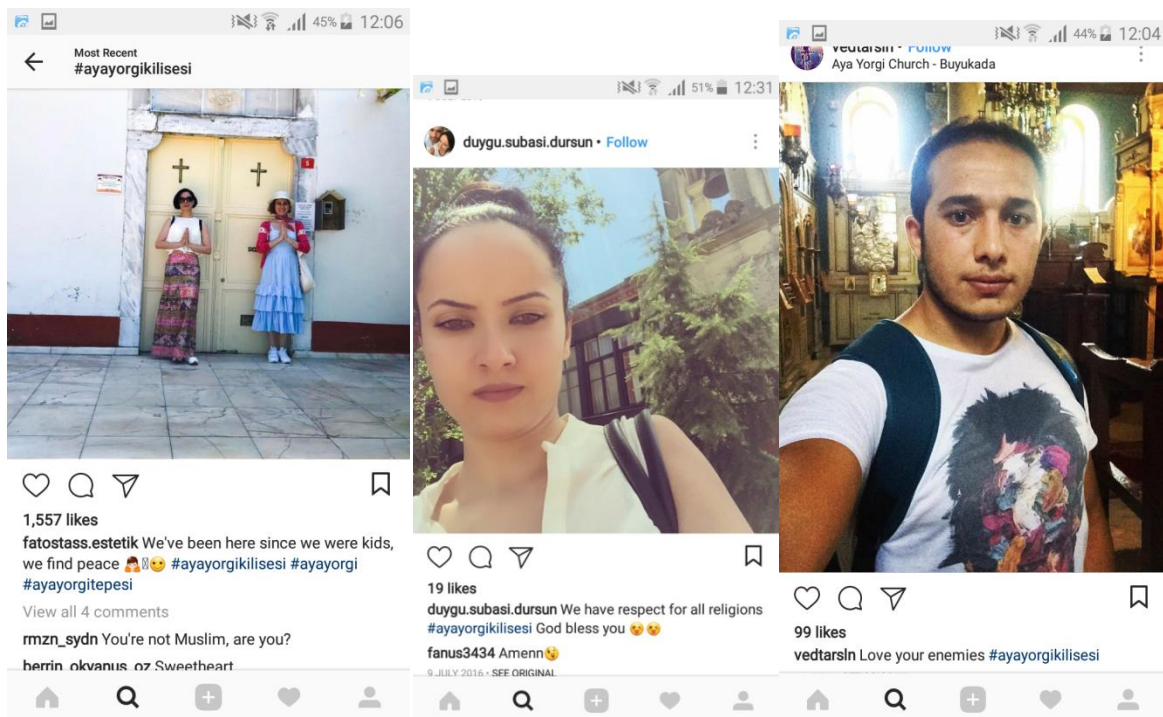
edifice is viewed from varied angles but most of them contain the bell tower. Many filters have been applied in these pictures to enhance the aspect and to render an original perspective. The pictures from inside of the church show the altar screen, the painted ceiling, the central lighted chandelier and also the icons of Saint George. They are also stylized and artistically enhanced. Comments below these images speak about the legend of the church (the miraculous way in which the place has been revealed to a shepherd while he was asleep, the buried icon, the sound of the bells which revealed the place of the hidden icon of Saint George). Some of the comments speak also about the difficulty of the road which pays off eventually. Comments speak also about wishes and prayers, about how beautiful is the church inside. There are also many posts showing candles lit at the Aya Yorgi church and even young women and men lighting candles. Most of the words below candle lighting posts display the word dilek- wish. People pray for peace, for their families, for their country.



Picture 39 posts related with the Church of Aya Yorgi on Instagram

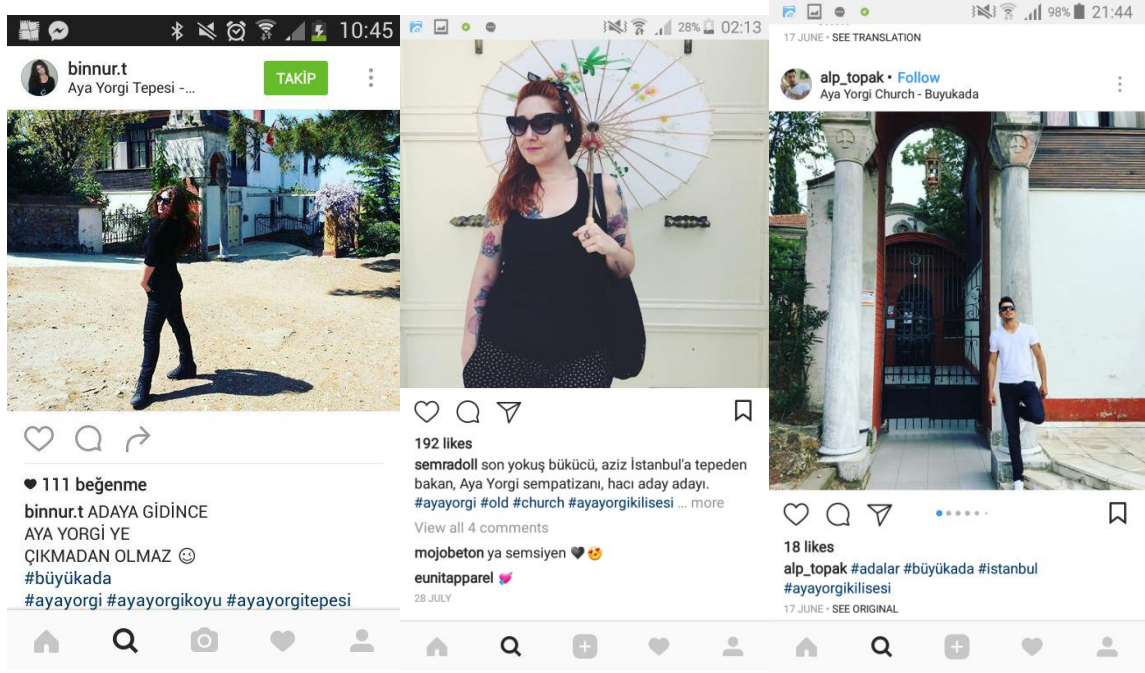
A special case which I want to discuss about is represented by the images showing women and men with the silhouette of the church behind. The reason why I find this case a special one is the variety of attitudes showed by people toward the church of Aya Yorgi. Some of the posts are neutral or even positive (pic 1, 2, 3 from annex 4). In picture 3 for example

two young women show a praying configuration of their hands while below the picture they write that they come here since they were children because here they find peace. Under this line someone wrote the question: “You are not Muslims, aren’t you?” As if it would be impossible for Muslims to find peace there. No answer is provided to this question but the question itself gives room for a separation inside the idea of this place as a generator of spiritual attitude beyond the borders of a certain religion. Aya Yorgi is considered a respected religious place by varied people as I saw in other pictures: number 4, annex4 for example in which a young woman taking a selfie picture with the church behind says that we have respect for all religions in the world. Likewise, picture number five, annex 4 in which a young man displays himself with the church space behind, displays a verse from Bible below the picture: “love your enemies.”(Matthew 5: 44). In other pictures, a woman dressed very modern and elegant show herself with the symbol of the cross behind writing about candles lit to fulfill wishes while another woman, less modern, in the same place, suggests that she hopes to solve personal problems coming here. Other pics, displaying young women mostly, show original picture composition: black and white for example, very suggestive for the idea of the good in contrast to the bad with the face to the church and arms open, the palms sustaining the crosses of the church door - a very beautiful picture (last picture from annex 4).



Picture 40 Posts related with the Church of Aya Yorgi on Instagram 2017

But other pictures show a discrepancy, a contrast between the location and the clothing or poses taken by people. What message do they want to convey? For example the first five pictures from annex 5 show young women and a young man who act more like models than pilgrims or people searching for spiritual fulfillment. It's not the church pointed out here but the individual and his/ her style, his/ her physical appearance. The church is just an interesting setting which will show by contrast the individual's own personality. These pictures make me think at people's need to express their personality in order to get recognition of identity. The attempt of gaining recognition might be sustained by the fact that these people are all very young therefore their need for a certain identity among Instagram users would be understandable. But what about the last picture from this annex in which a mature lady dressed a bit "inappropriate" for the church with colored flowers painted on her arms, with a sun Japanese like umbrella opened behind her head, sun glasses, one hand in a pocket and she stands in front of church door saying that she is a fan of Aya Yorgi and a pilgrim candidate? Actually there is no negative expression on her face or in her body language. But the composition of the picture arrests your eye. Is it about a positive attitude towards Aya Yorgi or a mocking one? I think it is a positive attitude, a message sustaining that no matter how different people might be in their appearance, they do search for spiritual fulfillment wherever this fulfillment could be achieved and Aya Yorgi is one of these places, no matter what religion do people belong to.

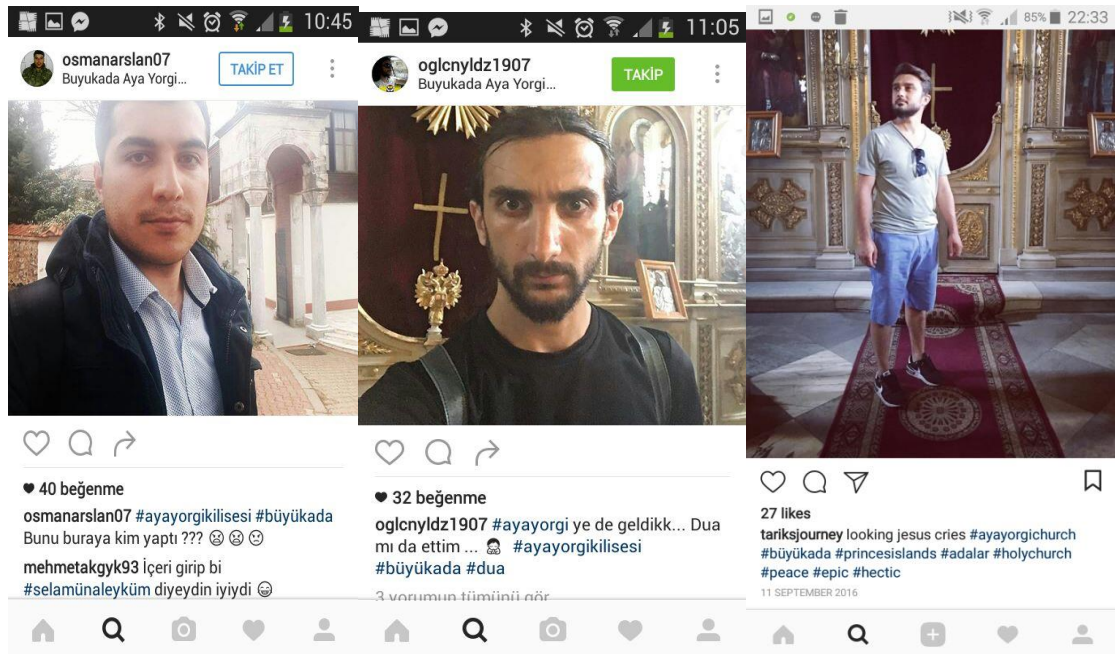


Picture 41 Posts related with the Church of Aya Yorgi on Instagram 2017

Concerning pictures showing negative attitude towards the church or the Christian belief, the section representing pictures with the church from outside or inside is the only one which provides negative, especially sarcastic attitude towards the Christian church and what it represents. In this respect I selected couple of pictures with comments below which could lead to a negative interpretation. For example in the first picture (annex 6) the question is: “who put this here” with 3 question marks. A comment below says: “I wish you entered inside and said salamaleykum”. Obviously the man doesn’t like that Aya Yorgi church was built in that place and the comment could be read as a disagreement with the fact that the church is Christian. The second picture is aggressive mostly in its appearance. The man notes that he came to church and prayed but a comment below says: “look at this ugly face, you look as if you are doing exorcism in the church”. It’s not necessarily an anti-Christian message or a mocking one but the picture itself conveys a negative feeling. It really looks threatening which shouldn’t be the case for someone who just prayed.

The third picture displays an inappropriate attitude: standing in front of church’s altar screen with the back side of the body oriented to it while the face is oriented to the exit in an uprising position like in an attempt to defy someone with a comment which says: “looking Jesus cries”. I find the attitude defying or mocking towards the values of Christianity.

The following picture mocks the idea of confession while the other one, posting the lyrics of a popular song which is about mocking church's hypocrisy show a negative attitude towards the Christian church and its values. Other pictures (6, 8, 9) are just funny but church is not a place people go to have fun this is why I considered them as examples for a negative attitude. The seventh picture from annex 6 holds a special attention because it's the only one in which I could find a woman having a denying attitude towards the church of Aya Yorgi and the practice of climbing the hill barefoot in order to make wishes. The woman says she didn't take off her shoes, didn't "shut up". She just enjoyed the view and she came back as she went there. Probably she didn't feel moved inside, she didn't experience any spiritual manifestation. She is denying the power of prayers, the sense of making wishes. As one can see men have the most negative attitudes towards Aya Yorgi phenomenon but it's not impossible for the women to have this attitude as well. However, the negative attitude is shown in such a considerably small amount of pictures (about 15 out of 1200) that they do not represent a common trait for these posts.



Picture 42 Posts related with the Church of Aya Yorgi on Instagram 2017

In the sections that follow, important strands from interviews and other similar factors that have appeared in the field will be taken up in order to explore some of the elements of a traditionally shared ritual site: Aya Yorgi. While one cannot offer an answer to the whys of shared pilgrimage with total finality and defined boundaries, it is certainly possible to look at the motifs appearing at the sites as contributing factors in the process of both the harmonious co-ritualization of a site.

1.6.3. Emergence of a “shared sacred site”



Picture 43. St George`s day in front of Aya Yorgi–late 19th century (source Akillas Millas)

St George feast day celebrations at Aya Yorgi have always existed among the Rum community for an indefinitely long time. However we cannot go beyond late 19th century in terms of written accounts. Dimitri Manos in his memoirs (1974 cited in Millas, 2013 p.521)⁶⁹ talks about the big number of Rums coming from the villages from opposite shores (Kumkapı, Samatya, Pendik and so on) in early 1900s. Dwelling on his memories Manos states Rum pilgrims used to climb up the hill and put up tents in front of the church. Around the fire they made, they used to sing and dance in their traditional clothes. The abbot of the monastery used to sit by the holy icon of St George and receive the votive sheep brought by the pilgrims one by one and bless them with the sign of cross and give

⁶⁹ibid

them to the wardens of the church to take them to the sheep pen under the hermitage rooms. Nikolas Vasiliadis (1910, cited in Millas 2013 p. 529)⁷⁰ gives an elaborative depiction of the feast day. In his literary narrative, he portrays the secret flirtations of beautiful young girls coming from off shore villages with the young local men, dancing elegantly “syrtos”⁷¹. The middle aged women in traditional outfits. He continues with the consumption aspects of the feast day. The fruit, food and drink sellers scattered around the church, and vendors selling small crosses, icons, rosaries, mirrors, bracelets and rings.

According to the locals of Büyükada the participation of the Muslims with few numbers into the feast day pilgrimage is basically started as regular visits to the church due to the beneficial and healing powers of the ayazma (sacred water) of Aya Yorgi. These visits were mostly paid by mothers and their daughters, assisted by their Christian neighbors. They used to climb the hill barefoot and ask the priest to read prayers on them just like their Christian neighbors did. It was also believed that young single girls would see the reflection of their future husbands on surface of the water of the sacred well which is a cross cultural phenomenon.

However, things started to change with the dislocation of the population in the island. As the Greeks (Rums) gradually abandoned the island, the number of Greek pilgrims on the feast day decreased but the pilgrimage never disappeared and towards the end of 80s and early 90s the morphology of the pilgrimage began to transform. The numbers increased again but with interesting majority of the Muslim participants that were stranger to Büyükada. Pilgrims mainly mothers and daughters from different secular neighborhoods of İstanbul started to replace the former Rum pilgrims. Nobody that I have interviewed on the island so far has managed to state clearly how this replacement took place. I had always assumed that there should be a driving force behind and always kept on believing throughout the research process that there had to be a major turning point or a motivation for the involvement of this huge amount of Muslim participants in the pilgrimage. Why and How? Could it be a subliminal publicity of certain nongovernmental structures? The politics of the church? Betterment in the transportation to the island? Revitalization of spirituality after 80s with the breaking point after the coup d'état and following governments? Or could everything have happened spontaneously?

⁷⁰ibid

⁷¹Syrtos, ancient chain dance of Greece

In order to satisfy my curiosity, apart from conducting face to face interviews with the local respondents, I flew to Athens to meet the Prinkipo (Büyükada) originated people who immigrated to Athens between the 60s and 90s. They live in different districts of Athens but mostly a coastal neighborhood called Faliro. After a quick googling on internet, I got to know that they organize around a civil association called *Büyükadalılar Derneği*. Although I attempted to call the association by phone and get an appointment, nobody responded my calls. Then Hüseyin, a Sivas origin Alevi man residing in Büyükada for almost 40 years advised me to go to a café-restaurant called “Sweet Melek” in Faliro area owned and run by an Armenian lady from Istanbul. He assured me that it was impossible not to come across with a “Büyükadalı” in that place, as it is a meeting point for them.

1.6.3.1. Why are they in Athens?

At the Lausanne Conference, Greece and Turkey decided to exempt from the exchange of populations that was to take place, the Rum Orthodox of Istanbul, as well as those of the islands Imbros/Gökçeada and Tenedos/Bozcaada, and the Muslims of Western Thrace. These people were to become nationals of Turkey and Greece respectively and enjoy a special minority status regulated by the Lausanne Treaty, section III on the protection of minorities (articles 37-45). The criterion for the designation of the minorities was the same with that of the exchange of populations. It was based on religion: non-Muslim minorities in Turkey and Muslim minority in Greece. According to the Lausanne Treaty, the two minorities in the respective countries were to enjoy protection of life and freedom and have the same civil and political rights as the majority. They should also have the right to establish and control their religious institutions and schools and they should be able to settle their judicial differences according to their customs (Gündoğdu, 2001)⁷² The rights of the minorities were reconfirmed and rectified by the 1930 agreement. After that the Rum Orthodox minority benefited from the good climate between Greece and Turkey. However this climate was reversed with the emergence of the Cyprus issue. The riots of 6-7 September 1955 that erupted in Istanbul and Izmir are said to have been retaliation for the sufferings of the Turkish Cypriots by the Greek Cypriots. With the emergence of the Cyprus problem, the Turkish press and some Turkish organizations, such as the Cyprus is Turkish Association (Kıbrıs Türktür Cemiyeti), played an important role stirring up

⁷²Gündoğdu, Ayten (2001), ‘Identities in Question: Greek-Turkish Relations in a Period of Transformation, *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 5

nationalist feelings. In 6 September Turkish radio and some newspapers reported that a bomb exploded in Mustafa Kemal's house in Thessaloniki the previous night. In the evening of the same day, a furious mob gathered in places resided by non-Muslims and started to destroy minority property, stores, houses, churches and cemeteries. 59 per cent of the business and 80 per cent of the houses that were destroyed that night belonged to the Rum Orthodox. It has been argued that the Turkish government was closely involved in organizing and instigating these riots as part of a project for the homogenization of the nation. In 1964, as a result of inter-communal conflict that erupted on Cyprus, the Turkish government abrogated the Treaty of Friendship of 1930 that permitted Greek citizens to reside in Istanbul and according to that, 12,592 members of the minority with a Greek citizenship were expelled from Istanbul. However, because of the close relationships (family, business) developed between the minority members of Greek citizenship with those of Turkish citizenship, it is estimated that around 30,000 minority members of Turkish citizenship also left Istanbul together with those expelled (Örs,2006)⁷³.

Spatio-temporal macro transformations are fresh in individual memories and this understanding dominates projections on Büyükada. By the time interviewers were asked about their views on today's Aya Yorgi, the transformation of the island comes into prominence, rather than their individual experiences. Stories are mainly shaped by the changing demography, the rapid transformation of the city (Istanbul) with the sense of business and irregular urbanization. One can argue that connection with time and space ruptured to a large extent. The conversations end up with the politics against minorities rather than their own experiences on Aya Yorgi. Personal memories, recollections of daily life remain in the background. It was difficult to delve into more personal and individual stories. But at least, I was able to reach a comparison on how they comprehend it.

“During my teenage years, we used to climb up to Aya Yorgi and dance one night before the feast day until the morning and then we used to attend the mass in the church. The island has changed drastically. For example there used to twenty five or thirty faytons. Now there are more than two hundreds. Only the Rums used to go to Aya Yorgi on the feast day. Turks didn't know it. They got to know about Aya Yorgi through us aft we left”. (Starvros Kavaliani, 70)⁷⁴

⁷³Örs, Işıl. (2006) Beyond the Greek and Turkish Dichotomy: The Rum Polites of Istanbul and Athens, *South European Society and Politics*, 11:1, 79-94, DOI: 10.1080/13608740500470349

⁷⁴ Personal Interview in Athens 22.05.2017

Some accounts from Büyükada Rum respondents indicate that religious affiliations were often more fluid in the mixed communities and did not isolate or mark distinct populations. Religious boundaries were constantly traversed, and members of different religions interacted and formed communities and friendships that were not divided on the basis of religion. The testimonies below show the existence of shared beliefs and miracles can also be witnessed by Muslims.

“Once, a Muslim man from Ankara visited the church with his dumb daughter. She was totally dumb. Papaz (the priest) read prayers on her. When they descended from the hill, the girl said to her mother that she was thirsty. She talked!! Her mother started to cry that a miracle occurred. Another Muslim man, asked for a small house and a place to open his own business from Aya Yorgi, and all his wishes came true. It is related with your intentions and good manners (Yannis ? 59)”⁷⁵.

They used to go there for the holy water which springs from the church. Muslims believe in the holy water too. You have “zamzam” for example we have “ayazma”. Similarly Muslims believe in Jesus as well. We have things in common. Now almost all of them are Muslim. They replaced Rums. You know how few we are in Turkey now.” (Lena Kavaliani 68)⁷⁶

“I have been on the island since 1947. I was born in 1930. I am originally from İstanbul from Osmanbey region. My parents were from Yanya. It used to be a city in Ottoman Empire. Then after the fall of Yanya to the Greeks, my parents immigrated to İstanbul to Ottoman land. We have always been “*Türk tebaalı*” (under Turkish rule). I am the citizen of Turkey. I have never been a Greek citizen. After 1964, a massive Greek immigration started from Istanbul. First 12.000 then up to 64.000 people came to Greece. My son is married to a Muslim Turkish woman. They live in İstanbul

Sometimes defining, and often demonizing, a stigmatized ‘other’ is an important in defining the ‘self’, especially the national ‘self’. For some Büyükada Rums, this ‘other’ became the barbarous Turk. This hostility, alongside the population exchange and other incidents, helped to solidify their borders. Christian clerical culture condemns superstitions. Having a strong Christian culture led to a more aggressive distinction. Religious education gives a confessional consciousness. We can see it in their narratives concerning Aya Yorgi Church:

“We used to ask for things as well. But now I see very stupid things. People set up stalls and sell stupid objects in the name of “dileklik”. This is for love; that’s for money etc etc. Don’t ever believe in these ridiculous things. Another new tradition is 24th of September. Nowadays, they climb up to Aya Yorgi on 24th September too. That’s the feast day of Aya Thecla. Why do they go to Aya Yorgi and ask for thing on this day? And what about those strings? Oh My God!! Who the hell invented that?

⁷⁵ Personal interview in Athens 23.05.2017

⁷⁶ Personal interview in Athens 22.05.2017

It is a dirty Turkish job. It is nothing to do with us. After all, what would a kruz woman or man who came from Kastamonu understand from Aya Yorgi!!! If I were a tailor I wouldn't buy strings and I would go to Büyükada and collect the strings on the feast day. These are all superstitions. I came here to Athens after 1973. Turks might have started to come to Aya Yorgi after 80s. let me tell you another story. During the 6th September incidents, Muslims were going to attack Aya Yorgi too. They were ready with the bidons of benzin in their hands ready to set Aya Yorgi on a fire. They started to march up the hill and they saw a knight mounted on a white horse throwing stones on them. That was Aya Yorgi of course. It protected the church and the monks. None of them dared to go up. (Stefano Damata)⁷⁷

Though the memories on their own pilgrimage experiences are still very clear, they mostly cannot bear certain testimonies to the shared nature of the church which makes it go far beyond the borders of a certain religion. They have difficulty in understanding the transformation in the new ritual practices related with the modern day Aya Yorgi pilgrimages

“We used to climb up the hill barefoot. Now Muslims don't obey this rule. We also used to tie rags on the trees. There might be Muslims on the feast day but Rums were in vast majority because the majority of the island were Rum therefore you could tell which one was Muslim. You could mark them from their accents and dress codes and headscarves and they were from the island not from different parts of Istanbul. It wasn't as popular as it is now. There were only very few Muslims *as far as I remember* and they were the inhabitants of the island not from different parts of Istanbul (Eleni, 68)

I used to climb up to Aya Yorgi more than 30 times a year on foot. Now I ask for a shuttle service from the Büyükada municipality. I can tell you the changes in the rituals and customs concerning the feast day of Aya Yorgi. These strings or stone edifices which evokes the wishes didn't used to exist. Yes, we also used to and we still do write the wishes on the slips of papers for the papaz to read. We used to give olive oil as a donation when our prayers were granted. They still do it. Those sellers, vendor never existed. And *as far as I remember* only few people used to tie rags on the trees. Now it is visible everywhere. I guess Alevis do it more than the Sunnis”. (Maria, 87)

Having summarized the basic history of Aya Yorgi from a number of angles provides helpful points of view in opening up a comparison with Mar Jiryes al Batiyeh

⁷⁷ Personal interview in Athens 22.05.2017

1.7. Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh, then and now

This cave oratory of *Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh* is by the sea coast of Sarba and it is only 100 meters down the ancient church of St George and they are in a way combined by old stairs that were renovated ten years ago in 2008. Unlike Aya Yorgi, there is not much written documents related with the shrine, yet, al Batiyeh seems to be proud of its ancient past and roots in the depths of history similar to Aya Yorgi. Despite the scarcity of written accounts it is possible to read about the cave in the reports of 19th century historian Ernest Renan (1864). Although today the historians are less systematic, Renan was convinced of the continuity of paganism with Christianity and Islam

“a sort of room in the level of the sea which seems to be related with some superstitions of which both Muslims and Christians a memory. They call it Grotto de St George and it is believed that the women who bathe in it get impregnated. The rituals requires the women to offer coins to saint George, determined by the regulations which may have remained from the ancient Phoenicians for the sacrifices or the atonements to keep away from sacred prostitution. The common pilgrimages of the Muslims, Christians and the other sects indicates the pagan cults centers in Syria” (p. 82)⁷⁸.

Waters of al Batiyeh blessed many new born babies. People used to baptize their children at al Batiyeh though it is a rare thing nowadays. And the children used to be inscribed in the list of St George Church as Batiyeh was the property of the Parish. While investigating the baptism records of St George Cathedral together with the priests of the church, many of which from late 19th century, surprisingly, we came across with the names that were stranger to the village. We detected many “Georges” in the list and surnames from far remote villages of Mount Lebanon. Though their reasons to choose St George of Sarba instead of their local churches, were not clarified, we assumed it could be a result of granted vows: namely, they could have made vows on St George for a baby and their after the vows were granted, they might have had their children baptized in a church dedicated to him which is a common tradition of vow making (ndr⁷⁹). That vow making for fertility issues made us relate it to al Batiyeh. Most probably these vows were made at Al Batiyeh of St George and after the successful birth, the boys were in return named as George and the parents showed their gratitude for the saint and the shrine through this symbolic way. Al Batiyeh belongs to Maronite Patriarcal Parish of Sarba. In pastoral terms, al Batiyeh depends on the St George cathedral which was built in 1869. Sarba, despite its relatively

⁷⁸ Renan, Ernest. (1864). *Mission de Phénicie* Imprimerie impériale

⁷⁹ نذر to vow in Arabic

small territory, is home to a several institutionalized religious places. The old church 100 meters down the cathedral in the name of St George that is thought to have been built even before the Mamlouks (BouLahdo, 2005 p. 45)⁸⁰. Consequently, it should be noted that the history of Batiyeh cannot be separated from the St George cathedral, the ancient church of Saint George and the monastery of The Basilian Order of Saint Saviour (Melkite) just 50 meters above the shrine which is according to a local legend connected with al Batiyeh via a secret tunnel.



Picture 44 a sketch of major religious sites in Sarba by Selçuk DIKTAŞ

Having been visited by people from different confession for an unknown period of time, and after fifteen years of civil war (1975-1991), Batiyeh became a tired, poorly managed and badly maintained oratory. The miraculous water was filled with the ex-votos or offerings of the pilgrims (pieces of clothes, shirts). Different than Aya Yorgi which partially surrendered to a tragic fire in 1986 and renovated by the Fener Orthodox Patriarchate, Mar Jiryes, on the other hand, had a civil touch in its revitalization. A Brazilian-Lebanese lady Regina Fenianos, former president of environment committee of Lions Club, was planning to design and construct a play park for children. One day while passing in front of the shrine, noting the messy and dirty status of the oratory, she changed her mind and wanted to build a public park as Lebanon is a country lacking in public spaces like parks. Typically public spaces in Lebanon have been constructed around religious buildings.

⁸⁰ Ibid

In the past, there was no road between *al Batiyeh* and the sea...the cave was just by the sea. I think the water between Batiyeh and the sea was filled and the present road was constructed during the presidency of Fouad Cheehab (1958-1964). After the road construction, the space between Al Batiyeh and the motorway was left blank. There were some trees and a public toilet for long years. It continued to be place of visitation and pilgrimage in the mean time. Mothers used to bring their sick children in order to be cured by the miraculous water of the cave and they used to leave the clothes in the water which made the oratory look very dirty as no one was cleaning it (Regina Fenianos, 74).⁸¹

She brought her idea to the agenda of Lions club of Jounieh and after 2 years of hustle and meticulous work (despite the financial hardships) the establishment of the park was completed. Under the patronage of Mrg Guy Boulos Njeim (former patriarch), Mar Jirjes (St George) al Batiyeh was reopened to public thanks to the collaboration of three key institutions: Sarba St George Wakef committee, Municipality of Jounieh and Environment committee of Lions clubs.



Picture 45 Inauguration ceremony of chapel at Batiyeh, 1997 (Regina Fenianos personal archive)

⁸¹ Personal interview with Mrs Fenianos, 24.06.2016

A new chapel was built (an old toilet was converted into a chapel) with the funding of Camille Fenianos (husband of Regina Fenianos) in memory of his father who had passed away twenty five years before. The chapel was blessed by the bishop in a beautiful ceremony. However although Lebanese army normally protects its neutrality and avoids taking sides in, and becoming a party to, sectarian conflicts with the participation of army officials such as General Emil Lahoud, Colonel Abdallah Wakim and many other important figures on the 10th August 1997.



Picture 46 St George Shrine at Al Batieh—entrance

The space around the shrine serves as a leisure park and it is free which is unusual for Lebanon. Families with little kids, friends and even lovers come to the shrine and the park to enjoy the sound of the fountain and the shade of the trees in hot summer days. Despite these facilities, regulations are posted reminding the visitors of the sacredness of the shrine. With the sign boards placed in different parts of the shrine and the constant aloud warnings of the warden, the visitors are very explicitly told to watch their behavior to maintain the holy aura of the place. Smoking, eating and drinking in the shrine are strictly prohibited. People ignoring these prohibitions are warned by the wardens without hesitation. I saw a young couple walking hand in hand, trying to sneak behind the trees to steal a kiss. The echoes of the angry warden's shouting could be heard from the distance.

He ran towards them and with a very outrageous manner, kicked them out from the garden “houn markez es salat” (here is a place for praying) he shouted.

The people of Sarba believe that legendary fight between St George and the dragon took place in Batiyeh. According to these local beliefs, this is exactly the place where St George rescued the daughter of the king. The morphological structure of Batiyeh shows interesting resemblances with the setting of the legend. There is a drinkable water pond where the pilgrims make ablutions and in the pool there are big rocks on which one can see some very visible but unidentifiable marks. The visitors showed me those marks saying that they belong to the foot prints of the horse of St George..

Modern day Mar Jiryas al Batiyeh has been open to public for nearly twenty years it belongs to the wakef of **Sarba Diocese**. The Maronite Patriarchal Eparchy, known as the Sarba Vicariate, is an ecclesial institution (non-juridical) with a non-profit purpose. It has been known by this name since 1990, on the basis of a decision of the patriarchal synod held at Bkerke from 4 to 9 June 1990, approved by the Holy Siege. The Maronite Eparchy of Sarba extends over districts of Kesruan and Metn, two regions of Mount Lebanon. It is limited in the east by the cities of Zahle and Hadath Baalbeck, in the north by an area of Jounieh⁸² called Ghadir, in the south by the city of Antelias and in the west by the Mediterranean. The term eparchy is the equivalent, in the Eastern Church, of the term diocese⁸³ in the East. This Parish includes the following towns and villages:

Kesrouan: Sarba, ZoukMicheal, Ain toura, Ain el Rihane, Jeita, Shaile, Nalloneh, Daraya, Ajaltoun, Kleiaat, Reyfoun, Feytroun, Kfardebian, Bkaatoura, Bekaetet, Kenaan, Kferty

Metn : Kferty, Wadi al Karm, Zabugha, Kfaraab, El Machre'e, Ain al Kabou, Baskinta, Moukhhada, Tamich, Zouk al Khrab, Dbaye, Aoukar, Naccache. Its total area is 800 km²

The population of this eparchy is about 250,000. The latter covers 31 villages in Kesruan and Metn North, and includes 45 parishes, 167 churches and 63 monasteries. Maronites make up 64% of the inhabitants of the patriarchal eparchy: 160,000. Greek Catholics, Syriacs Catholics and Orthodox, Latin, Greek Orthodox and Protestants %35: 87,000 and non-Christians 3000 including the Syrian refugees

⁸²The city Jounieh is formed of 4 zones: Sarba, Ghadir, Haretsakher and Sahel Alma

⁸³ Diocese is a Greek term meaning administration. According to the second Vatican Council the diocese is a portion of the church entrusted to a bishop



Picture 47 St George Cathedral of Sarba photo by the author 2016

1.8. Contested Issues and Ambiguities around Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh

Following part presents some prominent points that show how my target pilgrimage sites can be affected by controversies and debated issues from the various perspectives. By discussing these points, I aim address the broader social, cultural, political conditions, too. Throughout this discussion, I will emphasize the links between these experiences and the societal forces acting upon Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh.

1.8.1. Pilgrims' Transportation: "The horses are dying. Don't hire horse carriages".

According to the assize of the Protection of Immovable natural and Cultural property High commission dated 31st march 1984 Princes Islands including Büyükada was announced to be a complete protected area (sit alanı). In the June of 1999 Istanbul branch of the same commission declared all the roads on the islands as pedestrian roads by resolution. For this reason no motor vehicles are allowed in the island except for the official cars of the state and municipal institutions and ambulances. As a result, horse carriages (faytons) which had existed for hundreds of years became the major means of internal transportation. After 2000s faytons have been nostalgized and associated with intact and preserved landscape and consequently touristic commodity and a symbol of princess islands in general and Büyükada specifically. The number of the faytons and horses has increased excessively and *faytonculuk* (coachmen business) have become a massive business. Once the business of local islanders and mainly Armenians and local Turks, *faytonculuk* has handed over and the control powers have changed in relation with the internal migration in Turkey. Kurdish new settlers coming from the East and southeastern Turkey mainly Muş, Van and Malatya have become the new patrons. The chamber of *faytoncular* has expanded. The cost of an operation right of a simple fayton is 150.000. It is estimated that there are 270 faytons on the island which means more that 1500 horses. This excessive number of faytons and the multifaceted problems that they created have been a contested issue lately.

The very first accusation against the *faytoncular* comes from animal rights defender groups. They accuse the *faytoncular* of torturing the animals through long hours of run, underfeeding, and lack of veterinary checkup. According to animal rights activist

association called *Bana Göz Kulak Ol (take care of me)*⁸⁴ each year more than 400 horses die in Büyükada⁸⁵. During the winter season, the weak horses which are not considered to be worth taking care of, are left for dead in the forest. The dead ones are buried in the backwoods or even thrown into the sea. The bottom of the sea around the islands has the reputation of being the “grave of the dead horses”. This cruelty has had reflection in various media channels.. *Bana göz kulak ol* association shot two videos and with prominent actress and broadcasted it in social media and some TV channels to raise awareness on this point. On the feast day of Aya Yorgi in 2016 the members from the association issued press statement on the Büyükada main square to deter the pilgrims from hiring horse carriages also claiming that they had been threatened and blackmailed by the coachmen chamber. The distance from Büyükada port to Aya Yorgi is almost 4 km which is a 45 minutes of nonstop-walking. This distance is the reasons why horse carriage is the ideal and the quickest option to reach the site main square of the island to the lunapark square (the point where the pilgrims start to climb up the slope). On the feast day, number of horses and the fayton tariffs increases notably. Considering the massive flux of pilgrims into the island, 23 April becomes the biggest day of torment for the horses, the activists almost beg the pilgrims not to get on the carriages. Some of them take this into consideration but vast majority keep on hiring faytons showing their health problems as obstacle to work long distances.

⁸⁴<https://faytonabinmeatlaroluyor.wordpress.com>

⁸⁵<https://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/yilda-400-at-oluyor-faytona-binme-67657.html>



Picture 48 Horse carriages on Büyükada

Coachmen are also complained to be very rude in their behavior and not servicing for the local islanders but favoring the tourists as they earn more from the touristic touring. They don't obey the regulations of the municipality and act in a feudal network bestowing each other against municipal warnings. They sometimes leave the horse scat on the streets as a protest against the municipality sanctions. Because according to idle rumors⁸⁶ for years, Istanbul and Adalar municipality have long term solution plans for the improving or totally abolishing horse carriages. Battery operated cars or cable car system from the port to Aya Yorgi hill is considered two possible alternatives. However this transition still seems very challenging. How to shift from this violator and rotted business to a more nature friendly transportation system and how to persuade these coachmen are the questions still waiting for answers.

Not currently, but probably in the near future if this cable car system—a pending plan in the agenda of Ministry of transportation, from Büyükada port up to Aya Yorgi hill would definitely create new controversial topics, at least, in terms of Aya Yorgi pilgrimage it is evident that cable cars will change the structure of the pilgrimage

⁸⁶ Büyükada ve Kınalıada teleferik projesi ne zaman açılacak? <https://www.adagazetesi.com.tr/buyukada-ve-kinaliada-teleferik-projesi-ne-zaman-acilacak.html> 20 August 2017

notably. Will the pilgrims still walk the liminal steep path? Will they unreeling threads while climbing up? Or they will prefer to land on the church by cable cars easily without 900 meter-challenging walking?

Drawing on history and the ethnography of Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh, it is seen that these sites have attracted a range of participants with different motivations, interests and aspirations. Landscape, history, water, aesthetic and spiritual experiences are similar in that they entail a sense of wonder, a sense of the sublime and transcendent, but for the pilgrims and visitors these experiences emanate from or are channeled into worship of the divine. The elements discussed above, demonstrate both common and varying degrees of interaction among worship, history and landscape, and illustrate the sense of transcendence in and through these places and practices regardless of faith status.

1.8.2. “There is no place to sit for free in this city” Al Batiyeh as an example of hospitality and a free public park

Cities like Jounieh and Beirut are very tightly related to politics and it is to be read in the context of a total absence of urban policies. Jounieh doesn't have enough squares, parks, public beaches – often these spaces are privatized, closed or remain inaccessible. Shared spaces where public life and communities coexist par excellence do not exist. While the World Health Organization recommends a minimum availability of nine square meters of green open space per resident, the Lebanese capital Beirut for example barely provides one square meter per person. Urban planner Habib Debs says that Lebanon's lack of public spaces can be linked to the city's diverse history. During the Ottoman era, he explained, the common public space was the souq. French rule saw the city's structure modernize for the 20th century, and new public spaces like the Corniche in Beirut were created. But Lebanon has since plunged to the bottom of the region in terms of public space availability. Activists say that the effects of war, the power of the private sector over the public, and a lack of political consensus have all deprioritized the maintenance and creation of new public spaces.

Mona Fawaz, an urban planning professor at AUB, explains that private interests take precedent over public ones. As real estate prices soar, it becomes very difficult for a public actor to intervene in the city. The consequences are obvious, notably in the lack of museums or other free-entry cultural and leisure spaces. Despite the struggle to develop

public policies that enhance common spaces, Green Line Association head Dr. Ali Darwish says the problem lies in a lack of political will, not a lack of resources. Fawaz agreed that there are fundamental issues with how the municipality approaches public spaces. “We need to go back and accept the idea that capitalism and private ownership of land do not mean that the ‘community’ doesn’t have a claim over the city,” she said. “We need to make sure that the social value of land, meaning its role as a vital open, public space, is respected and shared and that public money is not just diverted to the pockets of a few landowners.” (Fawaz, Akar, 2012)⁸⁷

Within Beirut, a lack of basic services and a waste management crisis, has caused many groups of activists to emerge, reclaiming their basic rights, amidst an atmosphere of political distrust. In particular, the issue of Lebanon’s big cities’ shrinking green and public spaces sparked outrage among civil society groups. The fifteen years of the Lebanese civil war (1975—1990) inhibited the life of its public spaces and affected their evolution. Vulnerable and unpleasant during the war, these public spaces were also neglected during the post-war period since other urgent priorities related to reconstruction and infrastructure were set. Today, amidst a dense concrete building jungle, very few spaces are designated as public. In addition to being scarce, they are often inaccessible or privatized. They consist of 49 public gardens and squares (Shayya, 2010)⁸⁸, as well as a fragmented waterfront appropriated by private interests.

Since the municipalities are unable to provide the city with its much needed public space, many activists were fighting for public rights and had to step up and do the job of the municipality. The activists consist of individual and group initiatives, university professors, environmentalists, and community organizations, such as the Civil Campaign to Protect The Dalieh of Raouche, Legal Agenda, Green Line, Nahnoo⁸⁹ and Beirut Madinati among many others. Through engaging in initiatives revolving about public spaces, these activists have certainly been involved in shaping the future of these threatened commons, as well as raising awareness about them. The role of the activists was crucial in creating a dialogue with authorities, developing alternative visions for the public spaces and revealing corruption.

⁸⁷ Mona Fawaz and Hiba Bou Akar, "Practicing (in)Security in the City," *City & Society* 24, no. 2 (Aug. 2012): 105-109. doi:10.1111/j.1548-744X.2012.01070.x

⁸⁸ Fadi Shayya, "Enacting Public Space: History and Social Practices of Beirut's Horch Al-Sanawbar." The American University of Beirut, 2006.

⁸⁹ NAHNOO, "Horsh Beirut: The Forbidden Green." YouTube video, 2:21 minutes. Posted [May 2015]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXfM93OFGNQ> .

For example Horsh Beirut, also known as Horsh el Sanwbar or Pine forest, is the biggest public green space in Beirut, covering an area of 400,000 m². The history of development of the city of Beirut has always left traces and marks on this park, which area has been continuously shrinking since the 20th century. (Ayoub, 2014)⁹⁰. For more than 20 years, this urban park has been closed to the public. Prior to June 2016, only Westerners and well-connected people were allowed to stroll in the park. The main arguments justifying this closure included security since closing the park would avoid turning it into a space of conflict between individuals of different religions and political views (The Daily Star, 2015)⁹¹, as well as protection from uncivilized behavior or abuse (Nash, 2014)⁹². A coalition of twenty NGOs worked for more than two years through street campaigning, awareness raising and liaising with government officials, and was able to get the approval of the municipality and the governor of Beirut to open the park. The park opened first as part-time, while it is was completely opened to the public in August 2016 and managed by the municipality. Unfortunately, this success didn't last for long since the municipality seems to find every opportunity to close the park again and encroach on what remains of it (Farfour, 2017)⁹³. Today, while the park is closed, again, activists are reclaiming back their rights to access and reopen the park and are fighting against multiple encroachments currently happening.).

Politicians claim that, were the park open to the public at large, it would promptly become a den of vice and shisha smoke or an arena for sectarian fighting, and that maintenance responsibilities are too great. The massive influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon will also presumably facilitate the indefinite shuttering of the place, lest it be taken over by migrant hordes upon which the Lebanese state looks none too fondly. Waterfront property is a contentious issue in many cities. Lebanon's coastline is being swallowed up by a powerful real estate sector, turning the commons into private enclosures. The waterfront is

⁹⁰ Ayoub, J. (2014, September 23). Beirut, the concrete jungle of the Middle East. Al-Monitor. Retrieved from <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/09/beirut-lebanon-urban-infrastructure-inefficiency.html>

⁹¹ The Daily Star (2015, March 16). Green spaces drop to under 13 percent of land. Retrieved from <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Mar-16/290923-green-spaces-drop-to-under-13-percent-of-land.ashx>

⁹² Nash, M. (2014, December 9). A work in progress: Beirut's mayor explains his strategy to improve green spaces in 2015. Executive Magazine. Retrieved from <http://www.executive-magazine.com/business-finance/real-estate/work-progress>

⁹³ Farfour, H. (2017, January 23). «الحرج» تقضم بيروت بلدية. Al-Akhbar. Retrieved from <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/27136>

appropriated by private interests due to development laws that had been passed before and during the chaos of the civil war (Battah, 2015)⁹⁴

1.8.3. The case of Jounieh Public Garden

Public Garden of Jounieh, 1 km north of al Batiyeh, was opened in 2014 under the patronage of Minister of Tourism Michel Faraoun, Jounieh Municipality. The Mayor of Jounieh Antoine Afram said that "the children of Jounieh has a public park, and this is legitimate for all cities and all citizens, It is our duty as a municipal council to secure green spaces for the people of our city, the green spaces and areas are the city's lungs and the necessity of the urgent necessities and the basic elements of development, urban, environmental and tourism of civilized cities and developed societies". However in 2017 the municipality of Jounieh closed the doors of the park to the non- Lebanese to prevent anyone from entering, due to the security reasons". Majority of the residents in the city and the neighboring villages supported the idea of municipality. One of the respondents had justified his support saying that they didn't want to be invaded by veiled Syrian women or "stupid shisha smokers". In October 2017 in order to protest this apartheid some Syrians climbed the fence and entered with their children and wives in the garden. This uprising echoed in electronic media, specifically the site «Lebanon Debate». The site recently published a five-page story entitled "Syrian IDPs break into the public park in Jounieh," with photographs of a group of women and children who wanted to enter the public park in Jounieh after it was closed by the municipality "to prevent anyone from entering." The site treated the displaced and their families in the garden as a crime and considered that finding a space for entertainment, even in this way, is an outrageous crime that must be defamed.

Unlike Jounieh gardens, religious and wakef authorities of Al Batiyeh view as appropriate contact with visitors or strangers as hospitality. Visitors and all sorts of strangers including Syrian refugees are not regarded with suspicion or fear. The deacon of St George Cathedral and the member of wakef of al Batiyeh, Nadim Challita refers to the verses from the bible concerning hospitality issue: According to the Old Testament (Isaiah 58:6-7), generous hospitality towards strangers expressed a person's practical religious commitment to God. Because of the inclusion of deity into the hospitality equation, not being hospitable to travelers and strangers can be seen by a devout Christian as potentially having some

⁹⁴ Battah, H. (2015, March 17). A city without a shore: Rem Koolhaas, Dalieh and the paving of Beirut's coast. The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/mar/17/rem-koolhaas-dalieh-beirut-shore-coast>

serious spiritual ramifications. Al Batiyeh managers, despite financial constraints, do not feel the necessity of focusing more on the potential tourist receipts from charging entrance fees and religiously-themed souvenirs than on meeting to the spirituals of visitors. Bishop of Sarba Paul Rohana also encourages parishes to engage and reach out to both adherents and non-adherents who travel through their areas. According to the bishop, al Batiyeh, as it belongs not only to Christians but to all humanity, (to everybody) even the term “hospitality” shouldn’t be disputed as an issue



Picture 49 Al Batiyeh as a public park⁹⁵

Families with children around the neighborhood come to the park in the evening after work to spend time together. As it is situated in a convenient and easily accessible place, it hosts quite large number of visitors. As a young mother from Sarba:

In Lebanon, it is not easy to find a quiet and safe place for children. We came to Batiyeh very often because my kids love the pond and watching the fish. It is safe and free. And kids love it. Plus, the kids get to know St George and we pray in the chapel. It is really peaceful. Look at the fountains!! How beautiful.

⁹⁵ Al batiyeh is often used as a setting for wedding photographs

And an aged lady from Sarba:

I am 79 years old.. I am originally from here, Sarba.. We aged people need some fresh air. Sarba is not a village anymore.. Motor cars, noise, dust.. I come to Al Batiyeh almost every day towards the evening when weather cools down as the daytime is always very hot and dump.

In 2018, a new committee of wakef was elected in Sarba Parish particularly responsible for al Batiyeh. This new blood injected into the body of wakef started to function very rapidly. My research interest and fieldwork have triggered their attention towards al Batiyeh, too and in their first meetings they came up with the idea of publicizing the shrine which they thought the previous committee had neglected in a world where “every tiny thing which has a value is promoted”. They initiated to create a documentary type of programme that would reach to a large audience through a national TV channel. The channel they chose was OTV which was sponsored by Michel Aoun’s⁹⁶ Foundation and political party. Their main target is to include al Batiyeh into the official list of religious tourism destinations in Lebanon and to be issued by Ministry of Tourism. After a series of bilateral negotiations between the wakef committee and the representatives of the ministry, Mr Wadih Kanaan from the ministry of tourism reported that al Batiyeh could not possibly be counted as a religious sanctuary to be visited with religio-touristic purposes, as at present, it serves as a public park more than a religious shrine. In order for Batiyeh to be selected as a touristic spot by the Lebanese state, some of the ambitious members of the wakef are considering and discussing the idea of abolishing the “public park” which they believe to desanctify the spiritual aura and hinders the popularity of the shrine.

⁹⁶ Michel Naim Aoun is the current President of Lebanon and the leader of Free Patriotic Party

CHAPTER 2: Three Facets of Sainthood: George, Al-Khidr, Elijah



Picture 50.Icon of St George as a Roman soldier from Byzantine and Christian Museum. 14th Century—Athens (photoby the author, May 2017)

2.1. Saint George—Some hagiographies

To begin with, I want to look at the development of the St George legend and then reveal how St George happened to be identified with two other saints Al Khidr and Elijah. My aim is to see up to what extent it is possible to find the existence of these saints in my research fields: Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh. Alongside with hagiographies I want to elaborate this complex phenomenon with history and ethnographies secondary fields: Palestine and Edirne.

The earliest legends of St George record the details of his martyrdom at the hands of Roman rulers but no account of the dragon-slaying is included. The legends surrounding the saint are many and derive from a variety of provenances which are impossible to disentangle with any certainty. According to the Catholic Encyclopaedia⁹⁷, the oldest textual reference to the story of Saint George is to be found in the *Acta Sanctorum*, from the fifth century though *Acta Sancti Georgii* was soon banned as heresy by Pope Gelasius I (in 496). According to Delehay⁹⁸, the oldest hagiography from the seventh century was originally written in Greek. It recognizes Saint George as a witness, Christian soldier, and a martyr. However, only the later hagiographies gave some insight into his wonders. From this Greek version are developed Latin and Coptic translations with numerous changes and alterations. Historically the dragon-slaying episode was a much later addition to the original form. It was crudely attached to the beginning of the original account and was not properly assimilated.

Widely accepted tradition asserts that St. George was a true champion of the Christian faith. It is likely that he was born in a Greek Christian noble family in Lydda (Palestine). His father, Gerontios, was from Cappadocia, an officer in the Roman army, while his mother, Polychronia, was from the city Lydda (Palestine). As both of his parents were Christians, he was raised with Christian beliefs (Darch 2006)⁹⁹. He joined the Roman army in Nicomedia during Emperor Diocletian's reign and became an imperial guard (Walter 2003)¹⁰⁰. In 302 AD, Diocletian issued an edict that every Christian soldier should be arrested, and every other soldier should offer a sacrifice to Roman Gods. George refused to

⁹⁷Thurston, H. (1909). *St. George*. In The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved February 18, 2018 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06453a.htm>

⁹⁸Hippolyte Delehay (1909) *Les légendes grecques des saints militaires* (New York: Arno, 1909; reprint, 1975).

⁹⁹Darch, John. H. (2006). *Saints on Earth*. New York: Church House Press

¹⁰⁰Walter, Christopher (2003). *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing

conform to the emperor's edict and declared himself a Christian. Even though the emperor attempted to convert George with numerous offers, George defended his beliefs (Darch 2006)¹⁰¹. In the stories George is said to have been tortured in a number of gruesome and hideous ways. He was forced to swallow poison; crushed between two spiked wheels; boiled in a cauldron of molten lead. None of these attempts killed him and his wounds were healed in the night by Christ himself. After various torture sessions, including laceration on a wheel of swords, George was executed by decapitation in front of Nicomedia's city walls, on April 23rd, 303. His pain convinced Empress Alexandra and a pagan priest Athanasius to become Christians as well, and they joined Saint George in his martyrdom. Saint George's body was returned to Lydda (Lods) in Palestine for burial, where Christians soon came to honor him as a martyr (Walter 2003)¹⁰².



Picture 51 Illustration of the series of tortures that St George went through. Source: Claire Nakhoul Koura/Lebanon

¹⁰¹ Ibid

¹⁰² ibid

Legend aside, some attempts have been made in order to prove that St Goerge was more than a legendary figure and a martyr with historical records. For example in Eusebius of Caesarea's work, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, there is a reference to a soldier of noble birth put to death at Nicomedia (İzmit in modern Turkey) on the 23rd of April AD 303 under Emperor Diocletian. Eusebius stated that this soldier was accused of having torn down Diocletian's edict of Christian persecution (cited in Delcogliano, 2011 p 668) . For that he was martyred. There are no indications in Eusebius' work about the place of soldier's burial, his country or about his name.



Picture 52 Tomb and the Church of St Georg–Lod/Israel July 2017 photo by the author

One of the most long-standing challenges to St George can be traced back to Edward Gibbon, author of the hugely influential work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–89). Gibbon propagated the idea that St George could be identified with George of Cappadocia, a well-documented historical figure who pursued a career selling questionable pork to the Roman army, later rising to the position of archbishop of Alexandria, a known adherent of the Arian heresy (cited in Delcogliano, 2011 p 669)¹⁰³. Established in CE 313 by the Emperor Constantine after the Edict of Milan which stopped the prosecution of Christians, The Church of Rome was formalized at the ecumenical

¹⁰³ Ibid

Council of Nicaea in CE 325. The well-known debate of this Council about the holy trinity, split the religious arena at that time in two fields: the Trinitarians led by Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria in Northern Egypt against those who didn't accept the trinity, led by Arius, a presbyter from Alexandria as well. The name of Arius' followers was Arians. Their debate issue was about God and Jesus and their identity: are they one and the same person or not. Arians believed that Jesus was born separately in the flesh. As a result of this council, Arius was banished. But from the era of Constantine's son, Emperor Constantius, the Arianist doctrine flourished. At that time a person by the name of George (from Laodicea, Denizli in modern Turkey) was the closest friend of Arius and became Bishop of Alexandria. But later on, in AD 361, Emperor Julian (Flavius Claudius Julianus) banished both Christian doctrines Arian and Catholic and reinstituted the pagan polytheist doctrine. George, Bishop of Alexandria, was one of the victims of this dramatic change for the Christians. He was executed, mutilated and his body was cast into the sea by a pagan mob on the 24th of December 361 (Delcogliano, 2011 p 154)¹⁰⁴.



Picture 53 Tomb of Saint George /Lod 2017 photo by the author

¹⁰⁴DelCogliano Mark (2011) The Literary Corpus of George of Laodicea *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 65, No. 2, pp. 150-169

The most popular legend in which Saint George was immortalized was the tale of Saint George and the Dragon (Gibbs 1971). The earliest known depiction of the Saint George and the Dragon legend dates from the eleventh century Georgian text (Hackwood 2003)¹⁰⁵ and its representation from the iconography of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The standard iconographic interpretation of the image shows Saint George as a kind of medieval knight on horseback, armed in the orthodox fashion, slaying a dragon and often includes a young maiden who is watching them from a distance. The dragon represents both Satan (Rev 12:9) and the monster from his life story, while the young maiden is the Empress Alexandra. Thus, the image interpreted by Byzantine iconography is not an image of the martyrdom of the saint but a heroic savior (Walter 2003)¹⁰⁶. Historians interested in the "real lives" of individual saints, value the earliest texts above all others. But for assessing the later cult of saints in Western Europe, the *Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine, dating to 1260, achieved dominance in western hagiographical literature—about 900 manuscripts of his *Golden Legend* survived. From 1470 to 1530 it was also the most frequently printed book in Europe. According to the *Golden Legend*, the struggle between St George and the Dragon happened as follows:

a dragon made its nest at the spring which provided water for the city of 'Silene' in Libya And by this city was a stagne or a pond like a sea, wherein was a dragon which envenomed all the country. Consequently, the citizens had to dislodge the dragon from its nest for a time, to collect water. To do so, each day they had to offer the dragon first a sheep, and if no sheep can be found, then a maiden instead of the sheep. The victim was chosen by drawing lots. One day, this happened to be the princess. The king begged for her life to be spared but with no avail. She was sent to the dragon, but at that moment Saint George appeared on his travels. George was upon his horse, and drew out his sword and garnished him with the sign of the cross, and rode hardily against the dragon which came towards him, and smote him with his spear and hurt him sore and threw him to the ground. He faces the dragon, protects himself with the sign of the cross, slays the dragon and rescues the princess. In returning to their savior, the citizens abandoned their pagan religion and converted to Christianity (de Voragine 1900)¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁵ Hackwood, Fred. 2003. *Christ Lore - the Legends, Traditions, Myths*. Kessinger Publishing.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*

¹⁰⁷ De Voragine, Jacob. (1900) *The Golden Legend: or Lives of the Saints* as Englished by William Caxton. London: Temple Classics

According to the Coptic version¹⁰⁸ of the hagiography In that area a dragon—which was described as a huge crocodile with scaled wings—had eaten so many of the people that everyone fled the countryside for the city of Salone to take shelter behind its walls. The dragon’s breath was so poisonous that as it snored over the city wall people would drop dead. To keep the beast away, each day two sheep were tethered some distance from the wall. Eventually the supply of sheep ran low and the miserable people could think of no alternative but to sacrifice one child every day instead, chosen by drawing lots. One day the lot fell on the king’s daughter, Sabra, a girl of fourteen.

Dressed in her most splendid clothes, as if for her wedding, the unfortunate girl was taken outside the city walls. While she was awaiting her fate, weeping, St George the tribune came along, mounted on his white horse. On hearing her tragic story he decided to kill the dragon. ‘Fair girl,’ he said, ‘do not be afraid for I will save your life with the aid of my lord Jesus Christ.’ When the dragon appeared St George engaged it in combat, wounding it with his lance so badly that it could fight no longer. Then he and Sabra tied a rope around its neck and dragged it to the town. In the marketplace, George beheaded it in front of the cheering inhabitants, and the people were all baptized as Christians.

Many places around the world have the theme of Saint George’s legendary fight with a dragon within some local sites. This is a common thing as the legend uses the classic theme of a princess, a dragon and a heroic savior, which is a common motif to many legends, fairy tales, and chivalric romances worldwide. Sir James Frazer (1900)¹⁰⁹ points out that the theme of the demon lover and his mortal brides is a common type of folktale and exists worldwide. Although there are details which vary from tale to tale, the basic story is larger than of the St George legend. The narrative structure Frazer outlines as follows: a dragon, or many-headed serpent, demands the sacrifice of a victim or the community will suffer. Generally, the victim is a virgin and after many have lost their lives, it falls by lot to the king's daughter to be sacrificed. However, she is saved by the hero, usually a young man of humble birth, who slays the monster and marries the princess as a reward. Importantly, the monster or dragon inhabits a sea or lake or fountain and in other versions of the story he allows use of the water only on payment of a human victim. It is highly probable then that this part of the St George legend was an archetypal story belonging to the collective imagination and the experience of many people; it found its way into Greek mythology and also into romance and fairy tale and here it makes an appearance in hagiography carrying connotations which can be inferred.

¹⁰⁸‘St George’, www.copticchurch.net, accessed 6 December 2015.

¹⁰⁹Frazer, James. G. (1900). *The golden bough: A study in magic and religion*. London: Macmillan and Co.

According to Mircea Eliade (1959)¹¹⁰ the monsters of the depths are seen in many traditions. Heroes descend into the depths to confront marine monsters. Sometimes dragons mount guard over a treasure or water springs therefore the ritual victory over the guardian monster is equivalent to a conquest of immortality. Thus, the legend of St. George the dragon killer is widespread in folk legends and spiritual verses as a part of the narrative folklore. With the recognition of miraculous characteristics of the saint, as well as his legendary fight with the dragon, such characteristics of his personality were harmonized with the common folkloric beliefs. In this manner, people placed under his protection their essential, social and material needs and problems, considering this saint to be a helper in times of need (Okey 2007)¹¹¹.

Origin of St George's cult, it is entirely credible that an Egyptian myth would have had a role to play in shaping this Christianized figure. However, as the Coptic account makes clear, St George was much more than a dragon-slayer—he was a martyr, a healer, a liberator and a figure of youth and chastity. It was a regular exploit, both of Antique heroes and of early Christian saints, to protect mankind against obnoxious beasts¹¹². On one level the story of St George and the dragon represents the Christianization of a fundamental human myth—the archetype of the hero who fights a monster and prevails, usually to rescue a maiden, is found throughout recorded human cultures. In ancient Egypt an obvious parallel is found in the motif of Horus and the crocodile. This hawk-headed god is often depicted hunting another god named Set, or Setekh, who appeared in the form of a crocodile or serpent. Set was Horus's uncle (he is occasionally said to be Horus's brother), and he had murdered Horus's father Osiris, so the legend works as a revenge tragedy as well as the triumph of good over the evil.

¹¹⁰Eliade, Mircea (1959). *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.

¹¹¹Okey, Robin. 2007. *Taming Balkan nationalism*. New York: Oxford University Press

¹¹²Walter, Christopher (1989) The Thracian Horseman: Ancestor of the Warrior Saints? *Byzantinische Forschungen* 14,, p. G61-662.



Picture 54 Horus Cavalier¹¹³—Louvre Museum

It is sometimes claimed that St George's dragon-slaying exploits are derived directly from this myth, and this assertion is given weight by some images with a Greco-Roman influence where Horus is shown on horseback, in contravention of the usual Egyptian approach, which does not include depictions of deities on horses. Given the Eastern Mediterranean location which seems to be the origin of St George's cult, it is entirely credible that an Egyptian myth would have had a role to play in shaping this Christianized figure. However, as the Coptic account makes clear, St George was much more than a dragon-slayer—he was a martyr, a healer, a liberator and a figure of youth and chastity. St George's status as a liberator of prisoners is recognized in many places where his cult is strong, yet few of his devotees will identify him as someone who freed his own slaves. Even the version of the dragon legend presented here is by no means standard—the princess is not typically named (and in Ethiopia she is usually called Biruwit, not Sabra), the location is usually identified as Silene (a place no more historically authentic than 'Salone'),

¹¹³<http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/horus-horseback>



Picture 55 Icon of Saint George slaying the dragon at al Batiyeh.

On the other hand, the name "George" ties the cult of the saint closely to earth and to nature. Its meaning `husbandman` or `farmer` in Greek shows the agrarian origin of the cult. The word `georgeus` or `georgos` which denotes an occupation at a low socio-economic level came to be applied to one of the most popular saints of Christianity. The explanation that comes to mind is that it started as terms for the "divinity of the peasants" or the "peasant divinity." It can be said that, in urban centers such as Antioch, it was applied to the Baal or Zeus worshipped in the shrines of the countryside by the peasantry, possibly called Zeus Georgeus or Belus Georgeus. This assumption is supported by archeological evidence: an inscription from Athens contains an invocation of Zeus Georgos "Zeus the Farmer" in connection with the sacrifice of the 20th of the month of Maimekterion. This Baal or Zeus of the country folks is almost certain to be the origin of St. George. The attributes of the Christian saint, link him and his identity with other mythological figures (H. Delahaye, 1909)¹¹⁴.

In spite of the popularity of St. George, the official Church circles were loath to put him in the rank of the saints. Many of his attributes, the rites connected with his feast day, and the

¹¹⁴Delaheye, Hippolyte. (1909). *Les Legends Greques Des Saints Militaires* Libraire Alphonse picard et fils : Paris

myths about him could not easily be defined in Christian terms. As early as the fifth century, Pope Gelasius condemned the acts of St. George as corrupted by heretics, but asserted that the saint himself was a real martyr and, as such, worthy of reverence. Three centuries later, this condemnation was repeated in the East by the patriarch Nicephorus. The enigma of St. George was a controversy treated by many scholars. He was equated with many figures in the Syro-Babylonian, Greek, and Christian mythologies. He was, among others, equated with Perseus because of his fighting the dragon and with Glaucos, the green fertility genius (Haddad,1969).Saint George is also one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers. The Fourteen Holy Helpers are a group of saints venerated together in Roman Catholicism because their intercession is believed to be particularly effective, especially against various diseases. They are St. Christopher, St. Dionysius, St. Catherine of Alexandria, St. Blaise, St. Vitus, St. Erasmus, St. Margaret, St. Barbara, St. Eustachius, St. Achatius, St. Cyriacus, St. Pantaleon, St. Giles and St. George. St George is also regarded as one of the most prominent military saints. This was the main reason for the intensive preservation of Saint George's cult to the present day. (Gibbs 1971)¹¹⁵.

Interest in St George reached Western Europe in the sixth century, and by the eighth century it is clear that the cult was general throughout Christian areas. As listed before, a wide range of places and peoples has claimed him as their special guardian. For example, more than one hundred towns in Italy have a historic link to this saint; a number of French cities also claim his protection.St George's role as the patron of England has a long history too. In 1351 there is the first record of his invocation as a patron of the English nation in battle, and in 1399 St George's feast day was officially promulgated as a festival to be observed as a holiday, even as other nations observe the feast of their patrons.There is evidence to suggest that he was very important to particular groups within English society in the late Middle Ages, especially the social elite and, above all, the monarchy. With few exceptions English kings from Edward III onwards tended to show an interest in the saint through the possession of relics and the commissioning of imagery of St George,. However, it was not until the eighteenth century that the saint was formally declared, by Pope Benedict the fourteenth, as the principal protector of England. The relatively recent date of this pronouncement is reflects the long road to recovery that Europe was still experiencing more than a decade after the war officially ended (Gibbs, 1971 p. 102)¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁵ Gibbs, Margaret (1971). *Saints beyond the White Cliffs*. Ayer Press.

¹¹⁶ Ibid

When we consider the cult of St George outside England one of the most striking features is that many of the places that consider him their patron—and indeed other areas where he is an important saint—make a huge effort to celebrate his feast day, far more than is usual on English soil. In some places there are special traditions which are followed on St George's Day. For example, in Bulgaria there is a range of rituals and celebrations on what is known as Gergiovdan, such as the tradition of playing on swings on the day as well as the communal and civic. Gergiovdan is used as a day to celebrate the Bulgarian Army and the principal annual army parade formerly took place on this day. This seems to link to the identification of St George as an heroic soldier, but it also allows for an expression of national identity(Okey, 2007 p. 119)¹¹⁷.

In contrast to this militaristic approach, in Catalonia the feast is known as El Día de los Amantes ('The Day of Lovers'), so the honoring of St George (in Catalan known as 'Sant Jordi' is augmented by something akin to St Valentine's Day practices. There it is traditional for men to give roses to their lovers. Roses have been associated with this day since the Middle Ages. Today, Barcelona's principal street, Las Ramblas, and other places in the city see hundreds of stalls set up to sell roses on 23 April. It is said that by the end of the day some 4 million roses¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ <https://www.barcelona-tourist-guide.com/en/events/sant-jordi/sant-jordi-festival-barcelona.html>

2.2. St George of Büyükada



Picture 56 Icon of Saint George at the Narthex of Aya Yorgi Church 2016 by the author

The lore of St George is somehow obscure and doesn't go far beyond a name of church dedicated to him in modern Büyükada. Neither the hagiography of his martyrdom nor the legend of the saint slaying the dragon is known by the modern inhabitants of the island or the pilgrim-visitors to the sanctuary. Instead of a globally acclaimed dragon legend, the island has its own myths about their popular saints. The most prominent one is the miraculous discovery of the holy icon by the shepherd which is believed to be the base for the reconstruction of the monastery. This story is shared by almost all people living on the island as cultural-industrial lore and among "conscious" pilgrims. Alongside with this holy discovery tale, there are three other mythical stories that I was able to detect either from the elderly Rum in Athens or from some Christian pilgrims.

Second myth is quite recent and basically on how St George saved the monastery from the destructive fire in 1980s.

In the summer of 1986 the woods of Büyükada caught fire and the flames quickly spread across the hill up to the monastery. Unfortunately some parts of the monastery caught fire too and turned into ashes. But the priests and the ones around reported that they heard horse neighs and shortly afterwards the fire stopped before it reached the holy chapel and the church. That was the biggest miracle that Aya Yorgi made (Yanni 59)¹¹⁹

For the locals themselves, narratives function in any case as a chronological system of the island's history. Interestingly, however, the dominant trends change over time and different "stories" prevail. The stories recalled spontaneously mostly concerned lived experiences, even if one could classify them as legends or historical accounts. Stories spread within the community as "history", at least from one ethnographic perspective. Similarly third one is about the 6th of September pogrom in 1955 on the island. That horrible night is still vivid in many of the local Christians' memories.

Concerning Aya Yorgi, not me personally but my husband has a story that he has been telling since he was a child. As an orphan, he witnessed 6th September incidents in 1955 in the island. After that mad crowd of looters, vandalized the island they marched to Aya Yorgi...Aya Yorgi church could be seen from the windows of the orphans' room. My husband was around seven years old at that time. All the children of the orphanage saw a strange bedazzling light coming from the hill where Aya Yorgi was located and the sound of a neighing horse. They could see a knight mounted on a horse. The rocks were falling down from the slope onto the crowds of vandals who targeted to set the monastery up on a fire. It continued until the twilight..Nobody could reach to the summit of the hill... In the end Aya Yorgi church was saved... He was no one other than St George(Berchuh62)¹²⁰.

Fourth one is about the path towards the hill. According to the hearsays St George (Aya Yorgi) is disturbed with the idea of pitching the path with stones as the sacredness of the way to the church would disappear. That's why, no matter how many times the municipality of Büyükada tried, the stones on the road have never been clenched and they are splintered shortly after they renovated the road.

Oral testimonies reflect myths and realities that shape the belief patterns around Aya Yorgi. This is why they are a step towards drawing a map of the collective conscience of different kinds of people. Actually, the accounts of miracles always made me feel awkward, especially when they were told in a context of spontaneous communication and not for

¹¹⁹ Personal Interview with Yanni in Athens 22.05.2017

¹²⁰ Personal interview with Berchuh62 23.11. 2016

recording purposes. I could never offer a similar testimony (possibly because communicating through them was culturally unfamiliar to me), but I did manage to listen and empathize in profound respect, and also to interact with the participants.

Bercuhi and Nadya are two Armenian women in their sixties, who have known each other for a period of time that they don't even exactly remember. Bercuhi is married to a Rum man who had spent his childhood in the Rum Orphanage¹²¹ during 1950s. She is local to Istanbul but has deep roots inside Anatolia. Her great grandparents are the one of the lucky ones who could escape from the 1915 Armenian massacre. She is retired now after having worked for long years in private sector. She considers herself as a secular Christian Armenian. She is very affectionate towards the animals and a true animal rights defender. Bercuhi's testimony is more personal than the communal interpretations of Saint George:

I have overcome a deadly lung cancer. It is all because of my sensitive character said my doctor. Cancers are all due to over thinking and worrying. God damn it but I am such a sensitive and sensible woman. I can sit and just watch the things happening in my beloved country (Turkey). I am sort of leftist and a revolutionary. I actively fought against the government forces during the Gezi Park protests and opened the doors of my house to the protestors who were being chased by the police... During the chemotherapies, I prayed God and all the saints and especially George (Yorgi)... being a leftist doesn't mean that I am an atheist.. You won't believe but once I saw Virgin Mary (Meryemana) on the street waving her hands to me... I crossed myself.. I was speechless.

Nadya on the other hand, is still working in her own business as an optician. She owns an optic shop in Osmanbey- Halaskargazi street which was once considered as be Non-Muslim quarter and also is remembered as the street where Hrant Dink, internationally acclaimed Turco-Armenian journalist who was brutally assassinated by a "mysterious" Islamo-faschist conspirator.

I had a terrible traffic accident in 1983... a really horrible one... I was a young woman and my daughter was 4 years old... I was in coma for almost a month. My bones were broken and face was totally torn. They operated me many times... During the coma, I saw many dreams and illusions. Angels, saints and others... Saint George was one of them. He told me that they measured my sins and good deeds and

¹²¹It is Europe's largest wooden building, and the second largest in the world, according to Jak Deleon. The building was erected in 1898 by a French company, who planned to open it as a grand hotel called the PrinkipoPalas, with a gambling casino on the style of Monte Carlo. But Sultan AbdülHamit II refused to give permission for such an establishment and it never opened. The building was then purchased by Eleni Zarifi, widow of the banker Leonidas Zarifi, who donated it to the Ecumenical Patriarchate on condition that it be used as an orphanage. The Greek Orphanage, which had been at Balıklı in Istanbul, reopened here in 1903, helped by a gift of 146 gold pieces donated by AbdülHamit II, who also gave it tax-exempt status. The orphanage closed in 1964 and has since fallen into ruins, though it is still a most impressive site, one of the principal landmarks of Büyükdada as seen from the sea.

as I had no sins and I had a small daughter waiting for me, they decided not to get me into the underworld but to send me back to my beloved ones. And they assured me that I was going to fully recover and there wouldn't be any need for extra operations. Then I came around... My husband and everyone were looking at me. I asked them to give me a mirror as I really wanted to see my face after all... They hesitated as my face was almost completely shattered and disintegrated. I looked at my face in the mirror.. They were trying to console me that I was going to be healed after the a couple plastic surgeries I told them I did not want to go under surgeries and I was certain that I would regain my face. And It happened.. Day by day I got better; my face reintegrated and smoothed down. But I could hardly walk. One summer day, my husband brought me to our summer house in Büyükada, we were just taking a stroll in the woods and I told him that I wanted go up to the hill to Aya Yorgi Monastery. I couldn't believe it but he didn't reject and accompanied me up to the hill... You won't believe but I came to me that I walked up the hill in a few seconds..Like speed of light speed despite my disability. I didn't feel anything..I don't remember how I walked. I just found myself at the gate of the church after a few seconds. Since then I have been visiting the church often both in his (St George) name day and the ordinary days... I bring oil for the candles and donate money... All happened to me is a miracle... However I lost my husband a few years ago because of lung cancer... (Nadya 61)¹²²

Muslim visitors—pilgrims on the other hand, though accepting the miracles regarding the health issues or other wishes, they seem to be hesitant in relating these supernatural incidents with Aya Yorgi. Instead, they explain it with the strong desire in a person's prayer and the sacrality of the "space" more than the saint himself.

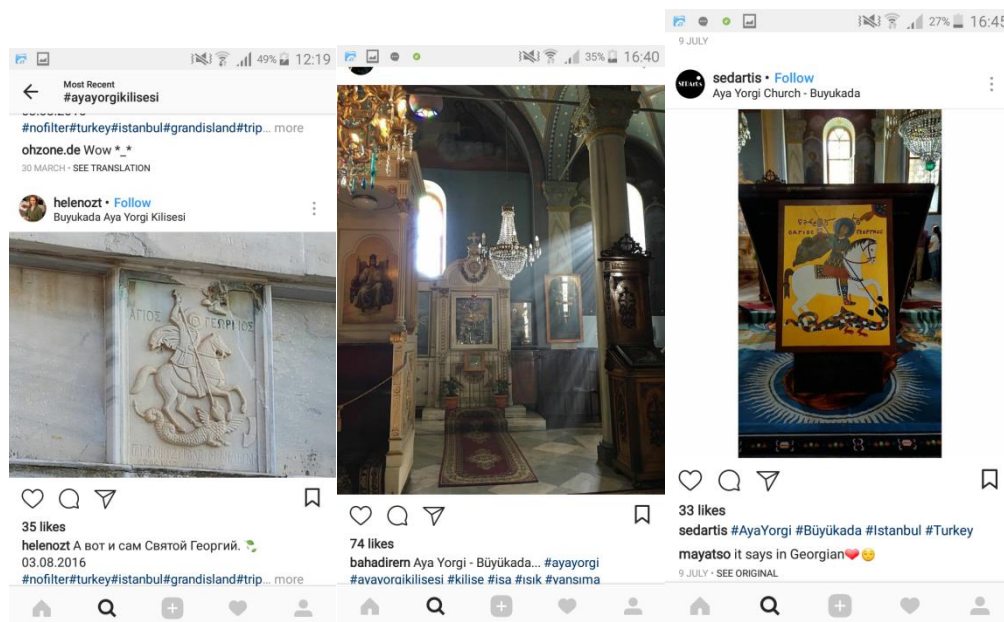
I had an operation from my stomach last year..a cancerous thing.. I still have difficulty in walking but each time I climb this path I feel like a child..as energetic as a child. I don't know much about Christian sainthood but I have respect to this saint (Saint George). He is a very holy person (mubarak). There are many stories about his miracles. but as you know everything depends on your will and how clean your heart is. If you believe in something very deeply it happens.. (Haluk, 57)¹²³

¹²²Personal interview with Nadya 15. 04.2017 on Büyükada

¹²³Personal interview with Haluk 27. 05.2017 on Büyükada

2.3. “Aya Yorgi himself”

This is a part from Instagram analysis, a comment made by a Russian woman (picture 1, annex 8) and it stirred my attention because it was unique in such a personal direct approach towards Aya Yorgi as a person: “А ВотсамСвятойГеоргий”- Here it is Saint George himself. There are a lot of Russian people`s posts on Instagram labeled Aya Yorgi from Buyukada and they all show positive attitude towards the feast, the church, the place and other religions as well. But this comment could be interpreted as a different view of the Christians compared to Muslims in relation to saints. While Muslim religion praises a unique God to whom believers usually address directly, Christians do address to Saints as well directly to mediate their prayers with their God. Christians feel close to saints due to saints` human nature who were all mortals until their deeds gave them a place to immortality and closeness to God. This doesn`t mean Muslims don`t mention Saint George in their posts. All the pics I selected have been labeled Aya Yorgi. Besides that a lot of them display the icon of the saint and even the fact that Saint George is the one who killed a dragon and so on. But there is no direct reference to the saint, no prayer addressed to him and no other pointing outs like this one. Nevertheless he is presented in lots of beautifully taken pictures



Picture 57 Captures from Instagram

2.4. Saint George of Lebanon (Mar Jiryes)

Lebanese Anthropologist Nour Farra Haddad (2009)¹²⁴ divides the shared figures of Sainthood in Lebanon into two major categories. The first major category includes the saints “recognized” and venerated by both communities, with the sacred figure of Virgin Mary (Saydeh Maryam, Sitna Mariam) as the most important. Despite being venerated by both communities, most of the worship sites devoted to the Virgin Mary are Christian (There are more than 900 religious sites dedicated to her in Lebanon). A second subgroup of the first category of saints is Biblical prophets. It is seen that Biblical figures would be common referents for the faithful of the three monotheistic religions, as Jews, Christians and Muslims share a common prophetic heritage. Of all the biblical saints, worship sites dedicated to St. Elijah are by far the most prevalent, with 262 shrines devoted to him in Lebanon (Sauma,1994)¹²⁵. Elijah, Elias, Ilyas or Ayla, is a prophet in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions. More than a dozen Muslim shrines in Lebanon are also dedicated to him under the name of *Nabi Ayla* or *NabiYassine*, such as the little mosque of Ablah, the *maqâm Nabi Elias* in Qabb Elias, and so on.

The second major category includes saints classified exclusively as Christian or Muslim saints but who are venerated by believers of all religious backgrounds. The devotion reserved for Lebanese Christian Maronite saints -Saint Charbel, Saint Rafqa and Saint Hardini - has become so intense that they appear to have become patron saints of the entire country. In the second subgroup of the second major category of saints with therapeutic virtues are known as healing saints or thaumaturgies to whom specific powers and virtues have been attributed; they are numerous in all of the communities. One saint can accumulate several specialties on his or her own, including therapeutic virtues, trade, protection, and so on.

The third sub-group is of saints claimed by both communities, but under different names; more specifically, these are Christian saints for whom counterparts exist in the Islamic tradition. These figures who can be designated as trans religious personages include Saint George (*Mar Jiryes*), or Al Khodr and Saint Peter (*Mar Boutros*), or *Sham'oun*, *Semaan*. After the Virgin Mary, it is Saint George's name which is associated with the greatest number of sites of worship in Lebanon. With approximately 350 Christian sites (churches,

¹²⁴Haddad Farra Nour . (2009). "Ziyarat: Visits to saints, shared devotional practices and dialogue with "the other"" in *Hyphen Islam-Christianity*, Beirut, Arab printing press.

¹²⁵Sauma, Victor. (1994) *Sur les pas des saints au Liban*, (In the saints' footsteps) Beirut, F.M.A.

cathedrals, convents, schools, chapels, grottos, and so forth) and about twenty Muslim sites, to name a few: *maqâm Al Khodrin* Sarafand (South Lebanon), *maqâm Al Khodrin* Ain Arab. The churches of the Middle East, especially the Maronite one, see him as a “mega-martyr” and the patron saint of Beirut, whose name varies in Arabic: Al Qedis Jirjis, Jerios, Jourios, Jawarjios, Jorjos, Djirjis, Jirjis, Kevork among Armenians, and Korkis among the Syriacs. (Farra Haddad, 2009). It is notable that various Christian sects in the eastern Mediterranean are also strongly attached to this figure, and it may well be that cross-fertilization between different religious traditions is at work. An example of this trend can be found in Lebanon, where St George is venerated—as a symbol of fertility and rebirth, and also as a mounted knight—not only by Christians but by some Muslims and the substantial Druze community (some of whom identify as Muslim while others claim their belief system to be essentially separate from Islam). St George is the dedicatee of 276 churches, 27 monasteries, 26 schools, two hospitals and two mosques, in addition to a number of villages, shrines and sanctuaries all over the country. His patronages include the capital city, Beirut, which has its own Bay of St George.

This insistence on an intangible rather than physical form of the saint as the dragon-slayer is also a link with medieval stories of St George appearing as a celestial warrior to break sieges during the Crusades and also on the battlefield. According to Marlène Kanaan (2013)¹²⁶, local people in Beirut say that a grotto with seven coves by the mouth of the river served as the den of the dragon; the grotto was transformed into a sanctuary dedicated to both the Virgin Mary and St George (a combination familiar to western European Christians in the late Middle Ages). St George is said to have washed his hands of the blood of the dragon in the waters of a spring next to the grotto; the waters of the spring have for many years been thought to have curative value. It was reported in 1920s that Maronite and Armenian pilgrims tied pieces of cloth, symbolizing their wishes, to the gates of the grotto; when the wishes were granted they would come back and untie the cloths. They also stuck pebbles with saliva or mud on the walls of the grotto while making wishes. Kanaan also writes about a church in Beirut being converted to a mosque, and subsequently being shared between Maronite and Orthodox Christian communities; it passed into Muslim control in 1661 because the Christians were not able to pay the required taxes; as a mosque it is said to have held a healing well which was thought to cure

¹²⁶ Kanaan, Marlène. (2013). Le Portulan sacré *La géographie religieuse de la navigation au Moyen Âge* Fribourg Colloquium 2013 / Edité par Michele Bacci • Martin Rohde

pulmonary diseases and female sterility. Kanaan describes the popularity of St George in Lebanon as an 'incontestable fact'. She says that his name acts as a leitmotif, with constant invocations. Lebanon is, of course, geographically very close to Palestine, and it is clear that St George has an equally lively cult here. In 1918, during the First World War, Arab Muslims, Shiites, Sunnis and Druze attacked Christian villages like Marja'youn, Kawkaba and others. They were about to attack Klei'a when a great miracle happened. One morning they began to attack the village with a great number, when a cavalier, dressed in green on a white horse, set out to meet the inhabitants of Klei'a, who were few in number, and began to encourage them to repulse the enemy. When the assailants approached, their horses became blind and came back, and when the bullets of the enemy rained on the village the horseman with the white horse raised his arms and the bullets turned against the assailants who became frightened and fled.

2.4.1. Mar Jirjes as a cure for *Walad Makbous*¹²⁷ or St George as Child Rescuer



Picture 58 Saint George with the young mounted behind him kills the dragon, Lebanese icon from the workshop of Mihâil Mhanna al-Qudsî in the Orthodox Monastery of the Saviour in Saida, second half of 19th century¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Ailing child

¹²⁸ http://www.icon-art.info/masterpiece.php?lng=en&mst_id=2814

In the following part I will try to portray another facet of saint George as a protector of the children in Lebanese context. Dwelling on the iconographic representation of St George cited in the work of Grotowski I will try to associate the child rescuer phenomenon with the practices at Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh

Among the representations of the saint in the art of the Eastern Church are occasional depictions of George on horseback accompanied by the considerably smaller figure of a young boy holding a vessel similar to a jug or a kettle, and sometimes a towel. As early as the 19th century, iconographers interested in Byzantine art noticed iconographic differences between those images without, however, being able to pinpoint their literary source. German philologist Johann B. Aufhauser has established a basis for further investigations on the topic of St. George with an adolescent in the further understanding of the iconography of George riding on horseback, accompanied by a boy, Aufhauser published three versions of the story about the boy's salvation by the miraculous intervention of the saint. Although the construction and the plot are similar in each of them, all versions differ in details and historical background. One version is like this:

During their invasion of Paphlagonia the Agarenes took many people into captivity, among them a young boy who was a servant in the church of St. George in Phatris. Some of the prisoners were killed, the rest turned into slaves. The boy was of such beauty that he was chosen as a servant for the Arabian ruler. As he rejected the offer to become a Muslim, he was sent to work in the kitchen. In his misfortune the poor boy prayed to Saint George. Once at evening, when he was lying in bed, he heard a voice coming from the yard and calling his name. The boy opened the door and saw a rider who caught him and placed behind himself on the horse. Then the steed rushed forward and started to gallop. The rider brought the boy to a certain building, and then disappeared. The exhausted youth fell asleep and next morning was awakened by the people, who were dismayed because his Arabian clothes suggested the presence of enemies. The boy recognized those people as monks. As it transpired, he had been brought to Monastery of St. George. All of them went to a church to offer a thanksgiving prayer to God for saving the youth. (Aufhauser, 1911 p.166 cited in Grotowski, 2003 p 28)¹²⁹

Another version of the legend, preserved only in late manuscripts, originated from the period after the fall of Constantinople. The earliest version is included in *Codex Vaticanus 1190*, written down by John Presbyter in the year 1542.

In Mytilene on Lesbos there was a church dedicated to Saint George. While planning the attack against this island, the Arabian pirates from Crete chose the day of the feast of the saint, when all the inhabitants were together in the church to celebrate the

¹²⁹Piotr, Grotowski, (2003) *The Legend of St. George Saving a Youth from Captivity and its Depiction in Art Series Byzantina*. I. Warszawa, pp. 27–77.

liturgy. Amongst those taken into captivity was the young and very handsome son of a widow. The Emir of Crete made him his personal cupbearer. For a whole year the despairing mother prayed to St. George hoping to get her son back. With particular fervour she asked the saint on his feast-day, in other words on the anniversary of her son's kidnapping by the Saracens. At such a moment, the boy was giving a glass of wine to the emir. Unexpectedly St. George appeared on a white steed, caught the boy and brought him to his mother's house. All the inhabitants of Mytilene revered the saint for his miraculous rescue of the boy(Aufhauser, *Miracula*, pp. 100–103. Cited in Grotowski p 29)¹³⁰

The above comparison of these legends allows one to say that with the exception of some repeated motifs of which the structure of the story is built (like the boy's one-year slavery, his prayers to Saint George and the miraculous rescue by the mounted saint) different narrative elements appear in successive versions of the legend. Some of them can be attributed to historical facts, which suggests a hypothesis concerning the date when particular versions were composed. But he was the first to notice that the popularity of this subject in Christian societies under Muslim control results from the symbolic understanding of the legend in which St. George appears as a heavenly defender of faithful against the infidel persecutors (Grtowski, 2003 p 33)¹³¹.

The evidence of the exceptional popularity of the legend of St. George rescuing a youth in the art of crusader kingdoms can be also found in the survived wall-paintings remaining in Lebanese churches in Edde, Enfe and Bahdeidat. The theme of a boy accompanying the saint was combined here with the legend of the fight against a dragon, resulting in an unhistorical amalgamation of two events: the first one taken from *Life* of the saint and the posthumous one known from the *Miracula*. George is shown thrusting his spear into the monster, against the background of a princess and her parents surrounded by their entourage, standing on the coping of the city walls. The emperor Selinus holds keys in his hands, signifying that he entrusts the rule over the city to the victorious warrior and confirming its conversion to Christianity, which was a condition of the saint's help. The motif of the sea was removed from the icon. The combination of the two themes is not justified by the hagiography, where both legends are distinct and refer to different periods of time. Obviously the messages conveyed by both events are alike, but one cannot identify the fight against the transcendental evil symbolized by the dragon with the protection of Christians from infidels. It seems to be the case that the reason for combining these themes lies somewhere else and should be sought in a compositional transition occurring at that

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ ibid

time. This fact may be explained by the constant threat of its Muslim neighbors. On the other hand, the subject under consideration was not popular in all Orthodox regions subjected to other religion (Grotowski, 2003)¹³².

Child issues are the major motivation for the visitation of Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh. May individual pilgrims come to the shrine to search for healing from Mar Jirjes and the water blessed by him for certain illness of their children. The children are begged to be rescued, not from a hostile sultan as in the legend, but from desperate mental or physical disorders that might stem from evil powers. One of these “imaginary” evil threats that Saint George is believed to cure is a *kabsa* which is an “imaginary” complexity cannot be easily explained by modern medicine:

The 40 day period for traditional Middle Eastern women is indeed both a time of social marginality and pollution. The normative account always stresses that a woman is meant to stay at home for 40 days, not do any work outside or inside the home, and in particular is not to cook whilst she is bleeding. She is meant to eat well and rest. There is a belief which reinforces this seclusion. It is that contact with other women who are menstruating, may close the womb of the post-partum mother and make it difficult to conceive again. This belief is called 'kabsa' (and the mother or the child who caught *kabsa* is called *makbous*) and underlines both the opposition between fertility and infertility and the mother and child's perceived vulnerability during this period (Inhorn, 2001)¹³³. The belief is that the evil eye could harm a mother's milk or prevent the child from growing. In Lebanon, the belief that the entrance of a menstruating woman into the room can harm a mother or baby is referred to as "mushahra". In Anatolia- Turkey, not allowing another lactating woman to enter the house is believed to protect the mother and baby from evil forces.

Saint George is mostly remembered with his recreational powers for the healing of *makbous* children. Tawfik Nakhoul born in 1918, the oldest man in Sarba but with a very bright memory provided me with invaluable information related with intact form of healing ritual practices at Batiyeh before Batiyeh was converted into a public park. He also worked as a warden of the shrine during 1930s:

¹³² ibid

¹³³ Inhorn, Maria C.; Van Balen, F., (2001). eds. Infertility around the Globe: *New Thinking on Childlessness, Gender, and Reproductive Technologies*. University of California Press; Berkeley

I witness for 90 years that people have been coming to visit Batiyeh. But it wasn't like this before. Al Batiyeh was just by the sea. The waves of sea water was beating the rocks and it was difficult to access the grotto inside. They used to bring the children who were touched by evil spirits (*waladmakbous*). They were all skinny children. I had a reputation in the village for immersing the children into the water safely and skillfully. They used to call me for help. Because only few people could do it. It required a special talent. There is special technique. You had to put your right hand on the baby's face so that s/he wouldn't suffocate and hold the baby tightly from his/her hips and dip him very quickly into the water. But very quickly...



Picture 59 Father and his son at al Batiyeh in front of the icon of Saint George, 2017 photo by the author

The term “child” doesn't always refer to a “small kid” or an “infant”. A child who is in need of a divine help can be at any age. Throughout the research at al Batiyeh I came across with two adolescent boys with Down syndrome, three young girls afflicted by mental diseases, and a man over thirty years old with a certain psychological disorder. They were all accompanied by their parents or close relatives. They spend some time around the shrine, pray in the chapel and in front of the icon of saint George, they follow the same rituals as others: getting some water and anointing the head of their children with the water and leaving a piece of the clothes into the grotto: “*I see hayalet (ghosts)...Throughout the night... I get very scared and panicked.. My father has brought me here from Beirut for finding a cure from Mar Jiryes...*” (picture above)



Picture 60 Riha and her grandchildren in front of the icon of St George, 2017 photo by the author

My mother used to bring me here too since when I was young. I am from Bekaa, but we live in Beirut now. I remember very clearly that we came visited this grotto many times from Bekaa to Sarba only to visit this shrine.. Now I am a grandmother and I have brought my grandson: the son of my daughter. It seems he is not growing. He is crying all the time. We scare that he is *makbous*. We came in the afternoon, washed the boy in the water. If we see a signifier that he is growing and crying less I will come here, donate money and light a candle.

Upon the question who the figure was in the icon:

He is Mar Jiryas al Khodr. From Muslim community in Lebanon not everybody knows that he is Khodr but he is. I know. We have exactly the same photo in our house in the village. My father keeps it.

The lore of Mar Jiryas al Batiyeh passes from one generation to another mainly from mothers to their daughters. The daughters visit the shrine when it comes to their own children especially when the futile advices of modern medicine do not work. The case of Leonida (35)¹³⁴ is not an exception:

¹³⁴ Personal interview Leonida 07.07.2017

I am from Harissa. Very near here. As you see I have twins but one of them grows more slowly than the other. He cries too much all day long.. I took him to doctor. He said everything is normal, there is no problem..But I believe there is.. My mom urged me to bring both of the boys here... I pray. I am am very hopeful that he will be better after today.

Mothers pay visits to a series of shrines across the country for the divine remedy and al Batiyeh sometimes become just a chain ring in this visitation network rather than a single health pilgrimage destination. These sacred spots varies from Mar Charbel to Afqa. Testimony of Hoda (60)¹³⁵, the cook, in the parish of St George sheds light on these inter-shrines relations:

I have never met anyone who has been cured after a visit to Mar Jirjesal Batiyeh but I heard many stories about how the holy water in the cave cured the sick children. But the sacred water doesn't only exist in Batiyeh. My village for example, Afqa, near Akoura. It is believed that the students of Mar Maroun stopped in Afqa while they were going from one place to another... they washed their feet in the river and they hung their wet clothes on the fig tress nearby. These holy persons blessed the water and the fig tress. So we consider the figs and the water to have healing powers. People especially Muslims from nearby or far villages bring their sick children to get blessed in the water. Interestingly, everyone knows about the existence of al Batiyeh. I heard many times from the old women that if the the children was makbous he/she had to be taken to al Batiyeh if the waters of Afqa don't heal. We as the inhabitants of Afqa are familiar with Batiyeh but here in Sarba few people knows about Afqa. I think al Batiyeh is more popular in Lebanon than any other shrines.



Picture 61 The badges from the shrines visited before al Batiyeh

¹³⁵ Personal interview with Hoda 28.06.2016

2.4.2. Ethiopia at Batiyeh or Sisterhood around St George

Lebanon is widely known to be home to eighteen official religious sects, but with the steadily growing numbers of foreign workers in the country, in total, there are approximately 200,000 migrant workers from countries including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, and it is estimated that approximately 60,000 to 70,000 Ethiopians currently working in Lebanon. Many have been here for several years and don't intend to return home due to dismal economic and financial conditions. Overwhelmingly female, most are employed as cheap household labor and are paid a wage that most Lebanese could never survive on. St George's church services for English speaking migrant workers are held on Sundays at 05:00 pm and every first Saturday of the month and for Ethiopians every Tuesday at 5 pm.

St George in Ethiopia has a fascinating and complex history, and its proximity to the Holy Land. One of the clearest demonstrations of the extent of the Ethiopian cult of St George is found at Lalibela, a city in the Amhara region to the north of the country. Lalibela is of immense historical and religious importance, and was recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1978, in the very first listing of monuments described, under the terms of the scheme, as having outstanding universal value. The church of St George (Biete Ghiorgis in Amharic, meaning 'the House of St George') is one of eleven monolithic churches on the site which were sculpted, rather than built, in the thirteenth century. According to Ethiopian cultural history, Biete Ghiorgis was built because of a vision experienced by King Gebre Mesqel Lalibela of the Zagwé dynasty (a poorly documented period, one of the most obscure in Ethiopian history, which extended from about 1137 to 1270). St George and God have both been said to have appeared to the king and given instructions to sculpt the church, which seems to be the last of the churches to be created on the site; it stands slightly apart from the main complex of ten churches (some of which may originally have been royal palaces) and is connected to them by a system of trenches (Chojnaki, 1975)¹³⁶.

Every Tuesday for Ethiopians (all female), there is a mass at old St George church with the participation of priests and deacons from Ethiopian Orthodox Church situated in Bikfayya city. They remove their shoes before entering the church and loosely drape themselves in a

¹³⁶ Chojnaki Samuel (1975) Note on the Early Iconography of St. George and Related Equestrian Saints in Ethiopia *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (JULY 1975), pp. 39-55 Published by: Institute of Ethiopian Studies Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4432>

natala, a thin, transparent white cloth that is symbolic of the purity and cleanliness necessary to enter the house of God. Women must wear long, modest clothing that covers their shoulders. Trousers and long skirts must cover the legs to at least the ankle. The mass takes nearly two hours until 7 pm. After the mass, some of them proceed to al Batiyeh where they can find a more comfortable space to meet their friends, for exchanging latest news among the Ethiopian domestic workers' community, gossiping, helping each other emotionally, namely relaxation and socialization. However al Batiyeh closes its gates at around 8 pm and there is a little time left for this type of meetings for the ones who have commitments in the houses they work. Therefore they make appointments for certain dates and time to meet at Al Batiyeh. In the summer of 2017 it was Thursdays 5 pm. Despite this fixed appointment time, yet certain girls working in Sarba or Jounieh neighborhoods, whenever they can find availability, take permission from their *madames* or when they are out for errands like shopping for the household, they get organized among each other via *whats app* groups, pay quick visits to al Batiyeh. I observed some of the crying on one another's shoulders, consoling each other, lending and borrowing money and so on. Visiting Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh on daily basis or attending the mass at St George church have obvious recovery or wellbeing effects on maid workers in their processes of displacement and integration into the host society. This provides emotional and cognitive support, and constitutes a vehicle for community building and group identity.

Mar Jiryas is very important for us. He always helps me when I feel in trouble here. We venerate him in Ethiopia too. He saved us from Italian occupation just as he rescued the princess from the dragon. He gives me whatever I wish. (Fasika, 35)

Madam doesn't let me come here often. I have a lot of work. But if it was for me I would come here twenty times a day. I love praying here. (Bety, 21)

This is where St George rescued the prince Biwut from the dragon. Our life is very difficult here. I am graduate of business administration from Addis Ababa.. I had big dreams and look what I have become. Never could I believe if somebody had told me that I was going to be a domestic worker in Lebanon.... Some madams are really horrible. Not me personally but most of my friends are literally tortured. We pray St George to rescue us from the dragons of Lebanon...(Beyza, 23)

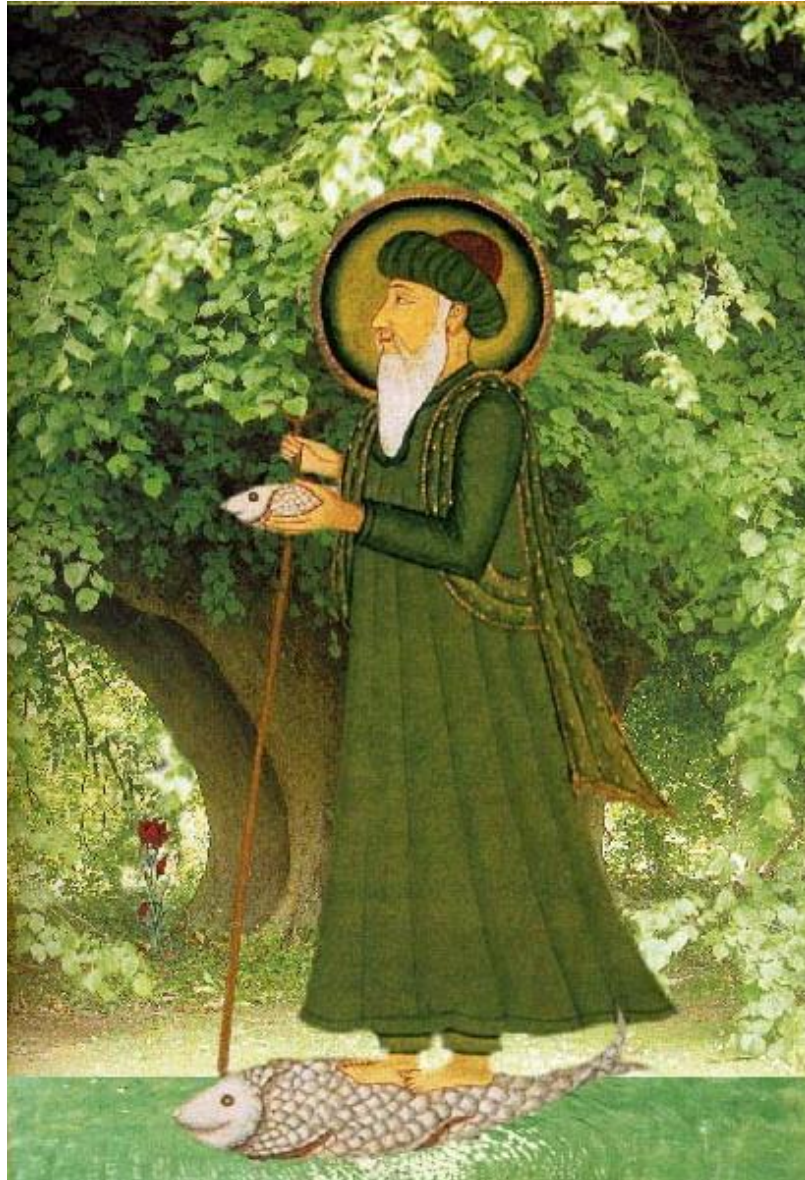
We often meet here every 23rd of each month. The 23rd is important as April 23rd is the feast day of St George and February 23 we defeated the Italians with the help of St George. Similarly it happens with monthly commemoration of Mar Charbel. They commemorate him every 22nd of each month. (Kiky, 24)¹³⁷

¹³⁷Face to face interviews with Ethiopian domestic workers at al Batiyeh 27.01.2017



Picture 62. Ethiopian domestic workers at Batiyeh, 2016 photo by the author

Despite the fact that St George is clearly a Christian figure, one of the most interesting facets of his cult is the way that aspects of his legend and imagery are paralleled in other, non-Christian traditions, both religious and secular. To what extent and on the ground on what type of parallelism could one link the figure of Saint George to other saintly figures be they Christian or not? Is he a unique figure embodying ideals and expectations particularly specific to Christian believers or he might transcend cultic limitations changing only the appearance and name while keeping the essence? In order to answer such questions, in the subchapters below, I will display a comparative research in other cult areas.



Picture 63 Al Khidr on the fish 18th century Mughul miniature¹³⁸

2.5. Al-Khidr

After the Prophet Mohammed and the Caliph Ali, the most revered figure among the Muslims in the Middle East (Turkey, Syria and Lebanon) is a Muslim saint named Khidr. Either through personal acquaintance or through hearsay, everyone in the region is familiar with the visible form in which Khidr appears to human eyes as an aged dervish with a long white beard, sometimes wearing a large white turban and green coat. Again Khidr may well be one of the oldest gods of the Middle East—pre-Moslem, pre-Christian, pre-Roman, pre-Greek—a vegetation god and a water deity. The Turkish name Hizir is transliterated from the Arabic Al-Khidr, an epithet that means, literally, ‘The Green One’ or ‘The Green

¹³⁸ <https://jennalilla.org/2013/02/20/khidr-angel-of-the-mystics>

Man' (Because of the flexibility of implicit vowels in Arabic, the name appears as Al-Kadr, Al-Kedr, or Al-Kidr. The Jews call him Hudr; the Persians, Kisir; and the Turks, Hizir.) His identity has become obscured by time and by syncretism through which Islam has always appropriated and transmitted elements of surrounding cultures. (Walker;Uysal, 1973)¹³⁹.

There are numerous prophets, saints and other heroes of Islam who have exerted a great influence on Islamic history. In Islamic folk literature, one finds a variety of names and titles associated with Khidr. Some say Khodr is a title; others have called it an epithet. He has been equated with St. George, identified as the Muslim "version of Elijah" and also referred to as the eternal wanderer. Scholars have also characterized him as a 'saint'; prophet-saint, mysterious prophet-guide and so on. The story, or the 'legend' as it is often called, of Khodr finds its source in the Qur'ān, chapter 18 (Surat Kahf)¹⁴⁰ verses 60–82:

60. Behold, Moses said to his attendant, "I will not give up until I reach the junction of the two seas or (until) I spend years and years in travel."
61. But when they reached the Junction, they forgot (about) their Fish, which took its course through the sea (straight) as in a tunnel.
62. When they had passed on (some distance), Moses said to his attendant: "Bring us our early meal; truly we have suffered much fatigue at this (stage of) our journey."
63. He replied: "Sawest thou (what happened) when we betook ourselves to the rock? I did indeed forget (about) the Fish: none but Satan made me forget to tell (you) about it: it took its course through the sea in a marvellous way!"
64. Moses said: "That was what we were seeking after:" So they went back on their footsteps, following (the path they had come).
65. So they found one of Our servants, on whom We had bestowed Mercy from Ourselves and whom We had taught knowledge from Our own Presence.
66. Moses said to him: "May I follow thee, on the footing that thou teach me something of the (Higher) Truth which thou hast been taught?"
67. (The other) said: "Verily thou wilt not be able to have patience with me!"
68. "And how canst thou have patience about things about which thy understanding is not complete?"
69. Moses said: "Thou wilt find me, if Allah so will, (truly) patient: nor shall I disobey thee in aught."
70. The other said: "If then thou wouldst follow me, ask me no questions about anything until I myself speak to thee concerning it."
71. So they both proceeded: until, when they were in the boat, he scuttled it. Said Moses: "Hast thou scuttled it in order to drown those in it? Truly a strange thing hast thou done!"
72. He answered: "Did I not tell thee that thou canst have no patience with me?"

¹³⁹Walker, Warren ,Uysal Ahmet. (1973). An Ancient God in Modern Turkey: Some Aspects of the Cult of Hızır. *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol.86, No.341: 286-289

¹⁴⁰ Holy Quran Diyanet Publishing 2002

73. Moses said: "Rebuke me not for forgetting, nor grieve me by raising difficulties in my case."

74. Then they proceeded: until, when they met a young man, he slew him. Moses said: "Hast thou slain an innocent person who had slain none? Truly a foul (unheard of) thing hast thou done!"

75. He answered: "Did I not tell thee that thou canst have no patience with me?"

76. (Moses) said: "If ever I ask thee about anything after this, keep me not in thy company: then wouldst thou have received (full) excuse from my side."

77. Then they proceeded: until, when they came to the inhabitants of a town, they asked them for food, but they refused them hospitality. They found there a wall on the point of falling down, but he set it up straight. (Moses) said: "If thou hadst wished, surely thou couldst have exacted some recompense for it!"

78. He answered: "This is the parting between me and thee: now will I tell thee the interpretation of (those things) over which thou wast unable to hold patience.

79. "As for the boat, it belonged to certain men in dire want: they plied on the water: I but wished to render it unserviceable, for there was after them a certain king who seized on every boat by force.

80. "As for the youth, his parents were people of Faith, and we feared that he would grieve them by obstinate rebellion and ingratitude (to Allah and man).

81. "So we desired that their Lord would give them in exchange (a son) better in purity (of conduct) and closer in affection.

82. "As for the wall, it belonged to two youths, orphans, in the Town; there was, beneath it, a buried treasure, to which they were entitled: their father had been a righteous man: So thy Lord desired that they should attain their age of full strength and get out their treasure—a mercy (and favour) from thy Lord. I did it not of my own accord. Such is the interpretation of (those things) over which thou wast unable to hold patience."

Aydın (1986)¹⁴¹ claims that the verses in Qur'an deal with an allegorical story about Moses' journey in search for truth. Full of symbolism, the Qur'ānic story introduces the mysterious figure of Khodr, who symbolizes "the depth of mystic insight" accessible to man. Khidr is not mentioned in the Qur'ān by name though. However, the commentators have generally agreed, partly on the basis of Hadith literature, that the mysterious person with whom Moses' meeting takes place, i.e. the meeting mentioned in 18:65, and who is called in the Qur'ān as " So they found one of Our servants, on whom We had bestowed Mercy from Ourselves and whom We had taught knowledge from Our own Presence.", is no other than the 'eternal' Khidr. According to Friedlaender, Khidr figure in Islam is not emerged from a single source; on the contrary, this figure is composed of various pre-Islamic legendary characters. For this reason Khidr is considered as a pure example of syncretism. (Friedlaender, 1959 cited in Ocak, 2012 p. 68)¹⁴².

¹⁴¹Aydın, Mehmet. (1986).Türklerde Hızır İnancı.*Selçuk University Journal Of Theology Faculty. Volume:2*

¹⁴²Ocak, Ahmet Y. (2012). *İslam-Türk İnançlarında Hızır yahur Hızır-İlyas Kült.*Kabalcı:İstanbul

In his frequently referred book “İslam-Türk İnançlarında Hızır yahut Hızır-İlyas Kültü” Turkish theologian Ahmet İnan Ocak (2007) carried out a deep historical, theological and literal analysis of Hızır cult in Turkey, Middle East and Balkans. As he states Hızır is such a deep, effective and popular cult in Islamic societies. Having drunk ab-ıhayat (water of life) he reached the immortal status so that in cultural practices he is believed to be a holy savior that reaches you whenever you call him for help. Even, Turkish medical ambulance system is named as Hızır acil (Hızır emergency).

In Levant territories Hızır and St. George are two personages identified with each other with respect to both their characteristic features and their functions. St. Georges (Aya Yorgi) cult is one of the most significant examples of mutual religious interactions between Muslim native Christian community during the process of Islamizing and Turkicizing beginning with the settlement of the Turks in Anatolia. Even today it is quite possible to observe how much St. Georges and Hızır cults have been mixed into each other as a result of this religious interaction in the regions where Muslims and Christians live together. The celebrations of Hıdrellez (or St. Georges’ Day), celebrated by Muslims and Christians together, also set a good example pointing to Christian-Muslim interaction in Hatay. Although there are various perceptions about his identity, all ethnic groups in Hatay have the Hızır belief. In Hatay, the legend of “the killing of the dragon”, known to be of St. Georges, is also attributed to Hıdır Bey, who is thought to be the same person as St. Georges, and told with some changes in the place (Türk 2006). The identity of Hızır, the place and the time he lives are not certain. Hızır is the symbol of spring, and the new life which emerges with it. In Turkey, where belief in Hızır is widespread, the characteristics attributed to him are as follows:

1. Hızır rushes to the aid of people, who is in difficulty and grants peoples’ wishes.
2. He always helps well-meaning, benevolent people.
3. He brings plenty and wealth wherever he stops.
4. He brings remedies to those who are troubled and health to the sick.
5. He helps plants to grow, animals to reproduce, and human beings to grow strong
6. He helps improve peoples’ fortune.
7. He is the symbol of good omens and good fortune.
8. He has the God-given power of working miracles.

With these characteristics attributed to him, Hızır brings to mind the gods, who are ascribed superior powers in mythology. (Walker and Uysal, 1973¹⁴³, Ocak, 2005¹⁴⁴). In all around contemporary Turkey, besides Hatay city like in the example of Türk (2006)¹⁴⁵ one can see many shrines, churches and sacred hills dedicated to both Hızır and St George. With a quick googling these places can be listed as Hıdır/Ilyas churches in the cities Erzincan, Konya and Diyarbakır. Moreover, situated on the top of a steep hill called Hıdırellez in Alanya, the church named Aya Yorgi has started to be renovated by the local municipality after a hundred years of silence¹⁴⁶.

St George has particularly strong links with an archetypal figure which appears in a number of religious traditions under a variety of names, which include Al-Khidr, KhwajaKhizr, Hizir, PirBadar, Raja Kidar, Mar Jiryis and Jiryis Baqiya. This figure is particularly associated with the eastern Mediterranean. Thus, for example, St George is venerated by Palestinian Christians as Mar Jiryis, and the same figure is recognized by Palestinian Muslims as Al-Khidr. Furthermore, this figure is associated with, and even identified as, the prophet Elijah in some folkloric traditions within both Judaism and Islam. There are a number of common themes which arise with this figure across religious traditions, particularly an association with immortality, healing, fertility, wisdom and water—especially the discovery of a well or fountain of eternal youth—and also the patronage and protection of people travelling by sea. The figure of Al-Khidr is also associated with rainfall, notably appearing in visions to prophesy the end of drought. One significant difference between this archetypal figure and St George is that there is usually no dragon legend attached to it—although Muslims in Palestine are known to recognize the iconography of the mounted dragon-slayer as Al-Khidr. It is likely, then, that Al-Khidr and the other analogues are more closely associated with the early understandings of St George as a holy man and martyr rather than with the later understandings of him as a dragon-slayer (Ocak, 2003 p. 87¹⁴⁷).

All the versions of the archetype can be referred back to figures in the folklore of ancient Sumeria and Babylon. For example, the figure of Ea, known also as Enki, was the ruler of the streams that rose in the underworld, and flowed from there to fertilize the land. In

¹⁴³ibid

¹⁴⁴ibid

¹⁴⁵Türk, Hüseyin. (2010). Hatay'da Müslüman-Hristiyan Etkileşimi: St George ya da Hızır Kültü. *Milli Folklor* vol:85

¹⁴⁶(<http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/3740/alanyali-ruslara-kilise-mujdesi>)

¹⁴⁷ibid

imagery Ea is linked with fish, and often holds in his hands a flowing vase which is the source of the water of immortal life. He is also identified as a figure of great wisdom. The various names applied to the holy archetype known as Al-Khidr, Mar Jiryis and so forth often equate to terms such as 'the Living', 'the Green One' and 'the Evergreen One'; he is sometimes said to derive from the Greek sea god Glaucos, whose name means 'the Blue One' or 'the Green One'. Glaucos was a fisherman who achieved immortality, and hence the status of a god, after eating a seashore herb which he had noticed restored his fish to life. Utnapishtim, a character in the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh (eighteenth century BC), attained immortality in a remarkably similar way, and this parallel may indicate another influence. (Walker and Uysal, 1973¹⁴⁸)

Al-Khidr is a significant figure in some Islamic traditions, especially Sufism, but it is true to say that he is primarily a folkloric figure who is recognized to be pre-Islamic in origin. He is reputed to have found the Fountain of Youth, or the Well of Life, which is said to be located near the confluence of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Drinking from this well or fountain confers immortality; it is claimed that Al-Khidr was repeatedly killed and resurrected, with one story involving martyrdom at the behest of a pagan king. This seems to be evidence of a strong link to early versions of the legend of St George as a Christian martyr, which claim that he was killed and resurrected on more than one occasion, and it perhaps indicates a common source for these legends. Some traditions state that Al-Khidr bathed three times in the Well of Life: in consequence his skin and all his clothing turned entirely green, and he leaves green footprints wherever he goes. In fact, the name 'Al-Khidr' ('the Green One') can be understood as an invocation of the natural world as well as a reflection of his physicality—it is certainly a theme in the 'pagan' equivalent.

Before Husluck but cited in his work, in the middle of the sixteenth century Busbecq and Dernschwam passed through the place, then called TekkeKeui, on their journey to Amasia. They found there a tekke of dervishes devoted to the cult of Khidr, a Mohammedan (Muslim) saint generally identified with St George, whose horse and dragon-legend he shares. The dervishes showed their visitors some traces of the dragon, a hoof-mark and spring made by Khidr's horse, and the tomb not of the saint himself (who found the Water of Life and became immortal but of his groom and of his sister's son, who accompanied him on his dragonslaying expedition. Cures were performed at the site by the use of earth and scrapings of the wall which surrounded the place of the dragon.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*

The immortality of Al-Khidr is sometimes interpreted as a symbol of the immensity of his knowledge and providential wisdom; we should note that the Jewish prophet Elijah is also thought to be immortal and deeply wise. Like St George, the figure of Al-Khidr is invoked as a healer: one of his shrines, visited by adherents of Christianity and Judaism as well as Islam, is known to have been located at a kind of psychiatric asylum near Bethlehem, where several miraculous healings were claimed. Another healing shrine was located on the slopes of Mount Carmel—a site strongly associated with Elijah—while in the early twentieth century it was noted that those suffering from ‘fever, quaking and fear’ resorted to a Christian shrine of Mar Jiryis at Urmi in Persia. (Pancaroglu, 2004 p. 157).¹⁴⁹ Al-Khidr’s interventions in human affairs are largely meant to help and provide succor to people in times of need: indeed, the ambulance service in Turkey today is called the ‘Khidr-Service’.

Al-Khidr also has strong associations with fertility, particularly in the form of stories linking him with the weather. One example dates to 1906, when the winter rains failed in Palestine, leading to famine and poverty. It is claimed that a woman was slowly filling a pitcher from a scanty spring at a place known as Ain Kârim when she was accosted by a horseman holding a long lance who ordered her to water his horse. She objected to his command, but obeyed him, and was horrified to discover that blood, and not water, streamed from the pitcher. The horseman then revealed his identity as Al-Khidr, and ordered the woman to tell everyone that if Allah had not sent the drought there would have been a great pestilence and other grave misfortunes. He then appeared to another woman at Hebron with a similar message, promising that the rains would come after the Greek New Year. It seems that his prophecy came true. This water themed story also exemplifies the way in which Al-Khidr is recognized as an eternal wanderer who helps people in trouble. In parts of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Central Asia and Afghanistan people have held a special Khidr meal at home to gain his blessings. In parts of the Balkans and Turkey, Muslims have also been known to celebrate a Khidr feast, and his sanctuaries and pilgrimage sites can be found throughout the Muslim world. Seeing a vision of and meeting Al-Khidr has been regarded as a great distinction in some branches of Islam: an encounter with him has been one of the distinguishing marks of Sufi saints, just as a vision of Elijah is much sought after in some forms of Judaism. Al-Khidr is sometimes represented as an angel,

¹⁴⁹Pancaroglu, Oya (2004). The Itinerant Dragon-Slayer: Forging Paths of Image and Identity in Medieval Anatolia *Gesta*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (2004), pp. 151-164 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25067102>
Accessed: 14/09/2013 13:43

reflecting both his immortality and his role as a kind of heavenly messenger; he is even described as the 'Green Angel Guide' in some Islamic writings (Wolper, 2000)¹⁵⁰.

Khwaja Khizr/Khadir—the figure known as Al-Khidr—is understood as a kind of patron saint of travellers, also of sailors, especially in the Middle East and Northern India. In the latter area he is identified with the prophet, saint or deity known as Khwaja Khizr, Khadir (especially in parts of India which have a strong Muslim influence), PirBadar or Raja Kidar; this figure is the object of a popular cult to this day, common to both Muslims and Hindus. There is a story that links the Indian Khadir to a healing well and—intriguingly—the 'quelling of a serpent', which may possibly indicate some link to the identification of St George as a dragon-slayer¹⁵¹.

Lebanese anthropologist Houda Kassatly conducted an investigation in southern Lebanon after the 2006 war among Shi'ite militants. She notes: "The majority of the interviewees reported on the constant protection they had enjoyed during the war and mentioned apparitions that took various forms. Some have manifested themselves in broad daylight, in a waking state or in a dream. The stories are varied. They see unknown forces, vague human forms, white shadows, even specters radiating a dazzling light, which disappeared as soon as one approached the place where they had manifested themselves; Some speak simply of voices they have heard, and others of hands they have seen. An old woman would have seen in the locality of Blida, where more than one hundred and fifty people had taken refuge in the mosque, two hands extended as if they were trying to protect the village where no human loss was actually deplored. Despite the different aspects of the apparitions, there is no doubt about their identity. The fighters have the intimate conviction that the people they saw and the voices they heard came from people who wanted them to be good and were there to protect them. For them, they can only be ahl al bayt Ali and Husayn, Zaynab and the other Imams, especially the twelfth, the Mahdî, of holy "awliyâ al-sâlihîn," or even venerated figures like the Virgin Mary. Houda Kassatly notes the manifestation of the Husayn horse: many people have pointed out the presence of a white horse with the appearance of a transparent spectrum running along the border on the blue line that separates Lebanon from " Israel, sometimes mounted by a cavalier with the face

¹⁵⁰Wolper, Ethel Sara, (2000). "Khidr, ElwanÇelebi and the Conversion of Sacred Sanctuaries in Anatolia", *The Muslim World*, Vol. 90, issue 3-4, 2000, p. 309-322

¹⁵¹ Longworth Dames, M. "Khwadja Khidr" *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition. Retrieved 21 April 2015.

of light that would be none other than Imam Husayn. This establishes a little wink with the Christian account of Saint George and his white horse¹⁵².



Picture 64 Saint Elias, Elijah Greek Icon¹⁵³

2.6. Elias, Elijah.

The prophet Elijah, who was active in Israel in the ninth century BC is a favorite hero in written and oral Jewish folk literature; he is considered to be a special guardian of Israel. Within rabbinic literature he is identified as the herald of the future redemption—he will announce the arrival of the Jewish Messiah, for example—but this motif is much less significant in folklore than an understanding of him as a heavenly figure that has been sent to Earth to combat social injustice. In many stories he rewards the poor who are hospitable to strangers and punishes the greedy rich, regardless of their status. The Christian Mar Elias is an extension of Elijah, the prophet in the Old Testament. The legend of Elijah was

¹⁵²Kassatly, Houda (2008) *Des interventions surnaturelles à la "Victoire Divine", le merveilleux dans les récits de la guerre de 33 jours*. In : MERVIN, Sabrina (dir) *Le Hezbollah, état des lieux*. Sindbad 2008, pp 311-331.

¹⁵³ <http://www.hellenic-art.com/st.-elias-the-prophet.html>

greatly augmented in the Talmudic and popular Jewish traditions. According to these legends, Elijah is omnipresent, attending all ceremonies of circumcision. It is customary to keep a vacant seat, the "chair of Elijah" ready for him. On Passover eve, a special cup of wine is set aside for him. Significantly, Elijah was the only Old Testament personality who became a popular Christian saint. He is also recognized as a prophet in Islam. His name is mentioned in Quran twice:

And surely, Ilyas was of the sent ones. When he said to his people, 'Do you not fear? Do you invoke Ba`l and forsake the best of creators: Allah, your Lord and the Lord of your fathers of old?!' But they laid the lie on him; so they will surely be brought forth. Except for the chosen slaves of Allah. And We left for him (a good word) among the later folk. Peace upon Ilyas. Thus, indeed, do We reward those who do things well. Surely, he was of Our believing slaves. (37: 123–132)¹⁵⁴

As a personal name, Elias is as popular as George among the Christians of the Near East. Although similar in attributes, George and Elias are two distinct persons in the popular lore, as well as in the official Church records of the saints. However, the fact that Khidr is identified as either one or as both at the same time, makes the hypothesis of a common origin of all three saints. This common origin is to be sought in the ancient "baalic" cults of the agricultural society of the Near East (Haddad, 1969 p. 12)¹⁵⁵.

The link between Elijah and St George may not be immediately obvious—Elijah is never presented as a knightly dragon-slayer, for example—but when some of the other aspects of the saint, such as his roles as a healer and a symbol of fertility, are borne in mind the connection becomes clearer. Meanwhile, beliefs about Elijah's powers as a healer and wise man are deeply entwined with similar understandings of Al-Khidr; in the Old Testament book of Kings, and in later Talmudic literature, Elijah is described as a rainmaker, another function he shares with his Islamic counterpart. Hundreds of shrines to Elijah in the Middle East and in Greece testify to a continuing understanding of his effectiveness as a patronal figure. He appears especially on the eve of Passover when he punishes misers and provides poor people with the necessities to prepare the Seder—the ceremony observed in Jewish homes on the first night of Passover (or the second night, in the Jewish Diaspora). Every household celebrating the Seder will traditionally set a place for Elijah, in expectation of his appearance, and the best cup is reserved for him. The cup of Elijah is placed in the centre of the festive table; it is usually a large ornate goblet that is filled with wine but not

¹⁵⁴Holy Quran Diyanet Publishing

¹⁵⁵Haddad, Samir. (1969) "Georgic" Cults and Saints of the Levant *Numen*, Vol. 16, Fasc. pp. 21-39

drunk, as an expression of a fervent hope that the prophet will come soon (Ocak, 2012 p. 87)¹⁵⁶ Elijah's interventions and miracles include healing, fertility and the interpretation of mysterious events and visions. Elijah's cave or shrine on Mount Carmel is claimed as the site of many healing legends. Another prevalent motif is his ability to act as provider, based on his role as a rainmaker. He conferred an inexhaustible barrel of oil on one devotee and distributed magic money-making boxes to the poor, but then took them away when the recipients stopped being charitable. It is claimed that Elijah did not die but was raised up to heaven in a fiery chariot. He is said to have dropped his cloak as he was carried, and supernatural powers are ascribed to this garment. In some understandings he is thought to wander the earth—just as Al-Khidr does—usually disguised as a poor man. Some Jewish folk beliefs describe ways to bring about visions of Elijah, and even to meet him. His name is inscribed on many protective amulets, especially in areas influenced by Islamic culture (Haddad, 1969 p 19)¹⁵⁷.

2.6.1. Common Attributes of Three Saints

- **Fertility:** Fertility is probably the central theme of the cult of these saints. The saints symbolize, or control, the sacralized forces of nature, places, objects, that are related to the fertility in crops, animals, and humans. St George for example is recognized all over the lands of the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe as a guardian of the fertilizing powers in nature. In Russian, Romanian, Slavonic, and other folklore, Green George is patron saint of cattle, horses, vegetation and rain. He unlocks the moist earth with his golden keys. In addition, he has the power of blessing women with offspring. In the Levant, shrines of St. Khidr and St. Elias-Khidr are visited by barren women, who vow money, cattle, or their children to the saint should prayers be answered. St. George's day, April 23 is the beginning of summer all over the Near East. Peasants consider their fruit trees safe from frost after that date. Tradition has it that snakes do not appear until the coming of St. George's day. Horses and cattle are sent out to pasture about the same time. The feast day of Khizriliyas (Hıdırellez), also April 23, was considered an official beginning of summertime activities by government circles of the Ottoman Empire. St. George's feast date has a basis in meteorological considerations.

¹⁵⁶Ibid

¹⁵⁷Ibid

- **Power and Militancy:** The extension of the saints' control over the forces of nature from the realm of fertility to that of overwhelming power exemplified in the storm, the flood, the mountain, and the sea. This power includes destruction, the ultimate control of fate. As such, these saints become symbols of military power and patron saints of armies. The aggressive side of the deity or the saint seems to be most popular in the pictorial and sculptural representations. The theme of struggle and display of power presents itself more clearly to human visualization than does the more subtle fertilistic aspects. St. George's pictorial representations almost constantly show his military character. The icons of St. George, as one can observe in most churches in Near East and elsewhere, depict him riding a magnificent horse, driving his weapon, a trident in many cases, a lance or a sword in some other, into the dragon. This show of military strength presents a striking contrast, and a significant one, to the emphasis on passivity and weakness found in almost all the other icons of the saints and martyrs. Khidr's military virtues are strongly emphasized in Nusairi traditions though pictorial representations due to the sanction on representation are very rare. The valor of Khidr as a knight in battle is proverbial in popular Islam (Ocak, 2012¹⁵⁸). The biblical account of Elijah, on the other hand, presents him, in contrast with the other prophets of Israel, more as a man of action than a poet or a visionary. His exploits are sometimes extremely violent, without apparent justification. His massacre of 450 priests of Baal may dubiously be justified by religious zeal; but his extermination of one hundred soldiers sent to bring him to the king displays an exaggerated aggressiveness (2 Kings 1: 3–16). His weapon of destruction is fire from heaven. Although he is not depicted as a knight or horseman, his chariot and horses of fire are even more spectacular as symbols of power. He also could divide the waters of the Jordan by smiting the river with his mantle (2 Kings 2:8)¹⁵⁹

The sailmen, in particular, refer to Khidr as rayyis "captain." The fame of Khidr as patron saint of navigation reached India: Raja Kidar is said to guard against the perils of navigation. A shrine dedicated to Khidr-George still stands near the seaport of Sweidiyyah on the mouth of the Orontes river. The shrine is far from any habitation, standing on a promontory overlooking the bay. Until recently, it contained a lighted lamp, supposedly to

¹⁵⁸Ibid

¹⁵⁹Old testament

guide boat- men along the coast. A similar shrine of St. George dominated the Bay of Juniyeh, north of Beirut. The bay of Beirut (also a well-known hotel overlooking the bay) is named after St. George. The maritime character of both St. George and Khidr is well established. Elijah's power over the river can be classified in the same category. However, Palestinian folklore makes a distinction between the domain of Elias and that of Khidr. A popular saying goes: "Al-Khidr mukallaf fil-bahr wa Iliyya mukallaf fil-barr." "Khidr is responsible for the sea and Iliyya is responsible for the land." (Haddad, 1969)¹⁶⁰.

However the most important point which I want to underline here that there is no reference to the mutual identity of Hızır, Elias and Aya Yorgi on Büyükada . Neither in the discourse of the correspondents nor in the interviews with the pilgrims is Hızır veneration mentioned. In my own ethnography I was puzzled by the fact that none of the Muslim or Christian pilgrims consciously or subliminally associates Hızır with Aya Yorgi. I didn't even observe a tiny clue. When asked, everybody has hearsay about Hızır and the festival dedicated to him (5th of May) but they don't perceive him as a counterpart of Aya Yorgi despite and by contrast to the huge corpus of academic and folkloric findings of previous scholars (such as Couroucli (2012)¹⁶¹ and Türk (2010)¹⁶². Pilgrims are attracted by the spiritual aura of space and the feast day and they are in search of miracles that are said to occur there. But they don't attain a cultic meaning to the day. I assume that ordinary people (apart from academicians, historians and the researchers) are not interested in theological explanations or religious theories. All they want is to find a shelter when they feel stalemated, miracles to heal their wounds and fulfill their wishes.

After a brief explanation of the concepts of Khidr and Saint George parallelism above, now I want to continue with a modern day celebration of Hıdırellez which is still alive and dedicated to Hızır and Elias among the gypsy population in Edirne Turkey

2.7. Kakava: A Hıdırellez Festivity in Turkey or the Holy Union of Khidr and Elias

Hıdırellez, is one of the seasonal festivals of all Turkic world. Hıdırellez Day, which is known as Ruz-I Hızır (day of Hızır), is celebrated as the day on which Prophets Hızır (Khidr) and Ilyas (Elias) met with each other on the earth. The words Hızır and İlyas have since fused together pronounced as Hıdırellez. Hıdırellez Day falls on May 6 in the

¹⁶⁰İbid

¹⁶¹ Couroucli, Maria (2012). Saint George the Anatolian. *Sharing sacred spaces in the Mediterranean: Christians, Muslims and Jews at shrines and sanctuaries* (ed.) Bloomington: Univ. of Indiana Press

¹⁶² ibid

Gregorian calendar and April 23 in the Julian calendar, also known as the “Rumi” calendar. In the folk calendar used by the people, the year used to be divided into two: The period between May 6 and November 8 was summer, called the “Days of Hızır”, and the period between November 8th and May 6th was winter, called the “Days of Kasım”. May 6 thus represents the end of winter and the start of the warm days of summer, a cause for celebration. There are various theories about the origin of Hızır and Hıdırellez. Some of these suggest that Hıdırellez belongs to Mesopotamian and Anatolian cultures, and others that they belong to pre-Islamic Central Asian Turkish culture and beliefs. However, it is impossible to ascribe the Hıdırellez festival and beliefs surrounding Hızır to a single culture. Various ceremonies and rituals have been performed for various gods with the arrival of spring or summer in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Iran, Greece and in fact all eastern Mediterranean countries since ancient times.

Hıdırellez is actively celebrated in many parts of the Turkey. People prepare beforehand for Hıdırellez celebrations in villages and small towns, although rather less now in the big cities. These preparations include house-cleaning, washing up, and food and drink. Before Hıdırellez Day, houses are cleaned from top to bottom, since people think that Hızır will not visit houses that are not clean. New clothes and shoes are purchased to wear on Hıdırellez Day. Giving alms, fasting and offering animals as a sacrifice are traditions in some parts of Anatolia to make prayers and wishes come true. Sacrifices and votive offerings should be for “the sake of Hızır”. Hıdırellez celebrations are always performed in green places, near sources of water, or near a tomb or shrine. Eating fresh spring plants, lamb’s meat or lamb’s liver is another custom in Hıdırellez. It is believed that eating the first lamb of spring will bring health and cure the sick. It is also believed that picking flowers or plants in the countryside, boiling them and drinking the water will cure all illnesses, and that the water thus obtained rejuvenates and beautifies anyone who washes with it for forty days. Various practices are performed on Hıdırellez night in the belief that Hızır will bring blessing and abundance to the places he visits and the things he touches. Food bowls, pantries and purses are left open. Those who want a house, vineyard or garden believe that Hızır will help them obtain such things if they make a small model of what they want (Boratav, 1992)¹⁶³.

Ceremonies to improve peoples’ luck are also widespread at this time. This ceremony is called “baht açma” in İstanbul and its surroundings, “bahtiyar” in Denizli and

¹⁶³Boratav Perter Naili (1992) *Türk Mitolojisi* BilgePublising : Ankara

surroundings, “mantıfar” by the Yörüks and Turkmens, “dağlarayüzükatma” in Balıkesir and the neighboring area, “niyet çıkarma” in Edirne and its vicinity and “maniçekme” in Erzurum and the surrounding area. People test their luck in these ceremonies, in the belief that peoples’ fortunes will also take a turn for the better with the awakening of nature and all living creatures in the spring. The night before Hıdırellez, young girls who want to test their fortune and improve their luck gather in a green place or near water. They place some of their belongings, such as a ring, earring or bracelet in an earthenware jar and close the jar with fine muslin. They then they put the jar at the bottom of a rose tree. Early in the morning, they approach the jar and drink coffee with milk and pray for their peace and tranquility not to be spoiled. They then open the fortune jar. As they remove the objects from the jar, they recite verses or quatrains, and comments are made regarding the owner of the object that is taken out. This practice, peculiar to Hıdırellez, may differ slightly in procedure in different regions of the country. Recently, this ceremony has tended to be performed only to bring a change in fortune for spinsters (Boratav 1967)¹⁶⁴

2.7.1. Is it really a shared festival?

In 2012 Turkey applied UNESCO together with Croatia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia to have Hıdırellez–St Georges day recognized and accepted as an intangible cultural heritage claiming that the feast day was a shared event by Christian and Muslim communities in Turkey and in above mentioned Balkan countries. However UNESCO decided that the information included in the file was not sufficient to allow the Committee to determine whether the criteria for inscription were satisfied. According to UNESCO more information was needed to demonstrate the unifying aspects and common core of the element and to provide a more holistic description; the contours and scope of the element as a single expression of heritage. It was also stated that the identity and common core of the element were not evident and information was therefore needed to demonstrate that its inscription would contribute to awareness of the intangible cultural heritage in general and of its significance. While communities and bearers in all submitting States participated actively in the nomination process, information was required to demonstrate that they had provided free, prior and informed consent to the present multinational nomination concerning a single expression. Although information was provided concerning intangible cultural heritage inventories

¹⁶⁴Boratav Perter Naili (1967), *Folklore et littérature populaire turcs*. "L'annuaire 1965-1966 de Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, , IV. Section, Paris 1966-1967, Paris 196.

within all submitting States, additional information was needed to demonstrate that the element was shared with the spirit of intercultural cooperation.

Despite the fact that Hıdırellez festivities were not planned beforehand to be a part of the scope of this thesis, as researcher, interested in St George vs Hızır phenomenon, I wanted to observe with my own eyes if the feast days dedicated to these two heroic figures were really shared as Turkey claimed them to be. Therefore I selected and focused on a modern Hıdırellez festival named Kakava that is held in the city of Edirne in Turkey, periodically every year on 5th and the 6th of May. Although Kakava has the reputation of a Gypsy (Çingene) carnival, for the past decade, the number of non-Gypsy participants is increasing. Here, I would like to sketch out the nature of the festivities dwelling on the ethnographic field work that I carried out on 5th and 6th of May in 2017.

Edirne is a rather small city (in Turkish standards) in Turkey which is surrounded by Tekirdağ and Kırklareli (Other Turkish cities) to the east and north, the Aegean Sea to the south and Greece and Bulgaria to its west. It is the north-western end of Turkey, which serves as a passage from the Middle East and Asia to the rest of Europe. The city is located in the European part of Turkey, called Thrace, or Eastern Thrace, more precisely.



Picture 65 Location of Edirne¹⁶⁵

It is possible to date the relationship between Gypsies and Turkish society back to very old times, since Gypsies first came to Iran after leaving India and then they spread all over the world in three branches. One of these branches crossed to Europe over Anatolia. Since Gypsies migrated to Europe together with Turks, they were sometimes defined as "Turkish Spies." Gypsies, who resided in the Thrace region called "Gypsy County", worked in the reconstruction of the area and provided military strength in some periods¹⁶⁶. Suleiman the

¹⁶⁵ <https://goo.gl/images/fzuOOV>

¹⁶⁶ Gökbilgin, M. Tayyip. (1997). *İslam Ansiklopedisi Çingene* İstanbul: MEB Yayınları.

Magnificent enacted a special law in 1530 for the Gypsies to settle in Rumelia. Ottoman records have defined the Gypsy population in terms of age, job and marital status in order to receive regular taxes. The Gypsies serving in the Empire army had a higher social status and prestige. Gypsies preserved their ethno-cultural characteristics, nomadic way of life and traditional jobs, and they expressed their identity in a better way compared to the Medieval Europe." (Marushiakova 2001)¹⁶⁷

We know that in the post-Ottoman period after the foundation of Turkish Republic, a high Gypsy population immigrated to Turkey following the population exchange with Greece in 1923 (Arı, 2003)¹⁶⁸. Edirne host the largest number of Gypsy population more than any other city in Turkey. Although the numbers are not certain, the local authorities talk about 50.000 gypsies in and around the city. Gypsy population in Edirne has deep roots in Ottoman Turkey as well. After the extension of Ottoman Empire's borders to the West, Gypsy population living in Rumelia province and İstanbul were regarded as being adhered on the *sancak* (ÇingeneSancağı or Liva-iKıbtıyan). In the Ottoman Empire, citizens were classified into two different groups: Muslim and non-Muslim. The local government did not request tax from Muslim people. However, Gypsy people were not considered to be within these two groups and they were registered as Kıpti which was a religious affiliation. In 1831, the first population census was conducted with regard to modernization and reorganization of the Empire (Dündar 2008)¹⁶⁹. In addition, the main dimension of census population was religion. Only men were counted. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to mention that Gypsies and Jews are registered separately and the religion of Gypsies was mentioned as Kıpti no matter whether they were Muslim or non-Muslim (Karpas 2003¹⁷⁰: 58; Dündar 2008¹⁷¹:88).

Edirne used to have a cosmopolite character since Turk, Bulgarian, Greek, Jewish, Armenian and Gypsy population cohabited (Dundar 2008¹⁷²: 184; Kazancıgil¹⁷³ 1992 p.113). Gypsy population used to live together with especially Greek, Armenian and

¹⁶⁷Marushiakova, Elena et al. (2001). Identity Formation among Minorities in the Balkans: The Cases of Roms, Egyptians and Ashkali in Kosovo. Sofia: *Minority Studies Society "Studii Romani*

¹⁶⁸Arı, Kemal. (2003). *BüyükMübadele, Türkiye'yeZorunluGöç, 1923-1925*Tarih Yurt Vakfı: İstanbul

¹⁶⁹Dundar, Fuat (2008) *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi: İttihat ve Terakki'nin Etnisite Mühendisliği, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.*

¹⁷⁰Karpas, H. Kemal (2003) *Osmanlı Nüfusu (1830-1914): Demografik ve Sosyal Özellikleri*, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları

¹⁷¹Ibid

¹⁷²Ibid

¹⁷³Kazancıgil, Ratip (1992) *Edirne Mahalleleri Tarihçesi: 1529-1990*, İstanbul: Turk Kutuphaneciler Derneği Edirne Şubesi Yayınları: 7.

Muslim population in the 16th century. For example, *Yıldırım* neighborhood was composed of Muslim and Gypsy as it is today. *Çavuşbey-Süpürgeciler* district was composed first of and foremost Muslim and Armenian, then Gypsy and Armenian inhabitants. *Menziliahir(Kıyık)* neighborhood was composed of Muslim and Greek, and then it involved Muslim, Greek and Gypsy population in the 1920s (Kazancıgil 1992 p. 34–70¹⁷⁴).

Hıdırellez-Kakava festival has gained reputation on national base for over a decade and for the past couple of years European photographers and journalist have begun to flood into the city during the festivities. It has become almost impossible to find accommodation in the as all of the hotels (including the small districts of Edirne and neighboring city Kırklareli) are fully booked at least two weeks in advance. Tens of tourisms agencies mainly from Istanbul and neighboring cities, even from Ankara which is almost 690 km, organize two day package trips. The prices of these packages depends not only the number of the stars of the hotels they are lodging but also how thematic and “intellectual” the visit is. Tourism agencies like *Antonina* sell cultural visit package under the guidance of nationally acclaimed art historians which involves the other architectural or religious sites like, Jewish quarter and the Grand Synagogue of Edirne and *Beyaz Ev* where the Baha’i prophet Bahauallah stayed for 4 years during his exile from Iran to Ottoman Empire during 1870s.

On the night of 4th May the tourists groups started to be visible in the streets of the city. The restaurants of Tava Ciğeri (fried lamb liver)—a unique taste originated from Edirne—were open until midnight and it was clear to mark the tourists with curious eyes and obviously gastronomy was embedded into festival programs. The tradesman of the city seemed very content with the crowd that they are expecting the next day and busy as I witnessed a part-time job interview in a coffee shop for two days for a waitress position. The banners of Hıdırellez-Kakava were hung on the city billboards and on the windows of the shops and flyers that cover the festival program had already been distributed to the local shops owners as official invitation by Edirne Municipality.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid



Picture 66 The Poster of Hidrellez-Kakava on the billboards

The festival program consisted not only of festivities of Hıdırellez but also different events organized by the municipality. The aim of the municipality was to profit from the crowd that Edirne was hosting around these dates by publicizing the municipal investments with maximum participation. One of these events was the inauguration ceremony of the Urban museum of Edirne. The building of the Museum used to be Hafızağa Konağı (Mansion of Hafizaga) and it had been renovated with the funding of Trakya development agency and then municipality. The main centre of the Hıdırellez Kakava festival was Sarayıçi which is a green and flat area by the river Tunca very near to the ruins of old palace of the Ottomans where the globally famous oil wrestling championships are also held every year. In order to avoid the massive congestion and also to be able to make the festival accessible to every corner of Edirne, festivities are also extended to different corners of the city simultaneously. Besides Sarayıçi, public spaces such as Zubeyde Hanım park, Suni Gölet and Sultan Pazarı district were planned to be parts of the big feast so that the whole city would turn into a carnival.

On the 5th of May around 4 pm I set out the road from my hotel to Sarayıçi. It was such a damp and hot spring day and high allergy risky pollens were flying in the air. I had been kindly warned by the receptionist that it would be risky to walk the way from city centre to Sarayıçi and I had better take a taxi as Sarayıçi and its hinterlands were “gypsy quarters” and those quarters had the reputation of thieves and drug dealers. However as an anthropologist I took the possible risks and went ahead and walked all the way to the festival place and the buses of the tourists accompanied me. This road reminded me of the

famous terms “purity and danger” suggested by Mary Douglas¹⁷⁵. It seemed to me as a striking example of the line between a touristic visit and an anthropological fieldwork. While I was challenging the possible prejudices against the gypsy population the tourists were staying away impurity and danger and keeping themselves “safe or clean.”

At Sarayıçi, the melodic sounds of Gypsy instruments could be heard clearly as I approached the arena. The car park of Sarayıçi was full up with the tour buses. Though I had been aware of the fact that Kakava festivals were cultural industry project of Municipality yet I was surprised how professionally everything was arranged. From the welcoming gate¹⁷⁶ (see picture 44) to the costumes of the gypsy orchestra, everything was far from the authentically local. Patrolling police cars and the shifting municipal officers were taking security precautions. One of the officers warned in a stern voice to watch my camera and wallet.



Picture 67 The gate of the festival arena

¹⁷⁵Douglas, Mary (1966). *Purity and danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo*. New York: Praeger.

¹⁷⁶The title “(H)ojgeldiniz” (in the photo below) on the gate carries sociolinguistic markers. In the Trace (Trakya) and the gypsy variant of Turkish language, –h sound is omitted or not clearly articulated. However in standard Turkish it must be written and pronounced. That is why –H is written in bold italic in order to create a word art. –J consonant on the other hand is also another signifier as the –ş is always pronounced as –j among vernacular Turkish among the speech community of the region.

The arena had already been filled up with the tourists as I entered from the gate. After a quick glance, I realized that the vast majority of the crowd, 95% percentage without exaggeration, was non-gypsies and tourists. I was expecting to find such a picture yet I got disappointed to see the scarcity of the local gypsies. The tourists consisted of mainly women who could afford financially such a package holiday. The stage had been set up and the sound systems were arranged one night in advance. There wasn't live music or a singer but an invisible DJ was playing proverbial songs which were associated with gypsy culture of Turkey, the songs of the famous singers like Kibariye, LaçoTayfa and many anonymous local voices. There was a group of amateur Gypsy belly dancers entertaining the crowd. These dancers with their shiny costumes and agility were posing to the cameras of the photo journalists and the others. Photography was a most important part of festival. Dancers had already been prepared accordingly with their picturesque costumes and high tone make ups and obviously tourists were directly posting the pictures in their social media accounts. It wouldn't also be wrong to state that Kakava festival was a paradise for the professional photographers as I saw tens of them.



Picture 68 Two Gypsy girls dancing

Among the crowd I noticed an old couple in their late sixties with their distinguishing dress codes and physical appearances which signal their ethnic Gypsy origins. I approached them and started the conversation. They were originally from Edirne but had been living in Antalya (a city in the south of Turkey) for 20 years and that was the first time after all those years that they came back to the city. They were very surprised to see how Kakava which once was celebrated in the narrow streets of the Gypsy quarter, transformed into a well-known festival. They were very proud to see the way non-Gypsies recognize, participate and cherish once undervalued folk event. The old lady was frequently underlying the fact that she was a *fidel* Muslim and apart from a spring festival Hıdırellez should also be taken into account as a day when Hızır and İlyas met. A very curious family, who had been eavesdrop our talk, came near us trying to figure out who I was or from which TV or newspaper I was working for now that I had an “expensive camera”. The family consisted of a grandfather and a grandmother at a young age around forty two and his son, twenty one and daughter in law and their newborn grandchild. The grandfather was working as a garbage man for the municipality. He was very eager to talk:

They have made up a story of Baba Fingo¹⁷⁷ lately. That’s ridiculous. We have never heard of it. Who created such a story? It is the day Hızır and İlyas meet. In fact it is tomorrow early in the morning. Will you be here? Today is Kakava. We celebrate the coming of spring... This festival is new as well. We used to celebrate it in our neighborhood, making fire and jumping over it when I was a kid. And during my father’s childhood things were more different than mine. My father often tells us that they used to roll in the wheat fields. Rolling this way and round in order to bring fertility or make the harvest fruitful. You see it was all about spring and fertility. Now it is even much more different than my childhood and my fathers. My grandchildren are experiencing something totally different. The municipality is doing smartly things. Bringing all these people here to Sarayıçi and publicizing Gypsy culture in a clean environment. You can’t enter our neighborhood. I mean you can of course but God knows how you will exit. Gypsies, my people, my nation but even me I watch out my wallet and other belongings, especially after this bonsai thing (cheap synthetic drug). They can kill you for three Turkish liras (3 kuruş). Oh, My God!!

¹⁷⁷According to the narratives in the media and newspapers lately, Roma people had a commander called Baba Fingo. He was very powerful and unbeatable. Roma people were safe owing to their commander. Gaco people (non-Gypsies) searched for a solution to defeat him. He had weakness for drinking and women. They sent a beautiful woman to make him drunk. Baba Fingo could not reject her and got drunk. Woman pushed Baba Fingo to the river and he was drowned. It is believed that Baba Fingo will reappear from the river and save Roma people again. According to the myth, Gypsies started to search for Baba Fingo and divided into three branches. In this way, their migration started from India. The myth has relevance with Gypsy community’s history of migration. In addition, Baba Fingo represents a messiah person for Roma community. When he reappears in the river, tyranny will be solved

Towards 6pm in the evening, protocol including the member of parliament of Edirne, mayor and the other forthcoming names in Edirne entered the arena with the orchestra trumping. Two acrobats with long stick legs were accompanying them(see picture 2.6.). The respondent that I was talking to was shocked to see such a performance. “What is this? This is new” he said. Opening ceremony of Kakava with all its practices carries the features of an “invented tradition”. As Hobsbawn defines it, “Many of the traditions which we think of as very ancient in their origins were not in fact sanctioned by long usage over the centuries, but were invented comparatively recently”. These sets of practices are tacitly accepted rules and of symbolic nature, which seek certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawn, 1993[1983]:1)¹⁷⁸

The festival was started with a short speech of the mayor focusing on the carnivalesque dimensions of the day without giving any religious or belief based reference and then a huge celebratory fire called “Kakava ateşi” was lit for which everybody was waiting. There were protective barricades around the fire which is meant to set the distance between the fire and the people as the heat of the fire was very tense and high. However the congestion around the fire was unbelievably huge. The leading actors of the festival- the belly dancers- despite the tremendous heat entered through the barricades, and started dancing in front of the fire which gave a carnivalesque photo frame for the photographers. Hundreds of cameras were in action trying to capture the best shots. I personally believe that Kakava has turned into a pilgrimage spot for the photographers.

¹⁷⁸Hobsbawn, Eric (1993[1983]) *The Invention of Tradition*, E. Hobsbawn, T. Ranger (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press



Picture 69 An invented tradition—Acrobats

Dancers went on the stage and the people were accompanying them singing and dancing. Festivities continued a couple of hours more and then towards the sunset people proceeded to the bank of river Tunca to throw their wishes or payers which they had written on slips of paper, into the flowing river. They accumulated on and around the old Ottoman bridge and started to send their “wish texts” to the spirits of the river. I heard people reciting Islamic prayers silently while throwing them or “Ya Hıdırellez”, “May my wishes come true” aloud.



Picture 70 Kakava fire

After the sun set, majority of the participants who had come for a daily tour got on their buses to go back to their cities. The ones who were going to come back to the river at 5 am in the morning—which is believed to be the time for the meeting of Hızır and İlyas, the most blessed time for wish making, went back to their hotels. I also walked back to my hotel and slept early as I had been highly stimulated by the fire, music, dance and colors. I woke up at 4 am and took a taxi as it would be tiring to walk all the way from the hotel in such an hour. When I arrived near the river, I was bedazzled by the number of people waiting on the bridge and around despite the chilly and damp weather. As soon as the clock struck 5am people left their wishes in the cold waters of Tunca (see picture 22 .).The river was covered with white slips of paper for a while until the flows washed away them. Hızır and İlyas fused, wishes made and the festival ended.

I met several secular Muslim women on the bridge having come from Istanbul. I asked if they had ever heard of Aya Yorgi in Istanbul in order to see whether there is a parallel networks between Hıdırellez participants and Aya Yorgi ones. Surprisingly two of them reported that they had participated in Aya Yorgi feast day many times and most of their wishes were granted there.

2.7.2. Sveti Georgi Church—Bulgarian St George

I didn't observe any reference to St George or a shared spirit of Muslim-Christian coexistence in the festivities organized by the municipality. However I knew that Edirne had a nineteenth century built Bulgarian Orthodox Church dedicated to Sveti Georgi (St George) located in the Kıyık District. I had read on the web site of the provincial directorate Tourism that the church was open only once a day in the first or second week of May, for the Bulgarian Orthodox congregation coming from Istanbul and Bulgaria: that was the feast day of St George in Bulgarian liturgical calendar. Therefore I hit the road early in the morning again to visit the church. When I reached the church, the mass had already started and the church was full up with Bulgarian visitors (around a number of 150), descendants of the Bulgarian orthodox community of Ottoman Edirne and they still keep their ties with the city and their St George Church.

Due to the fact that the Bulgarian people of Edirne left the city in masses in the second half of the 19th century, the size of the Bulgarian Orthodox Community had largely decreased when Sveti Georgi Church was completed. Because of this the priests who served in the church were Bulgarian citizens until 1940, but later came Bulgarian pastors of Istanbul. The building was worn out due to lack of maintenance in time and only the roof was repaired in 1996. Later, it was restored between 2003 and 2004 and re-opened on May 9, 2004.

The feast was celebrated in the church with the attendance of some prominent figures of Edirne originated Bulgarians. After the mass, they scattered around the city to do shopping and then they went back to home towns in Bulgaria. There were no Muslims in the church other than some photo journalists from local newspapers of Edirne.



Picture 71 Participants throwing their wishes into the river

2.7.3. Conclusion or Transformative features of space

Hıdırellez festival, a very key folk event in Turkic cultural geography is still in existence. However it is obvious from the ethnographic fieldwork that the particular festival which is held in Edirne has transformed into a touristic and a cultural event with the collaboration of Edirne Municipality and some other civil society groups. Throughout this paper I tried to depict how an official shift in space transformed such a traditional festival. Once, traditionally and spontaneously celebrated in the streets of Gypsy ghettos, Kakava is nowadays organized by official “educated” actors and put on the stage in a fictionalized space which is Sarayıçi. As one of the Gypsy informants stated “No one would come to Kakava if they celebrated it in our neighborhood (mahalle) as it is dangerous” the municipality seems to have a policy of “purifying” and “cleansing” the event by shifting its space. The core elements of the festival such as fire and dance are preserved but newly invented features are added as well. However there is no visible clue that Hıdırellez is a shared festival as Turkey claimed in the application process to UNESCO. Saint George day and Kakava-Hıdırellez obviously fall in the same date as the Bulgarian Church celebrates the feast of St George on 6th of May as well but Christian and Muslim communities

celebrate it separately in terms of space. Moreover the meaning attributed to the feast is quite differentiated from each other. Kakava is more like a festivalized folk event but Sveti Georgi has more ethno-religious connotation associated with the cultural memory of the Bulgarians related to Edirne.

After having given a sample modern celebration dedicated to Khidr and Elias in Turkey, I want to continue with another example of devotion to Khidr with his counterpart Saint George which appears and is still alive to a certain extent in Holy Land

2.8. Palestine: The land where St George and al Khidr melt into each other



Picture 72 Icon of Saint George in a Restaurant owned by a Muslim Family in Jerusalem. Photo by the author 2017

After this this brief survey of the analogues of Khidr in non-Christian traditions, I want to return to historical identity of St George and its relation with Khidr that is still alive in Holy Land. For this reason I paid a quick three day visit to Israel and Palestine in the summer of 2017 including, Jerusalem, Lod and Bethlehem.

As mentioned before the likely origins of St George's cult are in the Holy Land, and it is not surprising that his narratives are particularly well developed in this locale and the surrounding areas. More physical evidence of the cult can be found in the form of a relic of St George's blood in a silver vial in the chapel dedicated to him within the monastery of Mar Saba, and chains of St George are used for healing there just as in Cairo. The Byzantine monastery in Beit Jala is known to have been dedicated to St George, although it is mainly associated with St Nicholas now, and there is also a chapel in St George's honor which is one of the oldest Arab Orthodox churches in the Holy Land; local Palestinians started using it sometime during the Ottoman era. In addition there is a very small church of St George in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem, maintained by the Greek Patriarchate. The Orthodox Christian communities in the villages and cities of Rameh, Ramla and Taybeh all have St George as patron of their churches.

He has analogues in a number of different religions but his roles in the Abrahamic faiths, themselves focused on the Holy Land, of course, are especially striking: it is no surprise that this general area is particularly rich with stories of the saint and his power. Thus we find that people with long-term illnesses and injuries resort to the 'chains of St George', which are claimed as a relic of his imprisonment: they are kissed in an act of veneration, then wrapped around the afflicted body part. There are documented examples of the use of parallel relics among Palestinian Christians in the present day, for example, in the monastery church at Al-Khader—a place name that clearly invokes the Islamic analogue to St George, Al-Khidr (Laird, 2013¹⁷⁹). There are many facets to his devotion among Palestinians of various religious traditions, but he is particularly associated with healing and protection against political upheaval. In terms of the latter role, the village of Al-Khader has two myths which claim that he has protected the people from very specific threats. In 1948 St George appeared in the sky, saving the settlement from the worse fate which befell the villages to the immediate west, and in the Second Intifada (2000) the

¹⁷⁹ Laird, Lance (2013). *Boundaries and Baraka* in *Muslims and Others in Sacred Space* Edited by Cormack Margaret Oxfor Universty Press.

sound of the saint's horse could be heard, making protective sweeps around the village at night during the curfew.



Picture 50 The tatoo of St George (al Khidr) on the arm of a Palestinian Muslim man (photo by the author 2017).

The tatoo from the picture above dates to 1977. The crescent which is the symbol of Islam is visible on the top of the knight's lance which distinguishes him from Christian St George. The man (Ahmad) said that it was very popular before 80s to have a tatoo of Khidr as a protection against evil eyes. However lately, the ones who have such a tatoo (mainly middle aged or old generation) are concealing it under their long sleeved shirts and not eager to show it off. The reason for that prudency could be a topic for a separate and interesting research. These men consider such pictorial tattoos (in fact tatoos in general) as a sinful act against Islam and Muslim body. They feel ashamed of having a non-erasable mark of St George on their bodies.

According to the Palestinian Christians that I interviewed St George is asked to assist with a wide range of health issues in Palestine, including mental illness (with which the chains of St George are meant to be particularly efficacious) and children with speaking difficulties (which may be cured by placing a key in the child's mouth, an act performed at the monastery in Beit Jala, with both Muslims and Christians availing of the ritual); more

general health issues are treated by anointing the affected parts of the body, and then the forehead and hands of the afflicted person, with the holy oil of St George, using the sign of the cross as the oil is applied. One further form of assistance which St George gives his supplicants in Palestine relates to people falling down wells or into deep pits, or from high buildings. I came across with the similar story concerning his assistance to the ones falling down from high building at St George's church in Bteghrine-Lebanon during my fieldwork. The informants had reported in Lebanon that the one of the bricklayers (he was a muslim) who was working in the renovation of the church had fallen down from the dome of the church but miraculously survived without even a tiny scar. Similar stories are told in the Palestinian Muslim community too: Al-Khidr appears in visions to injured people as they lie in hospital beds and heals them. I find it striking that there is a shared belief that St George/Al-Khidr appears in a physical form. This is not a question of someone praying to a saint and then rescuers or helpers turning up on his behalf. Rather, the depth of people's devotion is such that they can call upon their saint and he will answer in a very literal way.

I needed to go two miles from the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem to the village the village of Al Khader. The entrance to the village is an arch on which there is a carving of Saint George and the dragon. In the middle of the village is the monastery church of Saint George. Above the church flies the flag of Saint George. Traditional beliefs about Saint George/Al Khader in Palestine are not shared by all. Many Palestinians do not know much about Saint George or Al Khader. However the traditions are very important in the religious faith and daily lives of some. Others do not believe nor follow all of these traditions. Saint George is sometimes often thought of as being one of many appearances of Al Khader. He is a rain bringer and can make the land green and fertile. To get good harvests farmers go to Saint George's Church in Al Khader where they make religious vows (promises), slaughter sheep and give donations. He is still with us and can appear anytime says the warden of the shrine. If, over a short period of time, you keep meeting the same person at different places you might say they are like Saint George Al Khader (ubiquitous). Young Children are sometimes told that thunder is Saint George/ Al Khader on his horse galloping across the sky. He can cure insanity. There used to be a mental hospital next door to the church in Al Khader. Also there are chains in Saint George's churches in Al Khader and in Lydda. The insane were sometimes left chained in the churches in the hope that this would cure them. Some people wear these chains when they

pray in the churches. He can protect from harm. That is why there are carvings of St. George above the doors of many homes in Palestine. When sheep are slaughtered behind Saint George's church in Al Khadir the blood is sometimes taken home and put upon the door to protect the family.



Picture 51: The chain (shackle) of Saint George in Lod/Israel photo by the author 2017

Saint George's feast day is on 23rd April and marks the start of spring. In Palestine this is celebrated according to the Julian calendar followed by Orthodox Christians. So they celebrate Saint George's day on 6th May. On 16th of November, the day when Saint George was buried, there is a festival that marks the end of the Olive Harvest. In Lydda and in Al Khader Christians and some Muslims attend these festivals



Picture 52 St George church al Khader photo by the author 2017

2.9. Festivalization of Saint George Day at Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh

It is seen that only a few Christian elements are related to the celebration of St. George's Day. In the customary practice of this celebration, pre-Christian magical ritual elements and traditions are dominant. People in the Balkans, Anatolia and Levant link growth and fertility rites which take place on April 23rd or May 6th with St. George's Day. These dates also correspond to the cycle of the Pleiades, a star cluster that divides the year in two, which in Greek mythology, was related to Demeter, the goddess of the harvest, earth and agriculture. Analogies between Saint George and a number of mythological figures, slayers of dragons and monsters have been established. One of these parallels can be seen in Apollo of ancient Greece, who was another dragon slayer and life/spring/water bringer, whose shrines stand on the frontier between the world of the man and the underworld. The hero descending from two races is a frequent theme in oriental mythology (Bowman 2012¹⁸⁰). As mentioned before St George is one of the most important saints in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, the distinct strand of belief followed in much of Eastern Europe and

¹⁸⁰ Bowman, Glen.(2012). *Sharing the Sacra – The Politics and pragmatics of inter-communal relations around holy places*. Oxford: Berghahn Books

the diaspora of these communities, separate from both Roman Catholicism and the Protestant churches. His feast day is usually celebrated on 6 May rather than the 23rd of April in the Eastern Orthodox Church, due to variations with the calendar followed by Western traditions. Broadly speaking, in Eastern Orthodox traditions the April or May feast of St George forms one of the most significant dates in the annual religious calendar, and a number of the rituals and practices associated with it are strongly linked into the saint's association with springtime and fertility. Although some Orthodox Churches certainly keep the spring feast of St George, it seems to be less significant than the 23rd of November, which is identified as the feast of the translation of his relics. This choice of date seems peculiar, for the translation of the relics of St George is usually celebrated on 3rd of November—the 'transference' in question relates to a narrative of the relocation of his relics, which are said to have been taken from Nicomedia, where he is reputed to have been martyred, to Lydda/Lod in the Holy Land, where he is said to have been born. It is sometimes claimed that the November feast is kept as a reflection of the fact that Easter can overshadow the spring date.

In contrast, the celebration of St. George and some traditions related to it are associated with the old Roman Palilia which was held on the 21st of April (almost simultaneously with St. George). The festival was celebrated in the honor of Pales, the divinity of shepherds (Okey 2007)¹⁸¹. Folk traditions and customs connected to the celebration of this saint differ among different nations. However, some similarities exist, mostly among neighboring nations. According to the number and variety of customary practices, it can be said that St. George's Day, is a very important spring holiday. Most likely the main reason for the celebration of St. George is that it is set at the time of the greatest renewal of nature. On this day, people of different nations perform religious, non-religious and magic practices

¹⁸¹ Ibid

2.9.1. Carnivalizing Aya Yorgi Day through *Yüzyüze (Face to Face) Evangelical Street Performances*



Picture 53 A Grotesque body in a performance of *Yüzyüze* photo by the author 2016

Aya Yorgi feast day and the pilgrimage will be dealt in detail the third chapter. However here I would like to show how a feast day pilgrimage goes beyond its scope and transforms into a festivalized event through the street performances of evangelical missionary groups. Therefore, to begin with, it would be useful to give brief facts about Evangelism in Turkey

Although the Protestant or Evangelical faith began spreading in Turkey during the 19th century, it was not until the late 20th century that it began to consolidate. In the 1990's they began trying to obtain legal recognition in Turkey. By the late 1990's, these Turkish converts began to appear on television debate programs. In 2005, the State Security Commission identified the three major threats against the Turkish state as the following: "terrorism", "Islamic fundamentalism", and the "proselytism practiced by missionaries". News articles began to emerge about "thousands" of hypothetical underground churches hidden in homes, which came to be called "pirate churches," and speculations that billions of dollars were used to buy land and recruit native missionaries by "deceiving young". Each 23 April, tens of evangelicals flood into the island to introduce the gospel of Jesus to the non-Christians or non- Protestants. Aya Yorgi day is a special time where the

missionaries shall find a big chance to contact with people freely without any suspicious look. As it is a Christian day and space people they feel themselves more secure and the can evangelize Protestantism at ease. However, the main aim of them missionaries is to deter the people from so called “Aya Yorgi” veneration or superstitious wish making practices claiming that Rab (God/Jesus) is the only “unique authority” to “console the souls”. One of the pastors that I talked to claimed that they received very few feedbacks afterwards. “Only a very slight number of people give their phone numbers for them to be able to connect them again and out of the ones who give their contact details, only very few people respond to the “message of Jesus”. Although the feast day Aya Yorgi never seems to be as fruitful as one might expect, the pastors are happy “at least to be able to sow the seeds of the love for the Lord”

You know we are not always able to find such an opportunity, it is a great chance and people talk about their beliefs easily and invite the people to pray easily. We cannot find such an opportunity under normal circumstances. Therefore we as a church wanted to benefit from it. And so we are here. We are here with a big group. We have brothers who chant hymns, we have brothers who evangelize, and we have brothers who act out small sketches. Also we have brothers who distribute bible and pray. We declare loudly and telling them who we are and we invite them. Many people responded and got prayers from us. Thank God we cannot imagine something better than this. We serve here for our homeland (Ali Kalkandelen, pastor from Yaşam church, 51)¹⁸²

Yüzü yüze (Face to face) is one these street performance groups. Yüzü yüze's mission is to creatively proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to Muslim people everywhere. They “introduce the latter to the former by using the creative arts and by enabling and training others”. Yüzü yüze began by using music, later involvement of the artists with varying “gifts”, they are increasingly using other art forms to attract people to their “message” such as theatre, dance, mime, visual arts, martial arts, clowning, grotesque bodies, puppets, illusion and even yo-yo tricks. They seem open and embrace creativity and excellence through whichever medium they helps their mission.

But how they achieve to create a way to evangelize the gospel in a carnivalesque atmosphere on a pilgrimage day? The work of Bakhtin on medieval festivity gives us

¹⁸² Interview with Ali Kalkandelen 23rd April 2015 at Sat7 Turk TV channel SAT7 Türk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvyrxAyejwE>

invaluable insight on carnival phenomenon. From his perspective, carnival presents a “comic folk aspect” of church and state institutions that ensures that hegemonic power was periodically challenged by the people, principally through satire and mockery (Bakhtin 1984)¹⁸³. Power structures are temporarily turned upside down through the active engagement of all carnival participants. Carnival celebrates “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival is the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. (Bakhtin 1984). According to Bakhtin, medieval societies celebrated the carnival as a time outside of their everyday, structured lives. It allowed people to exist briefly beyond the control of the state and the church. It is usually marked by displays of excess and grotesqueness. It is a type of performance, but this performance is communal, with no boundary between performers and audience. It creates a situation in which diverse voices are heard and interact.

Yüzüyüze team uses street theatre to abolish the boundaries between the audience and performance as street theatre in general sprang from the assumption that everyone can be involved in resistance against oppression and dictatorship, make meanings and express creatively without any formal training.¹⁸⁴ While traditional theatre articulates received beliefs and value systems and asserts a sense of continuity, street theatre breaks with the past and offers a critical commentary on society, politics, culture and religion as well as other aspects of contemporary life. It has become a social instrument that has the potential to lift the veils of falsehood and expose hypocrisy, especially in undemocratic, traditional value-based societies. It fractures the boundaries of mainstream theatre by performing out in the open, away from the rules and rigidities of the enclosed playhouse to perform for people who had neither the means nor the leisure to go to the theatre.¹⁸⁵

Sometimes Yüzüyüze team does small street performances and sometimes they perform to large crowds. Their concerts and performances allow them to publicly share the gospel in a way that is not normally possible in a Muslim country. Performers (through translators, if they don't know the language) are able to share the gospel from the very public stage, as well as one-on-one after performances. The lyrics of songs are translated into the local

¹⁸³Bakhtin, Mikhael(1984).*Rabelais and His World* translated by Iswolsky, H (Indiana University Press, Bloomington,

¹⁸⁴Tahmina Rashid, (2017). “Theatre for Community Development: Street Theatre as an Agent of Change in Punjab (Pakistan)”, *India Quarterly*, 71(4) 335–347, accessed February 26, 2017, 03:15 P. M., <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0974928415602604>.

¹⁸⁵*Ibid*

language and distributed to the audience. CDs sold at the concerts include translations of the lyrics. Members of the audience are offered a survey with different options for additional information. Yüzyüze is a dynamic collection of people. Some join the Yüzyüze team for one tour, some for a few months and some for the long term. The musicians continue to expand its repertoire of Turkish materials for Turkish audience. Others on their team are dancers, visual artists, puppeteers, drivers, techies, and/or provide backstage support such as hospitality, logistics, administration and intercessory prayer.

They have so far performed in over 14 countries in North Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans, Europe and Central Asia. They have performed in many and diverse venues: nightclubs/bars, discos, cafes, open air theatres, parks, fairs, camps, city squares, shopping malls, cultural centers, ships, and churches. The national partners (local protestant churches) are an integral part of each Yüzyüze performance. They invite them, determine local performance venues, advise them about everything they need to know, translate, and most importantly follow up those who provide contact information. They rarely go anywhere unless it's at the request of local partners. They also work to empower local churches to use the creative arts for their own outreach and church planting. For example they work in collaboration, particularly with the church in Diyarbakır in southeast Turkey. In the summers they offer "Kanat" (Wings), a camp that provides worship, music and arts training to the Turkish church. Local Protestants now participate as teachers as well as learners. They also offer an internship programme to train young people in the creative arts ministry.

“...many Muslim people: they hear the message for the first time and are affected by it, but because of what they have learnt, it seems absolute foolishness and even a disgrace. But it touches their hearts and starts a process. It seems that few people here come to faith immediately after first hearing the good news. This means that our work requires a lot of patience, but the opportunities to share our faith are abundant and we can see the awe in people's faces as they hear about God's sacrificial love for the first time. I know these seeds are worth sowing—as many as we can—even though they may take a while to sprout” says a Yüzyüze member named Charles¹⁸⁶.

In a play about Abraham's faith, his wife Sara, and Isaac, we may observe traditional puppet theatre, storytelling, music (oriental inspired music and costumes especially for a specific audience), dance and acting.¹⁸⁷ The Play is very entertaining—this is exactly what the crew wanted: to create a message very easy to understand for everyone, through an

¹⁸⁶Personal interview with Charles 22.03.2017 Istanbul

¹⁸⁷ “Hz. İbrahim'in İman Yolculuğu”, accessed February 25, 2017, 08:52 P. M., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvDisymx6A4&feature=youtu.be>.

eclectic combination of lively arts. Even if they play mostly in Turkey, which is a secular state, the group announces that they had shows in multiple Muslim countries. Public art and faith has a lot to offer to the public. They use music pieces and folk dance samples that would sound familiar to audience in order “localize” their performances. For example in the play about Abraham and Sara they play the song called “domdom kurşunu” by Ibrahim Tatlıses an Urfa (Edessa) origin famous Turkish singer. The leader of team said to me that they tried to make a subliminal connection between Abraham and Ibrahim in two senses. First the name Ibrahim was the Islamized version of Abraham and secondly apart from the name, the singer himself and Abraham shared a common point which was Edessa: their city of birth. The song sounded a bit absurd when it was used as a soundtrack for this sketch but it was able to cheer the audience up and make them accompany the song aloud and trigger their attention.



Picture 5473 Muslim pilgrims accompanying the songs of Yüzyüze photo by the author 2016

Experience of a public space is shaped by the simultaneous co-existence of people and their performances. Pilgrimage is such a performance which is central to the public realm. It involves mass movement, interactions and manifestation of religious or spiritual practices in public space. Consequently public space gives a character to the pilgrimage and in return pilgrimage shapes the dynamics and the frontiers of the public space. On the pilgrimage day of Aya Yorgi we observe a very visible transition between a mere pilgrimage into a lively carnival through the performances of Yüzyüze team. Sacred parodies and the miracle or morality plays that they perform show obviously carnivalesque

nature. Puppets, and grotesque bodies of the actors and live music- mostly very local melodies- that they play create such an atmosphere that enables pilgrims (mostly women) dance and sing and being part of the spectacles. As it is considered to be a Christian day and space, the missionaries find the freedom for manifestation or performance that they cannot easily attain in the rest of the year

2.9.2. From *Dawra* to *Mahrajanat Mar Jirys*: Feast day of St George



Picture 74: *Dawra* feast up; *Mar Jirjes* feast down

After having given this brief portrayal of the evangelical carnival taken place at Aya Yorgi I want to proceed to my observations in Sarba. What I will mention about is mostly the

outcomes of my participant observations that I conducted in the village during the feast day of Saint George that I participated on the 23rd April, 2016 in Sarba. In the following part I will show the interesting transformation of a pre-lent festival into a spring fest which takes place on St George's day with the touch of civil society association called Rabitat Chabab.

2.9.2.1. Dawra

Lent, or "*As-Sawm*" in Arabic, is the period of 40 days (some churches count Sundays, others do not) before the Easter Feast. Traditionally, Lent is a period of fasting, prayer and penitence that culminates in Holy Week with the commemoration of Jesus Christ's arrest, trial, crucifixion, burial and resurrection. The 40 days are symbolic of the time that Jesus spent in the desert when he was tested by the Devil. The exact dates on which these events are commemorated, however, change each year, as they are all scheduled a fixed number of days before Easter, which clergy call a "movable feast" on account of the way it is calculated. Normally called "Fat Thursday", the Thursday before Lent marks a day of mass global indulgence. In Lebanon, Christians come together for "Khamis Sakkara"¹⁸⁸, or "Drunken Thursday", phenomena that could only be massively popular among the Lebanese.

The main agenda of Rabitat Chabab is to revive old custom and traditions of Sarba. Dawra, is one of these forgotten folk events which is a kind of pre-lent carnival, celebrated mainly before 80s with excessive amount of grilled meat, food and drinks before the fasting days started. It derives its name from Arabic verb "dawr" meaning "to circle" referring to the street musician marching in the streets of the village drawing circles, inviting the Sarbavians to join the festivities around the cathedral of St George .

In the past people didn't have an easy access to restaurants for eating meat and drinking. They were supposed to prepare the food and everything individually or in a collective way. Making "mashawi" (grilled meat) was a collective way of entertainment. Sharing, enjoying around the grills accompanied by music and local costumes and dances. Those were the days but now things are different.. People prefer going to the fancy restaurant with delicious meat options. And there are many places to drink alcohol. That is why Dawra has become a history (Nadim Challita 45)¹⁸⁹.

¹⁸⁸Khamis El Sakara is a Lebanese holiday. The name is from Lebanese Arabic. It is celebrated on the last Thursday before the first day of Lent, when Lebanese Catholics gather and indulge in alcoholic beverages. This is an old tradition where Christians gather to finish all their meat and dairy before the 40 days of fasting.

¹⁸⁹Deacon from Sarba St George Cathedral personal interview 27.06.2016

Rabitat Chabab aims to revive *dawra* festivities by shifting its timing in the liturgical calendar and adapting it into St George feast. “We want to turn it into a spring feast” said the head of the association” Charbel BouLahdou a 35 year old business man.



Picture 56 Traditional belly dancer photo by the autor 2016

2.9.2.2. Mahrajanat Mar Jiryes:

Rabitat chahab Sarba (the chain of youth of sarba) with Sarba municipality in collaboration and the Sarba Parish organize the feast day of St George every year. The entertainments usually last for three days long. Festivities of the feast day were written on the cloth banners and hung on the main streets of Sarba and Zouk Mikhael, a nearby village. The celebrations began on the evening of 21st April. The Maronite bishop of Sarba started the mass at 6 pm. After the mass, a huge crowd of (all Maronites) processed with the bishop, priests and deacons from the cathedral to the old church (St Georges). A music band was trumping out in the very front of the procession. A man was holding a big Lebanese flag with the emblem of *chabibet sarba* (youth movement of Sarba). Two boys carried the icon of Saint George (Mar Jirjes) which is normally displayed in the cathedral. Everybody was chanting hymns about St George. When they arrived in the old church the bishop read out a special prayer for St George. Then the procession walked down to Batiyeh from the stairs. The bishop blessed the icon of St George in the cave and it continued with a cocktail party accompanied with music. Parades and processions in public streets turn them into “a

particular space, a landscape that could be exploited effectively through the collective performance of particular rituals to communicate, legitimate, and politicize values" (Goheen, 1993:128)¹⁹⁰. Not only do they mark out space, such "civic rituals" also represent "time apart", for they are "time separated from the normal activities" (Goheen, 1993:128)¹⁹¹. These rituals also stress shared values and reinforce group cohesion by emphasizing belonging. Further, "parades and other forms of mass public ritual characterized as demonstrations of community power and solidarity and serve as complex commentaries on the political economy or urban-industrial social relations"

St George feast in Sarba seems like an invented tradition based on the revival of a certain forgotten folklore. These new festivities celebrated around the St George day have the basic characteristic of a carnival in Bakhtin's¹⁹² sense. According to him carnival festivities and the comic spectacles and ritual connected with them had an important place in the life of medieval man. Nearly every Church feast had its comic folk aspect, which was also traditionally recognized. Such, for instance, were the parish feasts, usually marked by fairs and varied open-air amusements, with the participation of giants, dwarfs, monsters, and trained animals. A carnival atmosphere reigned on days when mysteries were produced. This atmosphere also pervaded such agricultural feasts as the harvesting of grapes (vendange) which was celebrated also in the city. Civil and social ceremonies and rituals took on a comic aspect as clowns and fools, constant participants in these festivals, mimicked serious rituals such as the tribute rendered to the victors at tournaments, the transfer of feudal rights, or the initiation of a knight. Minor occasions were also marked by comic protocol, as for instance the election of a king and queen to preside at a banquet 'for laughter's sake'.

¹⁹⁰ Goheen, Peter. (1993) The Ritual of the Streets in Mid-19th-Century Toronto *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* Vol 11, Issue 2, pp. 127 – 145 First Published April 1, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d110127>

¹⁹¹ Ibid

¹⁹² Ibid



Picture 57 Rabitat Chabab in Carnavalesque costumes photo by the author 2016n

Festivities started with a parade and processions then the following two days were basically for celebration and entertainment with the participation of dance groups, “affordable” singers, musicians, magicians and grotesque body performances. Members of Rabitat Chabab dressed up in bizarre costumes that evoked Ottoman Lebanon and they performed various forms of dabke in a fake wedding ceremony of an imaginary couple. The festivities lasted towards the midnight. Neither in the procession nor in the festivities, were Muslim inhabitants involved. “It is for us, for the Sarbavians” said a young guy from the youth movement of Sarba parish.” It is not that they weren’t invited it is just they don’t come. Muslims living in Sarba are mostly Syrian refugees and they do not feel at ease in our (Christian) gatherings.

2.9.2.3. Who is “RaabitatChabab”?



Picture 58 St George's celebration, RabitatChabab (photo by the author 2016)

Lebanese civil society includes associations as diverse as: NGOs; ethnic, family, alumni or neighborhood associations; clubs (sports, cultural, artistic, etc.); federations; scouts, youth and student groups; local branches of foreign associations; scientific or research centers; religious organizations; political parties; chambers of commerce; trade unions; professional associations; and cooperatives. Rabiab Chabab can be considered as neighborhood civil society organization. Their main aim is to protect and preserve the customs and traditions of Sarba village and create inner solidarity with fellow townsmen after the change in the population structure due to inner migration and dislocations during the civil war. The birth story of this “Chabab” is noteworthy in terms of its relation with St George:

During the civil war, one prominent figure among the villagers took the horse of St George which was made of a rare metal to keep it at home in order to protect it from the thieves or the possible devastation that can be caused by bombing and so on. He had a sheltering space in his house so the church and the other parishioners agreed on this precaution for the sake of their beloved patron Saint whom they dedicated their monumental cathedral and the church. Years passed. The dark days were over. The war ended. It was time to place the horse to the space it once belonged to. Whereas, this man was not eager to give it back and

he was creating various excuses. No matter how the priests of St George church and the parishioners tried and insisted on him, their efforts remained inconclusive. He was constantly justifying himself saying that he and his household created an emotional bond with this “sacred” horse. Then one day a group of men from the village, the laics, other than the parishioners or church collaborated and in the end managed to persuade him to give the horse back. These “heroic” men proved themselves being stronger than the church and parishioners in fixing the conflicts among the villagers with peace and common sense. And in the post war era, during 1990s, whenever there happened to a contested situation in the village, they were asked for assistance. These men were the prominent figures who founded modern “Rabitat Chabab”. In 2008 they applied for Ministry of the Interior and were officially registered as a civil society association.



Picture 59. Emblem of RabitatChabab

In this chapter I have tried to help the reader to disentangle St George from some of the concepts that have become associated with him over the last 1,700 years, and to show them the aspects of a changeable, malleable, dynamic cult whose elements and emphases have ebbed and flowed over time. This broad context of variation and reimagining St George—as no one culture has a singular claim on him, proves that no version of his image, legend or significance is universally applicable. With this in mind, we can now turn to consider some

of the salient factors underpinning his widespread popularity such as pilgrimage to his cult areas.

2.9.2.4. St George vs al Khodr at al Batiyeh : An Ambiguous interrelation? The discourse of the clerics and others

I believe that public opinion has a formative effect on clerical discourse on St George vs Khodr relation because responsiveness to public sentiment is integral to the success of religious leaders. It must be taken into accounts that even the most pious and altruistic cleric has strong incentives for responding to public opinion. If a cleric takes a position that is far from public sentiment, people will be less willing to make the drastic changes that following his advice entails. However, if he takes a position closer to their own, believers will be more amenable to his guidance. By doing this, the cleric creates an opportunity for believers to reap the satisfaction of believing they are doing God's Will. The clergy avoid becoming entangled in controversies which may jeopardize relations with public

Lebanon is a country of diversities. This diversity is our richness. Even Pope Jean Paul said during his visit to Lebanon that this country was a message to the world that varieties could cohabit. I do not mind whether the visitors come to Batiyeh for venerating Khodr or Mar Jirjes or any other. The most important thing is their piety. I respect everyone who believes in his/own way.—Nadim Challita (43), a deacon from Sarba Parish)¹⁹³

On the other hand intuitional Islam seem more reluctant and more attached to clear boundaries than the priests.

“There is hearsay that Mar Jirjes is the Muslim equivalence of Khodr. But I personally don't believe in this idea. It doesn't make any sense. They have different stories. How come one can associate Khodr with Mar Jirjes? Plus, in Islam visual representations of the saints don't exist”.—Sheikh of Khodr Mosque in Beirut 26.07.2017¹⁹⁴

I heard about this identification of Khodr with this Christian saint. I just heard. I never go to churches. It was years ago when I was a kid I participated a wedding ceremony with my mother. So I can't be sure about Christian sainthood. We do not receive any Christian visitors in Khodr mosque. But when I see the icon of Mar Jirjes, I don't perceive him as Khodr. I don't also think that the Christians equate their saint with Khodr.— Imad Dekramanji (58) a Hajje¹⁹⁵ man from the Wakef of the Khodr mosque in Beirut)¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Personal interview with deacon Challita 28.01.2017

¹⁹⁴ Personal interview with the sheikh 05.07.2017

¹⁹⁵ Someone who has already went for a pilgrimage to Mecca and fulfilled one of the five pillars of Islam

¹⁹⁶ Telephone interview with Imad, 05.04.2017 7 minutes

The identification of Khodr with Mar Jiryès can only please me sharing a common respected person with my Christian brothers and sisters. But not everybody knows this hybrid figure. I wish they knew. I am a religious woman and I remember my mother used to take my brother to Batiyeh when they were not feeling well. But I don't remember if they were visiting the shrine for the sake of Khodr. It was mostly for the miraculous water.— Majida Akram al Lakis (59), the cousin of the mufti of Jbeil and the warden of Khodr Mosque in Jbeil¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Personal interview with Majida 18.07.2017

Chapter 3 Defining the Pilgrimage of Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh

3.1. Pilgrimage : Multiplicity of Discourses

The phenomenon of pilgrimage has been a focus of special attention in various areas of academic research for several decades. As a result, a huge corpus of ethnographic, comparative and analytic studies and reference books has become available, and the pilgrimage has been ‘contested’ (Eade&Shallnow, 1991)¹⁹⁸, ‘explored’(Stopford, 1999)¹⁹⁹, ‘intersected’, (Badone&Roseman, 2004)²⁰⁰, ‘reframed’(Coleman&Eade,2004)²⁰¹ “secularized” (Margery, 2008)²⁰² from a variety of academic perspectives. However there are still plenty of open questions and enthusiastic researchers. After all, the pilgrimage is a global phenomenon, in which religion and people often manifest themselves in the most powerful, collective and performative way.

A pilgrimage has been defined as “A journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding” (Barber, 1993, p. 1)²⁰³. Today, pilgrimage is defined differently, as a traditional religious or modern secular journey. The phenomenon is currently experiencing resurgence throughout the world, as longstanding shrines still act as magnets to those in search of spiritual fulfillment (Digance 2003 p.145)²⁰⁴. Pilgrimage creates population mobilities such as trade, cultural exchanges, political integration, and even the less desirable spread of illnesses and epidemics. Pilgrimages have powerful political, economic, social and cultural implications, and even affect global trade and health. It requires spatial movement: each year, an estimated three to five million Muslims make the Hajj (the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca on a specific date), some five million pilgrims go to Lourdes in France, and

¹⁹⁸ Eade, John. & Shallnow Micheal (eds) (2000) *Contesting the Sacred. The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*. Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois Press

¹⁹⁹ Stopford, Jenny. (1999). *Pilgrimage Explored* York Medieval Press

²⁰⁰ Badone, Ellen, Roseman, Sharon. (2004). *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism* Illinois University Press

²⁰¹ Coleman, Simon, and Eade, John. eds. (2004) *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*. London; New York: Routledge

²⁰² Margry Peter, Jan. ed (2008). *Shrines and Pilgrimage in the Modern World: New Itineraries into the Sacred*. [Amsterdam University Press](#)

²⁰³ Barber, Richard. (1991) *Pilgrimages*, Boydell Press, Woodbridge

²⁰⁴ Digance, Justin. (2003) ‘Pilgrimage at Contested Sites’, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp.143–159.

approximately twenty eight million Hindu pilgrims visit the River Ganges in India (Singh, 2006)²⁰⁵.

Pilgrimage involves three factors: *a holy place; attraction of individuals or crowds to this place; a specific aim to obtain some spiritual or material benefit* (Brandon 1970, 50)²⁰⁶. One of the most basic elements in a definition of pilgrimage is movement. For geographic purposes, at least, pilgrimages must involve the physical movement of persons from one place to another. The primary definitional problem, however, concerns the minimum distance required for movement to be termed a pilgrimage. The issue suggests that a stroll to a local sanctuary is also a kind of pilgrimage. Indeed, some pilgrimage scholars do regard every shrine as a center of pilgrimage (Bharati 1970 p.87)²⁰⁷. Does this mean that all movements to sacred places, irrespective of how short they are, are properly called pilgrimages? Would defining and classifying pilgrimages only on the length of travel be an appropriate method? If so, what *distance* separates the "miniature pilgrimages" from regular ones? These questions about distance partly reflect the dilemma of scale inherent in all geographic study. Certainly the popular conceptualization of pilgrimage regards the movement as being longer than local travel. Furthermore, most pilgrimage scholars, including the Turners, have insisted that going on a pilgrimage involves movement away from the "local" environment (Turner and Turner 1978²⁰⁸). Perception of the distance varies: on foot or by flight or from village to a remote mountain and so on. Territory gives sensation of distance. A second element in the definition of pilgrimage concerns the *motive* for the movement. As seen in the definition quoted above, the motive is usually religious and there is general agreement that the motivation of the traveler must be religious for the event to qualify as a pilgrimage. Such agreement soon dissipates, however, when a definition of the term "religious" is attempted. Neither observers nor travelers themselves can differentiate motives that are primarily religious from a multitude of other reasons for making a journey. At a popular pilgrimage site where fairs, festivals, sporting events, and markets concurrently attract pilgrims, tourists, vacationers, excursion groups, traders, and hustlers, the true religious pilgrims cannot always be identified.

²⁰⁵ Singh, Rana P.B.(2006). Pilgrimage in Hinduism: Historical Context and Modern Perspectives; in, Timothy, Dallen J. and Olsen, Daniel H., (eds.) *Tourism, Religion, and Spiritual Journeys*. Routledge- Taylor & Francis Group, London & New York: pp. 220- 236. ISBN 13: 9-78-0-415-35445-5

²⁰⁶ Brandon, Samuel George Federick. ed. (1970) *A dictionary of comparative religion*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson

²⁰⁷ Bharati, Agehananda. (1970). Pilgrimage sites and Indian civilization. In *Chapters in Indian civilization*, v. 1, ed. J. W. Elder, 85-126. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt.

²⁰⁸ Ibid

Although some clues about *motivations* may be obtained by research technique, it is questionable whether data are entirely representative and valid. Furthermore, even if the "true motives" of travelers to pilgrimage sites were known, some definitional problems remain. One is the fact that motives change. If a person decides to visit a pilgrimage place because of curiosity but experiences a religious conversion while at the site, has the journey become a personal pilgrimage? Another definitional problem results from the fact that trips are taken for multiple reasons. If a person travels to a foreign area as a tourist but while in that vicinity also makes a religious journey to a sacred site, is that person a pilgrim? The issue is well illustrated by the uncertainty about whether the large number of participants in commercial tours to religious sites should be defined pilgrims (Nolan and Nolan 1989)²⁰⁹. In any case, the nature of the destination is an important element in the definition of pilgrimage.

The *destination* to be called pilgrimage, the movement normally must be to a destination that is regarded as sacred. Conceptually this condition is clear; but operationally it requires the ability to measure sanctity. Because there are no inherent characteristics at a site that reveal its holy attributes, it is difficult to objectively identify places that are sacred and thus attract pilgrims. Even conceptually there is not a sharp delineation between "sacred" and "nonsacred" places. (Bhardwaj 1973)²¹⁰. One method bases sanctity on statements in holy texts. Places enumerated in the indigenous literature as being sacred are accepted as equivalent to places of pilgrimages, it is assumed that a large number of persons traveling to a specific site indicate a high level of sanctity. Equating total number of pilgrims to sanctity is somewhat inappropriate for definitional purposes here because it involves cyclical reasoning, namely, that "pilgrimages" are movements to places that are defined as "sacred" because those places are where pilgrims go. Reliance on travel data associates sanctity of a place with the distance worshippers have journeyed; that is, longer average distances (or greater variances in distances) indicate higher-order pilgrimage places (Bhardwaj 1973)²¹¹.

A fourth definitional issue concerns the magnitude of movement to a sacred place. Here a very important distinction is made between the concept of pilgrimage and an operational

²⁰⁹ Nolan, Mary. 1., and Nolan Sidney . (1989) *Christian pilgrimage in modern Western Europe*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

²¹⁰Bhardwaj, Surinder Mohan. (1973). *Hindu places of pilgrimage in India: A study in cultural geography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²¹¹ Ibid

definition of this phenomenon of mass movement. Conceptually, the definition of pilgrimage should include any religious journey, including that of a single individual, to a sacred place. Consistently, then, an individual pilgrimage unit would be the travels of one person. The goal here, however, is to operationally define an event that involves the flow of a large collection of pilgrims. The aspect that presents uncertainty is the size or magnitude of the collection constituting a pilgrimage event. A single pilgrimage event is defined here as the movement of numerous worshippers traveling to a sacred destination, usually during a special occasion. Many pilgrimages occur at the time of a religious holiday and/or a specially announced occasion and, therefore, the question about whether a pilgrimage occasion has occurred does not arise. But, theoretically, the issue of magnitude is pertinent if very few pilgrims actually came at the same time of an announced ceremony or, conversely, if a large number of pilgrims spontaneously converged at a holy site at a time unassociated with a religious holiday. The definition of "numerous" can be operationalized by attaching the condition of "significance." That is, if at a particular time, the number of visitors to a sacred site is significantly greater than the norm that qualifies it as a "pilgrimage event."

3.2. Pilgrimage and Tourism.

These categories at first were analyzed as dissimilar, conceiving tourism as a 'modern, mass-leisure phenomenon, 'a shallow travelling for pleasure's fare' away from the 'spiritual'; but later, scholars focused more on the intrinsic similarities of the two, considering "tourism as the pilgrimage of modern times" (Cohen 1992:48)²¹². The similarities can be found at the structural level, where both are in search of more profound significances, and distinctions are at the phenomenal level in the self-indulgent quest of the tourists (Shinde 2007:186)²¹³. Nowadays, scholars do not see a rigid, hard distinction between pilgrimage and tourism "even when the role of pilgrim and tourist are combined, they are necessarily different but for a continuum of inseparable elements" (see Badone and Roseman 2004²¹⁴; Graburn 1983:16²¹⁵; Kaelber 2002²¹⁶; Tomasi 2002²¹⁷).

²¹² Cohen, Erik. (1992) Pilgrimage and tourism - convergence and divergence. Paper at Conference on Pilgrimage: The Human Quest, University of Pittsburgh

²¹³ Shinde, Kiran. (2007) Case Study 6: Visiting Sacred Sites in India: Religious Tourism or Pilgrimage? *In Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Festivals Management: An International Perspective*. R.a.N.D.M. Raj, ed. Pp. 184-197. Wallingford, UK; Cambridge, MA: CABI Pub.

²¹⁴ Ibid

²¹⁵ Graburn, Nelson. (1983) The Anthropology of Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 10(1):9-33.

A brief attempt to compare the pilgrimage with religious tourism shows that it is quite difficult in practice to distinguish between the two concepts. The intensity of the religious element, which fills the wandering, can be taken as an objective basis for the distinction. What we have in mind in the first place are the main aims of the wandering. In the pilgrimage it is the wish to reach a sacred place or considered by the pilgrim as such that is a place with a special presence of the sacrum, the super-natural reality. Then there is the programme filled with a suitable number of pious practices, prayers and services. An even more significant element should be noted as well. This is the faith of the participants of religious wandering and their personal religious attitudes. What I deal with here, however, is a subjective factor, not fully measurable or possible to examine. A very pious pilgrimage with a strictly religious programme may be joined by persons who are in fact guided by motives other than religion—such as education, the desire to experience something new, to be in a human community etc. And quite the opposite, an ordinary trip to sacred places may be an opportunity for very deep religious experience for many participants.

There are no absolute criteria of judgment of interpretative versions, no typologies left because, for example, individual experiences can change from moment to moment and there are no clear-cut distinctions between pilgrimage sites and tourist attractions. The major implication of the ‘both-and’ approach is that contradictions do not matter, since everything is acceptable. But the point is that though everything may be in a state of flux, we can still discover structures beneath the surface. This move does not imply the collapse of all existing theories in the field of pilgrimage studies. The transformation is not as sharp and dramatic. The current areas of pilgrimage research are still based on the existing theories, and the transition is still perceived as an expansion and not a contradiction of the existing ones (Roseman and Badone, 2004 P. 42)²¹⁸.

The change in the theoretical base includes removal of distinctions that were accepted in the past and a growing inability to distinguish between the different perceptions and research areas, which are now becoming integrated. It is part of a post-modern deconstruction of older typologies and categorizations. I believe that the difference

²¹⁶ Kaelber, Lutz. (2002) ‘The sociology of medieval pilgrimage: contested views and shifting boundaries’, in Swatos, W., Jr. and Tomasi, L. (Eds.): *From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism: The Social and Cultural Economics of Piety*, pp.51–74, Praeger, Westport, CT.

²¹⁷ Tomasi, Luigi (2002) Home Viator: From Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism via the Journey. In *From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism: The Social and Cultural Economics of Piety*. W.H.J. Swatos and L. Tomasi, eds. Westport, Conn: Praeger.

²¹⁸ Ibid

between traditional pilgrims and tourists will be fading, while numerous points of similarity will emerge: both require spatial movement and both involve an emotional desire on the part of the individual to visit sites meaningful to him or her. But overall, the visitor experience, be it called pilgrimage or tourism, is in fact not homogeneous and comprises different types. Visitors' motivations are also highly diverse, ranging from curiosity to the search for meaning. Differing market segments of visitors go to the various sites, holy or not and this occurs even though the reasons for visiting and the activities at the site are wholly different. Everyone has different expectations from his or her tour. Traditionally the journeys were kind of a challenge today they are more like travels for tourism.

Under the light of the above mentioned concepts, how can one read Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh? Is it possible to clearly classify them under certain pilgrimage categories? As a touristic spot in Istanbul with its beautiful nature, splendid civil architecture and romantic atmosphere, Büyükada welcomes both local and foreigner visitors (mainly Arabs from the Gulf countries) for the weekends and daily excursions. Aya Yorgi is such a highly recommended place of visit that they almost never leave the island without seeing the church. So all around the year it is open to the visitors. You can always see people climbing the path to the church anytime of the year. But the feast days are unbelievably crowded. The relatively small island hosts tens thousands of people on these days. Motor vehicles are not allowed in the island except for the ambulance and police. For this reason all visitors are pedestrian and if they do not reside in the island they have to take steamboats to reach there. There are three main steam boat stations in Istanbul that transports the visitors to the island. Kabataş, Bostancı and Kartal. On these stations both municipal and private companies give service. One 23rd of April in 2012 one of the private steamboat ticket sellers reported that it was almost impossible to count how many tickets he had sold. He estimated more than four thousand tickets for only the boats he was responsible for. Experiences at Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh show the main perspectives in which these phenomenon is perceived: as beautiful natural place, preferred destinations for travel and relaxation but also a place for pilgrimage with spiritual-religious motivations and a place where the feast of Saint George is celebrated by people. It is also seen that both shrines are physical locations, spiritual and virtual ones as well due to their complex association between a beautiful place filled with history and associated with the powerful and popular name of Saint George, the one who saved people from the dragon tackling this way an universal problematic: the prevalence of the good over the evil which is common to

all religions and beliefs. Movement is the most important element in both Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh pilgrimages. However, concerning Aya Yorgi, as mentioned in the first chapter, pilgrims are required to follow a series of transportation and a challenging walking route as the church is located “out there”. But al Batiyeh due to its convenient access and location it can be reached more easily with less physical effort. Pilgrimage to al Batiyeh is more individual type and small scaled when compared to the massive crowd of Aya Yorgi feast day.

It should be noted that motivations for pilgrimage is a difficult topic to research. When asked, either at Aya Yorgi or al Batiyeh, many pilgrims are not able to articulate their motives, nor may they wish to admit that they need to accumulate merit or remove sin- the traditional reasons for pilgrimage. I observed that pilgrims, more than other visitors, are more likely to subscribe to overt and covert norms at sites that hold religious significance for themselves; for example, by observing clothing conventions, keeping silence and refraining from taking photographs where this is prohibited. Even where the prime motivation for pilgrimage is explicitly expressed as religious, it can be seen that motivations and expectations change. Clearly vow making at Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh is the prime motive for pilgrimage. This motive, however, is a complex concept with different layers of meaning and intensity depending on individual belief and social context. Other motives are often evident: contemporary accounts of the desire for travel to unknown places, motivated by curiosity, considering it part of the fun of pilgrimage.

However it is certain that, neither at Aya Yorgi nor al Batiyeh modern day pilgrimages is becoming “very” different from the traditional pilgrimage. There are no qualitative changes in the nature of pilgrimages, for example there are no organized package tours, whereas it is true that some modern marketing techniques are applied at Aya Yorgi and the pilgrims behave more like consumers. I could also see that pilgrimage was seen as an opportunity to get away from everyday living and, hence, visitors to Aya Yorgi brought with them their urbanized consumerist values such as fancy, chic sport clothes which would ease the walking, rather than reverting to the simpler values traditionally associated with the pilgrimage like climbing barefoot. It would not be surprising; therefore, if the purely spiritual motivation for pilgrimage were not affected by such change, spiritual motives are in a way “contaminated” by commercial development.

Long established as a pilgrimage site, al Batiyeh is still visited on a daily basis by locals and tourist alike, keeping in train a long-established tradition of visits for the theme such as ritual, and recreation this site of ancient worship lives on in contemporary daily and seasonal enactments and rituals. Its function as a site of small health pilgrimage is also framed by the place, its views over the sea, the water itself and its many visitors, from high church to low public. Intersecting geographical settings (place) and healing rituals (practice) at al Batiyeh produce therapeutic effects as shown in the first chapter. While the extensive literatures on pilgrimage emphasize its function as an enactment of self-discovery and transformation through spiritual journey, the identity of al Batiyeh pilgrimage is expressed through a range of health outcomes. These range from miraculous cures to relief from symptoms to improved mental health status. In linking together, healing and spiritual health, al Batiyeh emerges as a site of contact for all of those different streams of mind-body-spirit health. From my perspective, al Batiyeh emerges as small-scale assemblages shaped by a range of material, symbolic and performative elements. The shrine functions as slow/small/semi-everyday space of pilgrimage in contrast to large-scale and established pilgrimage.

Two core elements of ritual at al Batiyeh are praying and leaving of a range of objects. The former might be broadly framed as spiritual and the latter curative, but they merge in more complex ways within their practice. They usually involve saying of specified prayers in front of the icon of Saint George and in the chapel. These routes are traced by individuals on everyday visits, the prayers and a mix of the ex-votos; performed in the promise of a favor to come, as well as in gratitude for those already granted. Yet, a large part of the business of visiting al Batiyeh is to come for a cure. This rituals are mix of the embodied, symbolic and performative wherein an object that should have touched the body (such as a strip of cloth from a petticoat), was dipped in the water, rubbed on the affected part and left on the tree to let nature take the now disembodied illness away. Though small scale compared to the experience of a wilderness environment as in the example of Aya Yorgi, al Batiyeh also allows one to experience the divine in the space itself, but also from within.

After having discussed Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh within the scope of pilgrimage and tourism concepts, now I would like to go further on to portray two sites under the light of some prominent theories that are mean to explain the nature of pilgrimage.

3.3. Theories on Pilgrimage

3.3.1. The Turnerian Approach to the Study of Pilgrimage

Victor Turner, and his wife Edith, published *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* in 1978²¹⁹, and it became a standard in pilgrimage studies during the 1980s and 1990s. As Yamba (1995:9)²²⁰ states, “ anthropologists who embark on the study of pilgrimage almost all start out debating with the pronouncements of Victor Turner, whose framework they invariably employ as a point of departure” (see Coleman 2002²²¹; Coleman and Eade 2004)²²². Interestingly enough, the explanatory model of *communitas* in the field of anthropology and sociology has expanded the theme of pilgrimage to include discussions on more diverse topics such as tourism and travel. Turner and Turner’s analysis of pilgrimage provides interesting insights into the study of pilgrimage as a socio-cultural process. This approach has influenced several anthropological studies on pilgrimage: Morinis on Latin American pilgrimage (1991)²²³, Frey (1998)²²⁴ on pilgrim’s stories walking the ‘camino’ to Santiago de Compostela, Dubisch (1995)²²⁵ on pilgrimage to a Greek shrine, and Garma and Shadow (2000)²²⁶ on Mexican pilgrimage, amongst others.

Turner’s approach of pilgrimage as liminal phenomena comes from the “Rites of Passage theory”. Since “the Turners’s approach proved hegemonic within an ethnographic and theoretical field” (Coleman 2002:356)²²⁷, it is important to explain their theoretical approach from its roots. Victor Turner sees pilgrimage as a social process. Therefore, he analyzes it using his theory of ritual, based on van Gennep’s “Rites of Passage theory” (1960)²²⁸. According to this theory, the rites of passage, or “transition,” present three phases: Separation, Margin (threshold, or *limen*, in Latin), and Re-Aggregation. Turner

²¹⁹ Ibid

²²⁰ Yamba C. Bawa (1995) *Permanent pilgrims: the role of pilgrimage in the lives of West African Muslims in Sudan*. (International African Library, 15.) xiv, 237 pp. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute, 1995.

²²¹ Ibid

²²² ibid

²²³ Morinis, Alan, ed. (1992) *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*. New York: Greenwood Press

²²⁴ Frey, Nancy. (1998). *Pilgrim Stories: On and Off the Road to Santiago, Journeys Along an Ancient Way in Modern Spain*. University of California Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnszj>

²²⁵ Dubish, Jill. (1995) *In a Different Place. Pilgrimage, Gender, and Politics at a Greek Island Shrine*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

²²⁶ Garma Navarro, C. and Shadow, R. (eds) (2000). *Las peregrinaciones religiosas: una aproximación*, México: UAM

²²⁷ Coleman, Simon (2002) 'Do You Believe in Pilgrimage? *Communitas*, Contestation and Beyond'. *Anthropological Theory* 2(3):355-68.

²²⁸ Van Gennep, Arnold. . (1960). *The rites of passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

borrowed this division and developed it within his own ritual theory. The first phase, Separation, embraces symbolic behavior representing the detachment of the individual, or group, from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a “state”), or from both. In the second phase, Liminal, the ritual subject (“the passenger”) passes through a cultural realm that has few, or none, of the attributes of the past state or the one that is to come, and is in a period of ambiguity. In the third phase, Re-Aggregation, the passage, or move, is consummated (Turner 1969)²²⁹.

From this Liminal state an unstructured, or rudimentary structured, and quite undifferentiated, community emerges. In other words, a communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders is created (Turner 1969)²³⁰. This *Communitas*, (the Latin term for community) is spontaneous, immediate, and concrete. It is not shaped by norms, is not institutionalized, and not abstract. In liminality, *Communitas* creates anti-structural bonds in the sense that they are undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, non-rational, and existential (Turner 1974)²³¹. Pilgrimages are not rites of passage *per se*, but they present some of their characteristics. For instance, pilgrims usually go through the three phases of Separation, Liminalization and Re-Aggregation. Pilgrimage liberates the person from everyday obligations and roles, from structure, and brings him/her to a liminoid phase, or threshold. From the believer’s standpoint, this liminoid phase is based on the pilgrimage center, a place and moment “in and out of time.” In this place, the believer expects to have a direct experience with the sacred, a miraculous healing or a personal transformation (Turner 1974:197)²³².

Turner’s liminality is an ambiguous term. Liminal entities are not found in one phase or another. Turner describes it as “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner 1969:95)²³³. The transitional beings do not have status, property, secular clothing, rank, kinship, position or rights. The individual(s) are invisible, ambiguous and neutral. On the other hand, the liminal group is a community, or comity, of comrades, and a structure of hierarchical arrangement

²²⁹ Turner, Victor .W.,(1969) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Aldine, Chicago.

²³⁰ Ibid

²³¹ Turner, Victor W. (1974b) Liminal to liminoid, in play, flow, and ritual: an essay in comparative symbology, in *The Anthropological Study of Human Play* edited by Edward Norbeck. Houston, TX: Rice University Studies 60.3: pp. 53-92 (reprinted in Turner 1982: 20-60).

²³² Ibid

²³³ Ibid

positions does not exist (Turner 1967)²³⁴. Pilgrimage has some of the attributes of liminality, such as the homogenization of status, release from a mundane structure, *Communitas*, movement from a mundane to sacred place, among others. However, pilgrims do not pass through a liminal period as ritual subjects do, but rather they experiment a liminoid phase since it is a voluntary act, and not an obligatory social mechanism (Turner and Turner 1978)²³⁵. It does not have the exact or same implication. Therefore, in Turnerian terms, pilgrimage is a liminoid phenomenon. Turner's theory fits better with collective pilgrimages than with individual visits to the sanctuaries.

Turner (1969)²³⁶ differentiates three types of *communitas*. The first of these, *existential* (or spontaneous) *communitas*, is often approached in the form of a “happening” or noteworthy event typically involving audience participation. A second type of *communitas* Turner designates as *normative*. This occurs when the spontaneous or existential *communitas* is organized into a lasting social system. The third form of *communitas* is *ideological*. This is a utopian model based on existential *communitas* that can be expressed as an outward form of an inward experience. *Communitas*, the normative one being an important feature of pilgrimages. Normative *communitas* is influenced by time. There is mobilization and organization of resources to keep group members alive and thriving. There is also a need for social control among those members in pursuit of these, and other, collective goals. The original existential *communitas* is organized into an enduring social system (Turner 1969²³⁷; Turner 1974b)²³⁸.

According to Turner and Turner (1978)²³⁹, normative *communitas* originates in a non-utilitarian experience of brotherhood and fellowship that it is preserved by religious, moral, and legal codes. It is held together by religious and civil ceremonies. It constitutes the characteristic social bond among and between pilgrims, and those who offer help and hospitality on their holy journey. For religious specialists, the freedom experienced by pilgrims in normative *communitas* can make it a potentially subversive experience. This is

²³⁴ Turner, Victor W. (1967) “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage.” *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1967. 93-111.

²³⁵ Ibid

²³⁶ Ibid

²³⁷ Ibid

²³⁸ Turner, Victor W. (1974a) *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press

²³⁹ Ibid

the reason why the “structured ritual system” model is used to control pilgrims and shrines (Turner and Turner 1978)²⁴⁰.

In the following part I will try to analyze Aya Yorgi feast day and the pilgrimage within the scope of Turnerian approach and show if this theory can be applied to the Büyükada context.

3.6.1.1. Analysis of Aya Yorgi Feast day Pilgrimage through Turnerian Perspective

After a comfortless sleep on a mattress as hard as a nail, I opened up my eyes, shivering, in a 105 year old, poorly managed, spooky pension on Büyükada. Annoying sounds of squeaky floors and stairs, the nasty smell of the old, badly maintained, shared toilet and the disgusting scene of the balcony covered with pigeon droppings made me come around quickly. I got dressed and left the pension which was run by an old lady and her middle aged daughter. It was already half past six in the morning and the cool breeze of the island and the smell of the horse excrement was mixed in the air as horse carriages were the only means of transportation. I walked to the carriage station to take one to go to the *lunapark meydanı* as I was feeling too lazy to climb up all the way early in the morning. I had heard that the fares of the carriages increased on the feast days of St George therefore in order to share the price, I waited for early comer pilgrims to set foot on the island from the very first steamboat coming from Istanbul. It didn't take long and the first boat arrived honking its horns which is identified with the nostalgia of Istanbul.

From the author's field notes of 23.04.2015

Throughout 2015 there was an increase in PKK (Kurdish separatist) terrorist activity in south-east Turkey. There have been a number of attacks by other groups including suicide attacks by Daesh (formerly referred to as ISIL), and attacks by the far left DHKP(C) and Kurdish separatist TAK in cities including Ankara and Istanbul. On the 22nd of April in 2016 one day before the feast day of St George, due to the security reasons and possible suicide attacks it was speculated that the pilgrimage day was going to be cancelled and nobody would be allowed in the island. Because the latest suicide bomb attack was against tourists on Istiklal Street in Istanbul on 19 March 2016, in which 4 tourists died and at least 36 people were injured. On 13 March 2016 another bombing in Kizilay Square, central Ankara killed more than 30 people. There was an explosion near a military base in central Ankara on 17 February 2016. For this reason the security forces in warned the citizens not to go to crowded places and occasions. However, despite the rumors, the feast day started without any visible interruption. The steam boats started to transport the pilgrims very

²⁴⁰ Ibid

early in the morning and around 10 am considerable amount of pilgrims had already accumulated and started to march on the road to the Aya Yorgi.

3.6.1.2. Pilgrimage Stages

As mentioned before Turner's work on liminality draws from Van-Gennep's model of the Rite of Passage, which he elaborates to include other cultural phenomena. Van Gennep described the process of shifting from one social status to another in three stages: **1. disengagement (Pre-liminal)** in which the individual is symbolically removed from society and his own identity. **2. The liminal stage (threshold)** in which the individual is secluded from society and is under constant supervision. **3. The reunion (post luminal)** or post-liminal stage in which the individual is reintegrated into society with his new statues.

a) Pre-liminal phase

Aya Yorgi day is not officially announced by the church or by any other formal or informal institutions. However pilgrims are informed about the timing via a couple of ways:

- Many of them already know, conscious, having been waiting for this annual pilgrimage for a year. It is also remembered easily as it coincides and is associated with the same day as National Sovereignty and Children's festival, 23rd of April,
- Through their personal networks: Friends, friends of friends, siblings, close relatives. They remind each other through phone calls, facebook, whats app groups a couple of days before.
- By coincidence. The ones who spend their official holiday vacation on the island follow the crowd of pilgrims out of curiosity and end up in the church

The timing of the pilgrimage is a bit controversial. St. George's Day falls between the two configurations: it is celebrated on 23 April unless that date falls during Lent or Holy Week, in which case it is moved to Easter Monday. The specificity of the calendar gives rise to three possible configurations. According to the Church calendar, St. George's Day is celebrated on 23 April, and the pilgrims who visit the island belong, at least in theory, to both the Christian and the Muslim communities. But when St. George's Day falls before Easter, the saint's feast is not celebrated on 23 April by the Christian congregation, yet tens

of thousands of pilgrims still visit the monastery because they have no knowledge of the Christian calendar. (Couroucli, 2012 in Albera&Couroucli, 2012:127)²⁴¹

b) Liminal stage

According to Turner, liminal phase fulfills threshold function and it serves as an individual's temporary disunion from fixed social structures grants an individual not only the ambivalent social status but frees him or her from any law, norm or rule of social conduct resulting in status which is by nature ambivalent and obscure. The individual occupies a gap between the worlds and becomes a sort of conceptual medium between alternative structures of "here" and "there". Thus, the individual is no more under the influence of the effects of "preceding" and "future" statuses and finds himself in an undefined position, awaiting for the realization of reconstructed and renewed cultural models and paradigms. Eliade²⁴² also states that the thresholds separate the two spaces, distance between two modes of being, the profane and the religious. The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds-and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible. Similarly at Aya Yorgi, though not officially defined, the pilgrims determine a starting point where the pilgrimage starts. It is the beginning of the 1 km-long challengingly steep path that combines the circus (Lunapark Meydanı) and the monastery up on the hill. This path (Aya Yorgi yolu) functions as a real threshold between profane (circus) and sacred (Aya Yorgi church). It is the path which the shepherd in the legend of Aya Yorgi is believed to have climbed in order to excavate the soil to bring up the holy icon of St George. This is the where I believe the beginning of the threshold is and obviously liminality is manifested.

- Walking towards the Shrine

Walking as a ritual practice towards the pilgrimage sites is rooted in thousands of years of tradition. The person who decides to walk for hours days, weeks, or months, - along the way- opens doors to the long journey within. Motivated by deeply held beliefs, or seeking some forms of healing, many of these solo or group pilgrims share a desire for a challenging walking experience. Walking has also become an important form of

²⁴¹ Ibid

²⁴² ibid

commemorative practice in historic pilgrimages (Markwell et al. 2004²⁴³; Plate 2006²⁴⁴; Slavin 2003²⁴⁵). During this form of peripatetic commemoration, participants are encouraged to inhabit the world of the past, to follow in the footsteps of those that came before, to see the world as they saw it, and to “feel what they felt” thus generating experiential and multisensory forms of historical knowledge (Schwenkel 2006)²⁴⁶. These practices create a particular kind of historical engagement linked to space, feeling, and action.

Most of the devoted pilgrims reject to speak and they remain silent all along the path which might be a reference to the legend of Aya Yorgi as the shepherd climbed the path silently; by listening to the sounds of the bells to determine the exact place where the icon was buried. However, only the local Rums are precisely aware of the legend and link with it. Others, on the other hand carry out this ritual unknowingly, without questioning, only accepting and obeying as it is believed to be a part of the pilgrimage. Despite the crowd, a striking silence prevails all along way. Telling from the moves of their lips they silently utter vows and make wishes. There is also a common belief that a true pilgrim must never look back while walking up. Otherwise the prayers wouldn't be granted if they turn or look back. This symbolic prohibition not to look back while going up is frequently featured in Old Testament, Sumerian, Babylonian and Greek myths. This type of prohibition on looking back is typical for the moment of separation: as with the wife of Lot²⁴⁷ from Sodom, and in Modern Greek folklore the bride when leaving the parents. The person who is looking back still has a tie with what is lying behind him; the prohibition therefore is a radical cut with all connections with the past. It is, to use the terminology of Van Gennep, a typical rite of separation. By not looking back the person definitely cut through all

²⁴³ Markwell, Kevin, Deborah Stevenson, and David Rowe (2004). Footsteps and Memories: Interpreting an Australian Urban Landscape through Thematic Walking Tours. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 10(5):457–473.

²⁴⁴ Plate, Liedeke (2006) Walking in Virginia Woolf's Footsteps: Performing Cultural Memory. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 9(1):101–120.

²⁴⁵ Slavin, Sean (2003) Walking as Spiritual Practice: The Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. *Body and Society* 9(3):1.

²⁴⁶ Schwenkel, Christina (2006) Recombinant History: Transnational Practices of Memory and Knowledge Production in Contemporary Vietnam. *Cultural Anthropology* 21(1):3–30.

²⁴⁷ The narrative of Lot's wife begins in Genesis 19 after two angels arrived in Sodom, at eventide, and were invited to spend the night at Lot's home. As dawn was breaking, Lot's visiting angels urged him to get his family and flee, so as to avoid being caught in the impending disaster for the iniquity of the city. Lot delayed, so the angels took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and his daughters and brought them out of the city. The command was given, "Flee for your life! Do not look behind you, nor stop anywhere in the Plain; flee to the hills, lest you be swept away." [1]:465 Lot objected to the idea of fleeing to the hills and requested safe haven at a little town nearby. The request was granted and the town became known as Zoar. Traveling behind her husband, Lot's wife looked back, and became a pillar of salt

connections with their past. It seems that this prohibition serves as a very meaningful way for total segregation and separation from previous selfness. Going forward with the aim of transition from their present status into a new one requires symbolic abandon of everything behind without looking back again, hoping to turn into a new being.

Silence is important from different perspectives, according to the pilgrims of Aya Yorgi. Apart from intensifying the awareness of the surroundings, it locks other participants out and gives a space for own reflections. For example ‘I was more receptive’ one pilgrim said. The shared silence makes it legitimate not to talk, but to have this time for them with the divine and be able to reflect and to go through what they need. It is fascinating to see how the pilgrims manage to stay quiet. The silence is often, but not always, preceded by a short reflection or some words of meditation. Many pilgrims do not focus on the words; instead, they see the silence as a moment to reflect on their own existential questions.

They say that we must climb without talking. It makes sense. You focus on your prayers and your inner voice. We, as Turkish people, find it difficult to keep our mouth closed (laughing). But this walk gives us an opportunity to practice to shut up for a while at least (a female pilgrim in her 40s)

Silence is also required in other church and mosque activities. The pilgrims themselves mention three reasons for their liking of silence: it gives them the opportunity to experience nature, time to think and a chance to be non-social.

It would be great to listen to the sound of the nature without talking. But unfortunately it is very crowded and there are people who don't respect the prohibition of talking. I will come again but not on the feast day just to walk this path alone. (A female pilgrim in her 40s)

To be silent by oneself could be a sign of loneliness. The silent walk as a moment for individual reflections is a fundamental element of this pilgrim spirituality. The silence gives people permission to reflect, to formulate their own theology (how to interpret the words of meditation) and their own praxis (what to do in life). This individualized spirituality goes hand in hand with the most secular-rational and self-expression values (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005)²⁴⁸. Spirituality comes from within; it is an individual search and an individual answer, each person is his or her own authority according to emotions, reflections and experiences. On the other hand, silence makes the crowd community too, being a lone, but feeling in a community, in a collective manner. Pilgrims of Aya Yorgi

²⁴⁸ Inglehart, Ronald and Christian Welzel. (2005). *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy*. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

frequently underlines the fact that they have private religiosity: 'I'm a Muslim in my own personal way' said a pilgrim.

One of the customs most associated with the liminal stage is climbing barefoot. Shepherd who found the icon in the legend was barefoot too. The climb may be easier than in the past but only by a small amount. Less people complete the rounds or do the climb barefoot but they still have to complete the walk. There is no mechanical assistance. It still provides people with an authentic and challenging experience. Only a small minority now undertake this challenge. It is still possible to find people doing it because they feel it is in the spirit of the pilgrimage.

"In Iraq we make vows like this. I mean walking barefoot to the shrines. We call it ndr. I said to myself if I can climb this path barefoot, God will hear my voice. I have been here in Istanbul for two year waiting for the visa to Australia. We are getting tired. I am asking Mar Gewargos (St George) to see my situation and speed up my visa process" (An Iraqi Assyrian refugee boy in his early 20s).

"This is how it is meant to be. You must suffer to make your wishes come true. It is not easy but I challenge it." (A female pilgrim from Istanbul in her 30s).

- **Leaving ex-votos**

- i. **Tying rags**

Tying rags to holy objects or trees is 'a very old 'custom which is still to be found all over the near and Middle East. Rags are fastened on trees, on the iron bars of windows of sanctuaries, on the door-handles of the tomb. These rags are sometimes so numerous that every inch of the iron bars of the windows and every twig of a sacred tree which can easily be reached are filled with them. They are generally fastened by visitors with one of the following intentions: 1. as a sign of having visited the makam and fulfilled the religious duties. 2. The piece of rag acts as a reminder to the well not to forget, the visitor and his wishes. According to Tawfiq Canaan in his detailed study of Palestinian "folk religion" (1980 p. 122)²⁴⁹ the fundamental principle at the base of these two ideas is what we call "contact magic." That is to say everything which has been in contact with somebody or has belonged to him will never completely lose its relation to this person. Thus these pieces of cloth always keep their connection with the person from whom they came. They represent him, and anything done to them will happen to their owner. They represent the visitor,

²⁴⁹ Canaan, Tawfiq (1980 [1927] *Mohammedan saints and sanctuaries in Palestine*. Ariel Publishing House: Jerusalem Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/MohammedanSaintsAndSanctuariesInPalestine>

reminding the holy man of the visit performed, imploring help and begging for cure. Through their direct contact for a long period with the holy place they get some of the power of the *wali or saint*, which is transmitted to the person from whom they come and to the one who carries them. This practiced belief is well established in Turkish folklore and we can still see leaving portions of clothing upon a sacred tree or bush, or a tree or bush, or adjacent to, a sacred well etc is a cross cultural practice. The object of this rite is generally the attainment of some wish, or the granting of some prayer or simple offerings or left with the intention of retaining a contact with the holy place.



Picture 75 Rags tied on a tree photo by the author 2017

ii. Strings

Pilgrims at Aya Yorgi in the liminal stage, apart from the rags, tie strings from their hair or even plastic sheets on the bushes on the way up to the church. Vast majority of the pilgrims tie threads on bushes and trees at the bottom of the hill and they unreel them as they climb the path. Threads symbolize the destiny of a person. It is believed that the destiny might be strapped like a bobbin of thread and symbolically it is possible to undo the blockage in the

faith by unreeling the thread which is a type of magical practice that aims to combat the problem by using the principle of contrast to produce effects different from the problem.



Picture 61 Strings unreeled on the slope of Aya Yorgi photo by the author 2016

iii. In the church

In the ongoing luminal stage pilgrims wait in the line between the metal barricades set up by the police²⁵⁰ one day before in order to enter the church. The visitors are expected to watch the modesty in their dressings. Sleeveless tops or miniskirts or shorts are not allowed. Once a young girl who was warned by the wardens to cover her bare legs, was complaining out loud that she didn't go to mosques because of outfit regulations and she was frustrated to see similar regulations in a church. Once they enter the church there are a series of rituals waiting for the pilgrims:

²⁵⁰Aya Yorgi church officials call for police assistance for security reasons which may result from congestion. Tens of male and female police are shifting throughout the day around the church.



Picture 62 The line in front the Church Photo by the author 2017



Picture 63 Regulation of entry photo by the author 2015

iv. **Lighting candles:**

Light is everywhere the symbol of joy and of life-giving power, as darkness is of death and destruction. Fire, an impressive element in worship has been used in many religions and spiritualities. Candles, as a kind of light source, are used all over the world in religious ceremonies as explained by "The presence of light as the manifestation of the holy spans multiple religions. Light, through its presence or absence, sets apart the sacred from the profane". Candles and oil lamps are lit on the graves of saints or other shrines by Christians as well as Muslims in Turkey in general while making a vow, personal praying or as a regular commitment to the saint as a result of a vow. In the Muslim shrines (turbes) it is strictly banned by regulations and the plaques posted in various sanctuaries forbid the lighting of candles along side with the offering of votive objects, and related devotional activities in these places as they are considered as superstitious folk practices.

v. **Writing Prayers**

After the candle lighting in the narthex with the assistance of the wardens, they proceed in the church. The gestures give away the religion of the pilgrims. Christians cross themselves or kneel in front the icons reciting prayers. Muslims on the other hand, after having a quick glance at the icons and the interiors walls of the church, sit on the narrow pews and mostly pray silently. It is also clear from the moves of their lips that they recite memorized verses from Quran (*fatihah*²⁵¹ and so on). Then they take out pieces of papers and pens from their handbags in order to write their wishes and put in the "wish box" specially designated for it. This wish box relatively small for such number of wishes therefore the wardens empty it out several times during the feast day in order open a space for these endless wish papers

²⁵¹ **Fātiḥah**, also called **Fātiḥat Al-kitāb**, the "opening" or first chapter (*sūrah*) of the Muslim book of divine revelation, the Qur'ān; In contrast to the other *sūrahs*, which are usually narratives or exhortations delivered by God, the seven verses of the *fātiḥah* form a short devotional prayer addressed to God, and in oral recitation are ended with the word *amīn* ("amen"). The *fātiḥah* has acquired broad ceremonial usage in Islām: it introduces each ritual bowing (*rak'ah*) in the five daily prayers (*ṣalāt*); it is recited at all Muslim sanctuaries; validates important resolutions; appears frequently on amulets, and is recited for the dead. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/fatihah>



Picture 64. Wishes on papers in wishes box at Aya Yorgi pilgrimage (photo by the author 2015)

3.7. A closer look at the petitionary and intercessory prayers at Aya Yorgi

Prayer seems to be a prominent feature of every religion. When people pray, they attempt to communicate with special persons or entities, such as a God or gods, or dead relatives, or exemplary human beings who are believed to occupy some special status. People pray for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes people pray in order to give thanks, sometimes to praise, sometimes to apologize and seek forgiveness, and sometimes to ask for things. Prayer has a number of traditional communicative functions in monotheistic religions. These include *Invocation, Praise, Devotion/Worship/Adoration, Thanksgiving, Benediction or Blessing, Penitence, Remonstrative prayer of Complaint, Dedication, and Contemplative, Meditative prayer, Petitionary and Intercessory prayer* (Kesler, 2008²⁵²; Downes, 2014)²⁵³. Petitionary prayer is one of the most widespread expressions of religious behavior that involves some kind of request for oneself. Religious believers all over the world attempt to engage in interactions with gods, spirits, witches, dead ancestors

²⁵² Kessler, Arnold. (2008). Heartwork: A Loving Meditation on Various Forms of Prayer. Reterived from <http://whosoever.org/v3i3/heartwork.html>

²⁵³ Downes, William. (2014). Prayer as a Cognitive Register retrieved from <http://www.williamdownes.co.uk/upload/Prayer%20as%20a%20Cognitive%20Register%20FINAL%2022-March-2014.pdf>

and other supernatural beings (Zaleski, 1996)²⁵⁴, asking them to intervene on their behalf and bring safety, good fortune (or bad fortune for others), cure from illness, and many other goods. Intercessory prayer, on the other hand, is the act of praying for other people. The Greek noun, “enteuxus” in the Bible is the word for “intercession.” It primarily denotes a “meeting with,” a conversation or petition rendered on the behalf of others. “Intercessory prayer,” then, is seeking the presence and audience of God in another’s stead (Argyle, 2000 p. 102)²⁵⁵.

Churches are the places where many different devotional gestures are practiced. In many Catholic churches it is possible to encounter devotional notebooks where the visitors write their prayers. Some visitors on the other hand note down their prayers on slips of papers and give them to priests to be read or slide them under the statues with the desire of being more intimate and proximate to the divine beings (God, the Virgin Mary, the saints). (Marcoin, 1993 p 6)²⁵⁶. These votive writings serve as a mode of communication between the believers and the sacred figures (Dromzée, 2005 p 8)²⁵⁷. Scholars such as Lamireu (2009)²⁵⁸ conducted ethnography of the contemporary practices of votive writing within catholic places of worship of Paris mainly in churches, places of pilgrimage and a chapel of an airport. Benoit Flichet (2009)²⁵⁹ carried out a more detailed analysis of the devotional notebook in St Antoine church in Istanbul. He scanned a huge corpus of votive writings between the years of 1996 and 2009. However in Aya Yorgi church of Büyükdada there is not such a notebook through which we can access systematical data. The ones whose intentions are to transmit their written prayers to the priest in order for him to read and pray on behalf of them, are supposed write them on the slips of paper and put them in the wish box (*dilek kutusu*). This locked box is the “official” box where the prayers are accumulated and taken into consideration by the clergy. In the interview with one of the priests (*papaz efendi*) he reported that “after the long a tiring pilgrimage day they open the boxes, read the prayers carefully and pray for the owners of these votive writings. As it is

²⁵⁴ Zaleski, Carol. (1996). *The Life of the World to Come: Near-Death Experience and Christian Hope*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press

²⁵⁵ Argyle, Micheal. (2000). *Psychology and Religion: An Introduction 1st Edition*: Routledge : London.

²⁵⁶ Marcoin, Francis. (1993). Écritures ordinaires. *Bulletin des bibliothèques de France* [en ligne], n° 3, Disponible sur le Web : <http://bbf.enssib.fr/consulter/bbf-1994-03-0094-012>>. ISSN 1292-8399

²⁵⁷ Dromzée, C, Brevot. (2005) « Cher saint Antoine... », *Communication*, Vol. 23/2 <http://communication.revues.org/4074> ; DOI : 10.4000/communication

²⁵⁸ Lamireau Micheal, C. (2009). La poursuite du divin. Écritures votives des lieux de culte catholiques parisiens. *Social Anthropology and ethnology*. EHESS 2009. French. <tel-01136637>

²⁵⁹ Flichet, Benoit. (2014). Une ethnographie de l'indifférence. Les écritures votives de l'église Saint Antoine à Istanbul », *Ethnologie française*, 2014/2 Vol. 44, p. 319-330

impossible to save these papers, the most appropriate way to efface them is to burn them all". Despite my persistent requests, he rejected to share these papers with me to avoid "betraying the confidence of the pilgrims". On the other side, at Aya Yorgi as well, many pilgrims wrap and tuck their votive writings into the unseen parts of the church like behind the icons, under the chairs or in the hollows of the wall, with the desire of being more intimate and proximate to the saint-God as Marcoin (1993)²⁶⁰ states or to make their messages long lasting and durable. Even on the trees way up to the church several written prayers are attached. Being not allowed to reach all the written prayers in the wish box and the absence of a prayer corpus have limited the quantity of data. Whereas, trying to be invisible, I collected totally 50 papers (or piece of napkins), either from the trees or sneaking inside the church, diving behind the icons and under the chairs. The pilgrims who witnessed what I was doing warned me strictly saying that I was committing a big sin (Günah). Some even threatened me denouncing me to the priest (papaz efendi). This reaction proved how serious and strong the faith and motives of the pilgrims were. With the papers I gathered from the field I tried to create my own corpus of prayers.

The huge congestion of Muslim pilgrims in a Christian space and event frequently grabs the attention of Turkish media. Especially for the past ten years, Aya Yorgi day has become very popular and begun to be portrayed as an important folk event in the evening news on TV on the 23rd of April and the following day newspapers²⁶¹. This "odd ritual" and ritual practices are often considered as "superstition" "meaningless" (*hurafe, boş inanç, anlamsız*) and criticized by the orthodox Muslim clergy stating that a true Muslim should only pray God and seek for his mercy directly without any mediator. but my aim here is to ask the most curious and pragmatic question? What are the pilgrims praying for and how? In order to identify this question I targeted to study the votive writings of the pilgrims and while doing this I decided on four major categories. 1) Direction (to whom the prayers are addressed) 2) Need (the reasons they pray) 3) Petitionary & intercessory (for whom they pray), 4) Style and the form of the prayers (length, tenses used and wordings).

²⁶⁰ Ibid

²⁶¹ Hurafe kilise Aya Yorgi <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4odWQYRvAQ>; Büyükada Hurafe günü <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4odWQYRvAQ>

3.7.1. Direction

Out of 50 papers it is seen that 17 pilgrims directly address God using the Turco-Islamic term for God “Allahım” and “Ya Rabbim”. 3 of them address Aya Yorgi (St George) and in the rest 30 papers, the addressee (direction) is not specified. In one prayer, it doesn’t directly address God whereas the compound word “inshallah” is frequently uttered.

Prayer 1. “Allahım (My Allah)!. Ordain us health, happiness and peace. Let me enter a good university and a good department. Ordain us a long life. To all my beloved ones”

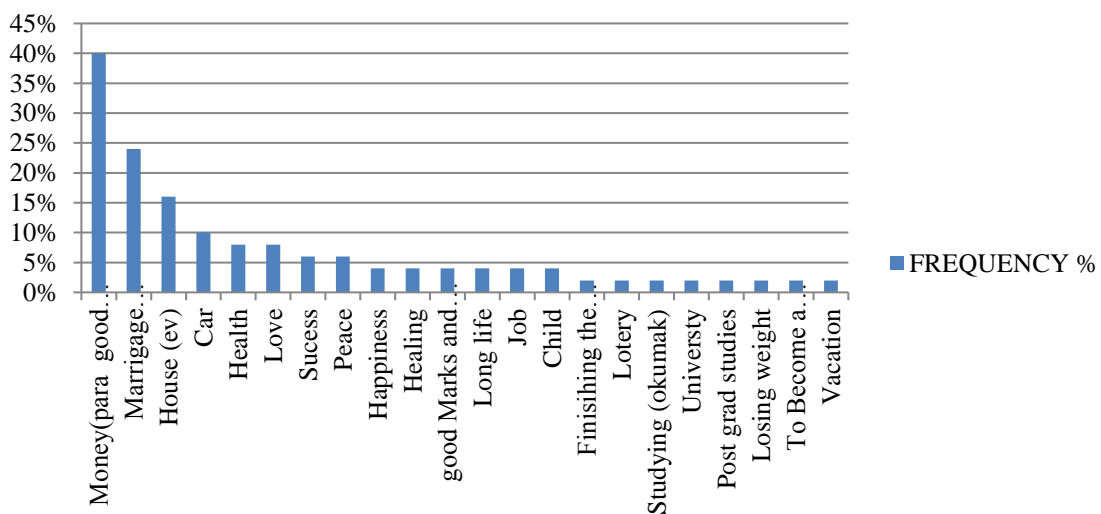
Prayer 2. “Aziz Yorgi! (Aya Yorgi) Let me come here again with good news next year. Give a miracoulous healing and mental health to my daughter Defne. Money and hapiness. Luck (baht), wealth and success. We want to be proud of her”

Prayer 3.“Lucky marriage and good fortune”

Prayer 4. I would get takdir (Honor degree) at school İnşallah. I would enter Marmara or Mimar Sinan University İnşallah. My family would be disembarrassed İnshallah. My sister Seher (seher ablam) would buy a house İnşallah. We, as well, would buy a car and a house İnşallah. I would be able to find a rich husband with a car and a house İnşallah

Inşallah is an Arabic expression that means "God willing," or "if God wills it." It is a conjunction of the Arabic word for God (Allah) and the Arabic words for his will. İnşallah is one of the most common expressions, or verbal appendages, in the Arab world and beyond it: Persian, Turkish and Urdu speakers, among others, use the expression liberally. Although it's been claimed to be an essentially Islamic expression it is uttered by Christians as well. ("Do not say of anything, 'I will do it tomorrow,' without adding, 'If God wills,'" one reads in the Koran, surah 18, verse 24).

3.7.2. Need



Praying for material purposes is a global phenomenon. As it is shown in the chart above, the most frequent need for prayers that is repeated 20 times in 50 papers (%40) is “money”(and good income). Marriage (Spouse, husband *eş, koca, baht, kısmet*) is the second highest demand with %24 frequency. The rest of the needs are house, car, paying off the debts (*borç*), lottery, studying (*okumak*), health, happiness , healing, success ,university, good marks and school reports, long life, post grad studies, peace, losing weight, love, to become a celebrity, a good job, child (to be fertile) and vacation

Prayer 5. “Allahım! Give me money, health and peace. A long life without debts and overweight”

Prayer 6. “Money and happiness to all my family members!”

Prayer 7. “Allahım (My God). You give me, my sister Elif and Suzan a clean and well-behaved husband. Give us a healthy life and a prosperous household. Let us be peaceful. Let us buy a car. Let my marriage be good. And let it happen quickly”

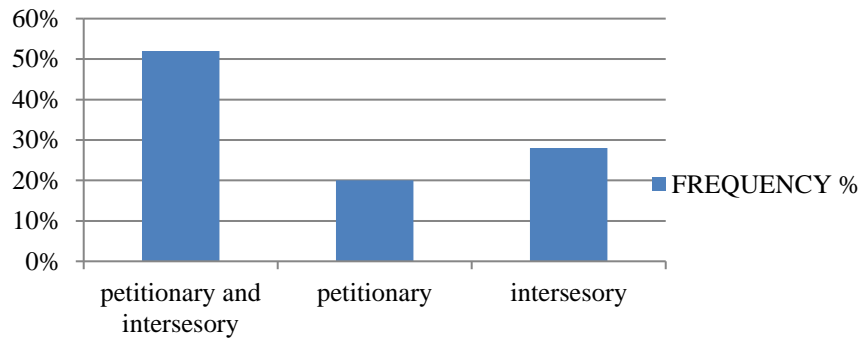
Prayer 8. “Let my music album reach large masses. Let me become an acclaimed celebrity. Let me earn good amount of money in good places. May my relationship with Mehmet last for a life time. Let him love me to death. May his eyes not see anyone but me. Let him be my lifetime husband!”

Besides the above mentioned “de facto” needs, there are two very personalized and specific prayers that are out of the categories in the chart above.

Prayer 9. “My Allah!! I am again in front of your gate. Till today you have never sent me back empty handed. Thank you my Allah. Please show the proper way to my husband (Can-his name). Keep him away from the women, alcohol and drugs. Send me a miracle. May my husband never desire to see Gülcan’s face or hear her voice again. (Gülcan the name of the woman). May he hate that woman. Turn my husband’s mind, heart and face to me. And may this Gülcan disappear”

Prayer 10. “May Erkan apologize Başak for what he did to her.. Let him understand his faults”

3.7.3. Petitionary&Intercessory Prayers



Frequency of prayer types

Deciding on which prayer is petitionary and which is intercessory is a complicated task as most of the prayers intersect and include both. After having completed the transcription of the texts I read through them and structured three columns for the classification. I considered the prayers as petitionary whose subject or object refer to “I” or “me” only (*ben, bana, beni* in Turkish) or telegraphic prayers where there is no verb and subject. And I called the prayers in which only “others” are mentioned as intercessory. However as it is shown in the diagram above, in the majority of the cases, the prayers include both. They not only pray for themselves but also their kids (*evlat, çocuk*), husband (*koca, eş*) parents (*anne, baba*), siblings (*abla, ağabey, kardeş*), friends (*arkadaş*) and relatives, or acquaintances.

Prayer 11. “Lütfen Allahım (Please, My God) let **me** get married to Çağan very soon. May he be always inlove with me. Let me do Phd and act in a popular tv series”

Prayer 12. “Health, happines, peace and good income to all my children.”

Prayer 13. “I wish (diliyorum) health to **me**, to my mother, my children and the other members of my family. I wish money. I want my son Berk to enter Middle East Technical University. I want my son Sarp to continue his studies and become a happy musician or a basketball player. I wish a good income for Selahaddin Ayyıldız. Let him be rich. For Rıza Ayyılsız Money+ peace+health. Let the baby of Kenan Ayyıldız be healthy. For Civan Money+health+peace”

Prayer 14. “For **me**, a good husband and money, love and a baby. For my Semanur a good school and bright future and success. For Oktay, marriage, job, Money and a car.. Health for my parents”

3.7.4. Style

The dominant presence of women in the Aya Yorgi day and the lexical indicators in the texts show that the prayers are mostly written by females. Pragmatic usage of the language also supports the impression that the prayers belong to females. While asking for a spouse, the term *koca* (husband) is frequently featured and the names mentioned about whom they want to get married to are masculine. When asking for a brand new house or a happy marriage the term “*yuva*” is uttered in the prayers. The word “*yuva*” (nest) which a feminine metaphor and symbolizes marriage and house. There is even a well known Turkish idiom “*Yuvayı dişi kuş yapar*” (It is the female bird that makes the nest). In a couple of cases the pilgrims even sign their names in the prayer. As in the following example:

Prayer 14. Me, namely *Selma Karasu*. You really forgot us *yani*☺²⁶² Please ley my life be beautiful. Money..money..money.. for the education of my children and a peaceful life Money Money Money.. Let it be what it good for my husband.. money to Saadet.. a happy *yuva* (house) for Dilan..Let Başak become a doctor

Petitionary prayer normally has an overt invocation and often said to be the primitive form of prayer. Petitions are realized in two ways, by the use of the imperative sentence type or by a performative formula containing one of a set of verbs of supplication: “beg”, “beseech”, “implore”, etc. The two ways can appear together, as in “Grant, we beseech thee...” (Downes, 1998). The reason for the use of imperatives, Phillip’s (1981:121) claim that petitionary prayer is the expression of speaker’s desires “When deep religious believers pray for something, they are not so much asking God to bring this about, but in a way telling Him of the strength of their desires” by using imperatives. In the prayers of the pilgrims imperatives are frequently applied. Making a verb imperative in Turkish for the second singular person (**sen**), is the same as it is done in English. Just plain verb is used without any suffix or change. When you want to order something to a single person listening to you, you just say the plain verb. As observed in the prayers imperative form of *ver-mek*(to give) *ver!* (give!) is utilized very often.

Prayer 15.“Özgür filiz kuluna para ver hayırlı rız²⁶³k ver.”

²⁶²Humorous informal register is also observed. As in the example above, the pilgrim reproaches the divine figure in a humoristic way “You forgot us” and a smiley. “*Bizi unuttun yani!!*” is a frequent utterance in Turkish oral that is used when the speaker reproaches about being neglected or ignored.

²⁶³ Rızık (rizq رزق in Arabic) The Arabic word for sustenance, provision, gift from God or basically daily bread. It is ordinarily considered as meaning food and drink, or material wealth. It, however, has a much broader meaning (see Mert, 2005). It stands for any beneficence of Allah that is ongoing either in this life, or

(Give money and good rızık to your servant Özgür Filiz)

Prayer 16. “Allah’ım evimin içindekileri.....²⁶⁴güven ver. Bol para ver rızık ver”

(My Allah. Give confidence..... to the ones in my house. Give a lot of money and rızık)

Prayer 17. “Kız kardeşimin oğluna sağlık ver. Çok para ver. Şifa ver Ya Rabbim!”

(Give health to the son of my sister. Give a lot of money. Give healing My Rab (God)

The other imperative form observed in the prayers for second singular is *nasip et*. Its a compound verb with the combination of *nasip* and the turkish auxiliary verb *et-mek* (nasip et-mek). Nasip (also spelled Nasib or Nasip) (Arabic: نصيب (is an Arabic term used in many languages including Persian and Turkish ,which means destiny or fate .Thus *nasip et* may roughly be translated as “to predestinate or ordain”

Prayer 19. Allah’ım sen bize sağlık mutluluk huzur **nasip et**. Güzel okul kazanayım güzel bölüm. Bize uzun ömür **nasip et**. Tüm sevdiklerime..

(My Allah! Ordain us health, happiness and peace. Let me enter an good university and a good department.. Ordain us a long life. To all my beloved ones)

On the other hand, to make third person imperative (*The Third Person let him, her*) the third person singular adds **-sin** directly to the verb stem and the third person plural adds **-sinler** directly to the verb stem(in accordance to vowel harmony rule in Turkish laguage - **sin/-sın/-sün/-sun** and its plural forms **-sinler/-sınlar/-sünler/-sunlar**)

Prayer 20. “Çocuğum başarılı olarak okuyup iyi bir meslek sahibi olsun”

(Let my child study succesfully and have a good job)

Prayer 21. Serkan okusun güzel yerlere gelsin.

(Let Serkan study and reach a good statue in his life.)

Prayer 22 Başak doktor olsun

(Let Başak become a doctor)

the life hereafter. It is featured 112 times in Holy Qur’an. “[He] who made for you the earth a bed [spread out] and the sky a ceiling and sent down from the sky, rain and brought forth thereby fruits as provision (rizq) for you. So do not attribute to Allah equals while you know [that there is nothing similar to Him].” Surat al Baqara:22

²⁶⁴Elligible statement

The imperative in the first person singular adds the suffix **(y)ayım/- (y)eyim**, (as examples: **alayım** *let me buy*, **bekleyeyim** *let me wait*). The first person plural adds **(y)alım/- (y)elim**. Vowel harmony operates on the imperative.

Prayer 23. “Herkes tarafından sevilen tanınan bir sanatçı olayım”

(Let me become a singer who is known and loved by everybody)

Prayer 24. “Hepimiz mutlu ve huzurlu yaşayalım, ev alalım bu yıl”

(Let us all live happily and peacefully, let us buy a house this year)

I observed that majority of the pilgrims prefer writing their prayers on the pilgrimage day inside the church, rather than preparing them in advance. Mostly they don’t have proper papers so they write on whatever they find: tissues, receipts, or they even tear papers from the Bibles distributed by the evangelical missionaries. The ones who don’t have pens borrow from others. In such a rush they write the prayers very quickly or mostly they even scrawl illegible prayers. One needs to carefully analyze the scripts. Consequently the prayers are generally short or often telegraphic. Only words without verbal statements.

Prayer: 26 .Evlilik. Kısmet.

(Marriage, Fortune)

I also encountered two “less serious” or “smile raiser” type of prayers. It shows that some of the visitors ridiculed the event or didn’t take it as serious as the rest of the pilgrims did.

Prayer: 27.” Kısır yemek sevap sayılsın ☺”

(Let eating kısır (Turkish tabboule) be considered as a good deed)

Prayer: 28. “Beşiktaş şampiyon olsun”

(Let Beşiktaş become the champion)

The content analysis shows that pilgrims often address God (ALLAH) just as in a typical Muslim prayer though some direct their prayers to St George (Aya yorgi). However in majority of the prayers analyzed so far, the addressee is not mentioned. This can be interpreted that the votive pilgrims, most of whom are Muslims remain silent in terms of addressing as they do not know whom to direct their prayers in a Christian church. In my opinion by omitting the addressee as a strategy (Allah or Aya Yorgi) they avoid the

“possible risk” of committing *shirk*²⁶⁵ unknowingly. The aim for the prayers are generally for material needs such as money, house etc. Marriage and finding a spouse is another frequent demand of the female pilgrims. They not only pray for their own good but also for the sake of others thus prayers consists both petitionary and intercessory motifs. Stylistics analysis reveals that the prayer statements are structured with imperative form in Turkish which also supports the findings of Downes (2014)²⁶⁶. In terms of wording, Turco-Islamic lexical items are used which makes the prayers sound like more Islam oriented. Many will return later to thank St. George, who heard their prayer and granted their desire, bringing the indispensable oil for his vigil lamp. You hear with passion how he healed this person’s son, how another became a mother after being barren for many years, how a third acquired a house, etc.

c) Post-Liminal stage : What do they eat? Pilgrims’s Foodways



Picture 6576. Pilgrim’s food photo by the author 2016

On the pilgrimage day, food and eating behaviors turn out to be a major means of pilgrims’ segregating themselves from the others. This segregation is mostly related with their taste and capabilities to afford but it hinders the possible construction of *communitas*. Here, I

²⁶⁵ **Shirk**, (Arabic: “making a partner [of someone]”), in [Islām](#), [idolatry](#), [polytheism](#), and the association of God with other deities. Encyclopædia Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/topic/shirk> access Date: May 29, 2018

²⁶⁶ Ibid

would like to refer to the distinction model of Pierre Bourdieu²⁶⁷. With his outstanding book “Distinction,” published in 1979, Bourdieu set out to show the social logic of taste: how admiration for art, appreciation of music, even taste in food, came about for different groups. Bourdieu rejects the traditional notion that “tastes” (that is, consumer preferences) are the result of innate, individualistic choices of the human intellect. He argues that tastes are socially conditioned and that the objects of consumer choice reflect a symbolic hierarchy that is determined and maintained by the socially dominant in order to enforce their distance or distinction from other classes of society. Thus, for Bourdieu, taste becomes a “social weapon” that defines and marks off the high from the low, the sacred from the profane, and the “legitimate” from the “illegitimate. Bourdieu’s distinction model contradicts the notion of *communitas* in pilgrim’s process put forward by Victor and Edith Turner. For the Turners, pilgrimages are spaces where people exist without the usual constraints imposed by modern social structures. Indeed, for them pilgrimage is a space which allows people to step out of normal everyday ruled and regulated existence.

Büyükada is well known for its gastronomical richness: from a wide range of expensive fish restaurants to relatively affordable kebab houses. However within the limits of ritual space–Lunapark square and Aya Yorgi church, the options for food decrease. There are basically two food corners. One on Lunapark square which is less chic even can be counted as shabby and the other is the acclaimed Yücestepe Kır Gazinosu located on the summit behind the church which has been servicing for over half a century. The prices are quite high but it offers its clients a matchless sea view and a rich menu. However, a long side with these two options, only temporarily for the feast day, numerous quick food stalls help the pilgrims assuage their hunger: meatball grill sandwiches, simits, toasts, fruit salads and so on. However many pilgrims bring their own food that they prepare one day before. They sit on the rocks around the church; have a kind of potluck, sharing their lunch with their friends. I was also invited by some of them to join in. The pilgrims who can afford to have a “proper meal” with non-soft drinks (wine, beer and raki) eat in Yücestepe Kır Gazinosu behind the church after waiting in the long queues paying sometimes more than 200liras for two persons that is counted as quite expensive (50 euros in 2016).

²⁶⁷ Bourdieu, Pierre. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. R. Nice, transl. Harvard University Press



Picture 66 Pilgrims' food on Instagram Post

In order to conclude this in dept analysis of Aya Yorgi and proceed to Al Batiyeh, let us have another look at the photo analysis on Instagram one more time to see what pilgrims shared on the feast day. The feast of Aya Yorgi posts does not show any negative or denying attitude. It is young women`s favorite section (maybe because they look beautiful with the flower diadems on their heads) but not only. Mature women as well seem keen on posting pictures with practices and participation in Aya Yorgi`s feast (see pictures from annex 7). Posts on the 23th of April are visibly more numerous than posts on the 24th of September. It`s 23 Nisan feast which has a lot of significance: National Sovereignty and Children`s Day in Turkey but also Saint George`s Celebration. People climb up the hill to Aya Yorgi Church while they stretch colored threads and tie up colored ribbons in the trees. They also light colored candles on a rock wall and put sugar cubes for their granted wishes. Each color has a special meaning. The visual result is extremely impressive. Beautiful pictures of a beautiful feast setting and, most important, happy faces, people who obviously enjoy everything. Comments talk about a beautiful day, about wishes about faith, prayers and respect for all religions. Picture number 21 in annex 7 displays a prayer note which is very touching firstly because the one who writes the prayer is doing this not for him or her, but for someone else`s health, probably a child. Secondly, the prayer is unusual and touching because it is addressed to the creator and it says: “I am praying in various languages and various religions. I don`t know which one you accept. Please hear me”. The note is written in Turkish and shows a great deal of acceptance to all religions in the world like many other pictures from Aya Yorgi. The interesting part is that the prayer

is not addressed to Aya Yorgi (although it's his feast) but to the creator directly meaning that Aya Yorgi's feast opens a channel to the divinity in general. Posting on Instagram might also mean a kind of testimony for pilgrims. A pilgrim who needs this testimony again can go for a virtual pilgrimage through his/her account, sitting in his/her armchair



Picture 6777 Posts related to Feast day on Instagram

3.8. Al Batiyeh and Lebanese Shrines: Contesting the Turnerian theory

Turner's theory on pilgrimages as ritual has its strengths and weaknesses, just like any other theory in anthropology. However, the fact that this theory has influenced the study of pilgrimage, not only in anthropology, but also in other disciplines (religion, geography and history) demonstrates its importance. It must be noted that it is the appropriate one to use in the study of pilgrimage as personal and collective transformation. For Turner the essence of pilgrimage is the experience obtained in *Communitas*, the direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities (Turner 1969:131). By experiencing normative *communitas* pilgrims separate from their social structure to be part of a liminoid state that might lead them to experience different transformations. Critics of the Turnerian approach (Eade and Sallnow 2000²⁶⁸; Coleman and Elsner 1995²⁶⁹; Morinis 1992²⁷⁰) coincide on two points. First, pilgrimage is not an isolated process. Therefore, pilgrimage cannot be analyzed as a solitary process with universal characteristics that can fit in a three-stage formula. It is a social, cultural and political phenomenon, varied in content, dynamic and in

²⁶⁸ Ibid

²⁶⁹ Ibid

²⁷⁰ Ibid

constant change due to its connection with the globalized world. According to Morinis, “Pilgrimage is too varied in content to be analyzed as if there were a single, recurrent, common, manifest factor” (1992:9²⁷¹). Pilgrimage is a channel for the movement of culture, knowledge, ideas and representations.

We cannot study pilgrimage without taking into account the global context in which it is embedded. Pilgrimage is “an unruly process whose regularities cannot be contained within the universalist structures of integrative analysis. The diversity of contemporary research into pilgrimage around the world, and across religions and secular boundaries reflects, in part, the wider changes wrought by the interweaving of local and global processes” (Eade 2000: 20).

Secondly, *communitas* does not necessarily equalize the status or roles of the pilgrims, and does not necessarily provide a bond among them. Turner’s theory has been tested in different countries, such as Morocco, Thailand, Nepal, north India, Peru, Sri Lanka, and Bengal, and none of these studies confirms his hypothesis. A leveling *communitas* situation is not always present, and in some cases, pilgrimage is highly individualistic (Morinis 1992)²⁷². Coleman and Elsner also state that *communitas* is only an ideal, and that many pilgrimages involve situations of social division and conflict (1995:202²⁷³). In the case of a Peruvian pilgrimage in the Andes, Sallnow found, that instead of having an idealistic *communitas* experience “a plethora of divisions and interferences contrived to frustrate its realization, sometimes in an apparently gratuitous fashion”(1991:176)²⁷⁴.

Eade and Sallnow, the main critics of Turner’s paradigm, base their point of view on the theoretical criticism others have made of Turner’ approach. They state that “it is the determinism of the model which limits its usefulness, for the necessary alignment of pilgrimage and anti-structure, not only prejudices the complex character of the phenomenon, but also imposes a spurious homogeneity on the practices of pilgrimage unwieldy differing historical and cultural settings” (2000 p.5)²⁷⁵. Therefore, they propose a model to demonstrate “how analytical discussion could be linked to careful ethnographic research of particular cults without recourse to the universalistic claims of structural

²⁷¹ Ibid

²⁷² Ibid

²⁷³ Coleman, Simon and John Elsner (1995) *Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

²⁷⁴ Sallnow, Michael J. (1991). Pilgrimage and Cultural Fracture in the Andes. In *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*. John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, eds. London: Routledge.

²⁷⁵ Ibid

models” (Eade and Sallnow 2000: 13)²⁷⁶. As Kaelber points out, it is a new paradigm that presents pilgrimage as a contested activity with contested knowledge within any retelling of its undertaking. This knowledge might come from different groups: pilgrims, clerics, or heretics, and range from traditional to innovative practices (2002:53)²⁷⁷. For Eade and Sallnow, the place, the sacred centre, the shrine, builds up its ‘religious capital’ through the meaning and ideas projected onto the shrine by shrine officials, pilgrims, and locals. Their meaning and ideas are shaped by their political and religious, national and regional, ethnic and class background.

The shrine can be seen as a “religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meanings and practices...what confers upon a major shrine its essential, universalistic character is [their] capacity to absorb and reflect a multiplicity of religious discourses [and] to be able to offer a variety of clients what each of them desires... Therefore the sacred centre... appears as a vessel into which pilgrims devoutly pour their hopes, prayers, and aspirations” (2000 p.15).

The case of al Batiyeh as a shrine offers more than a personal transformation, more than the experience of *communitas*. The pilgrimage process offers additional elements that have to be taken into account since they provide insightful information for a more in-depth understanding of the process. Therefore, individual visitation to al Batiyeh needs to be seen as a multiplicity of discourses, with multiple meanings and understandings. The discourses usually come from the person: pilgrims, residents, religious specialists etc. as an anthropologist, in order to shuffle these multiple discourses and come up with a distilled argument one needs to apply holistic approach covering the supplementary factors and surroundings of the focus field.

A holistic analysis in anthropology takes the social whole into consideration - the context - that surrounds the phenomena which is the philosophy that functional systems, like a body or a country, can't be explained or understood by looking at the individual pieces; rather, the individual pieces can only be understood by looking at the whole. In order to fulfill the holistic approach of social anthropology, throughout the periodic ethnographic researches that I conducted in Lebanon, I tried to visit as many shrines as possible to be able sketch

²⁷⁶ Ibid

²⁷⁷ Ibid

out the overall picture of the ritual practices in Lebanon so that I would approach my target field: al Batiyeh in a wholesome way.

Christian shrines and monasteries visited: Mar Charbel, Mar Rafka, Hardini, Esthefan Nehme, Mar Antonious Kozhayya, Mar Doumit Notre Dame du Liban, Saidet al Mantara, Hamatura, Mar Jirjes Dbaiye, Mar Elias, Mar Jacob, Mar Jirjes Batroun, Mar Jirjes Bteghrine, Mar Jirjes Akoura, Saidat al Nouriye, Saidat al Hosn

Muslim mosques and shrines visited : Khodr Mosque Jbeil, Maqam al Khodr Mosque Beirut, Khodr Maqam Sarafand, Abou Amr al-Rahman al-Uza'i, Maqam Nebi Younes, Maqam Nebi Omran

One perspective from which to understand shrine pilgrimages-ziyarat through Christian-Muslim relations is to analyze beliefs and practices shared by Christians and Muslims in a particular culture. The similarities in such beliefs and practices may be attributed to a number of factors, including their independent development to address universal human needs, the common theological and cultural foundations of Christianity and Islam, and the processes of cultural diffusion. Whatever their diverse origins such common practices and beliefs constitute elements of shared culture and opportunities for mutual understanding, while the differences within these practices may provide some insight with regard to the essential differences between Islam and Christianity and between the different sects within each.

In the following part I will first give conceptual information about *ziyarat* pilgrimages and then try to depict the general panorama of rituals in shrine visitations for vow making in Lebanon with special focus on al Batiyeh.

3.8.1. Pilgrimage for vow making: “Ziyarat and Ndr”

A form of pilgrimage, *ziyārat*, or shrine pilgrimage, is practiced in different ways with its unwritten rules among people from different religious backgrounds in Middle East and *ziyārat* visit consist of shrines, mosques, and tombs allied to the prophets, saints, martyrs, imāms, and other venerated persons (men and women). These voluntary pilgrimages are akin to pilgrimage travel in Christianity, which people do as a way of getting closer to God, gaining blessings in their lives, and celebrating famous saints from history

(Bhardwaj, 1998 p.70)²⁷⁸ Shrine visitation as a small scale pilgrimage for petitionary prayers is a common act of “popular” devotion by adherents of a broad range of faiths, both monotheistic and polytheistic, past and present. In Lebanon, it is a common practice among adherents of all the sects as well. One should not assume, however, that there is a strong correlation between engaging in petitionary prayer and religiosity, whether in terms of belief in religious doctrine, regularity of ritual observances, or adherence to religious values or norms of behaviour. Absolute faith is not an essential prerequisite to prayer. Nevertheless, engaging in the practice does imply the petitioner's willingness to accept at least the possibility of divine existence and responsiveness to human requests. My own observations and collected *nidr* accounts support this assessment that those who engage in petitionary prayer in Lebanon, are women than men similar to the case of Aya Yorgi. A number of explanations can be given for the apparent gender imbalance in this practice of contractual prayer. Some of the clerics I interviewed in Lebanon suggested that women tend to be more spiritual than men and have greater direct responsibility for the concerns that are generally addressed in *nidr* however; I will discuss gender and spirituality not here but in the following chapter.

Among petitioners of all four sects (Maronite, Orthodox, Shia and Sunni), the most common requests were for the safety or health of a loved one and the birth of a healthy child or more specifically one of a particular sex, usually male. It is this focus on health and fertility, matters primarily within the traditional domain of women that the Lebanese clerics were referring to as an explanation for the gender imbalance in the practice of *nidr*. In addition to concerns about fertility, health and safety, *nidr* requests shared among the various sects in Lebanon included requests to attain personal success in status (marriage, employment) and objective measures of achievement (admission to a particular educational institution, a specified grade for an exam or course). It should be noted that in Catholic Christianity to which the Maronite sect is affiliated, miracles are not only considered possible, but are among the necessary criteria for the elevation of a righteous person to sainthood. This, however, is not reflected in any significant difference in the nature of requests among other sects. Contractual prayers thus appeal for supernatural assistance primarily in addressing basic human concerns which are shared by all people regardless of their religious affiliation.

²⁷⁸ Bhardwaj, Surinder. (1998) ‘Non-Hajj Pilgrimage in Islam, A Neglected Dimension of Religious Circulation’, *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 17(2) 69-87.

Requests made in prayers of petition are often made on behalf of others. This can be thought of as human, as distinct from divine, intercession. Many of the *nidr* requests in Lebanon are intercessory prayers: requests for the health, safe return, and success of loved ones. In Islam special prayers of human intercession on behalf of the dead, expressing the wish that they be received by God in Paradise, are a prominent part of funeral services. And in Catholicism, prayers of intercession are extended to the dead, specifically to shorten their stay in Purgatory so that they may enter Heaven. The need to limit the requests in contractual prayer to those whose fulfillment can be objectively observed, however, precludes such requests in contractual prayer.

To whom the prayer of petition is addressed lies at the heart of religious faith. Religious doctrine explains the official pantheon of supernatural beings in any given religion (gods, angels, saints, spirits, and ancestors). But how a petitioner addresses his/her request is a clear reflection of how that person understands his/her relationship to the supernatural. In Lebanon, one common, though not essential, element of *nidr* as practiced by the different sects is the use of an intercessor (a *shaft* or *wasit*). While the petitioner generally attributes ultimate power to God, the *nidr* is often addressed to someone who lived on earth and gained recognition for his or her closeness to God—a prophet, martyr, holy person or saint. This figure is believed to have more influence with God than humans do and can thus serve as an advocate for the petitioner. The intercessor is also a less imposing figure than God and thus may be more easily viewed as a personal friend and confidant. As one respondent stated at Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh: “St George, I don’t know. I feel that he is a heroic friend of mine”

Some petitioners ascribe actual power to this holy figure that is believed to have the ability directly to fulfill the request. This power, however, is considered to have been bestowed by God. The use of intercession (*wasit*) in its secular form is pervasive in Lebanese culture. Most people feel compelled to seek an intermediary in almost all interactions of unequal power or access. People develop a network of influential contacts they can appeal to at the airport, the post office, the various government ministries and large private institutions like universities and they, in turn, provide that service to others in regard to matters for which they are better placed. If they do not know someone important in a particular institution they seek to identify a friend who does, so that they can have an indirect connection. *Nidr* can thus be viewed as giving a religious dimension to a common cultural practice. Rather than appeal to God directly, they seek the assistance of an intercessor that can bridge the

power gap and support their appeal. In many cases, particularly among Christians, petitioners perceive of intercessors in terms of a divine division of labor. Thus, a petitioner would seek the intercession of one saint for infertility, another for illness and yet another to pass an exam. There does not seem to be any consensus, however, as to the actual specialization of individual intercessors even within a particular sect. A Maronite nun Mouna (personal interview)²⁷⁹ used the analogy of medical specialists to explain this popular practice, noting however, that people's perceptions of the attributes of different saints are often localized and change over time. She expressed understanding of the practice, but questioned its validity and would not, herself, attribute specialties to specific saints.

Considering the issue of gender, the major figures in both Christianity and Islam are male except for Saint Rafqa a former nun canonized after her death. Thus, in Christianity God (the Father), Jesus (the Son) and all the disciples are male. In Islam, God is not anthropomorphic and is viewed theologically as genderless; however the use of the singular male pronoun and verb forms (as well as the genderless plural forms) in reference to God give a distinctly male persona to the deity even in Islam. Furthermore, Muhammad and all his successors are male. In both Islam and Christianity, however, significant, though secondary and supportive, roles are played by major female figures in religious tradition. Females, in scriptures, as in traditional culture, often serve as intermediaries between those who hold power and those who seek assistance as in the case of Hindiyye²⁸⁰ in 18th century. In addition, females are largely responsible for many of the concerns addressed by *nidr*. Thus, it should not be surprising that there are female as well as male divine intercessors that petitioners of both genders appeal to in contractual prayer. While there is considerable convergence among the sects in the practice of appealing to divine intercessors, there are important differences in the doctrinal view of intercession.

In both Maronite and Orthodox Christianity intercession is an important element of religious doctrine. The formal beatification of saints is based on their righteous living, personal achievement, and the miracles ascribed to them. It is a sacred duty of saints as

²⁷⁹ Personal interview with sister Mouna from Mar Yacoob hospital 02.07.2017

²⁸⁰ Bernard Heyberger gives detailed information about the fascinating history of Hindiyya 'Ujaymi, a highly charismatic eighteenth-century mystic of sinister repute. Heyberger makes a careful study of Hindiyya's life from earliest childhood, with a detailed picture of her formative years in the eighteenth century Christian community of Aleppo, the domestic reality of which is little known, exploring the influences she would have experienced. He leads us through her spiritual development under the direction of the Jesuits, her determination to found a new religious order, and the tragic history of its collapse in a welter of paranoia and persecution.

well as clergy to intercede with God on behalf of the faithful. The faithful, in turn, are encouraged to seek their intercession rather than (or in addition to) making direct appeals to God. In contrast, in Muslim doctrine, particularly in Sunni Islam, the intercession of saints is very controversial and is interpreted by many as a violation of the oneness and omnipotence of God—of *shirk*—the greatest sin²⁸¹. Mohammad the prophet made it clear that in Islam a petitioner should only address a *nidr* to God and it is God's appreciation of the petitioner's honouring of a Saint which increases the likelihood that the request will be fulfilled. This doctrinal perspective on mediation would explain why many of the *nidr* experiences described by Muslims address their contractual prayers directly to God. Nevertheless, many Sunni as well as Shia Muslims address their contractual prayer to God through intercessors, whether major religious figures in Islam or more local saints. Muhammad appears to be perceived as the pre-eminent mediary because of his divinely ordained role as the messenger of God. Many petitioners may well address their *nidr* to saints and consider them capable of intervention to fulfill the request.

The pool of sacred figures is less institutionalized and more decentralized in Sunni Islam than in Shia Islam, Catholicism or Christian Orthodoxy. As in Shia Islam, it is not only based on righteous living and achievement, but also on ascription of sacred power, *baraka*, through lineal descent from Muhammad or his companions. Muslims sometimes appeal to Christian sacred figures that are incorporated within Muslim religious belief, particularly to the Virgin Mary, who is the only female mentioned by name in the Qur'an. In addition, in a few cases Muslims have appealed to Christian figures outside of Muslim tradition. Similarly, some Christians have appealed Khodr out of desperation when their own religious figures have not fulfilled their requests, particularly in regard to the desire for a son. Because people generally understand their relationship to the supernatural in terms of human interpersonal relations, they use many of the same strategies of persuasion to gain a favorable response to their prayers of petition as they use in human interaction. The petitioner may seek to convince the supernatural that fulfilling the request is in the addressee's own interest—either as reciprocity for gifts or sacrifices already offered by the petitioner or as a loan whose collateral is a promise of future compensation.

²⁸¹ Until mid 20th century, saint veneration was not considered as a *shirk*. The rise of “Wahabist- reformist” Islam, however, included the eradication of centuries of “unlawful” innovations that included tomb visitation and saint veneration, and local customs deemed as out of “orthodox” practice.

People visit or make pilgrimages to sect-specific shrines dedicated to religious figures, in many cases sleeping there over night (incubation²⁸²). A popular destination of Lebanese Orthodox Christians is Saydnaya, a convent outside Damascus although I couldn't visit due to the unrest in the country during my research process. Maronites often fulfill *nidr* promises at sacred locations dedicated to St Charbel, a Maronite saint canonized by the Catholic Church, as well as at churches or shrines dedicated to Mary and to universally recognized Catholic saints. A popular place for Lebanese Sunnis to visit in fulfillment of a *nidr* is the Uza'i mosque outside Beirut dedicated to Abd al-Rahman al-Uza'i, a locally revered holy man. There is no comparable place for Shi'a in Lebanon, but many Shi'a travel to Damascus in Syria where they make or fulfill *nidr* pledges at the mosques of Zaynab, the sister of Husayn, and Ruqayya, his daughter. In addition, some Muslims go to Christian religious shrines, particularly those dedicated to sacred figures incorporated within the religious tradition of Islam such as the Virgin Mary. I didn't encounter any Christian who promised to visit any specifically Muslim shrine to fulfill a *nidr*; however the Shia warden of the a Khodr maqam in Sarafand told me that an Orthodox woman who couldn't conceive had prayed in the shrine and then miraculously gave birth to twins and she named them Zeinab and Ali as a gratitude for the a fulfillment of her vow. This imbalance can largely be attributed to the fact that Islam came after Christianity. Thus Muslim religious figures are not recognized in Christian doctrine or power relations among the confessions and the superiority of Christian shrines in terms of popularity in modern Lebanon. Islam has an inclusive conception of Christianity and Judaism and it has included the biblical prophets within its "pantheon".

Among Christians, gifts are often promised to the shrine of the intercessor or are given (though not explicitly promised) when a petitioner is fulfilling a promise to visit the shrine. These may include money or a specified measure of some commodity such as gold, silver, incense, oil or candles. The measure itself may be related to the request—such as gold equal to the weight of the requested infant's hair at a specified age or a candle the height of the child who is to be healed. In the case of Christian Lebanese, both Maronites and Orthodox, the promised gift is commonly an artifact which serves as a testimonial to the efficacy of the intercessor in fulfilling the request. On the lower floor of the Maronite church of Mar Charbel there are displays of *dhikr*, small mementos in gold and silver in the

²⁸² Incubation is the ritual of going to sleep in a sacred place in anticipation of receiving a helpful dream from a divine benefactor

shape of arms, legs, eyes, and other body parts, crutches no longer needed by the handicapped, and hundreds of letters of appreciation. Many of these are directly related to *nidr* while others are tokens of appreciation for the fulfillment of a non-contractual petitioner prayer. All serve to encourage future petitions to the honored intercessor.

Furthermore, *nidr* is encouraged at these occasions by the setting out of candles to be lit by any guest who chooses to make a vow. Such secondary vows usually are in the name of the religious figure being celebrated and commonly promise the holding of a similar event if the request is fulfilled. A specifically Maronite pledge is to promise to wear, or have a child beneficiary wear, the habit (characteristic clothing) of the intercessor for a day, a month or even a year. For that purpose, certain clothing is identified with certain saints: a white robe with a blue cape for the Virgin Mary, a brown tunic for St Charbel, and a similar tunic in green and red for St Elias. In honouring specific religious figures, certain days have more significance than others so that the declaring of the request or the fulfilling of the promise is often timed to coincide with that sacred period. Thus, Christians in Lebanon are most likely to wear the dress of the Virgin Mary or visit a shrine dedicated to her (or both) during the month of May, her month, or on the holiday of the Virgin Mary, August 15.

Another type of promise to religious institutions is a period of labor in service to God. As in the case Nawal²⁸³ at Mar Jirjes Al Batiyeh:

I am 60 years old. My first son died after a couple of months of his birth. His name was Elie. I came to Batiyeh and made a vow to have another son. Then miraculously, I conceived again. We named him George. The patron saint of the church of Tratej my home town is St George too. During his childhood, I brought my George to Al Batiyeh many times when he was sick. But the reason I am coming to al Batiyeh once a month to clean the church is a bit different. My husband and my son George had a terrible accident a couple of years ago. God saved them. I made a vow again (ndr). In order to thank God to ordain their lives I am paying occasional visits to prominent St George churches and St Rafka too, and clean the churches. I wash and iron the naps (charchaf).

The healing value of sacred land is also well known in the Christian context. The pilgrims who visit the sanctuary of St. Rafqa in Jrebta, for example, often carry a pinch of the earth from his tomb with them. And if they give this land to the sick at home, the patient may feel better or even heal. Similarly pilgrims bottle water from the sacred of grotto of al Batiyeh. It is always a question of making physical contact with a sacred place or with the

²⁸³ Personal interview with Nawal .03.07.2017

person of a saint, touching his tomb or bringing home some object of the place of worship. There is often a trade of this kind of objects beside the place. They are bought, kept at home and distributed to friends so that they also benefit from the grace of the place visited.



Picture 68 A Muslim Shia male Pilgrim bottling water at Batiyeh photo by the auhor 2016

3.8.2. Blood Sacrifice and Charity

Typical promises of Muslims are to sacrifice an animal and distribute the meat to an orphanage, to give bread to the poor, to feed ten poor people, or to finance a group of poor pilgrims to visit a particular shrine. This form of giving is already a part of Muslim tradition both in the sacrifice of *'id al-adhd* and in the passages encouraging charity in the Qur'an.

Laird (2013)²⁸⁴ mentions about the animal sacrifice at St George church in al Khader village in Palestine and he claims that animal sacrifice is not only bound to Muslim tradition. Christians see it as a commemoration of Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son. Moreover Jesus considered himself a sacrificial lamb. I would rather associate the lamb sacrifice with the hagiographical legend of St George where the inhabitants of Silene offer a lamb each day to the greedy dragon.

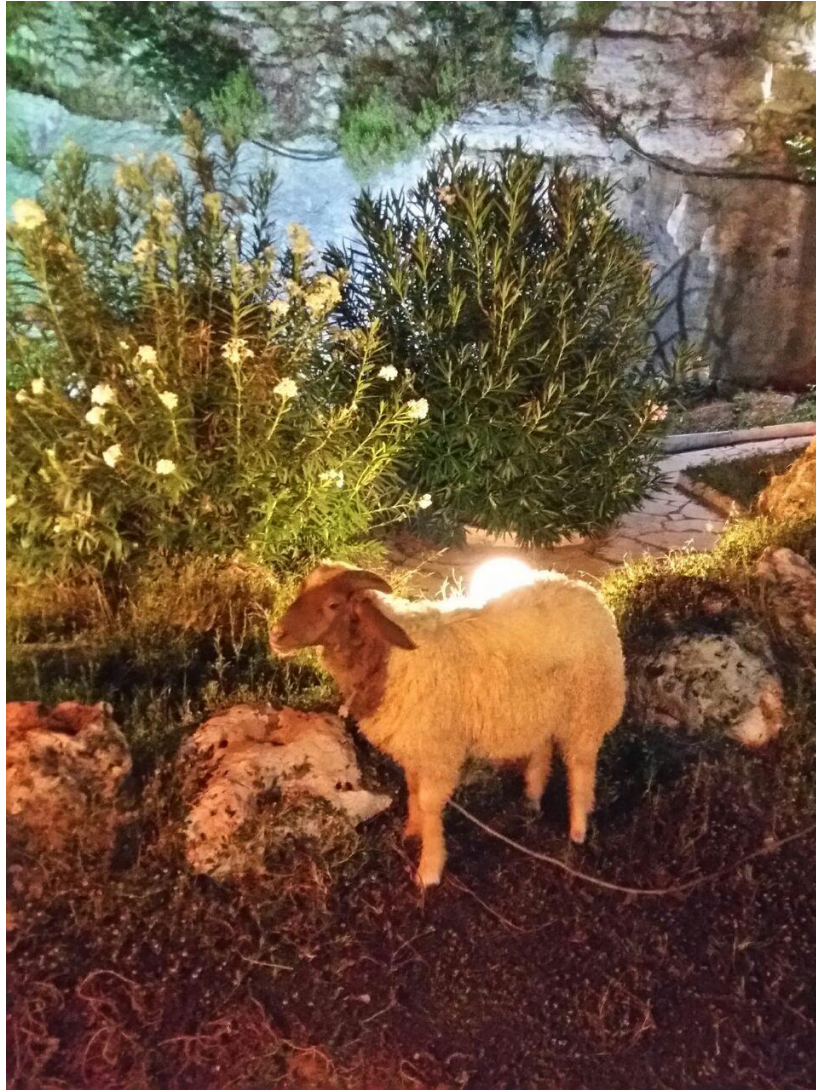
²⁸⁴ Laird, John (2012). "Boundaries and Baraka: Christians, Muslims, and a Palestinian Saint." *In Muslims and Others in Sacred Space*, edited by Margaret Cormack, 40-70. New York: Oxford University Press

In his travel accounts in late 19th century Samuel Curtiss talks about an annual festival attended by thousands of people, at a Greek shrine of Mar Elias, in Beirut. He reported that the worshipers often brought animal sacrifices. The servants of the church received the usual dues from such animal sacrifices that were brought: a quarter, the skin, and the head; sometimes they even have half of the animal. He also mentioned about the Greek church of Seyidet en Nuriyeh in the North of Lebanon that was visited by all sects, including Jews. According to his observation, many barren Muslim women visited the church to ask for a child and they killed sheep and goats on the threshold of church gate (Curtiss, 1904)²⁸⁵. He also gives us a valuable testimony on the sacrifice ritual at al Batiyeh:

If the influence of the Maronite religion has done away with animal sacrifices in fulfillment of vows, in connection with this cave (Batiyeh), it has not availed to suppress the offering of sacrifices in connection with the launching of new ships or boats. The neck of a sheep is laid on the prow of the ship or boat, and is cut so that the blood runs into the sea. The victim is then thrown into the bay as a sacrifice to St. George or to Seyide. The boat- men at Beirut related the same custom. There they (Moslems) make a vow either to Chidr (Khodr) or to Usai, and after cutting the throat of the victim they throw the sacrifice into the sea. They believe that through this offering the ship will be safe (p.336).

In June 2017, I received a message from the deacon of the shrine saying that somebody left a lamb at Batiyeh as a gratitude for the fulfillment of his vows. And to the deacon's surprise this man was an aged Muslim man named Anis. "He left the lamb, gave his phone number to the warden and disappeared" said the deacon. Then I called him many times from different Lebanese numbers but he didn't answer. He still remains his mystery. The deacon called the nearest butcher and sold the lamb as nobody in the the church is capable of slaughtering an animal and distributing the meat to the poor is not a part of their commitments. However the clergy of Sarba parish was also surprised not because the donator was a Muslim but due to the fact that it had been a really long time since the last offering of a lamb for St George as a votive offering was rare.

²⁸⁵ Curtiss, Samuel Ives (1904). The Ancient Religion of Syria in Centers of Moslem and Christian Influence The Biblical World, Vol. 23, No. 5, pp. 326-338 University of Chicago Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3140760> Accessed: 04-07-2016 15:48



Picture 69 Lamb as a sacrifice at Batiyeh photo by the author 29.07.2017

Among Christian petitioners in Lebanon, a *nidr* promise of charity is generally more direct. Money promised by a *nidr* is commonly given to the Church rather than a charitable institution, and the Church, in turn, uses some of that revenue to support its own sectarian charitable institutions like orphanages, schools or hospitals. Gifts to religious institutions, some extent overlaps with charity. The gifts may be monetary or material. The prevalence of giving material objects among Christians may be partly attributed to the extensive use of such objects in Christian ritual. Thus, a Christian might promise a church bell, pew, icon, statue, altar cloth, cross, chalice or plate for the holy Eucharist, candle stick or candles, incense, oil or holy bread (*qurbani* قربانی). Thus a carpenter would promise something made of wood, a tailor something sewn, and a farmer the product of his land (Khatar 1974,

38)²⁸⁶. There are few comparable items of ritual significance in Islam to encourage this type of promise, though Islamic shrines often have some gift objects within the locked area of the tomb, as well as framed prayers, some of which may be in fulfillment of *nidr* promises. Related to this, an important sectarian difference in Lebanon is in the manner and extent to which *nidr* is actually institutionalized in the sense of being officially recognized and facilitated.

Both the Maronite church and the home of St Charbel, and also the Church of the Virgin Mary at Harissa have gift shops where religious gifts may be purchased and the clothing symbolic of the saint may be borrowed. The clothing is lent at no charge, although a voluntary contribution is usually given for the use of the clothes. At the church of St Charbel there is, in addition, an office called the *sandug al-nidr* (a cashier for *nidr*) where those giving large *nidr* related gifts to the church can have their gifts registered. In every Maronite church there are also locked boxes with slots alongside secondary altars dedicated to specific saints where people can light candles and give monetary contributions when they make a *nidr* or fulfill a *nidr* promise. *Nidr* is clearly a very important and highly institutionalized source of revenue for the Maronite church. This institutionalization of *nidr* can be observed in the Orthodox Church as well, though less so. *Nidr* is to some extent institutionalized in Islam, particularly among the Shi'a. The practice of doing a *ziyara* or sacred visit is particularly important among Shi'a and formal rituals are prescribed like the reciting of a particular prayer, also called a *ziyara* at the religious site. This recitation at the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab makes reference to *nidr* and certain rituals seem to accompany it. In regard to revenue, some believers rub money along the columns of the inner shrine and then drop the money inside. Moreover, when Muslims visit a religious shrine as part of a *nidr*, they may leave money there but the money itself is not necessarily an explicit part of the promise.

3.8.3. Excavating the sacred grotto and the donation box

Fountains and ponds have become common choices of decoration to complement architecture or places that invoke an atmosphere of leisure. Virtually any pool made accessible to the public qualifies as a wishing well. The coins found in wishing wells are vestiges of the desires of patrons who can only hope that their wishes may come true.

²⁸⁶ Khater, Lahed (1985). *Lebanese habits and customs*. Beirut: Editions (4th edition). 442 p. (Document in Arabic)

Wishes can be vague or general fortunes such as happiness, wealth, and love. They may also be extremely personal desires, such as an intimate request for a loved one to recover from illness. Thus, throwing a coin into a volume of water while making a wish has become a common practice. Although these expressions may be from the older traditions of wishing wells, these acts should in no way be considered wasteful, primitive, or inane. Rather, wishing wells are a method through which people exercise hope, especially against events whose desired outcomes are unlikely or uncertain (Averill & Sundararajan, 2005)²⁸⁷. The ability to hope is a hallmark of a healthy personality because it allows individuals to reconcile the opposing forces of reality and want. In the case for wishing wells, hope is expressed by offering money. Money is not an empirical object of monetary value, but a medium instilled with systems of meanings and symbols. It can be apportioned for use with significant social relevance and minimal economic consequence.

As mentioned before in Lebanon we commonly see that visitors to graves, remnants, shrines, sites of former temples, or monuments often leave things there or take things away with them. People maintain ongoing relations with forces or gods or ancestors as well as with other devotees by means of a material set of negotiations consisting of the things they leave and take at holy places. These relations are variously negotiated in practices of gifting or donation, petition or supplication. Each form of negotiation carries different expectations. And each form of negotiation involves corresponding material practices. For example, marking one's presence at the site of the holy is a way of lending ballast to one's petitions as well as physically participating in the collective and ongoing action of remembrance. Leaving an object or a text signals one's veneration of the site and what it conveys; one's intention to return; and one's desire to connect with the person, group, or event that is remembered in the place. Prayer at graveside or holy site may be much more meaningful and considered more propitious.

Leaving in this instance is a demonstration of continuing reverence and piety. In giving, believers signal or seek to secure the expectation of some form of response. In taking, believers engage in a kind of record keeping. When pilgrims take a souvenir with them it may be to establish an enduring link with the place and time of pilgrimage; to show others as proof and as a form of veneration; to serve as the occasion for speaking with other, presenting one's testimony, or encouraging others to make pilgrimage. The structure of

²⁸⁷ Averill, James R., & Sundararajan, Louise. (2005). Hope as rhetoric: Cultural narratives of wishing and coping. In J. Elliott (Ed.), *Interdisciplinary perspectives on hope* (pp. 133–165). New York: Nova Science.

some religious practice is eminently economical; objects and images commonly serve as the token or currency in this economy. But when the objects they leave or venerate are understood to participate in the very being of themselves or a saint, the material economy of the sacred is intensified by trade in the very substance of value.



Picture 70 Coins from the grotto (photo by the author 2017)

3.8.4. Al Batiyeh in the memories of Lebanese Diaspora

The wardens of Batiyeh cleans the bottom of the cave, the candle trays thoroughly bring out all the votive coins and also each month the secretary treasurer from St George parish church, in collaboration with a person from the waqef of St George, open the donation boxes and document the sum of the money accumulated in these boxes. I was told by the church that it might be interesting for me to see the different currencies left by the visitors, found at Batiyeh and they gave me privilege to access these coins kept in the chest of the church. I took two handfuls of coins randomly from the chest, investigated the coins by classifying them. This wide variety of coins somehow verifies the fact that al Batiyeh is visited by people, either from different origins (Syrian refugees, Indian immigrant workers. See the table below) or Lebanese diaspora that is scattered around the world who come to visit their county periodically.

It is almost an uncontested truth that every Lebanese household has been touched by migration be it a family member, a relative, or a friend. Although the number of Lebanese emigrants may not be sizeable, about 4 to 6 million, their presence in the countries of migration was and continues to be visible and their impact on the Lebanese political, economic and cultural life has been and continues to be significant. Lebanese migrants have maintained pulsating networks with each other and with their homeland. Their memory and vision of the homeland further stirred by visits or news and their commitment to restoring Lebanon to its old glory has driven them to maintain and nurture a continuing relationship with the homeland. While living in various countries in North and South America, Australia, Africa, Europe and the Gulf, Lebanese migrants have established migrant communities, some of whose migration history can be traced back to nearly 150 years. Whether individually or collectively, Lebanese migrants have always created solidarity with Lebanon and maintained it (Sheffer, 1997)²⁸⁸

In his renowned historical study, Akram Khater²⁸⁹ proves that the Lebanese Diaspora was instrumental in developing the Lebanese middle class, as well as in assisting in the modernization of Lebanon, especially in the late 19th–early 20th centuries. He also confirms that a large number of the Lebanese diaspora migrants maintained close contact with their families in Lebanon and have sent remittances. In terms of economic relations, Lebanese migrants have assisted Lebanon and its people by sending remittances, by visiting the country, by creating businesses and trades. Social relations include contributions to organizations that deal with social problems in villages and towns in Lebanon. Lebanese migrants have also responded with generosity and compassion whenever a natural calamity or a manmade disaster engulfed the country. Lebanese migrants have built hospitals, schools and orphanages, constructed roads and other infrastructures, and erected monuments such as community centers, church halls and even municipal palaces.

²⁸⁸ Sheffer, Gabriel (1997). Middle Eastern Diasporas: Introduction and Readings, *Journal Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 2, [http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1997/issue 2/jvol1no2in.html](http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1997/issue%202/jvol1no2in.html)

²⁸⁹ Khater, Akram (2001). *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 19870-1920*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2001

Swedish Krona 7	Jordanian dinar 7	United Arab Emirates 2	Euro (Cyprus) 1	Ukrainian trivna 1
Indian Rupee 5	Euro (France) 6	Syrian Lira 7	Euro (Greece) 1	Romanian lei 1
US dollars 4	Lebanese pound 8	Saudi Arabian dinars 1	Euro (Malta) 1	Australian dollars 1
Euro Slovenia) 2	Kuwait dinar 2	West African franc 2	Canadian dollar 6	GBP 2

Table 3. Different types of money from the box

Sweden, Australia, USA and France have always traditionally preferred places for immigration of the Lebanese people since late 19th century. Greece was a target destination for the orthodox community who wanted to flee from the country during the civil war. Ukraine and Romania has become advantageous countries to build up business after the fall of Soviet Union and the communism. Kuwait and Arab Emirates are relatively new as well. It is known that a big Lebanese community work and live in the Gulf. Lebanese trade has strong place in Western Africa since 1950s. Syrian liras on the other hand obviously belong to the refugees and Indian rupee is left by the Indian domestic workers living in Lebanon.

Giving money to the shrine as a charity or throwing coins into the water of al Batiyeh is not a recent tradition. Once again I would like to refer to the memoires of Samuel Ives Curtiss²⁹⁰ talking about the financial benefit of the cave for the church:

At Juneh, in the vicinity of Beirut, beyond the Dog River, there is a curious case of syncretism, where the ancient religion connected with an artificial cave by the sea, called el-Batiyeh, dominates the Maronite church, known as Mar Jirjis (St. George), some distance away. The cave is thought of as belonging to St. George, but this is a case of the tail wagging the dog. The vows, from which the annual income is about 12,000 piastres (\$480), are made almost altogether at the cave (p 336).

Similarly in the testimony of the oldest man in Sabra (born 1918) it is possible to trace back in time and have an idea of the amount of money gathered in the shrine of al Batiyeh:

²⁹⁰ Ibid

There used to be a big iron box for the donations. You couldn't believe, towards the end of the week (juma-friday), you could make a huge pile from the Money accumulated in it. My father-Allah yrhamou- was in charge of taking the box to Fenianos family. They were, then, the representatives of the wakef of Sarba Mar Jirjes Church and the bishop was responsible for it. "Nobody could dare to steal the Money from the box. Everyone was scared. Once I heard that one man was going to steal the Money, Mar Jirjes hold his arms tightly and he couldn't move. But this man was definitely not from Sarba" (Toufik Nakhoul)²⁹¹

Whereas, they dared. In July of 2017, in a morning around 8 am, (just a couple days after the interview with Toufik Nakhoul) the warden opened the gate of Batiyeh and saw that the padlocks of the donation chest was broken and all the money had been stolen. The incident was immediately reported to the bishop. However bishop decided not to call the police for a possible investigation. They did not blame anybody. And the case was closed.



Picture 7178 The robbery at Batieh—broken box

What Morinis suggests as true of petitions presented during pilgrimage is to some extent true of contractual prayer in general: "The spiritual cultivation of the heart which is stressed in the pilgrimage may have psychological and somatic effects that do indeed work changes in health, fertility, and aspects of life where attitude is relevant" (Morinis & Crumrine 1991, 15²⁹²). This may be especially true when the emotional and sometimes physical experience

²⁹¹ Personal interview with Toufik Nakhoul 02.07 2017

²⁹² Crumrine N. Ross , Morinis E. Alan. (1991). *Pilgrimage in Latin America* Westport, CT" Greenwood Press,

of making the request and the desperation of the request itself are combined with faith in divine reciprocity.

All the Lebanese clerics, affirmed the acceptability of *nidr*, and recognized the value of linking hope and action. However, they all denied any direct cause-effect relationship between doing *nidr* and achieving the desired results. In Islam, the Prophet is, in fact, reported to have said, 'Do not make a vow for it cannot alter fate' (Hughes 1995, 658)²⁹³. This consensus of the clergy can largely be attributed to the fact that the practice of *nidr* challenges religious doctrine on divine will and predestiny. Furthermore, all the clerics interviewed maintained that *nidr* binds the petitioner to fulfill his or her promise if the condition is met, but does not bind God to do what is requested. This is perfectly in accordance with the properties of a unilateral contract. I believe that public opinion has a formative effect on clerical discourse on shared shrine visitations because responsiveness to public sentiment is integral to the success of religious leaders. It must be taken into accounts that even the most pious and altruistic cleric has strong incentives for responding to public opinion. If a cleric takes a position that is far from public sentiment, people will be less willing to make the drastic changes that following his advice entails. However, if he takes a position closer to their own, believers will be more amenable to his guidance. By doing this, the cleric creates an opportunity for believers to reap the satisfaction of believing they are doing God's Will. The clergy avoid becoming entangled in controversies which may jeopardize relations with public for the necessity of preserving peaceful relations. Generally, mainstream clergies from Catholics and Islam avoid extremism and radical positions. Below is a testimony of a priest from Sarba:

“This custom in Batiyeh has been alive for long generations. If the child is sick (*makbous*), they take him/her here. After the *takdis*, they used to dip the clothes of the kid into the water of al Batiyeh or they used to steem the clothes with the smoke of the incense blessed by the priest. I remember it very well”. Upon the question of Muslim attendance: “We can't say ‘don't come’. We should respect them. We can no way deny the existence of other religious groups. After all we believe in the same God. We have the Holy Spirit and they have Mohammad. We have Mariam and they have Maryam and Zeinab or Fatima. We can't criticize them. It is the issue of *taqwa*(piety). They have *takwa*. They believe that Mar Jirjes cures the illnesses. All is related with your intentions. As clergy, We must

²⁹³ Hughes, Thomas P. Dictionary of Islam (1995). rpt. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishes Pvt. Ltd..

respect the beliefs of the ordinary people”—Abouna Efraim, a priest in the St George cathedral/Sarba)

In addition to certain similarities and differences between the sects in the practice of *nidr* in Lebanon, certain points of convergence are noteworthy. This is particularly common between sects within the same religion. Orthodox and Maronite Christians visit each other's shrines and sometimes adopt each other's practices like the wearing of saints' clothes discussed earlier. Similarly, Shia and Sunni sometimes visit each other's religious sites. Points of convergence between the two religions also exist. All of the Christian clergy that have been interviewed noted that many Muslims fulfill *nidr* promises at Christian institutions, particularly places dedicated to the Virgin Mary since there are no Islamic institutions in Lebanon dedicated to her despite her significance in Islam. This was corroborated by Muslim accounts of *nidr* which sometimes entailed a visit to a Christian institution. Reverence for Christian religious figures is not in contradiction to Muslim doctrine, since many of them are mentioned in the Qur'an. But religious figures that are not incorporated within Islam are apparently also appealed to by some Muslims, including St Charbel and St Marun.

There are certain differences among the two religions in terms of how *nidr* is practised, reflecting differences in such elements as the roles of religious institutions, the importance of unifying religious figures, and the use of physical symbols in worship. Similarities can be attributed to the need to address such universal concerns as health and procreation as well as shared elements of culture such as the common religious foundation on which both Christianity and Islam are constructed, the prevalence of mediation in human interaction, and the gender-typing of social roles. Not all Lebanese practice *nidr*. Differences in the degree of faith and the interpretation of doctrine lead to a wide range of behavior patterns within each of the different sects. Finally, whether the request is fulfilled or not, it serves a human need, shared by Christians and Muslims alike, to counter feelings of impotence in the face of life's crises. Throughout my fieldwork on *nidr* among all sects studied I found that almost everyone, regardless of their own personal beliefs, had a *nidr* story to relate, whether a personal experience or that of some relative or friend. *Nidr* is thus clearly an integral part of Lebanese culture for Muslims and Christians alike.

3.9. Votive Offerings (ex votos) at Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh: Magic, Vernacular or Controlled Religion?

“People set up stalls and sell stupid objects in the name of “dileklik”. This is for love; that’s for money etc. Don’t ever believe in these ridiculous things. Another new tradition is 24th of September. Nowadays, they climb up to Aya Yorgi on 24th September too. That’s the feast day of Aya Thecla. Why do they go to Aya Yorgi and ask for thing on this day? And what about those strings? Oh My God!! Who the hell invented that? It is a dirty Turkish job. It is nothing to do with us” (Stefano Damato)²⁹⁴



Picture 72 *Dileklik* at Aya Yorgi pilgrimage (photo by the author)

When studying ritual practices in churches it is often the official rituals of institutionalized nature that have been focused on. The unofficial ones (magical, vernacular, popular interpretations) have been labelled as folk religion and have usually only been mentioned in passing. These two sides of ritual practices have traditionally been studied separately and due to the lack of systematic background the latter has often been treated as a collection of random magical acts that have little to do with Christian religion. Vernacular practices that seemingly have little or no connection with the official liturgy in churches have often been considered originating in the pre-Christian period, thus being pagan in

²⁹⁴ Personal interview with Stefano Damato, 22.05.2017 Athens.

nature. This in its turn has created a view of the syncretic nature of folk religion where pre-Christian and Christian elements have intertwined to form a mixture of popular interpretations of Christian liturgical elements. Contrary to such interpretations I suggest that both ritual practices have to be understood in the same frame and instead of representing two different traditions they form a closely associated system in a particular time period.

Before approaching the actual case studies and practices, we should explain the terms used in this discussion. Concerning the concepts 'unofficial', 'popular' or 'folk' religion, Leonard Norman Primiano (1995)²⁹⁵ has been very critical of their usage, naming the terms residualistic and derogatory. He has also considered the juxtaposing of these terms with 'official' religion on a two-tiered model problematic. Naturally, the creation of dichotomies and verbalising clear-cut differences between (religious) practices or elements is a conventional scholarly approach. We can observe this, for example, in the traditional treatment of magic and religion as two different faces of a single coin – for example magic vs. religion, where the first is seen as manipulative, secret, private, practical, prohibited, and so on, while the qualities ascribed to the latter include supplicative, public/open, symbolic, permitted for everyone, and so on (compare with the classical theorists such as Mauss, Durkheim and Frazer).

Primiano has suggested to use the concept 'vernacular' religion, emphasising the 'private' or 'personal' component in it, defining it as 'religion as it is lived', as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it. I very much agree with Primiano's views and stick to the concept of 'vernacular religion', attempting to use the concept adequately when interpreting the source material, as a concept of its own and not as a step on the official–unofficial scale. On the other hand I also prefer to continue using 'folk' or 'popular' or 'magical' when describing certain practices, but not as direct synonyms for 'vernacular'. The relationship between the concepts can be described as follows: vernacular in this context is understood as a system, which includes practices and interpretations through which religion is lived by certain people, whereas magical and popular are used as more specific 'labels' for practices within the vernacular system. However, it should not be forgotten that vernacular practices are very much connected with the official religious or liturgical programme, so the former is constantly influenced by the

²⁹⁵ Primiano Leonard Norman (1995) 'Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife', *Western Folklore* 54 37–56, at 38.

latter but their intertwining as well as personal interpretation by every single practitioner makes the matter very complicated.

Thus it is obvious that the academic differentiation between 'Christian' and 'non-Christian' or 'religious' and 'magical' elements does not help us much, as both are combined in various ways and to differing extents in different practices. I suggest that we have to focus on the meaning of the particular ritual context for the practitioner, directly connected with the desired outcome of the practice. Such powerful objects could comprise both Christian liturgical objects (for example the Bible, the host, holy water) but also objects like natural stones and fossils, or artifacts carrying magical signs. The liturgical elements used in vernacular practices include the host and holy water, which should help against a variety of problems, mostly illnesses. However, elements connected to the inside or outside of the church were similarly powerful. (Sax, 2010, p. 8)²⁹⁶ So, we might see here the traditional dichotomy between religion and magic, the first having more general aims, the latter more specific ones. However, the situation where the elements are used makes the religious context different, although the object and its original meaning remain the same. It is obvious that vernacular beliefs and practices are connected with the official ones and thus vernacular religion changes constantly as well. So traditional 'syncretism' and modern age 'syncretism' were different and instead of focusing on the completely artificial problem of pre-Christian religious phenomena within the Christian religion, we should rather study vernacular Christianity and the practices connected with it in some particular time-period (Johanson, 2009).²⁹⁷

Pilgrimages and pilgrims also provide a rich area of study about symbolic, spiritual and material consumption. According to Pinto the experiential character of pilgrimage creates the demand for objects and images that can embody the memory of the emotions and sensations produced by the physical and symbolic activities connected to the pilgrimage, such as sacred objects' (Pinto, 2007: 110)²⁹⁸. Pilgrimages are sites where the sacred and the profane overlap and where exploration of the relationship between religion, spirituality and consumption can be undertaken. Ex votos or the votive offerings can be considered within

²⁹⁶ Sax, William S (2010) 'Ritual and the Problem of Efficacy', in W. S. Sax, J. Quack & J. Weinhold (eds), *The Problem of Ritual Efficacy*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 3–16, at 4.

²⁹⁷ Johanson Kristiina (2009). 'The Changing Meaning of "Thunderbolts"', *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 42 (2009), 129–174, at 130

²⁹⁸ Pinto, Paulo.G. (2007) 'Pilgrimage, Commodities, and Religious Objectification: The Making of Transnational Shiism between Iran and Syria', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27(1): 109–25

this consumption apart from their spiritual connotation. The Latin term *ex-voto* (short for *ex voto suscepto*, “from the vow made”) designates a votive offering placed in a church or shrine in thanksgiving for a miracle received however the custom of offering gifts to deities or spirits to propitiate or thank them for their protection can be traced back to ancient Greek, Mesopotamia and Egypt.

At Aya Yorgi the votive offerings could be analyzed under to two major categories: Votive donations and votive objects. The votive donations include money in the donation box in return to the candles which is a common way of donation cross culturally. Second type of donation is olive oil (or vegetable oil) brought by the pilgrims whose vows are granted as a way of showing gratitude. This oil is used for the oil lamps by the church throughout the year. One of the wardens of Aya Yorgi says that they receive such a huge number of bottles of oil that they sometimes cannot find a place to store them. In that case they sell them to the restaurants on the island or send them to other churches. Third form of donation—sugar cubes—is not given to the church but to the fellow pilgrims. The ones, whose prayers have come true, distribute sugar cubes or chocolate to the people, announcing explicitly that their vows have been granted by the divine. However as the sugar cubes are not easily edible or tasty enough so the ones who accept this offering mostly throw them away. And if the sugar cube box is not finished, those cubes are used in an imaginative way by the fortunate pilgrims to sketch out their upcoming wishes. In the back yard of the church there is a flat space which has lately begun to be called as “şekerlik” (place for sugar) where artistic forms of sketches from sugar tubes can be seen on the feast day. However the church authorities are quite disturbed and they object to this sugar ritual because of the pollution it creates. Sugar cubes melt, dissolve and get sticky if it rains on the feast day. The objection stems from two reasons as the warden states: “They also pollute the environment besides the fact that it is nonsense.”



Picture 73 A young university candidate pilgrim (or his/her mother) writing *Tıp* (Medicine faculty) with sugar cubes photo by the author 2017.

The votive objects are also subdivided into two. The officially accepted ones by the church: *afieromas*, the small bells and unacceptable objects: *dilekliks* (for wish).

- i. Αφιέρωμα- *Afieroma* or *tama* (offering) is a general term for the votive objects in Greek churches. They are mostly silver or tin sheets, embossed with images including “eyes, nose, ears, arms, hands, fingers, legs (with and without feet), feet, abdomens, breasts, torsos. At Aya Yorgi, behind the glass framework of the icon of St George, innumerable *afieromas* with different images are displayed given by the Christians who acquired the miraculous properties of the icon. The icon looks so eye-catching with all those silver and golden *afieromas* that it grabs the attention of curious Muslim visitors.



Picture 74 An afieromata in the shape of an arm. Photo by the author 2017

- ii. Tiny votive bells: As mentioned in the miraculous discovery of the holy icon of St George, the saint appeared in one shepherd's dream and told him to climb way up to hill and dig in the soil where he hears bells ringing. He climbed up to the church barefoot and in silence. What he saw in his dream became reality. As he reached closer to the top, he could hear the bells ringing. He began to dig in that exact spot and found those buried icons and other holy objects with small decorative bells. Referring to the bells in this legend, the monastery was named Aya Yorgi Koudunas, which can be translated as St George of the bells. Reminiscent of this legendary object, the church, upon the request of visitors, gives tiny figurative bells. The person makes a wish in the church and takes the bell with him/her. The lucky ones whose wishes are fulfilled are expected to bring them back. This tradition of such a dual contract between the believer and the church has been alive for over centuries. And at the site it is always highly possible to meet visitors who could tell you the marvelous properties of these bells.



Picture 75 Tiny bells of Aya Yorgi photo by the author 2017

iii. Multicolored candles or “fifty shades of a candle”²⁹⁹

According to archaeological data, mankind has been using candles since at least 5000 B.C. Important objects for domestic use, such as providing light, heat, and fragrance, and as a way to keep the time, candles have attained many symbolic connotations through the ages, and have become the key object in the performance of magico-religious ceremonies. The multifaceted magic functions and symbolic meanings of a candle are partly due to its properties and its ‘construction’. Light, heat, fire, and the smoke a candle produces are relevant for any magic ritual, be it with positive or negative value. (Belova, Sedakova, 2015 p.141)³⁰⁰. Thus a candle gives a lot of possibilities for semiotic and axiological attitudes and is treated in terms of the basic semiotic oppositions: bright/dark; sacred/profane; alive/dead; pure/impure; divine/humane in their manifold combinations. Candles can also be considered as a donation and a votive object. Apart from semiotics attributed to it, a candle can also be an object of symbolism in material culture and votive offerings as in the case of Aya Yorgi. On the stalls wide range of colorful candles are sold, attributing meaning to each color. The candle sellers claim that each color stands for a different wish: Navy blue for work and car; orange for success; red for love; green for money; pink for fortune, yellow for luck. Whereas church authorities are object to this

²⁹⁹ I use this term as a reference to “Fifty Shades” series of novels by E. L. James. Just like colours have many grades, shades; the wishes at Aya Yorgi have shades, faces and elusiveness

³⁰⁰ Belova, Olga and Irina Sedakova. (2015). Magico-Religious Symbolism of a Candle in the Slavic Calendar Rituals in *Magic in Rituals and Rituals in Magic* Eds Tatiana Minniyakhmetova and Kamila Velkoborská Innsbruck – Tartu

newly invented symbolism, though they permit the pilgrims light these colorful candles in the church, they also offer their own candles to the pilgrims in return to a small donation.



Picture 76 Multicolored candles photo by the author 2016

iv. *Dileklik*—an invented ex-voto

However afteroma tradition has inspired and led to an invention of new votive commodity called *dileklik* by Turkish initiatives of souvenir products. These objects are made of cheap metals and evoke the physical manifestations of the wishes. Instead of carving or drawing the shape of the thing they ask for from the divine powers, pilgrims can buy the readily made forms. They are in various patterns such as, the shape of heart when asking for love; a figurative car when asking for a car and a stylized key for luck and so on. *Dilekliks* are sold in various stalls or shops in Lunapark square or in the downtown of Büyükkada. These objects are fabricated by souvenir industry in Istanbul by mass production. *Dilekliks* constitutes the main conflict or contested issue among the church, the vendors and the pilgrims. Despite the constant rejection of these objects by the church, *dilekliks* manage to remain the best sold thing on the stalls. “It is the vendors who create these stupid things. Who invented it? They mix faith and money into each other and lure the people. They profit from the innocence of the pious” said one of the local people of Büyükkada. However, women pilgrims seem to enjoy buying these *dilekliks* as they look fancy and practical.

I asked several different souvenir stalls about the how I could implement these objects in my prayers in the church. The answers were ambiguous, blurry and wide varied: one said, I was supposed to tie it on the tress, the other instructed me to dig the earth and bury it under the soil. One other told me to attach it to the paper that I was going to write my wishes on or keep it with me until my payers were heard by God. The last seller said that these *dilekliks* had to be brought back to priest after the fulfillment of my wishes. However it never happens. Because the warden of the shrine said to me that many people brought these *dilekliks* back and asked them to whom they had to be given to. “and I tell them to give them back to place they are sold” was his answer. “The women don’t want to believe us. They can get persistent and stubborn. One of them even said that we deceived them. But it is not us who deceive them but the sellers. We warn them millions of times that these objects have no place in our church. These are superstitions”. I discussed this issue with a couple of pilgrims, and one of the highly motivated pilgrim said in a mocking manner that “if they accept the bells, they should accept *dilekliks* too. They call these objects superstition but what about the bells? That’s not rational?”. What they do overlook is: these bells belong to the official history of the sanctuary and bells are typically a Christian artifact.



Picture 77 79 a dileklik in the shape of a house photo by the author 2015

v. The Strings as Sacred Waste



Picture 78 Unreeling threads on the road to Aya Yorgi Church

Colourful strings... They are the most prominent objects that popularize Aya Yorgi feast day. On the extremely crowded feast days (in 2012 for example), pilgrims-unintentionally-weave a 900 meters of rug on the liminal steep path that combines Lunapark square and Aya Yorgi the church with different shades and colors of strings throughout the day. This colorful pilgrim-product has become subject to TV news an object to exhibition like Lieux Saint Partagés³⁰¹, an artistic background for instagram post and an inspiration for a 60 min of documentary Marianna Economou “Bells, threads and Miracles”³⁰². Strings as mentioned previously have profound symbolic meaning. Strings as ritual objects can be seen in the Muslim shrines of Anatolia such as Susuz Dede türbesi in İzmir and Hacı Bayram Veli in Ankara. The bobbins of strings represents destiny. According to the practitioners the foreordination of a person can be blocked like the strings around the bobbin. Therefore, by unreeling the threads, the person symbolically can undo the blockage in her/his destiny. The act of unreeling the threads of strings is quite theatrical in

³⁰¹ <http://www.mucem.org/programme/exposition-et-temps-forts/lieux-saints-partages>

³⁰² Bells, Threads and Miracles (2008). <http://www.cultureunplugged.com/play/9488/BELLS--THREADS-AND-MIRACLES>

many senses and an example of a ritual drama as ritual theatre quite simply is the enactment of a myth or archetypal story with the intention of bringing about healing—usually to resolve an issue, to deal with a difficult life experience, to restore depleted energies or to ease a transition.

However this popular string issue hadn't been a part of St George's feast day until 1990s. Local islanders, Rum community (in Istanbul and in Athens) and the church authorities are still unclear about how and when exactly this ritual tradition started. During one of my periodic fieldworks at Aya Yorgi I came across with Suna Selen a 78 year old but still well-known actress in Turkey. She said to me that she had been coming to the feast days since she was a little girl as they once used to have a summer house in the island. While we were discussing about the changes and transformation in the form of the pilgrimage and the rituals what she said conformed my presumptions.

“ when I was a child, I am talking about 40s 50s, Büyükada consisted mainly of the Rums and Armenians. I remember my mom used to take us here for the holy water. There were no strings or those *dileklikes*. But when the internal immigration started mainly after 60s, each person started to bring not only his/her luggage but also the things they believe in. I guess this why these strings appeared suddenly after 90s. I”
(Suna Selen)³⁰³

In a country like Turkey where strong heterogeneity is present in geographical, economic and social conditions throughout the country, internal migration becomes an important component that affects not only population distribution but also many other dynamics. The internal migration phenomenon has increased in some periods since 1950's in Turkey. There is a tendency to move from the rural area to the urban area and especially from the less developed regions to the developed regions. A significant part of these migrations have been the results of economic, social and political reasons. In particular, the unbalanced distribution of income and employment are the mains factor for increasing migration. In 1950s, Turkey witnessed migration from rural to urban areas because of the development of industrialization and service sector in cities. Unemployed labor force in villages move to cities to seek a job. In 1970s, it is observed that while there was a decrease in migration from the rural areas to the urban areas, there was an increase from urban areas to urban areas. Between 1970 and 1980, the great majority of total internal migration movements constitute immigration from urban areas to urban areas. With the implementation of free market economy, privatization, communication and the

³⁰³ Personal interview with Suna Selen (actress, 78) 23.04.2017 Büyükada

development of transportation conditions, individuality; the importance of civil society, the speed of migration in Turkey has been accelerated in 1980s and 1990s. On the other hand, internal migration has intensified due to political reasons. This period was specially characterized with the compulsory and voluntary migration. Because of terrorism in East and Southeast of Turkey, thousands of people had to migrate. A substantial population initially migrated to Diyarbakir, Van then Istanbul, Izmir, Adana, Bursa, Mersin. Migrating further amplified existing urban problems (Icduygu and Sirkeci, 1998, p. 251-253)³⁰⁴.

Local İstanbulites and or the islanders who are not familiar with this string based ritual sometimes become very severe in their criticism. Some feel frustrated as the strings create a massive “waste” some others associate it with pagan or primitive practices. However the thread bobbins preserve their place as another ritual commodity along side with the *dilekliks*. The pilgrims are instructed by the vendors on how long or what color the threads mean to be. They offer wide variety of threads and the prices change according to the durability and the length of it. As the prayers can only be fulfilled if you can reach the summit of the hill without any break in the threads, you are kindly advised to buy “the specially made for Aya Yorgi slope” ones: long, strong, durable. If not finished upon the reach the summit, you are supposed to unreel the whole bobbin so that the entire blockage in your destiny will disappear. Towards the end of the feast day, pilgrims leave huge piles of threads and plastic bobbins behind. What will be done with these leftovers and how they should be treated always remain as contested issues. Warning signs are nailed on trees by Aya Yorgi authorities on the way up the path warning the pilgrims against all possible pollution types.

³⁰⁴ Içduygu, Ahmet, Sirkeci Ibrahim (1998) “*Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türkiye’sinde Göç Hareketleri*”, 75. Yılda Köylerden ühirlere, Ed. Oya Baydar, Istanbul, Tarih Vakfı, 1998, s. 249-268.



Picture 79 "Polluting the environment is fined (punished) in hereafter- Aya Yorgi Directorate photo by the author 2015

Should it be considered as sacred waste? Its ambiguous nature, charged with a religious, moral, or emotional value on one hand, but at the same time a kind of leftover for which no proper destination exists, makes such “sacred” wastes a serious matter, and hence often a ground for conflict and contestation. In studies on ritual, religion, and the sacred, the production of waste has not received much attention yet, probably because of the contradictory connotations and the lack of value or meaning of waste. However, the insight that material produced in the sacralizing process may simultaneously be waste and makes our understanding of the sacred more complex, and exactly therefore contributes to the study of the field of material religion. New forms of consumption create more waste.

Büyükada Forestry operation directorate—a state institution of public utility—is always present throughout the feast day with a number of personnel responsible for keeping an eye on the pilgrims ritual behaviors related with the tress. They do not actively warn the pilgrims but watching out the event from a considerable distance silently. The possible harm to the tress would result from the rags tied on the branches or these huge piles of threads that are attached to the tress and the endemic bushes and plants. On the feast day in 2015, towards the afternoon, a big amount of colorful strings accumulated and upon a serious entanglement in the threads that could break the branches of a pine tree, two man from the directorate intervened with special scissors to cut the blockage out. Upon seeing this, an aged but highly motivated female pilgrim shouted with frustration: “What are you doing? Hey hey!! We don’t pour wine into your mouth forcefully during Ramadan, do we?

So how could you dare cutting our wish threads without permission? Isn't it a sin?" After this "tensional protest" of the pilgrim, I approached the worker and tried to see what happened. He said "They would kill you if you touch the strings. You saw it. She acted like a panther. My God! They look educated and modern but look what type of absurdity they believe in".



Picture 8080 Ex votos in the form of bride and groom which symbolize the pilgrim's will for marriage photo by the author 2015

After having sketched out the votive offerings at Aya Yorgi pilgrimage, let us see how pilgrims manifest their petitionary prayers or vow through votive material objects at al Batiyeh and see how these objects are interpreted by the officials and the ordinary visitors.

3.10. Al Batiyeh: Clothes, Undewears as Sacred waste

In fact, these power relations between pilgrims and authorities (as in the case of female pilgrims protesting the forest officer) are constantly negotiated: in order to maintain high numbers of pilgrims coming to the site, officials have to alternate between resisting and tolerating people's healing experiences, so they often show an ambiguous attitude towards miracles in general, and ex-votos in particular. Ex-votos are a vital part of the material culture of pilgrimage (King 2005: 49)³⁰⁵. They are material expressions of thanks for miraculous healing or rescue, and are often accompanied by a promise or vow (Gemzöe 2009³⁰⁶: 154; McDannell 1995³⁰⁷). Pilgrims take their ex-votos to the shrine to offer them to a particular Saint and to leave them in the holy place. An ex-voto differs from a prayer as it is a material gift that has to be placed in the saint's vicinity (Cousin 1983)³⁰⁸. Through obtaining a more or less permanent place in the sacred space, the votive gift extends and reinforces the relationships between the devotee and the saint; the drama expressed by the ex-voto also becomes publicly displayed and recognized. The practice of offering ex-votos is not confined to Catholic Europe but is a worldwide phenomenon (Latin America, Caribbean, Africa, Asia). People in different cultural contexts, embracing different religions and practicing different rituals, offer material things to their saints or gods in return for favors granted (Derks 2009³⁰⁹; Francis 2007³¹⁰). The official attitude towards "popular religion" has always been very ambiguous. The shrine's officials repressed popular devotion, but they also encouraged it so that the sanctuary would survive and grow.

Another example of votive offerings observed in many shrines in Lebanon is the personal clothes which enable a physical contact with the divine powers. However this ritual

³⁰⁵ King, C. Lindsey (2005). Pilgrimages, Promises, and ExVotos: *Ingredients for Healing in Northeast Brazil*. In *Pilgrimage and Healing*, ed. J. Dubisch and M. Winkelman. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 49–68.

³⁰⁶ Gemzöe, Lena. (2009). Caring for Others: Mary, Death, and the Feminization of Religion in Portugal. In *Moved by Mary. The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, ed. A.K. Hermkens, W. Jansen, and C. Notermans. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 149–63

³⁰⁷ McDannell, Colleen. (1995). *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.

³⁰⁸ Cousin, Bernard. (1983). Le miracle et le quotidien: Les ex-voto provençaux, images d'une société. Aix-en-Provence: Sociétés, Mentalités, Cultures

³⁰⁹ Derks, Sanne. (2009.) *Power and Pilgrimage: Dealing with Class, Gender and Ethnic Inequality at a Bolivian Marian Shrine*. Berlin: LIT Verlag.

³¹⁰ Francis, Doris (ed.). (2007). *Faith and Transformation: Votive Offerings and Amulets. Santa Fe*: Museum of New Mexico Press

practice can create tensions at the shrines. The power of the pilgrims to resist the authority of wardens and officials must not be overestimated. During my field work for the ex-votos at Al Batiyeh I experienced silent sometimes overt conflicts between the shrine authority and the pilgrims in terms of ex-votos. To support their vows to St George or the holy water by material gifts, pilgrims have to persist. To overcome the official rules concerning the ex-votos, they need the help of officials who sympathize with their devotional practices and try to bridge the gap between dominant and subdominant needs.



Picture 81 Votive offerings at al Batiyeh

The wardens (*Natour al mazar*) of Al Batiyeh are generally remain deaf and blind for the rituals of the pilgrims. When the warden see that someone has thrown something into the water, he waits for the visitor leave the shrine and then he takes the thing (clothes,

underwear etc) out with the help of a long stick. Although there is no explicit warning or rule stating that throwing ex votos into the water is not permitted, yet the pilgrims mostly do it in discreet very quickly, avoiding being noticed by the others or the warden of the shrine. However once I witnessed a conflict between the warden one of the pilgrims who brought his “makbous daughter”:

The man took out his little daughter’s shirt in order to dip her into the water and then all of a sudden he threw the shirt into the water. The warden was already there with them for help, as sometimes pilgrims ask for assistance of the warden. This quick maneuver of the father angered the warden, he reacted in frustration, grabbed the stick and intending to take the cloth out saying “This water is for blessing not for contaminating!!!” However the father got even more nervous and shouted “Who do you think you are? You are only a warden (Natour) !!That’s the rule of this ziyarat. First we throw the clothes of the child and then we dip her into the water. Who do you think you are to ruin this long tradition”?

From the perspective of the shrine’s officials, ex-votos left by pilgrims have become more and more unwanted material, not only because they visualized a popular empowerment of St George that the Church did not normally want to accord him, but also for more mundane reasons, such as keeping the place clean and allowing for a smooth transit of pilgrims.

To conclude it seems firstly that the way how rituals are conducted and meanings ascribed to them is a rather “irregular behavior”, which nevertheless has a system. This system of (re)interpreting the official liturgy in vernacular practices is very flexible, encompassing different traditions and meanings that are important in a particular context. Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh are religiously powerful places that attract also common people to undertake healing rituals and practices to gain good luck, health and fertility. As many such rituals got their inspiration from the symbolism of official liturgy these were interpreted, using religiously powerful symbols and other elements. This resulted in combinations of similar symbols but in slightly different contexts. It was well illustrated by the example of prayer slips of church corners and portals but also by the example of *dilekliks* which represented not official pilgrimage object but popular interpretations of them. The cases of cloth leftovers, ribbons and coins represent more universal symbolism which was realized at the most powerful religious centers and thus believed to be more effective. It is unquestionable that some elements of votive offerings or beliefs may have their roots also in the pre-

Christian period, but it is also obvious that the meanings of such elements have changed. And so, instead of studying Christianity and folk religion, we should rather think about new religiosities and consumption and material culture. Vernacular tradition has often been misused while taking the term just to replace 'folk religion'. This means that vernacular is not characteristic only to the lower strata of society, but each representative of every social class, including the religious and social elites, has his or her own vernacular religion. Of course the differently composed groups might have shared vernacular elements, for example, how they perceive a particular religious element or conduct a given ritual or understand a specific practice. At the same time, the members of a group might also have different views on some other element or practice, which means that the overall corpus of the particular beliefs and perceptions of a single person is still always unique, personally vernacular.

CHAPTER 4: A CLOSER LOOK ON THE PILGRIMS OF AYA YORGI AND AL BATIYEH



Picture 82 Female pilgrims sitting on the pews at Aya Yorgi in front of the fresco of Agios Damaskinos and Agios Kleonikos. Photo by the author 2017

4.1. Shrines, genders and ideologies

Lighting candles, making offerings or collecting holy water for personal use... Such religious practices have been condemned by religious officials as 'folk religion', 'superstition' or even 'sin'. The rejection of popular forms of religious observance has a strong gendered dimension, as it is mostly women who partake in the activities discouraged by the Church and the Islamic scripturalists, and therefore women's religious practices that are deprecated. Tapper reported how men in the Turkish town she studied viewed the visits of women to saintly shrines 'as verging on heresy' (Tapper, 1990: 247)³¹¹. Women, by contrast, give different interpretations of their behavior and resist the male-controlled, interpretation of what constitutes a proper religious act. Other scholars too have noted that pilgrimage should be seen as a gendered practice. In general, more women than men visit religious shrines (Dubisch, 1995)³¹². The 'saint' they visit is also more a man. However, in Europe, Mary and other female saints are three times more often the primary subjects of devotion than Christ or male saints (Gemzöe, 2000)³¹³. Feminist scholars like Fatima Mernissi have argued that saint or shrine visitation and pilgrimage can both reinforce dominant gender patterns, by upholding ideals of femininity, and also provide opportunities for women to improve their power position and to change structural gender inequalities. It is therefore important to understand how gender is enacted and changed during such religious observances.

Women in an unflinchingly patriarchal society seek through the saint's mediation a bigger share of power, of control. One area in which they seek almost total control is reproduction and sexuality, the central notions of any patriarchal system's definition of women, classical orthodox Islam included. Women who are desperate to husbands, women whose husbands have sexual problems, women have lost their husband's love or their own reproductive capacities go the saint to get help and find solutions. One of the important functions of sanctuaries is precisely their involvement with sexuality and fertility. Indeed, if power can be defined as "the chance of a person or a number of persons to realize their own will in a communal action, even against the resistance of others, who are participating in the action," then women's collaboration with saints is definitely a power operation. Excluded from ritualistic orthodox religion, women walking in processions around saints' tombs

³¹¹ Tapper, Nancy. (1990), "Ziyaret, Gender, Movement and Exchange in a Turkish Community," *Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, eds. F. D. Eickelman and J. Piscatori, London: Routledge

³¹² Ibid

³¹³ Ibid

express their quest for power in the vast horizons of the sacred space, untouched, unspoiled by human authority and hierarchies. (Mernissi, 1977 p. 107)³¹⁴

Multifunctional shrines are not marginal to the mosque but were centers of women's practices. These female spaces are not "public in the sense that women are out interacting with anonymous institutions and populations, but public in the sense that these are economic/ social/ spiritual forums where women take decisive productive action on their own behalves and can demonstrate the results to the community of their peers". (Sered 1996:104, 285)³¹⁵. The shrines also serve as places where Sered further suggests that motherhood and the physical and social vulnerability it may involve in the form of miscarriage, infertility, pregnancy, birth-giving, infant mortality or poor health, predisposes women to deal with existential issues and human suffering. In contrast to male-dominated religions, women's religions deal with these issues in concrete, this-worldly contexts. In fact, scholars who have studied vernacular Orthodoxy in Eastern Europe have coined the term "female suffering" or women's "culture of suffering" to depict the cultural competence women have acquired for dealing with pain and suffering (Caraveli-Chaves 1980:146)³¹⁶.

Moreover, as child bearers, mothers and care-givers, women must also deal with suffering caused by illnesses (Sered 1996:103). Healing is therefore a central theme in women's religious practice and has been seen as an integral part of their domestic duties in both male and female dominated religions. Sered presents the *zaar/saar* cult in North Africa and in the Middle East as a perfect example of women's cults which centre on healing and alleviating suffering (1996:36, 106–107)³¹⁷. Visits to the shrine of a holy man or a saint can be seen as functional alternatives to healing cults. A healing ceremony—arranged at a holy shrine or at home—is often preceded by a vow. Anne H. Betteridge, who has studied women's vow-making in urban Iran, contends that vows were central to the religious practice of Iranian women in spite of the fact that vows and the ceremonies connected with them were considered controversial both by male religious leaders and educated women because of their putative non-religious nature and because of the participants' alleged

³¹⁴ Mernissi, Fatima. (1977) *Women, Saints, and Sanctuaries, Vol. 3, No. 1, Women and National Development: The Complexities of Change*, pp. 101-112

³¹⁵ Sered, Susan. (1996). *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated by Women*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³¹⁶ Caraveli-Chaves Anna.(1980) "Bridge Between Worlds: The Greek Women's Lament as Communicative Event." *Journal of American Folklore*, 93:129-57.

³¹⁷ Ibid

disrespectful bargaining with God. Women's vows dealt with a variety of issues among the important ones barrenness and children's sickness (Betteridge 1992:104, 110)³¹⁸.

On the northern coast of the Mediterranean, women's vows and pilgrimages are also closely related to health issues. Because of this close connection between vows and health, Gemzöe views vow-making itself as a healing ritual (Gemzöe 2000:92, 80–82)³¹⁹. Health has also been central to women's vow-making and pilgrimages in Greece (Dubisch 1995:94)³²⁰. Sered has identified a further feature characteristic of religions dominated by women, namely their interpersonal orientation, which again is coupled to the socialisation of women into mothering and care-giving. Women's rituals demonstrate dependency and interconnectedness and are designed to cure and strengthen relationships (Sered 1996:121–122)³²¹. A closer analysis of the aforementioned vows (See the analysis of the prayers at Aya Yorgi) and pilgrimages makes the interpersonal nature of women's rituals explicit. Flueckiger has found that women's and men's visits to holy shrines in Muslim cultures are motivated by their gender-specific interests. She writes: "Women may visit the grave to ask for fertility, for the health of a child, or resolution of a marriage negotiation; men may ask for business success or success in an exam" (2006:724)³²². Mernissi's study³²³ also shows that the main reason for women's visits to the *maraboutic*³²⁴ shrines in Morocco healing as well as infertility. These shrines also function as a kind of a centre for health maintenance. Women also go to the shrine to be healed by the sacred water in the saint's cistern and perhaps to be treated by the guardian of the shrine who is often also a traditional healer. A number of different healing techniques are used including massage, infusions, amulets, chants, sitting in healing smoke and breathing the steam of pots in which Quranic verses are simmering. Platt's study shows that women visit the *maraboutic* shrines both on their own account and for the sake of their family members, pleading to the

³¹⁸ Betteridge, Anne H (1992). "Specialists in Miraculous Action: Some Shrines in Shiraz." In *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, edited by Alan Morinis, pp. 189–210. Westport, Conn., 1992

³¹⁹ Ibid

³²⁰ Ibid

³²¹ Ibid

³²² Flueckiger Joyce Burkhalter (2006), *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press: 2006).

³²³ Ibid

³²⁴ "Marabouts are Islamic spiritualists who are also believed to have the capacity to foresee but not control the future. These spiritualists range from conventional Islamic clerics (imam) who are versed in the Koran and preside over services at local mosques, to local healers and diviners who mix Islam with indigenous beliefs and practices. Some marabouts practices resemble those of getba, with Islamic verses replacing cowries. Most marabouts receive gifts or money for their services, with the most respected and renowned marabouts drawing substantial income from their practice. However, these practices are generally disapproved by Islamic orthodoxy."

saint if, for example, their husband has been unfaithful or if their son needs help to pass an exam. When imploring the saints to put an end to a husband's infidelity or when seeking to influence marriage negotiations, women ritually manage relationships.

It is necessary here to go back to a previously mentioned prayer sample written on a slip of paper that I found at Aya Yorgi also matches with the previous scholars' findings concerning the "infidelity" issues:

"My Allah!! I am again in front of your gate. Till today you have never sent me back empty handed. Thank you my Allah. Please show the proper way to my husband (Can-his name). Keep him away from the women, alcohol and drugs. Send me a miracle. May my husband never desire to see Gülcan's face or hear her voice again. (Gülcan the name of the woman). May he hate that woman. Turn my husband's mind, heart and face to me. And may this Gülcan disappear"

Jill Dubisch's observation that women are the majority among the pilgrims to the island of Tinos in Greece, because they are responsible for the family's love rituals, which are often women's specialty and which has been seen by traditional scholarship as a merely personal, sometimes even anti-social activity, is another example of women's ritual management and control of social relationships. These rituals serve similar socially approved social ends as the aforementioned supplications to the saints. Love rituals bind pairs together or break undesirable bonds and sooth marital relationships (Bell 2002:178–179)³²⁵. We find a similar gender-specific pattern in the prayers at Aya Yorgi:

"Allahım (My God). You give me, my sister Elif and Suzan a clean and well-behaved husband. Give us a healthy life and a prosperous household. Let us be peaceful. Let us buy a car. Let my marriage be good. And let it happen quickly"

For women in the Middle East, healing as well as the solution of other difficult life problems is a primary impetus for *ziyarat* to saints' shrines. Such healing furthermore may be multifaceted. On the one hand, belief in *barakah* and the abilities of *barakah*-bestowing dead saints to perform miraculous cures, including the restoration of fecundity to the infertile (Inhorn, 1994)³²⁶, brings hope to those whose health problems seem intractable or who have failed to find relief in other therapeutic venues. In addition, the activities of the pilgrimage itself—including the respite from everyday routine; the exhilaration of travel to a spiritually "magnetic" center ; the cathartic effects of unburdening one's "private

³²⁵ Bell, Catherine M. (2002). *Ritual. Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press,

³²⁶ Inhorn, Marcia.(1994). *Quest for Conception: Gender, Infertility, and Egyptian Medical Traditions*.Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

heartaches" (Tapper, 1990)³²⁷ on a nonjudgmental but responsive holy one who can be requested to act on one's behalf; the ability to be part of a sympathetic, experienced community of female sufferers who often congregate at these shrines (Mernissi, 1977)³²⁸; and the ministrations of the living, *barakah*-bestowing *shaikhs* who often attend to these shrines and who pray and write healing amulets for suffering pilgrims—are part and parcel of the healing process. Thus even if miraculous cures do not eventuate, the pilgrimage itself may bring relief and psychological relaxation as well as spiritual renewal through contact with divinity. Furthermore as Fatima Mernissi (1977)³²⁹ has noted, Middle Eastern women's pilgrimages to holy sanctuaries are "power operations," means by which subaltern women can seek control over their sexuality, fertility, health, and general wellbeing in societies that tend to be decidedly patriarchal (Inhorn, 1994)³³⁰.

Pilgrimages to saints' tombs allow women to reaffirm, if only temporarily, control over their lives and their personal well-being through actions that are autonomous from men. Typically, *ziyarat* to the mosque-tombs of blessed saints are journeys that women make alone, allowing them the opportunity to demonstrate their agency and independence. Even though women's *ziyarat* often require money from husbands and, in most cases, permission to travel by husbands or other family members, the pilgrimage typically remains an exclusively female activity, with shrines often serving as protected "female turf" (Betteridge, 1983)³³¹. As women are barred in many ways from formal public ritual practice, including participation in Friday communal prayers at mosques, many of the popular healing rituals and pilgrimages practiced in the Middle East are nonetheless carried out by women within the framework of the Islamic ritual cycle. In many cases, pilgrimages and healing rituals are undertaken during the exact hour of the Friday communal noon prayer—the most important one in the Islamic weekly cycle of thirty-five prayers.

³²⁷ Ibid

³²⁸ Ibid

³²⁹ Ibid

³³⁰ Ibid

³³¹ Betteridge, Anne H. (1983) "Muslim Women and Shrines in Shiraz." In *Mormons and Muslims*, edited by Spencer J. Palmer, pp. 127–138. Provo, Utah



Picture 83. Female (Muslim) Pilgrims praying in the church of Aya Yorgi. Photo by the author 2017

Examining women's involvement in pilgrimage from an historical perspective begins in ancient times with the travels of wealthy Jewish women to the Temple in Jerusalem, as an expression of their piety, with records dating from the 6th century BCE (Kanarek, 2015)³³². These examples show that these pilgrim women often travelled together with other female relatives; sisters, mothers, daughters, grandmothers. In Medieval times, the subordinate role of women in society and their position within the household as subject to their husband or father (Mecham, 2008)³³³, made distant travel for pilgrimage difficult, and as a result, such journeys were often made closer to home, to minimize the impact on their domestic responsibilities (Bailey, 2012)³³⁴. These women brought with them gifts, of goods they had made themselves, such as 'kerchiefs, towels, jewelry, and similar objects of a domestic and personal nature' (Mecham, 2008:585)³³⁵, and liturgical objects, but also made financial gifts to support female and male religious communities and charitable works (although money was more commonly given by men). Such pilgrimages were noted

³³² Kanarek, Jane (2015) Pilgrimage and piety: Rabbinic women and vows of valuation. *NASHIM: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues* 28(1): 61-74

³³³ Mecham, JL (2008) Cooperative piety among monastic and secular women in late medieval Germany. *Church History and Religious Culture* 88(4): 581-611.

³³⁴ Bailey, Anne (2012) Flights of distance, time and fancy: Women pilgrims and their journeys in English medieval miracle narratives. *Gender & History* 24(2): 292/309.

³³⁵ Ibid

for their ‘shared devotional culture’ (Mecham, 2008:611)³³⁶, and female pilgrims also faced hardships, giving up comfort on their journey ‘in return for spiritual reward’ (Bailey, 2012: 294)³³⁷. Women pilgrims express their faith in a characteristically feminine way: by weeping and wailing, and acting out ‘emotion-laden dramas’ (Bailey, 2013:493³³⁸). This female emotional behavior was part of a ‘powerful public performance of self’ in a gendered ‘performance space in which they can express emotion, socialize with others, and find legitimate time away from family and home’ (Bailey, 2013:493)³³⁹.

Today, women predominate in the cult of Mary and the saints and more often than men make pilgrimages to sacred sites such as the shrine of Our Lady of Fátima in the middle of Portugal. Women also make more vows to Mary and the saints than men do (Yel, 2005)³⁴⁰.

Alternative transmission of knowledge (as in ziyarats and non-official pilgrimages) is particularly important. As “social memory” transmitted through rituals (that of Aya Yorgi) has often been silenced, erased, or forgotten, pilgrimages are the only ways to “make visible those social actors, scenarios, and power relations that have been overlooked and disappeared” (Taylor , 2003 p.278³⁴¹). Thus, pilgrimage is a good place to do the work of challenging traditional expectations and creating new alternatives is because pilgrimage itself is such an ancient practice. *Women’s Leadership in Marginal Religions*, Catherine Wessinger (1993, p.102) ³⁴² points out that women who “feel excluded from the mainstream of society due to sexism” and choose to “develop separate religious structures”. Women create communities through pilgrimages. This temporary community is built from both diverse individuality and a feeling of “belonging to the group”. Perhaps this is how a “community” of women pilgrims can be understood: not *en masse*, united under the universal umbrella of “woman,” but as individuals choosing to come together as an intentional community.

³³⁶ Ibid

³³⁷ Ibid

³³⁸ Ibid

³³⁹ Ibid

³⁴⁰ Yel, A. M. (2006). *Fatima: Portekiz’de Bir Hristiyan Hac Merkezinin Kültürel Antropolojik Analizi*. Kaknüs Yayınları İstanbul

³⁴¹ Taylor, Diana (2003). *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Duke University Press

³⁴² Wessinger Catherine. (1993.) editor. *Women’s leadership in marginal religions: Explorations outside the mainstream*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press

Susan A. Ross also in her study, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology*, (2001)³⁴³ both offers examples of how ritual, theology, and gender are intertwined, and illustrates how women's performance of gender and spiritual identity through ritual can transform faith practices. Ross's example (sacramental theology) runs parallel with my own Aya Yorgi pilgrimage in at least two useful ways. First, Ross suggests that "women have turned to 'unofficial' or 'unorthodox' religious practices," in large part because feminist theology, as "a theology of liberation," is interested in the "emancipatory potential" of spiritual practices (p.27). Next, it depends upon shifts in interpretation of history and orthodoxy, or what Ross calls *ambiguity*, as "a source of transformation and meaning" (p.65).

4.2. Pilgrimage for (In)fertility

Ethnographic researches show that in Central Asia and the Middle East, in traditional families, it often used to be women, not men, who were held responsible for children. In childless couples, it was generally women, who were stigmatized for their inability to conceive and thus seek intersection to augment their fertility although the case has changed with the improvements in the medical awareness (Kobbeisi and Inhorn, 2007)³⁴⁴ These patterns could be explained through a local understanding of motherhood as the meaning of womanhood, or through existing religious sensibilities supporting patriarchal social structures, which, in turn, continue to sustain existing gender ideology endowing women with responsibility for their fertility (Akiner, 1997³⁴⁵; Sultanova, 2011³⁴⁶). Women are (still) expected to act as the caretakers and teachers of future generations and therefore, creators of the future moral/national/local community. But more importantly they are biological beings who have a capacity to bear children. From this perspective, female fertility becomes important. It not only connects daily life and social benefits, but also links female procreative abilities to social reproduction at large (Inhorn, 2006 p. 438)³⁴⁷.

³⁴³ Ross, Susan(2001) *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum)

³⁴⁴ Kobeissi Loulou, Inhorn, Marcia C. (2007). Male Fertility in Lebanon. *Ethnicity & Disease*, Volume 17 retrieved from <https://www.ethndis.org/priorsuparchives/ethn-17-02s3-33.pdf>

³⁴⁵ Akiner, Shirin. (1997), *Between tradition and modernity : the dilemma facing contemporary Central Asian women*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York.

³⁴⁶ Sultanova, Razia. (2011), *From Shamanism to Sufism: Women, Islam and Culture in Central Asia*, I.B. Tauris, London.9

³⁴⁷ Inhorn Marcia. (2006.) Making Muslim babies: IVF and gamete donation in Sunni and Shi'a Islam. *Cult Med Psych* 30:427–450.

“The one who has descendants (offspring) doesn’t die” a Lebanese proverb says. It accurately reflects the stereotypical attitude towards posterity among indigenous peoples of the region, where the importance of having children is caused not only by individual desire for procreation and companionship but also by ideals about life-cycle, which is first of all oriented to marriage and multiple children. Having children determines social status of a family, therefore, in most cases, childless unions do not last. Mainly, women seek transcendental intersection to augment their fertility. In order to overcome infertility, aside from the medicine, childless women (sometimes together with their husbands) visit sacred sites such *mazars*.

The local people of Sarba frequently talks about the miraculous properties of al Batiyeh for infertility. They even claim that queen of Iran, Sorayya paid a visit to this oratory in 1950s to find a cure for her infertility before her divorce from the Shah. However, in their visits to the shrine for infertility issues women are not alone. They mostly come with their husbands as in some cases the travel needs a long car drive depending on where they live in Lebanon. Contrary to what Mernissi claimed at Al Batiyeh we observe men and women mostly together. This could result from the recent change in family size and conception of being couple and family

For example during my first visit to al Batiyeh in 2013, I met a Syrian Sunni-Muslim refugee couple from Raqqa who had been married for five years and still did not have a baby. They had heard from their Lebanese acquaintances that the water of that cave had procreative features. When I asked them who that chevalier was, showing the big poster of St George, their answer was interesting: “He might be Saaladdin Ayyoubi?” said the young man seriously. They were more interested in water than the saint himself. The wife took a bottle of water from the cave and they left the shrine.

Another story comes from a women living in north Lebanon who witnessed the improvement of her daughter`s illness after being brought to Mar Jirjes. The daughter finally decided to become a nun:

My story goes back to 28 years ago I live in Chakka, north Lebanon. I am an Orthodox Christian at the age of 56. During her infancy my daughter used to cry so badly she couldn’t sleep, couldn’t eat and of course we (her mom and me) couldn’t either. No doctor could find a reason for her endless crying... Sometimes 24 hours somebody advised us to bring her to al Batiyeh. They said Mar Jirjes and the water would cure the kid. We did. We brought her here blessed her with water etc. Then slowly she decreased crying. But it was a slow process. She began to put on weight.

Time passed she started school but as she grew slower than other kids she was slow in learning as well. But she managed to finish her basic studies. High school etc...In the meantime she was going to the church quite often... when she reached the age of 17 she decided to be a nun... She is a nun now at Harissa. And she also works at Charity (Christian) TV

On a hot and dump summer day at Batiyeh, again, a young couple with a newly born baby in their arms appeared, accompanied by another couple with three kids. They looked so cheerful, laughing and talking aloud. After a short introduction of me, they revealed the reason for their happiness and didn't hesitate to share their stories with me.

My story is a bit interesting. Last year we came here. My wife couldn't conceive. I prayed here and made a vow and look!! We have our baby in our hands now. We named him Tony but his baptismal name in the church is Gerges(George). We live in Bekaa, in a village called Jdeide al Fekkeh. My mother advised us to visit here. During my childhood years, I still remember that she used to bring us here when we were sick. Al Batiyeh has a reputation everywhere in terms of these issues: children, sterile women etc. My brother too. He asked for a son from Mar Jirjes here in Batiyeh and his son is 12 years old now. His name is Elie too.

After a quick prayer in front of the icon of St George, Elie with the help of his sister in law dipped little Tony into the waters of the cave for him to acquire the grace (baraka) and then they threw the shirt of the baby into the water saying "Shoukran Ya Mar Jiryes" (Thank You Mar Jiryes) prayers in order to show their gratitude.



Picture 84 Little Tony and his mother by the grotto of Mar jirjes al Batiyeh photo by the author 2017



Picture 85 Woman with a picture of Atatürk on her T-shirt at Aya Yorgi pilgrimage photo by the author 2017

4.3. Deconstructing the Pilgrims' Confessions

After bibliographical introduction to gender issues concerning women's overwhelming presence at shrine pilgrimages, it is essential to examine and deconstruct the broad notion of "shared shrine" and the scope of "pilgrims" at Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh. This is a crucial question for at least to see if it is possible to link of the pilgrimage with gender, certain groups or ideologies. Thus, in the following part, I will also deconstruct the term "Muslim or Islam" as it is too broad to be analyzed as a category, instead, I will try to scrutinize it by opening subheadings such as Laiks, Alawis and Sunnis in the context of Turkey. While doing this, I will be looking for (or rather noticing) the potentially powerful or efficacious elements that I gathered during my fieldwork in Istanbul and Sarba.

4.3.1. Secular Muslims

It is noteworthy that the state and religious institutions in Turkey have always intervened at different times to promote a 'correct' or 'high' form of religion while trying to isolate certain forms. First intervention came from Kemalists in the early days of the Republic. Turkey's version of secularism, with its emphasis on rationality and positivism, associated certain rituals carried out in shrines with backwardness or superstition and claimed that they challenge the 'modern' ideals of the state. Starting from the 1950s onwards, however, with increasing influence of Islam in public life and political discourse, different governments but especially within the last years, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) government took great strides to renovate the shrines and tombs of revered Sufi sheikhs and saints. Regardless of the interest taken in renovating shrines by the government, most of the shrines displayed prominently placed plaques by *Diyanet*, the main religious authority in Turkey, instructing what to do and what not to do at the shrines. It is argued that the autonomous and esoteric character of a 'saintly space' makes it problematic for both seculars and orthodox Muslims alike—as they advocate modern systematic rationality and believe that society and religion should be structured with clear boundaries between private and public or the sacred and the profane (Shelke & Stauth 2008, pp. 15–16)³⁴⁸.

Although *Diyanet* was established in early days of the Republic to maintain the secular lines of the state by reinforcing Kemalist reforms in society, it has undergone some

³⁴⁸ Schielke, S. and G. Stauth. "Introduction". In *Dimensions of Locality: Muslim Saints, Their Place and Space*, edited by G. Stauth and S. Schielke. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008, pp. 7–21

changes. Since 2002, strands of the ruling party suggest that certain rituals are not in line with the ‘correct’ model of Islam and more related with pre-Islamic cult of ancestors and animism. The long list of condemned, but in fact, common local practices by many women, as written on the plaques at the shrines pertain to the sacrificing of animals as a vow to the shrine, lighting candles or sticking small stones or coins to the walls of the shrine, tying pieces of cloth to the shrines or to the trees in front of the shrine complex, throwing money on the tomb, leaving food at the shrine, touching the tomb or the cloth over the tomb with hands or face, asking a favor from the dead saint directly for help and not from God, circumambulating around the shrines and tombs, expecting miraculous healing from shrines, and sleeping and performing canonical prayers (*namaz*) inside the shrines. The plaques further indicate a dichotomy between the two versions of cultural expressions of Islam: an urban, scripturalist, ‘high’ version (official Islam) and a rural, ritualistic, and ‘low’ version (popular Islam), which heavily depends on saint veneration.

I encountered with the similar uneasiness when I tried to interview the Mufti³⁴⁹ of Büyükada regarding my questions about Aya Yorgi. I called his secretary several times to take an appointment however they were not eager to meet me. In the end I managed to persuade the mufti to agree on a phone conversation. He was extremely rigid and stern in his tone and obviously very distant:

What do you mean with sharing? A Christian is Christian. A Muslim is Muslim. I do not agree with the general assumption that majority of the participants of Aya Yorgi day are Muslims. Who can prove this? Have they ever carried out a quantitative analysis? Have they asked them what their confessions are? Have they counted them one by one? Plus, our television media always exaggerates the numbers of the people.. It is not more than two or three thousand people and I am certain that they are mostly Christians.. But of course among them there might be some corrupted Muslims who are unaware of the pillars of Islam or who believes in magic and superstitions. They write their wishes in the papers and put it in the box in the church. What sort of comment can I make on a woman who asks for a better or more handsome husband or a man who asks for a brand new car? What can I say? Such useless comments on such useless things wouldn’t fit with my position.

This sharp dichotomy between ‘official’ and ‘popular’ Islam, however, falls short of explaining the contemporary reality in Turkey. The terms, popular Islam and official Islam, have acquired different meanings at different times in Turkey. For example, Özdalga (1997)³⁵⁰ uses the term ‘popular’ Islam to denote religious ideologies in Turkey and the

³⁴⁹ Mufti of Büyükada, Kamil Tuncer , telephone interview 22.05.2017

³⁵⁰ Özdalga, Elisabeth (1997). *The veiling issue: Official secularism and popular Islam in modern Turkey*. London: Curzon Press.

rising trend of wearing headscarf among the urban female in the 1990s. Therefore, instead of viewing official and popular religion as monolithic and fixed entities, it is more appropriate to focus on the ‘dialectical character of their interrelationship’ (Badone 1990)³⁵¹. There are a couple of reasons for such an analysis: First, “contrary to the classical assumption that modernity displaces religion, the Turkish case illustrates that the relation between modernity and religion is far more complicated and subtle” (Çınar 2005, p. 16)³⁵². Since the early days of the Republic, ‘secularity and religion are in a dialectic’, as secular and Islamic discourses argue time and again over which elements constitute Turkishness and proper Turkish culture, sometimes using each other’s rhetoric in reference to an ‘other’ (Navaro-Yashin 2002, p. 7)³⁵³. Moreover, to promote their own different agenda, both secularists and Islamists in Turkey use women for ‘the perpetuation of custom and the potential for negotiated change’ (for a similar argument, see Kandiyoti and Azimova 2003, p. 338)³⁵⁴. Especially after middle 1990s, the transition in Turkish society and handover of economic power to emerging Sunni ‘elite’ groups living in urban centers who were originally from small towns in Anatolia, opened the possibility for greater active involvement of marginal Islamic movements of the ‘periphery’ in the public life which was formerly under the control of the ‘center’ (Çarkoğlu and Toprak 2006, p. 15)³⁵⁵. As a reaction, secularists used the symbol of Atatürk by visiting his mausoleum to show their ongoing devotion to his principles and modern ideals of Turkey as opposed to a so-called ‘hidden Islamist agenda’. Despite being secular in outlook, Islamists, on the other hand, likened these visits to the practice of visiting shrines of Sufi saints (Çınar 2005³⁵⁶, p. 4; Navaro-Yashin 2002, pp. 192–93³⁵⁷).

Second, although the historical divide between ‘official’ (high) and ‘popular’ (low) Islam was mainly attributed to urban vs. rural masses respectively, starting from the end of 1950s onwards, this dichotomy was mostly blurred as a result of mass rural–urban migration.

³⁵¹ Badone, Ellen. (Ed.) (1990). *Religious orthodoxy and popular faith in European society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

³⁵² Çınar, Alev (2005). *Modernity, Islam, and secularism in Turkey: Bodies, places, and time, public worlds*, Vol. 14. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

³⁵³ Navaro-Yashin, Yael (2002). *Faces of the state: Secularism and public life in Turkey*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

³⁵⁴ Kandiyoti, Deniz & Azimova, Nadira (2003). The communal and the sacred: Women’s worlds of ritual in Uzbekistan. *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, 10(2), 327–49

³⁵⁵ Çarkoğlu, Ali & Toprak, Binnaz (2006). *Değişen Türkiye’de Din, Siyaset ve Toplum (Religion, politics and society in a changing Turkey)*. İstanbul: TESEV Yayınları.

³⁵⁶ Çınar, Alev (2005). *Modernity, Islam, and secularism in Turkey: Bodies, places, and time, public worlds*, Vol. 14. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

³⁵⁷ Ibid

Thus, people who had been living in rural areas before brought their version of ‘popular’ Islam together with them to the city centers (such as string practices at Aya Yorgi). Third, the ‘official’ and ‘popular’ dichotomy among religious groups also points to the unbalanced power relations within society, where ‘popular’ religious groups may usually have a subordinate position vis-a-vis those adhering to ‘official’ religion (Berlinerblau 2001, p. 619)³⁵⁸.

Shrines in urban areas in Turkey are often attached to or located close to mosques but the purposes served by shrines and mosques tend to differ and the visitors that frequented them had varying expectations. Women were conspicuous by their absence in all but the major mosques perhaps with the exception of the month of Ramadan. Even then, they were often crammed into corners or made ‘invisible’ in other ways. This suggests that shrines become devotional public spaces for women where they can actively participate and exercise ‘agency’ when they are not welcome into male domains, the mosques (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2002, pp. 165–78)³⁵⁹.

Former mufti of Usküdar district of Istanbul, Ihsan Ozkes once talked during a discussion about the question if women are determined to sit at the back parts of the mosque"; and said that "Put aside women being at the back of the mosque, in some mosques there is even no place for women, they didn't think of it when building the mosque." In parallel to Ozkes's declaration, a young woman at Aya Yorgi talked about her adventures in the Kuzguncuk mosque in Istanbul. She goes to their local mosque and performs her namaz behind hundreds of men from different classes as the only woman there. As a result of this experience, she feels that the religious rituals are getting away from women: "there was one common characteristic of all those from the lowest and highest ranks of the society. All were more privileged than woman in religious ritual".

Sunni mainstream scholars say that all the practices around the shrines and holly places are to be rejected and should be stopped immediately because Muslim theology say that it is against Islam and secular Muslims state that such practices are results of ignorance and lack of education (Öztürk, 2013)³⁶⁰. Moreover, many Muslim seculars reject Islamic law

³⁵⁸ Berlinerblau, Jacques (2001). Max Weber's useful ambiguities and the problem of defining ‘popular’ religion. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 69(3), 605–26.

³⁵⁹ Mazumdar, Shampa & Mazumdar, Sanjoy (2002). In mosques and shrines: Women's agency in a public sacred space. *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 16(2), 165–78.

³⁶⁰ Öztürk, Yaşar Nuri (2013) *Din Maskeli Allah Düşmanlığı Şirk, Yeni Boyut Yayınları* : Istanbul p.. 166-187.

(sharia), together with Islam. Modern Muslims consider that Islamic sharia is a nightmare. They do not want to follow any of them. They do not respect any clergy. They admit they are Muslims by origin, ethnicity by history that they have Islamic roots but by no means has it implied that they have to follow Islamic tradition and clergy. The only solution to the modern world are modern international education, human rights rule of law in a secular framework, equality of men and women, unifying the global culture, a secular interpretation of the words, rational thinking, modernization of society, sexual freedom, freedom of journalism, personal freedom. Such Muslims consider that a symbolic move towards Christians and Jews or symbolic participation to Jewish and Christian ceremonies is a message to the west that they reject Muslim fundamentalism and they have no barrier between people of different religion. And the real agenda is to embrace modernity so they have top priorities well beyond returning to the past. In the Muslim world regardless of fundamentalist or secular there is a conflict which can become very violent between secular who have their own vision of modern country and Islamist who want to revive Islamic traditions.

In the world all over, we have the internet, a very free movement of ideas of faith continuously changing mosaic of ideas and belief. An ordinary person in the world can be influenced by anything he sees on the internet, instantly and people don't mind moving around, taking pictures of a Buddhist temple etc, it is a kind of tourism. They adopt a legend, have fun, and learn new things. They do not ask what is good or what is right. She/he doesn't care about the contradictions. Most of the people want to enjoy life, learn new things. They wouldn't mind believing in Christianity for two days or Islam. The global citizen doesn't feel threatened. A global citizen is proud to have a multi-cultural experience.

“Let me tell you something my boy!! I am a secular women and I personally don't feel comfortable in a mosque. The sheiks and all others poke their noses in the length of my skirt and visible hair. Ahh.. by the way.. Thank God (elhamdillah) I am a Muslim but I feel more peaceful in a church. I can pray in my own language and no one cares if I wear headscarf or not..” (Canan, female, 57)

It wouldn't be wrong if I say that Aya Yorgi feast day hosts the afflux of “secular women”. Turkish way of secularism has always had particular reflections on female body. And especially, according to Nilüfer Göle after 1980s, with the rise of political Islam and its visibility in the public sphere, headscarf (türban) continues to carry a symbolism that is more complicated than the dichotomy of modern/non-modern. In the last two decades,

Turkey witnessed the rise of Islamist movements and politics, influence in economics, parallel with a distinct Islamist female identity. Increase in the veiled women in the public sphere has been pointed out as the indicator of the rise of political Islam and Islamist groups in Turkey (Göle, 1997)³⁶¹. However, the ways in which Islamic dress codes of modesty are understood has changed in Turkey over time. Still, the headscarf became the most visible symbol and indicator of Islamization of politics, gender relations, urban spaces and daily practices (Göle, 1997: 69)³⁶².

Modernity in Turkey is implicitly associated with Christian-European values or phenomenon although almost never overtly articulated. However once and still inside Anatolia and Istanbul, the women who wears fancy stylish clothes or rejecting the headscarf or the mean with used to be accused of being degenerated Muslims by conservatives. I believe that this perception has been accepted by the seculars (laiks) as well. Apart from bodily issues I assume that we can hear the echoes of such a mindset related with the interpretation of certain spheres as well. Churches, for example, are the most prominent places which the modern western lifestyles are considered to be manifested. The young Muslim warden of Aya Yorgi told me that many people asked him to show them where the confessional was. Because they had seen the images of confessionals in the western movies and they want to have a picture in front of it. Not only at Aya Yorgi but also at St Antoine church in Istiklal Street, during a visit in previous years I listened in two men talking on the pews. One of them was astonished with the architecture and the cleanness of the church. He was comparing the mosques with the churches in terms of cleanness and ergonomics for praying. “These Christians are really civilized (medeni) and modern.. Look how comfortably we sit. In the mosques I can’t sit properly on the floor and I can’t breathe because of the smell of the dirty socks of others”.

Two anecdotes from two women at Aya Yorgi imply the same point of view:

I like churches and the island itself. It is very clean really. Even the air.. Some Muslims shrines however are stowed out and dirty except for Yahya Efendi on the Bosporus. . The women are like bogies with their headscarves. (Sezen, female, 48)

³⁶¹ Göle, Nilüfer (1997). Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites Source: *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 1, pp. 46-58 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4329022> . Accessed: 12/02/2015 08:43

³⁶² Göle, Nilüfer. (1993) *Musulmanes et Modernes. Voile et Civilisation En Turquie [Muslim and Modern. The Headscarf and Civilization in Turkey]*. Paris: La Découverte.

I am a Muslim but I don't wear headscarf. I don't believe that it is an obligation. I don't often go to the mosques or other shrines but when I do, I just cover up my hair with capuchin. That's why I feel very comfortable here . (Feyza, female, 32)

Secular women (mainly Kemalist) have perceived the rise of Islamic movements after the 1980s as a major threat, and they organized efficiently to counter it. Those urban, well-educated, middle class Kemalist women who viewed defending principle of secularism as the primary aim in the name of guarding women's rights mobilized many platforms and civil society organizations such as *Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği*³⁶³ and *Cumhuriyet Kadınları Derneği* (Yazıcı, 1996³⁶⁴ Yüksel, 2013 p.5³⁶⁵). In their perception, the protection of secular political system and lifestyle were the most important prerequisite. Therefore headscarf was also perceived as not being 'modern', and as conflicting with the kind of modern clothing that the secular, modern Turkish nation is to wear.

When I visit Aya Yorgi, I always pray for our Mehmetçik (soldiers), the police officers, security guards and the serenity of my motherland. I am an Atatürkist and a sort of nationalist. I am always proud of being a Turkish woman following the steps of Mustafa Kemal. (Serpil,female, 42)

The coincidence that St George's day and National Sovereignty day are both on 23th of April is notable. Although it is not possible to find reliable historical evidence that reveals the connection between these two festive days, an "independent" researcher named Oktan Keleş³⁶⁶ claims that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk might have chosen this specific day on purpose to imply the renaissance of Turkish nation referring to Hıdırellez spring festival which is associated with rebirth of nature. Because, before the adoption of western solar calendar system, Turkey as remnant of Ottoman State, used to use Rumi calendar where Hıdırellez feast was on the 23rd of April. But the calendar reform in early 1926 Hıdırellez was begun to be celebrated on the 6th of May according to the Gregorian calendar. National sovereignty day is an official public holiday in Turkey. Naturally, it is a matchless opportunity in the middle of the spring for small scale trips and daily excursion in Istanbul. Büyükdada and the other islands enable the people to enjoy very scenic beauties and fresh

³⁶³ The Association to Support Contemporary Life (CYDD), a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that works to place young girls in school. CYDD was founded by Türkan Saylan in 1989, a Kemalist female doctor, who worked in rural Turkey, where girls, for cultural and financial reasons, are often left behind at home when their brothers go to school. CYDD has built schools in rural areas and awarded scholarships to young girls. The aim of this NGO is to protect and advance "Atatürk's Turkish Republic and secularism".

³⁶⁴ Yazıcı Serap (1996) *İnsan Hakları Açısından Laiklik, Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği Yayınları-7*, 2.

³⁶⁵ Yüksel, Saadet (2013). The Clash Between Free Exercise of Religion and Secularism Within the Turkish Legal System *Milletlerarası Hukuk ve Milletlerarası Özel Hukuk Bülteni*, C.33, No. 2, 2013 (English) www.journals.istanbul.edu.tr/iuhmhobh/.../5000160528

³⁶⁶ Öteki Gündem. Haber Türk TV. 05.05.2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGWtX0kRNJY>

air for the ones who are tired of hectic life of overcrowded Istanbul. All the pilgrims that I interviewed with and the other local residents of Büyükada associated the massive number of Aya Yorgi feast with reason that it is public holiday. The ones who attend the festivities of National Sovereignty day in the neighboring districts such as Kadıköy, Maltepe and Kartal visit the island afterwards. One can notice these people with the Ataturk or Turkish flag printed shirts and Turkish flags in their hands or temporary tattoos of the signature of Kemal Atatürk.



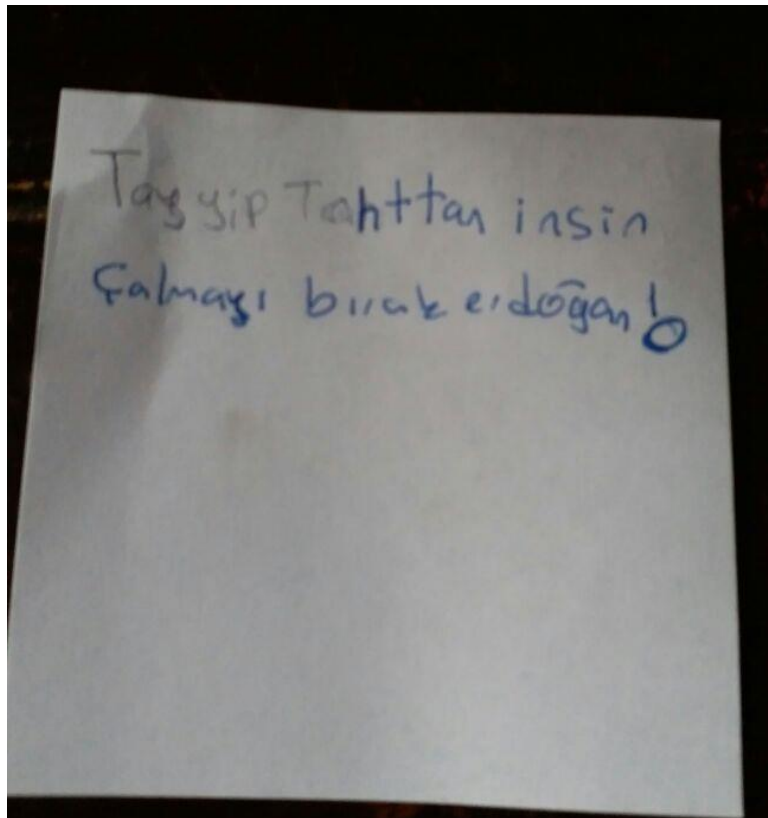
Picture 86 A Secular Kemalist woman with Turkish flag on her T-shirt distributing candles to announce that her wishes came true. photo by the author on 23rd of April 2017

Another visible print of the secular or anti–AKP pilgrims can be seen in the wish box prayers or the papers attached to the tress. Secularists accused AKP leaders of seeking a ‘silent’ Islamist revolution since taking power in 2002. They claim that the secular establishment is concerned about the pro-Islamic policies of the AKP, which could bring to an end Atatürk's legacy and his laic (secular) Turkish Republic. For example Turkey went to constitutional referendum on 16th April 2017 to vote on amendments that would transform the country from a parliamentary democracy into a presidential system: which is popularly called “yes/no referendum”. It was a week before Aya Yorgi day. I was at Aya Yorgi on 8th of April for an habitual fieldwork visit. And in the wish box I saw two papers which say “Please God, let the “No” win.

And July 2016, Turkey suffered an attempted coup d'Etat. But a second, more insidious coup took place five days later, when the Justice and Development party (AKP) government declared a state of emergency, suspending the rule of law and parliamentary democracy. Since then Turkey has been ruled by decree. The government has sacked around 105,000 civil servants without any proper explanation. It has arrested large numbers of academics, journalists, and even members of parliament, on politically motivated charges. Kemal Kilicdaroglu the leader of main opposition party (CHP) leader announced 450 km protest march (*adalet yürüyüşü*) on 15th June 2017 from the Turkish capital to Istanbul after a CHP parliamentarian and former journalist Enis Berberoğlu was arrested. He was sentenced to 25 years in jail for giving an opposition journalist video allegedly showing Turkey sending weapons into Syria. Over a million people actively attended the rally and millions of others supported the march on their social media accounts with the hashtag *adalet* (*justice*). Not on the feast day but on an ordinary summer day when I was in the field, I came across with the papers attached to tress with wishes for justice. It was as if they were asking for a miracle from an unbiased divine assistance.



Picture 87 #Freedom #Justice #Equality Photo by the author 2017



Picture 88 "May Tayyip be dethroned. Tayyip, Stop stealing!!" photo by the author 2017

2015 was the year for parliament elections. For this reason almost all parties with their representatives and the candidates were also there, taking the advantage of the crowd for their propaganda. Booklets, free emblems and flags were being distributed. AKP, the ruling party, was there and they were also offering free *kandilsimiti* (traditional ring-

shaped, savory roll covered with sesame seeds) to the by passers because 23rd of April coincided with *Regaib Kandili* which is one of the holly nights in movable calendar of Islam. CHP (Republican People's Party) the main opposition in the parliament, seemed to take the greatest attentions from the pilgrims. Though only few were approaching AKP stalls, CHP was obviously the most powerful among the crowd. Some women were even applauding and chanting slogans like "En Büyük CHP!" (CHP is the greatest). I had a chance to interview with a Member of Parliament candidate for CHP, Barış Yarkadaş, a formerly famous journalist. He reported that they had double reason why they were there. First the enormous crowd and secondly the Aya Yorgi pilgrims were mostly known to be "Kemalist (Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of Turkish Republic), laique, modern and open minded".

In the beginning, I also wondered "the degree of religiosity" of the people that I talked to, nevertheless spirituality cannot be categorised, not in a kind of study that I was doing. Tolmacheva (1994)³⁶⁷ writes about this difficulty of estimating a religiosity for other people, as well: "...Since Islam allows lapses of observation, the latent nature of Islamic belief and ritual in the Soviet environment has often misled observers into overestimating the degree of secularism modernization has brought to Central Asia."(p.10)

A similar picture could have been drawn about Istanbul where so many women seem to have no acts of ritual Islam. The great numbers of secular women visiting Christian shrines didn't surprise me. When one enters in a church or saintly tombs, one sees many women who define themselves as Muslim laicist. These women would not talk about their religious visits within their daily talk, but they are believers who exercise some pillars of Islam.

The headscarf is what distinguished women who merely perform religious things from ordinary women throughout history. The uplift of the headscarf with the reforms of Atatürk created a dilemma in many women in this respect. This was an intrusion in the most visible sense. One of the pilgrims (Çiğdem) was very religious but she defined herself "very modern" at the same time, reading the Koran in Turkish (for its meaning) and in Arabic (for the divine phonetics) every day. The laicist women that I have talked to during my study are in parallel with Çiğdem's explanation. In the light of these explanations

³⁶⁷ Tolmacheva, Marina. (1994). The muslim woman and atheism in Soviet central Asiaa. *Islamic Studies*, 33(2/3), 183-201. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20840166>

regarding secularism and Turkish secularism, they draw the portrait of a laicist Muslim woman as: She sometimes uses *the tülbent* or the *yazma*, a headscarf widespread in the villages. She uses it when she reads the Koran or performs her namaz which she performs especially at the Night of Power of such special nights in Islam. It is no problem for her to cover or not to cover most of the times. She doesn't question this, this unproblematic attitude just happens. She conceives of Atatürk as another saint.

Secular women do not associate Aya Yorgi pilgrimage or the ritual practices around the church with ignorance or backwardness contrary to the pilgrimages to Muslims shrines. They clearly differentiate Aya Yorgi from the other places with Islamic connotation. Moreover their "high" educational level or cultural background do not hinder most of them from paying devotional visits to such a sacred space or embracing the "superstitious" behaviors that they normally disapprove when it comes to Muslim türbe. On the contrary they upgrade Aya Yorgi to a high level of spiritual status and show profound respect.

I am a laik but very spiritual woman. I come here every year to pray. When my wishes are granted I distribute candies to the other pilgrims. I believe in the strength of the prayers. Let me tell you a story. Long time ago, when I was working a journalist for Chanel D, we were stuck in the car in heavy snow together with three other photo journalist. They were younger than me. I was like a mother to them. We were in a very difficult situation and ran out of fuel. Imagine no heating in the car, nothing...when I remember this, I have goose bumps. I had nothing to do but to pray God. I prayed from the depth of my heart. We all fell asleep while waiting and I woke the driver up to try to start the engine again. And miraculously it started. Then, my faith in God solidified. This doesn't mean that I am a conservative person. On the contrary I am a laicist, a true Kemalist believing in science and modernity more than anything. I embrace all the faiths. Plus, I believe in the sainthood of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as well. He is the the biggest saint that Turkey has ever seen (Rasime, a retired academic from communication studies, 52)

I wasn't born into a religious family. I was born in Kadıköy, spent my childhood and teenager years around Bağdat Street. I did not know much about religion. I did not even know if we were Alevis or Sunnis. When I first heard about Alevi issues, I asked my husband what we were. Alevi or Sunni? I am telling you. I had zero knowledge on religion. I only knew Allah, Muhammed and Atatürk. After all religion is not an issue. I have many atheist friends and they have strong ethical values whereas I have also many religious (Islam) friends who have no idea what honesty is... but Aya Yorgi has always been in our lives since I was a little girl. I remember my mother used to take us. It must be around 1985...My mother fell down from the donkey while going up to the church on the summit and hurt herself badly... I also visit shrines like AyınBiri Church and the ayazma of Koço in Moda...

I love Koço ayazma indeed... I read 1 surat fatiha and 3 surat kawsar³⁶⁸ for the souls of the patron saints of these shrines (Hande, female, 45).

The shared shrines in Turkey have the function of representing history within a modern context. The shrine helps to the deconstruction of the very idea of 'historical time' and the mothers' and grandmothers' memories come into light. A woman, who becomes an 'ideal' part of modern life, remembers of her mother visiting the Aya Yorgi for example. Many women in Turkey have cut off some of their ties with Islam due to the changes in the application or politization (lately) of Islam by the state. Their ties with the mosque are not regular as it would "require" if they were a part of a Muslim community. That is, if they have any ties. Yet they continue to visit the shrines where they find three places in one. Turkey is full of holy-visiting places for the Christians as well as for the Muslims. And Istanbul is a perfect signifier of both a cosmopolitan city and a multi-pilgrimage site.

I have faith in religion (Islam). After all, I ask things from Allah so it is not important to be in the church or in the mosque. I make wishes and I visit fortune tellers, too... However It is true that I prefer to be together with the people that I resemble... That's why I fancy Büyükada. I like the elitist air of the islands... People are more modern and open-minded. For example I prefer living on the coastline of Turkey to living inside Anatolia.. The people of water culture are more open-minded... Drinking and hanging ot with friends or your outfit. They do not problematize such things... Liberty... And similarly I feel more comfortable at Aya Yorgi than Ulucami³⁶⁹ for example.. (Duygu, female, 29)

The internal unity of the women that I had interviewed was fascinating in combining Islam and laicism in different ways. Oral history proved that these internal processes are closely related to national processes where the political regulations concerning religion directly affect peoples' lives. For example, in my interview Duygu narrated her inner processes were interwoven with her experiences as a devote Muslim and a laicisit .

4.3.2. Alawis

A great deal of research on Anatolian Alawism has been done since 1980. Among these researches, many views on the origin of Alawism have been expressed. Some of the views defend that Alawism is an Anatolian Islamic sect originated from Shiism, and also some of the views stress that Alawism is an Anatolian religion (Bozkurt, 2000)³⁷⁰ and a populist

³⁶⁸ Sūrat **al-Kawthar** (Arabic: الكوثر سورة , "Abundance") is the 108th **surah** of the Quran and the shortest

³⁶⁹ Ulucami, the "great mosque" of Bursa. Built in early Ottoman period, in 1399

³⁷⁰ Bozkurt, Fuat. (2000.) *Çağdaşlaşma Sürecinde Alevilik*. İstanbul : Doğan Kitapçılık A.Ş.

Islamic faith (Burhan, 1990)³⁷¹. On the other hand, some of the views defend that Alawism is Ali's supporters' philosophy of life and a political manner (Zelyut, 1990)³⁷². However, a prevalent view is that "Alawism is a syncretic belief". This view is also defended by the scientists doing research on Alawism (Melikoff, 1994³⁷³; Ocak, 1990³⁷⁴). To Ocak, Alawism is a mixture of belief, of which origin goes back to the ancient times. It is syncretism shaped in time and space by many religious, political, socio-economic and cultural factors extending from the oldest periods of the Turks (1990: 20-25; 1983)³⁷⁵. According to Şener (1997)³⁷⁶, Alawism is a life style, which is not a racial but a social one. Alawism has two sources: 1-The injustice act treated to the Saint Ali by not accepting him as a Caliph, 2-The ancient Turkish Beliefs, 3-The ancient Anatolian civilizations (1997: 38-40). According to Birdoğan, who states that Alawism is an original belief and a life style which is the mixture of Turk-Oguz beliefs and Islam, there are close connections and similarities between the Shamanist belief and Shaman rituals of Turkish clans and those of Alawis (1995: 449-487)³⁷⁷.

In many places of Anatolia, there are a lot of shrines and vowing places which are visited mostly by Sunnis and Alawis. Apart from visiting the shrines, Sunnis worship in diverse forms, such as performing ritual prayer (the namaz), fasting, pilgrimage, and giving zekath, which are indicated in the Koran and applied by the Saint Mohammed. Visiting the shrines has a second place among their worshipping. In fact, mosques are their actual place of worship. The principal forms of worship of the Alawis, who do not go to mosque because of the fact that the Saint Ali was killed in a mosque while praying, are to visit the shrines and vowing places after the cem ritual. Thus, the Alawis' actual vowing places are the Cem houses³⁷⁸ and the shrines. Compared to Sunnis, Alevis in Turkey have always had a subordinate status historically, especially during the Ottoman Empire. With the foundation of the Republic, they welcomed Atatürk's reforms and became ardent supporters of

³⁷¹ Oğuz, Burhan. (1990). "*Anadolu Aleviliğinin Kökenleri*". *Alevilik Üstüne Ne Dediler?*. (Ed. Cemal Şener). İstanbul:

³⁷² Zelyut, Rıza. (1990). *Öz Kaynaklarına Göre Alevilik*. İstanbul: Ana. Kül. Yayınları.

³⁷³ Melikoff, Irene. (1994). *Uyur İdik Uyardılar*. İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi.

³⁷⁴ Ocak, Ahmet Yaşar. (1990). "Alevilik Bektaşilik Hakkındaki Son Yayınlar Üzerinde Genel Bir Bakış ve Bazı gerçekler". *Tarih ve Toplum*. Cilt XVI. 91. sayı. s. 20-25

³⁷⁵ Ocak, Ahmet Yaşar. (1983.) *Alevi Bektaşî İnançlarının İslam Öncesi Temelleri*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları.

³⁷⁶ Şener, Cemal. (1997). *Şaha Doğru Giden Kervan, Alevilik Nedir?*. İstanbul: Ant Yayınları

³⁷⁷ Birdoğan, Nejat. (1995) *Anadolunun Gizli Kültürü Alevilik*. İstanbul: Berfin Yayınları

³⁷⁸ A cemevi or **cem** evi (pronounced and sometimes written as djemevi; meaning literally "a **house** of gathering" in Turkish or more precisely, "**house** of [the religious ritual called] **cem**") is a place of fundamental importance for Turkey's Alevi-Bektashiyyah tariqa populations and traditions

secularism in Turkey. The narrative structure of Alevi-Bektashis and their religious worldview, which is often characterized as a combination of Islam and pre-Islamic Turkish religions, such as shamanism, is worthy of investigation for the contrast it provides to the beliefs and practices of mainstream Sunni Islam in Turkey. In Turkey's case, '*Diyanet* was designed for the interpretation and execution of an "enlightened" version of Islam—which could be termed as 'state' Islam—through its civil-service personnel, notably imams' (Sakallıoğlu 1996, p. 234)³⁷⁹, whereas Alevis were considered as a heterodox group by most members of the Sunni majority as their traditions mainly depend on syncretism combining the features of folk Islam shaped around saint cult (Uğur 2001, pp. 333–35)³⁸⁰.

During my fieldwork either on the feast day or daily basis, I met a number of Alevi visitors. Their ritualistic behaviors: the way they enter the church, kissing the door or the candles and the wordings that they use during their talk ("for the sake of Hussein") clearly differentiate them from the other Sunnite. And only the Alevis are the ones who are interested in the icons of St George and other biblical figures. I saw many aged Alawi women kissing the icons and they ask each other what these iconic depictions might be telling them.

We have a lot of shrines in Bingöl like here. I am not sure if they are churches or ruins of old castles but there are many. And they are situated on the top of the hills like here. We make vows there, slaughter animals and distribute it to the poor. Can I do it here as well? Would they let me do it? (Gül, 62 female)

I am culturally Alawi. I do not participate any cem ceremonies. Funerals are the only occasions that force me to go to Cemevi but Alawism is more like culture for me even if I do not practice. I lived for long years in Germany. Now I live in Kartal area. Every 23rd April I come here. I like the air of this sanctuary and tying rags on the trees.. This doesn't require long and boring ritual as in Cem ceremonies or mosques. (Eylem, 41 female)

4.3.3. Sunnites (women with headscarf)

Despite the fact that vast majority of the Muslim pilgrims have secular tendencies, it is possible to see the women with Islamic dress codes, headscarves and long baggy dresses. Interviewing with such type of women was the hardest of the fieldwork. They either rejected to talk or gave very ambiguous answers to my questions. In the church I tried observe their behavior closely, sneaking behind them, trying to catch what they were

³⁷⁹ Sakallıoğlu, Cizre U. (1996). The parameters and strategies of islam-state interaction in republican Turkey. *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 128(2), 231–51.

³⁸⁰ Uğur, Etga (2001). Intellectual roots of 'Turkish Islam' and approaches to the Turkish model. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 24(2), 327–45.

speaking about among themselves. A woman in her late 30s was asking her friend, whispering, if these Christians believed in God or not. The answer was a bit harsh and in a silent interrogative form “May God help them. How are they going to die? Aren’t they sacred of doomsday?”. Another woman was trying to figure out the meaning of the frescos in the church. I chipped in and gave brief information about St George and the dragon. They cynically smiled and said that “these Christians boast of themselves with being clever and educated. Look how meaningless are the things they believe. Thanks for informing me about it. Now I have a proof that I can use in defending rationalist side Islam compared to Christianity”. However those women wrote their wishes and put them in the wish box later, laughing. Later on, I met a woman³⁸¹ who was talking in Arabic with her friends in the courtyard. She was from Mardin—a southeastern city where the inhabitants were Arabic speakers. Her ambivalent discourse concerning her participation in the pilgrimage and her presence at a Christian space show the ambiguous perceptions of religious Muslims related with so called Muslim- Christian dialogue:

I have been visiting this place for three years with an advice of a friend... She had said that “nobody came back home empty handed after visiting here”. I had quite a lot of debt and a garnishee order on my house. I prayed here for the dissolution of attachment... Then things changed on behalf of me and I fixed those problems. This is a church..But it happens... Normally, I do not trust Christians. Once in Mardin, I helped a European girl. She needed help for her research. I opened many doors for her, provided her with valuable contacts and everything. I did it for the sake of Allah... I opened the doors of my house to a Christian. I let her stay in my house for a month though she smelled horrible. Oh My Allah, he smelled like hell. You know Christians have their distinctive nasty smells... But in the end I happened to know that she had been working for Armenian diaspora, related with this famous Armenian issue. As soon as I learnt this, I kicked her out... I confiscated her camera and the voice recorder. Allah knows what kind of trouble she was going to bring on me.

4.4. Another way of Sharing: Syriacs, Armanians and Greeks at Aya Yorgi

At Aya Yorgi, it is possible to see different pilgrims who belong to the different Christian minority groups especially on the pilgrimage day. This coexistence and sharing of the sacred might be due to their belonging to a certain social group which is the umbrella term “Christians” as minorities. This involves certain feelings towards, intergroup identity and to outer groups. Via their religious identity, we can understand bonds of individuals with other groups. It is namely through this coexistence that individuals give meaning to their

³⁸¹This woman took my phone number in order to continue our friendship. She called me many times inviting me to dinners and lunches and implying that she wanted me to meet her beautiful daughter who was at the age of 26 and I could be a perfect husband candidate for her.

own personal identity. Religious identity in that sense is an element of self-conception, through association with certain groups. Factors influencing their identity are among some of the things based particularly on religious and cultural practices. For the Syriacs, Armenians and Greeks (Rums) of Istanbul it is often the case that they have a strong identification with their social group specified for example by religion. Besides this, individuals make comparisons with other groups, in order to define the positive identity of their own group.

I eavesdropped on a humorous conversation between an Armenian and a Syriac women at the restaurant behind the church on the pilgrimage day which verifies above mentioned

Armenian: You are Syriac. You and us. We are one of the first nations who and accepted converted Christianity..

Syriac: Oh Yes. Allah'a Şükür (Thank God)

Armenian: But keep in mind that we Armenians are the first. You followed us.

Syriac: That is not an issue. We are sisters of the same religion. We are here altogether in this sacred place, sharing this beautiful air and food. May God accept our prayers.

These different groups remember the same events in similar ways, in some cases comparisons were made between different groups, who experienced the same event. Another Armenian woman (Selin) I talked to who has a religious awareness said that Saint George is the equivalent of Surp Kevork. She was happy to see their Saint in different confessional context.

Most of the men that I met there told me that they don't believe in such a pilgrimage but they couldn't reject the offer of their wives, daughters and girlfriends to accompany them. However I could still see men praying in the church either with Islamic gesture or Christian way of crossing themselves or writing wishes on pieces of paper to put in the wish box for the priest to read. I met a Syriac-Christian guy from Şanlıurfa city. He told me that he wanted to get married soon but "God hasn't introduced the bride to him yet". He was beseeching Aya Yorgi to speed up his will

There are also some other non-Muslim minorities such as Syriacs who are not included to the criteria defined by the Treaty of Lausanne³⁸². First of all, because of the nationality criteria the Syriacs faces difficulties to work for certain churches. But, similar to the problems of other non-Muslim minorities, the Syriacs are not permitted to establish schools and the election of the heads their churches is subject to strict conditions. Their clergy continue to have difficulties in visa matters and residence/work permits. They face serious pressures under the recent attacks against clergy and places of worship of non-Muslim religious Communities. However, their main problem is related with the property rights. The Syriacs suffered a lot under the quasi-civil war situation in the Southeast and immigrated to European countries in the past decades. In June 2001, Ecevit issued a circular, requesting “all public institutions and establishments show necessary care and sensitivity in letting our Assyriac citizens to freely use their Constitutional, legal and democratic rights” under the guarantee of the state. However, very few of them were able to return home and most of them lost their Turkish nationality. Syriacs who no longer have Turkish citizenship have not been able to register their properties in the Southeast. Complaints regarding the seizure of their uninhabited property by both citizens in the region and the land registry authorities have recently reached to a worrying level. Those who are able to return face harassment from the village guards and local populations. The Turkish directorate of religious affairs recently (August 2017) seized about 50 properties—monasteries, cemeteries and churches—that belonged to the Syriac Orthodox Church, claiming the ownership deeds had lapsed (de Courtois, 2013)³⁸³.

4.5. What about the Jews?

The Jewish communities of Turkey numbers at present some twenty thousand people and almost the entirety living in Istanbul. The remaining few are located in a handful of urban centers—most of them in Izmir, Ankara and Antakya. This represents a small remnant of a group that once numbered well over one hundred thousand and has been reduced largely by voluntary emigration; to Europe and Latin America at the beginning of the Turkish

³⁸² Turkey bases its minority policies on the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 and claims to be bound only by this treaty, which itself is entirely obsolete in light of current international standards for minority rights and protection. Moreover, while the treaty provides for protection for all non-Muslim minorities, all Turkish governments since 1923 have persistently interpreted the treaty to guarantee protection only to three minority groups: the Armenian Orthodox Christians, the Greek Orthodox Christians, and the Jews

³⁸³ de Courtois, Sébastien (2013) “Tur Abdin : Réflexions sur l’état présent des communautés syriaques du Sud-Est de la Turquie, mémoire, exils, retours.” *Conflits et territoires au Moyen-Orient et au Maghreb: Cahier du Gremamo* 21 (2013): 115-153.

Republic and to Israel after the 1950s. The community is officially represented by the Chief Rabbinate (*Hahambaşılık*), located in Istanbul. At the head is the Chief Rabbi, working with religious and lay councils. The Chief Rabbinate administers those aspects of civil life that have a religious character: marriage, circumcision, divorce. As for the religious institutions, these are governed by the law of the *vakıf* are at present 18 synagogues in Istanbul grouped under nine *vakıf*, located in old as well new quarters of Jewish residence. The oldest, for example, is in Balat, and in *Kuzguncuk*, where very few families remain but mobilize for the maintenance of these almost unused places, because once abandoned, they revert to the State (law of Vakıf of 1935). Nor is the community free to replace them with other institutions located in or near the centers of Jewish residence: since new *Vakıf* cannot be created, there have been no new foundations since 1950 the exception of the Jewish School that moved from Galata (traditional quarter) to Ulus (a residential modern neighborhood in Istanbul) which was created according to the civil code that allows communities to fulfill their communal needs such as creating a school (Güven, 2011)³⁸⁴.

The Jewish community presents a relatively undifferentiated character to the rest of Turkish society. This aspect related to a larger process of “modernization” affecting Jews and non-Jews alike have come to constitute an index of Jewish emancipation; that is integration in the larger society, Turkish is now the dominant language for the generation of the Republic at home as well as outside. There are very few people left who speak Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) as their everyday tongue, speak nothing else. This process of linguistic assimilation, accompanied by much more intensive social mixing of children with those of other religions, in private as well as public schools, has opened the community to outside influences and frequentations, and increasing intermarriages (Jewish-Muslim). The very secularization of the community, its increasing adherence to national values along with its neglect or ignorance of Jewish practice and observance, has emptied the identity of spiritual content and reduced it to a bond of congeniality and reactive self-affirmation.

Nevertheless, an analysis of the Turkish Jewish experience has shown similar periods of stress and emergency, with a comparable polarization of reactions as in Europe even though Turkey remained neutral to the WWII: The expulsion of Jewish residents of Edirne (Adrianople) and Thrace in 1934; the Varlık vergisi, a head tax on wealth that was

³⁸⁴ Güven Erdem (2011) Kuzguncuk as a Village of Mutual Respect and Harmony: Myth or Reality?, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 10:3, 365-382, DOI: 10.1080/14725886.2011.608553

instituted in 1942 and levied at rates up to ten times as high for non-Muslims as for Muslims and the Anti-Greek riots in 1955 made some Jewish victims. To this day, the Jews of Turkey prefer to negotiate rather than demand or protest. This “political discretion” differentiates the Jewish community from the Greek and Armenian communities and it is justified by national historical events that kept them “safe” in Turkey. This concern of “safety” translated as “peaceful coexistence” had been publicized in 1992 with the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and their welcome into the Ottoman Empire in 1492. The Quincentennial Foundation created for this event organized all kinds of cultural events and succeeded to mobilize the Jews as well as “Friends of Turkey” abroad. The Jews need improvements of their Vakif, they want to insure good relationships between Turkey and Israel felt as a token for their “security” in Turkey, and the Turkish state wants Jewish support in matters of foreign policy, especially as regards the United States and Turkish national interests represented in the Congress (Güleryüz, 2012)³⁸⁵.

During my fieldwork I did not encounter even a single Jew. I knew that small scale pilgrimages or tomb visitation do not exist in the Jewish tradition of Turkey. However I wanted to see if the Jews of Istanbul were involved in the colorful mosaic of Aya Yorgi pilgrims. Therefore in order to satisfy my curiosity I talked to Verda Habib³⁸⁶, one of the prominent figures in Büyükada Jewish Association

In textual Judaim, *ziyarat* types of pilgrimages do not exist. The only pilgrimage we as Jews can go for is Jerusalem as you know. I was born in Istanbul and spent my childhood and youth in Büyükada. We all were aware of this feast day. It was mainly for the Rums and then Muslims engaged but I can assure you that Jews never participated in the feast day pilgrimages. Surely, we used to climb up the hill especially during the full moon to have dinner at the restaurant behind the church.. But never with the purpose of asking for things or lighting candles so on... I assure you never. Now there only sixty Jews left in the island and around twenty thousand in Turkey. We are invisible not only at Aya Yorgi but also in all around the country (smiling).

4.6. New Female Spirituality at Aya Yorgi: Sahaja Yoga followers

After the structural transformations that has been lived in the world recently, the number and types of religious groups and spiritual movements has increased. The transformation has also affected the religious field in Turkey, and structural differences have been experienced due to the internal dynamics besides the three macro factors. It is observed

³⁸⁵ Güleryüz, Naim (2012). *Bizans'tan 20. Yüzyıla Türk Yahudileri*. Gözlem Yayıncılık

³⁸⁶ Personal telephone interview with Verda Habib 04.10.2017

that also by the effect of these changes the competition among religious and spiritual groups came to the fore, and a power struggle is concerned. Groups who are struggling are in competition sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly (Hunt, 2010)³⁸⁷. Opening religion to the competition also means individual's freedom of choice and the obligation of religious groups to effort in the face of this freedom. Thus, religious and spiritual movements and groups are acting in the context of persuading individual as well as competing against alternatives. This movement is carried out via a rational and bureaucratic organization in accordance with the logic of the modern era. Furthermore, some groups construct the modern organization through a different option by offering the spiritual essence via a secular form. Of these, Sahaja Yoga Movement is noteworthy by being prominent (Derin, 2011)³⁸⁸

³⁸⁷ Hunt, Chizuko (2010) "*Yoga Practice in 21st Century Britain: The Lived Experience of Yoga Practitioners.*" PhD Dissertation. De Montfort University, 2010.

³⁸⁸ Derin, Serkan(2011). "*Sahaja Yoga: İçeriği, Amacı, Türkiye'deki Faaliyetleri,*" Unpublished Masters Thesis Dokuz Eylül Ü. SBE, 2011.



Picture 89. Promoting Sahaja Yoga at Aya Yorgi pilgrimage

4.6.1. Sahaja Yoga

Notwithstanding the sex of Sri Mataji herself, and despite the fact that Sahaja Yoga has attracted a disproportionate number of women - perhaps sixty-five percent of the total membership, or even more - Sahaja Yoga is not an organization with a matriarchal emphasis throughout. Gender roles for women and men within Sahaja Yoga are clearly specified and highly segregated, and positions of authority in the group are held almost exclusively by the men (Hunt, 2010 p.48)³⁸⁹.

³⁸⁹ Ibid

Is a new religious movement founded by Nirmala Srivastava, more widely known as 'Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi' and affectionately as 'Mother' by her followers (Sahaja Yogis). According to the movement, Sahaja Yoga is the state of self-realization produced by *kundalini* awakening and is accompanied by the experience of thoughtless awareness or mental silence (Nirvichar Samadhi). Practitioners of the Sahaja Yoga meditation technique feel a cool breeze on their hands and on top of their head while meditating, other effects include a dilation of the pupils and deep physical and mental relaxation. Thus Sahaja Yoga is not only the name of the movement, but also the technique the movement teaches and the state of awareness achieved by the technique. The movement teaches that self-realization through kundalini awakening is a transformation which results in a more moral, united, integrated and balanced personality. Sahaja Yoga started in India and England (where Nirmala Srivastava moved in 1974) and there are now Sahaja Yoga centers in almost 100 countries worldwide. She charged no money, insisting that her lesson was a birthright, which should be freely available to all. "There can be no peace in the world until there is peace within," she said. For many her methodology on self-transformation and creating consciousness led to a happy and blissful life. The organization has had its share of controversies some related to the behavior of leaders and others to the perceived level of influence the founder had over her followers (Puttick, 2006)³⁹⁰.

On the feast days Sahaja Yogis arrive early to set up the stall, decorating the backdrop with colorful saris and put the poster of Shri Mataji behind the stall to give "realization" to crowds of people, there is a steady stream of people all day, with yogis talking to people and handing out information.

These people who come to Aya Yorgi are very sensitive in spiritual issues. Look at these strings, and superstitious things... I am a part of it as well... We accept a spiritual hand no matter where it comes from... I believe that these practices are related with ancient shamanic religion of the Turks: magic, sorcery and everything. Plus the nature is amazing... You find yourself after this experience... We need it. Whether Aya Yorgi or Sahaja Yoga or others... They create a spiritual atmosphere. (a woman in her 40s).

When the participants of a Aya Yorgi day are asked what the festivity is about, the answers they provide vary significantly: some refer to the pilgrimage to the shrine wish making, while others speak of the congregation of friends, the meditation and recitation. Others simply find the Aya Yorgi day great fun, with crowds, lights, music, and the colourful

³⁹⁰ Puttick, Elizabeth. (2006) "Sahaja Yoga." Peter B. Clarke (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements* London-New York: Routledge, 2006, ss.544- 545.

fascinating world of inexpensive popular amusements. The festivities also provide a livelihood for a large number of people. In most cases the different motives for celebrating Aya Yorgi day are not clearly distinguished. The search for blessing and spiritual experience goes hand in hand with the fascination of the festive atmosphere. Like no other occasion in Istanbul, a Aya Yorgi day is an ambivalent mixture of religious and profane elements. Much of the religiosity expressed in a traditional Aya Yorgi day is expressed in a strong belief in miracles. Unlike many other festive occasions in Turkey, Aya Yorgi day is a carnivalesque utopian festival, during which many of the boundaries and norms of ordinary life are temporarily suspended. In the narratives of pilgrims and visitors, the Aya Yorgi day indeed emerges as a utopian moment beyond the boundaries of daily life, a place where all people from various backgrounds unite, a moment of freedom far removed from home and daily routines. During the Aya Yorgi day you can “leave behind your work and family and set for a long, hard journey”, “get a breath of fresh air”, “see strange, new things” and “forget all your worries and live in the moment. The more profane elements of the feast—cafés, restaurants, and amusements, small trade etc.—are commercial and run by countless private entrepreneurs.

4.7. Evangelical Proselytism and New Religiosities against all “Orthodoxies”

Although the Protestant or Evangelical faith began spreading in Turkey during the 19th century, it was not until the late 20th century that it began to consolidate. In the 1990’s they began trying to obtain legal recognition in Turkey. By the late 1990’s, these Turkish converts began to appear on television debate programs. In 2005, the State Security Commission identified the three major threats against the Turkish state as the following: terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and the proselytism practiced by missionaries. News articles began to emerge about “thousands” of underground churches hidden in homes, which came to be called “pirate churches,” and speculations that billions of dollars were used to buy land and recruit native missionaries by “deceiving young”. However in 2010s, unexpectedly, the main conflict is not between the security commission or proselytes but in Aya Yorgi case it is between the orthodox church and the missionary groups. As in nature, Protestants honor the saints but don’t venerate them. For the protestant faith in Jesus alone saves. Although they reject the orthodox feast day practices Aya Yorgi day gives them a marvelous chance to rise to the surface that they cannot easily do elsewhere. As it is

considered to be a Christian day and space, the missionaries find the freedom for manifestation or performance that they cannot easily attain in the rest of the year. The evangelist missionaries—both Turkish and non-Turkish—who reside in Istanbul literally flood into Büyükada on the feast day in early hours. They gather for a quick meeting first, and then scatter around setting up stalls on different points along Aya Yorgi slope. They distribute booklets and free bible. The booklets are basically talks about the futility of asking for things from the deceased person or a saint and that the only way for salvation is to attach you to the strings of Jesus Christ not the “fake strings” of Aya Yorgi (reference to the strings as *ex votos*).

This direct objection to the ritual practices and the saint veneration echo not on the pilgrims but on the church authorities, too. Pilgrims mostly do not understand their intentions or their reasons to be there. Once I asked a female pilgrim what these people were doing. She said it was a part of the feast day of the Christians to entertain them though she was not sure. Some curious pilgrims were asking Korean evangelists with slanting eyes to be in the same photo frame as a souvenir from the pilgrimage day regardless of their mission. But the church authorities are not as welcoming as the pilgrims to the missionaries and the other way around. On the feast day of 2016, an evangelist was shouting “don’t ask for things from Aya Yorgi. Come to us. We pray for you for free. The following year, again on 23 of April, this once, I witnessed a very direct aggression towards the missionaries by an Orthodox priest from Aya Yorgi. Normally, the evangelists open up their stalls and distribute booklets, and talk to the pilgrims on the steep path, not getting close to the church, keeping the distance. However that time, one young evangelist was close enough to the church and obviously he was heard, or someone complained about him. I was there among the crowd waiting in the line to enter the church. A priest came out of the church in a swift and dapper way. It was a salient moment as the pilgrims are not used to seeing anyone around from the clergy with priestly attire. They almost never mingle with the pilgrims preferring to stay inside their dormitories. The absence of official clergy is another factor why people feel themselves comfortable in their praying practices. This priest appeared from his “nest” and began to shout at the evangelist boy. He accused him of frightening the pilgrims with his “absurd” narratives and propagating against Aya Yorgi’s holy sainthood and finally asked him to “disappear”. And he did.

Throughout the fieldwork, the common statements that I heard in the discourse of secular Muslims, the evangelists and others which lay emphasis on the terms of “individuality”, “self” and “person’s own ways” bear resemblance with the essence new age spiritualities and made me question if there could be much more complex phenomena that appears at Aya Yorgi than a mere shrine visitation and ordinary evangelization. Are New Age spirituality, Evangelicalism and secular Islam, three, vital and visible strains of religiosity seen at Aya Yorgi? How and why?

The three are nowadays not only embraced much more enthusiastically by the younger generations than any other type of religion, but moreover attain some striking features in their hands that serve to set them apart from the traditional types of church-based or mosque-based religion embraced by older generations of faithful. Although, needless to say, Evangelicalism is quite distinct from New Age spirituality and sets itself decidedly apart from it, we see that there are nevertheless striking resemblances between the two that account for their popularity among the young. Likewise, the Islamic discourses and practices found among particularly Muslim Aya Yorgi pilgrims differ strikingly from these of mainstream and state driven Islam and equally strikingly resemble what we find among New Agers and Evangelicals.

From a theoretical point of view what are the common features New Age, Evangelicalism, and Islam? Ever since the appearance of Luckmann’s³⁹¹ book New Age spirituality has been understood as, the best example of a modern type of religion that constitutes nothing more than an incoherent collection of strictly personal spiritual ideas and practices. Participants in the spiritual milieu, it has been repeated again and again, tend to draw upon multiple traditions, styles and ideas simultaneously, combining these into idiosyncratic packages. New Age has thus been understood as a ‘consumer religion par excellence’ (Possamai, 2005: 49³⁹²), ‘pick-and-mix religion’ (Hamilton, 2000³⁹³), ‘do-it-yourself religion’ or a ‘spiritual supermarket’ (Lyon, 2000³⁹⁴). Every single person in the spiritual

³⁹¹ Luckmann, Th.(1967). *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*. New York [etc.]: MacMillan

³⁹² Possamai, Adam.(2005). *Religion and Popular Culture: A Hyper-real Testament*. Brussels: Peter Lang.

³⁹³ Hamilton, Malcom. (2000). An Analysis of the Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit, London. In *Beyond New Age. Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, ed. S. Sutcliffe and M. Bowman. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 188–200.

³⁹⁴ Lyon, David.(2000). *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*. Oxford: Polity Press

milieu, Possamai maintains, constructs a 'subjective myth' and it is as if 'every human being should have his own paradigm' (2005: 57)³⁹⁵

These relentless portrayals of New Age spirituality as religiously incoherent blatantly miss the shared and undisputed discourse of 'self-spirituality' in the holistic sense, a discourse that paradoxically demands and hence produces these practices of individual *bricolage*. Ironically, then, these practices stem from a shared and morally binding religious discourse that insists that one should 'follow one's personal path' and 'listen to one's inner voice', rather than 'proving' its non-existence (Aupers and Houtman, 2006³⁹⁶). This uncontested discourse of 'self-spirituality' postulates that the sacred cannot be found 'out there', like the transcendent personal God of Christianity. This spiritual self is conceived as laying hidden behind, beyond, or underneath the mundane self, residing in the deeper emotional layers of consciousness and understood as representing the person one 'really' or 'at deepest' is. It is believed to be intimately tied up with a universal power, life force or that holistically permeates and connects 'all', that is, nature, society, and the cosmos. One's feelings, intuitions, and experiences are understood as emanations of this spiritual self, so that acting according to them is understood as connecting to this whole.

According to New Agers, one should hence 'follow one's heart': do what 'feels good' and refrain from what 'feels bad'. The basic idea is that what lies within—experienced by way of 'intuition', 'alignment' or an 'inner voice' serves to inform the judgments, decisions and choices required for everyday life'. In New Age spirituality, in short, taking one's personal feelings and intuitions seriously is conceived as bringing life into line with who one 'essentially' or 'at deepest' is, and consequently as connecting to 'all that exists' (Hanegraaff, 1996³⁹⁷). This New Age discourse understands established religious traditions as flawed and alienating renditions of this eternal spiritual truth, because these have buried the latter under layers of dogma and doctrine, imposed upon the laity by powerful and dogmatic priesthoods. Religious traditions are as such not rejected *totally*, but rather seen as placing too much emphasis on ritual conformity and institutional side issues, while 'deep down' they all refer to this same eternal and universal spiritual wisdom. A statement from an Aya Yorgi pilgrim supports the theoretical assumptions of New Agers

³⁹⁵ Ibid

³⁹⁶ Aupers, S. and D. Houtman. (2006). Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The Social and Public Significance of New Age Spirituality. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 21, no. 2: pp. 201–222.

³⁹⁷ Hanegraaff, Will. (1996). *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*. Leiden: Brill.

I am a Muslim. I respect Christianity too. After all these places are the houses of Allah. There is no difference if you feel yourself good. Praying is important, feeling secure and peaceful.

In effect, New Age understands established religious traditions and institutions as alienating and misleading to the extent that they define themselves as conflicting with and superior to one another. They are seen as ‘manmade’ and hence ‘artificial’.

We are all children of Allah. There is no need for conflict. No need to make division such as this one is for Muslim that one is Christian. That is not true and it is against the nature of humanity (a female pilgrim in her mid 50s).



Picture 810 An evangelical with a banner³⁹⁸ in his hand at Aya Yorgi photo by the author 23.04.2018

Something similar goes for Protestant Evangelicalism. The conviction that faith is primarily and eventually exclusively about the ‘heart of the believer’ about personal commitment rather than mere conformity to religious institutions, of course is and always has been a decisive feature of Protestantism. Although this emphasis on the heart of the believer has not prevented Protestantism from accepting all sorts of mediations between God and the individual, the consciousness and faith of the ‘single individual’ and his or her immediate and unmediated relationship to God have always constituted Protestantism’s

³⁹⁸ Mathew 13-14 “The Narrow and Wide Gates: Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

single locus of practice and belief, in effect downplaying the relevance of supra-individual mediations and institutions (Keane, 2007³⁹⁹).

Contemporary Evangelicalism emphasizes the individual believer's personal relationship with God as the core of faith, not infrequently as a reaction to a firmly institutionalized Protestantism that is held to be too much preoccupied with the organization of the church or the righteousness of dogma. Much like New Agers, It is not about the church you attend. It is all about your "personal relationship with God". "Your personal relationship with Jesus". "Your personal relationship with the Holy Spirit"⁴⁰⁰.

This exemplifies the Evangelical conviction that church authorities and dogmas are subordinated to the individual believer's faith and his or her personal relationship with God. Faith is, to quote another respondent, primarily about 'going one's own way with God' and the compass to guide one on one's path is found in one's personal feelings and experiences rather than in the authority of the church and its religious doctrines.

To get a clearer idea how Evangelists perceive the day of Aya Yorgi and the ritual practices, apart from personal interviews, I also referred to a TV programme specially shot for the day of Aya Yorgi on their TV channel called Sat 7 Turk. This TV channel creates and broadcasts Christian programming designed to both help the wider non-Christian audience understand the beliefs and teaching of their neighbors who follow Christ, and also airs many programs designed to help teach, train and encourage the often isolated Christian community within Turkey. It began airing on SAT-7 in January 2006 under the name "TURK-7." SAT-7 TÜRK airs a wide variety of locally produced programming, including shows for children, youth and women, as well as many teaching programs which explain the love of Christ and support local Christians. It is currently broadcasting 24 hours a day 7 days a week via web streaming

The broadcasted video⁴⁰¹ on Aya Yorgi lasts over 45 minutes. It is not displayed within the evening news but as a special program for the day time. It is not presented by an anchor.

³⁹⁹ Keane, Webb. (2007) *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

⁴⁰⁰ David, a German evangelist. Personal interview 23.04.2018 on Büyükdada

⁴⁰¹ SAT7 Türk, Aya Yorgi Günü Etkinlikleri. Air date: 30th april 2014: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvyrxAyejwE>

The video begins with a warm and lively greeting of a female correspondent. She simply describes the atmosphere without giving a background of feast day or St George (Aya Yorgi) or any folkloric information. It is observed even from the introduction that she names the ritual practices as superstitious and gives us the impression that the program will be more didactic than descriptive. The correspondent makes tens of interviews with the pilgrims all along the way up to the hill. She asks neutral questions in a friendly manner with the purpose of revealing the motivations behind the visit. She tries to be very cautious not to sound judgmental. Finally she terminates the video by summarizing the event and the interviews. Revisiting the ritual practices such as attaching wish slips and strings. She corrects the wrong assumption of the pilgrims that the string attaching is a Christian tradition advocating that a “true Christian’s hope by no means is attached to the strings but God himself”. Then she criticizes financial benefits of the ex-voto and candle sellers stating that the area looks more like a market than a spiritual space referring to a verse from Mathew 21:12-13 and reading it aloud *“Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. “It is written,” he said to them, ‘my house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’”*



Picture 821 Evangelicals at Aya Yorgi: “The one who needs miracles may come”. photo by the author 23.04.2018

New Agers, Evangelicals and secular Muslims all feature a critical stance *vis-à-vis* established religious traditions and institutions. They understand these as ‘manmade’ and hence ‘artificial’ and ‘inauthentic’ renditions of a ‘pure’ and ‘eternal’ religious or spiritual truth. New Agers embrace the understanding that all religious traditions are essentially perverted and distorted versions of the eternal spiritual wisdom that can be found within the self; young Evangelicals want to go beyond the church and its dogmas to establish a personal and unmediated relationship with God; laik Muslims, finally, are critical of the state driven or “backwardness” aspect of Islam and aim to return to ‘pure’ Islam which is culturalized religions of their parents as in the testimony of one of the respondents

Islam that we used to live in our childhood was more peaceful and clean, not contaminated as it is now. You were free to believe the way you prefer. The way you dress was not a matter of conflict. More liberal and clean. They (Islamists) do lots of bad things in the name of Allah and prophet. The Islam that we as Turks have is a mixture of our old shamanic traditions: Full of love for nature, wisdom, goodness etc. this must be the true Islam not the one is exposed on us lately.

4.8. New Visitors of Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh : Moldavian, Georgian, Ethiopian, Sri Lanki Domestic Workers ; Iraqi Assyrian refugees and others

Contemporary migration is marked by an acceleration of the pace of interaction between the host and home setting through multiple networks. Immigrants establish and maintain familial, economic, political and cultural ties across international borders, in effect making the home and host society a single arena of social action. Technological advancements have further strengthened the migrants’ links with the home countries on a day-to-day basis. The migrants make efforts to sustain their relations with the sending country through transnational religious practices as well. Religious communities simulate transnational movements which challenge the way in which we imagine religion and politics traditionally. The migrants often retain their religious beliefs and traditions through various kinds of social and economic links with the home country.

Although social scientists have written extensively on the role of religion in the diaspora, very little research has been done on the impact of transnational religious groups in the sending countries. Transnational Migration and Fading States (1997)⁴⁰² by Rudolph and Piscatori concludes that in today’s postmodern age religious communities have become vital agents in the creation of a transnational civil society. Immigrants lean towards

⁴⁰² Rudolph, Susan and James Piscatori(1997), Transnational Religion and Fading States, Colorado, Westview Press, 1997

religious institutions to escape the hostility and discrimination of their settings and also to achieve social recognition. They argue that for immigrants who are separated from their homeland and from many relatives, religious membership offers a refuge in the sense that it creates a sense of belonging and participation in the face of loss and the strains of adjustment. Ebaugh (2002)⁴⁰³ noted that religious mobilisation also help immigrants cope with marginalization by providing fellowships, social services and leadership positions to compensate for the downward mobility many of them experience.

That many immigrants have turned to religion to ease the stress of transition and to find meaning in a new social world has been documented well by studies of Irish, Italian, and other immigrants from Europe to America. In recent years, a growing body of research has added substantially to this early literature. From this emerging literature on religion and immigration we learn about transnational identities, linkages and networks (Levitt, 2003⁴⁰⁴), “religion helps immigrants imagine their homelands in diaspora and inscribe their memories and worldviews into the physical landscape and built environment” points out Vasquez (2005: 238)⁴⁰⁵. Furthermore, “religion plays a critical role in identity construction, meaning making, and value formation. Migrants also use religion to create alternative allegiances and places of belonging” (Levitt, 2003: 85⁴⁰⁶).

In the host setting the transnational religious practices enhance the transformation and reshaping of identity, perception and ritual practices of immigrants. Non-acceptance and alienation of the immigrants have strengthened their quest for spiritual and religious identity. New places of worship have emerged as —community centers to fulfill the identity-vacuum the alienated immigrants experience in these societies. The reorientation of immigrants’ lives in the host setting has a direct impact in the sending society as well. The domestic worker migration to Lebanon is both transitory and circulatory in nature, which heightens the transnational activities of the immigrants and their links with the sending country. The religious restructuring and the ghettoisation of immigrants have inadvertently affected the socio-cultural realm of sending society. The change in religiosity and religious practices were in turn influenced by the migrant experiences based on their

⁴⁰³ Ebaugh ,Helen Rose and Janet Saltzman Chafetz ed. (2002) *Religious Cross borders: Transnational immigrant networks*, Walnut Creek , CA: Altamira Press

⁴⁰⁴ Levitt, Peggy (2003) You Know Abraham was really the first Immigrant: *Religion and Transnational Migration*, *International Migration Review*, Vol.37, No.3

⁴⁰⁵ Vasquez, Manuel A.(1999) Pentecostalism, Collective Identity and Transnationalism among Salvadorans and Peruvians in the USI, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol.7, No.3, September ,p-630

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid

religious beliefs in their host countries. These differential experiences made them reinvent their own religions in a transnational environment but exclusivist in spirit. The transnational religious networks play a significant role in the reorientation of the societal space in the sending society. The change in immigrants' lives and the restructuring of their beliefs has a direct impact on the religious realm in the home society as well (Kerbage and Esim, 2011)⁴⁰⁷.

The demise of the Soviet Union (SU) has resulted in numerous social transformations with many unintended consequences. Of them, one was Turkey's turning into a country of immigration. Following the collapse of the SU, Turkey began to attract migration initially from the formerly socialist countries located to her west. In 2000's, new migration routes from other similar countries located to the east of Turkey also emerged. In this rapid transformation of about fifteen years, one sector that has specifically attracted migration was domestic work. As a result, the concept "foreign domestic worker" has been identified in Turkey almost exclusively as a post-Soviet phenomenon. In the twenty years since its emergence, the migrant domestic workers' market in Turkey has become an intrinsic element of the urban (upper) middle class experience. While the domestic work sector was formerly a realm that attracted Turkish women of the urban poor, it has become a true labour market with the arrival of migrants originating from post-socialist countries in proximity to Turkey. As the demand for migrant labour has increased, the country has received flows from a range of places into the market, including the former socialist countries of Southeastern Europe, such as Bulgaria, Moldova and Ukraine and later from the countries of the Caucuses and Central Asia, such as Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

In ordinary days, other than the feast day, the vast majority of the Christian visitors of Aya Yorgi consist of above mentioned migrant workers (mostly Orthodox) living in Istanbul. On the day offs the ones who visit Büyükada almost never return their homes without paying votive visits for the patron saints of their homelands (As St George is the patron saint of Moldavia, Georgia and Ethiopia). When the feast day falls after the Easter, the ones who are actively following the liturgical calendar, also flood into the island to attend

⁴⁰⁷ Kerbage, Carole, and Simel Essim (2011). "The Situation of Migrant Domestic Workers in Arab States: A Legislative Overview." Paper presented at the Interregional Workshop on Strengthening Dialogue to Make Migration Work for Development in the ESCAP and ESCWA Regions, June 28-30, 2011. Beirut: International Labour Organisation, 2011.

the pilgrimage as 23rd of April is a national official holiday and a matchless time to spend their day off around a saint who is familiar and reminds them of their countries. Besides venerating the saints and fulfilling their needs of a prayer, they swiftly join in and adapt to local traditions of the feast day the basic rituals of the pilgrimage although some of them seem vague and strange to them.



Picture 92: Moldavian domestic worker in the pilgrimage at Aya Yorgi (photo by the author 2016)

In Moldavia, we don't tie threads on the tress or tucking sugar cubes in to the hollows of the wall. That's the tradition of the Turks. But I did the sugar cube thing and walked all the way up the slope without stopping. I recited prayers dedicated to Saint George silently during this hard walk.

Some of them come to the church to ask for a divine assistance for their desperate problems. A Georgian mother states:

My son is in jail in Tbilisi... They claim that he was arrested from the crime of drug dealing. I don't know... I do not want to believe in it. I ask Aya Yorgi to bring him back to me.

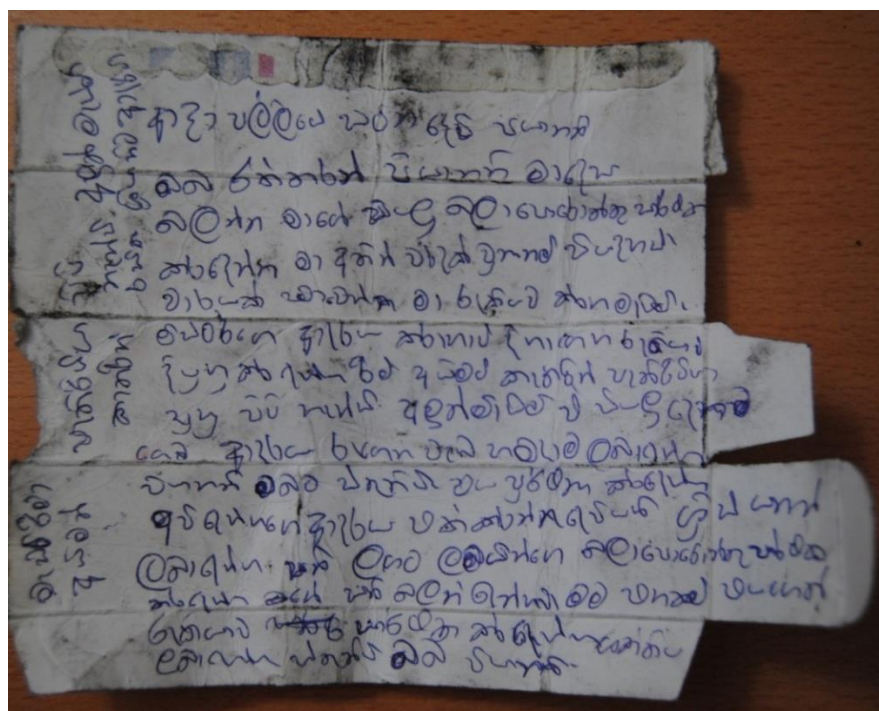
Their exact number of the community of Iraqi Christian refugees in Turkey is unknown, but it is estimated to be 40,000. Despite recent efforts by the EU to improve refugee

employment and services, Turkey is overwhelmed by the largest refugee population in the world, and unable to provide sufficient protection services according to the Refugee Convention, including the rights to work, health care, and education says Human Rights Watch. It's largely an urban refugee problem: 90 percent of refugees live outside of border camps, and are cut off from basic services including access to nutritious food. Outside of the 2.7 million Syrians living under a protective status in Turkey, Iraqis make up half of all asylum applications in the country, and they receive almost no support from the Turkish government.

We have been living in Turkey for two years. I work in a small unlicensed production company with my two other brothers. Today my brother and I have come here to pray Mar Gewargios (St George) to help us. We have a temporary residence permit as refugees in Turkey. We applied for Australian visa two years ago and we are still waiting. I beg Mar Gewargios to speed up our visa process therefore I made ndr (vow). I walked up the slope barefoot. We have such a tradition in Iraq too... when you ask for something from God you must make him believe in your sincerity so you must show him your faith with some challenging vows like I have done... walking the path barefoot under the rain.

4.8.1. Searching for Andha in Lebanon: Sri Lankis

“We purify ourselves from the filth of Lebanese houses in the waters of Mar Jirjes at Al Batiyeh”⁴⁰⁸



Picture 93 A prayer written on the carton of a skin bleaching cream and put behind the icon of saint George at Al Batiyeh⁴⁰⁹ photo by the author 2017

⁴⁰⁸ A Sri Lankian woman's statement when asked why they visit al Batiyeh 01.07.2017

Since the early 1990s, there has been a large influx of Sri Lankan women into Lebanon, serving primarily as domestic labour in private households. The Sri Lankan government, as with other countries, has actively encouraged the 'export' of domestic labour as it has become the largest single source of foreign revenue for the country. As they migrate, it becomes unavoidable that changes affecting their lifestyle will inevitably impact their religious involvement and commitment in the destination country. Their religious belief becomes the single most important source of continuity in a world that changes in so many ways as they embark and begin their lives in a foreign land (Jureidini, 2002)⁴¹⁰. Churches incorporate religious practices culturally essential for the immigrants as they “create new religious spaces and bring new expressions of the faith”. In order to overcome and cope with everyday existence, Sri Lankan domestic workers make use of their day-offs as opportunities to gather and engage in rituals; one particular space is found in religious institutions, shrines and the activities associated with it (Jureidini, 2004)⁴¹¹.

Buddhists, Hindus, and Catholics alike patronize Christian shrines, principally to make and fulfill vows. By performing a vow (“bara” in Sinhala), a person puts him or herself in the care of a particular saint, promising that if the saint fulfills a wish, the petitioner will repay them. Repayments typically come in the form of an offering of money, jewelry, or other valuable items, lighting candles, giving a *dane* (alms, often in the form of a large meal), or donating money or staples to the poor. The vows made by housemaids at al Batiyeh are primarily petitions for help with mundane issues—to regularize one’s visa status, obtain a good job, bring a relative, cure an illness, or solve family problems in Sri Lanka. They lit candles and started to pray in front of the icon of Mar Jirjes with typical Buddhist pray gesture, the palms and fingers joined at the level of forehead.

My madame will dismiss me soon. She is threatening me. But I took loans from the bank in Sri Lanka and my husband is building a house for us with that money. I have to pay it.. at least I beg her to let me stay for one more year. I have visited to Batiyeh many times before and many of my wishes have been granted. It is not an easy task to come from Zahle to Sarba by changing three different public transportations but I do. I am really in despair.

⁴⁰⁹Help me!! If I have done anything wrong, forgive me... May Rîma, Nancy, Catherine and new madame love me!! I want to be happy with them. Mar Jirjes, help me!! I cannot walk properly. My legs hurt. I want to see my children... let me take my visa quickly...(a Sri Lankan petitionary prayer).

⁴¹⁰ Jureidini Ray (2002) Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon. *International Migration Papers* 48, *International Migration Programme, International Labour Office*, Geneva

⁴¹¹ Jureidini Ray and Moukarbel N(2004) Female Sri Lankan Domestic Labour in Lebanon: Contractual, Slavery-like Practices and Conditions. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Volume 30, No. 4, July 2004, pp. 581-607.

Repayments tend to be small and private, involving the lighting of candles, fasting for a few days, and/or giving a small amount of money or gold as an offering. Several factors explain the popularity of Christian religious sites among Sri Lankan migrants of various faiths in Lebanon. One is that prejudice against Buddhists and Hindus is common amongst employers. Many Lebanese employers express a distrust of Buddhists and Hindus and prefer to hire housemaids who are Muslim or Christian. Aware of the stereotypes, some migrants wear crosses around their necks and say they are Catholic in order to get jobs.

I am a buddhist from Sri lanka. But I know all the ritual practices of Christians and I believe in it. I respect and venerate Mary. I wear cross as you see. And I cross myself when I pass by a holy shrine. Buddhism and Christianity are a lot in common. Now I can't tell you what they are but believe me there are so much in common. I visit al Batiyeh quite often. The water that you see here is really miraculous. Try if you want!! If you a a scar of spot or an allergic stain on your skin, it will disappear when rob it with this water. And the fish here never die. I came today to pray and ask for help from Mar Jirjes. Mar Jirjes is a familiar saint to me.. I saw his icons and pictures in Sri Lanka too. Maybe the domestic workers who work in Lebanon brought him to Sri Lanka. I have a daughter studying at university. This is her last year. And my contact will be over in 3 weeks. I want to have it renewed. I only need to work one more year for my daughter. Mala (Sri Lankan)

A second factor is that many employers only allow domestic workers out of the house to go to church, assuming that they won't get into trouble there. Attending weekly church services provides migrants with a rare opportunity for free time away from work. Going to church is also an affordable way to socialize with other Sri Lankans. The final and most important factor is that the attendance of non-Christians at Christian holy sites is part of the syncretism and tendency toward devotional, personalized practices that are characteristic of contemporary Sri Lankan religiosity. In Sri Lanka, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims alike patronize Christian churches and shrines to make vows. They also visit Catholic priests said to have healing powers. Against this backdrop, and given the absence of Buddhist and Hindu temples in Lebanon, the churches and shrines to the Virgin Mary and St. George act as stand-ins for shrines to more familiar saints and gods that Sri Lankans petition for help at home.

The water of the grotto of al Batiyeh is brackish. It is water that is saltier than fresh water, but not as salty as sea water. It results from mixing of seawater with fresh water coming from the source. Therefore it is not portable enough to drink safely. Rather it is used for rubbing the ill parts or immersing the body totally. And there is also certain wildlife inhabits it.

I am a Buddhist and there is no Buddhist temple in Lebanon. St George is very familiar to us Sri Lankans as people venerate him in my homeland too. So there is an affinity between him and me. He reminds me of Sri Lanka and my family. Let me tell you something: Years ago, I came here once and I saw many *Andha* - black fish in this pond. I felt uneasy. At that time, my son was in the army in Sri Lanka fighting against Tamil guerillas. That night I received a phone call and learnt that my son wounded seriously during the battle. I took a small bottle of water from here and went to Sri Lanka. I applied the water on my son's wounds and miraculously he got healed. I had a night mare one night. Since then I venerate St George more than ever.



Andha - Eel

Picture 94 Andha Eel ⁴¹²

Another testimony from a Sri Lankan woman related with andha eel is quite touching as follows:

I am a Latin Catholic from Sri Lanka, not a Buddhist nor Hindu. I have been working in Lebanon for more than 20 years. All I spent my youth here in this country for nothing. I was a teacher in Colombo, I had fallen in love with a Buddhist guy but my parents didn't give permission to get married to him. Then I tried to commit suicide. How stupid I was! Thank God I survived. But I no longer wanted to stay in Sri Lanka. I applied for a job as a domestic worker in Lebanon. Since then I have been here... My boyfriend got married with a girl from his confession. But he never loved her. I know. He never became happy, neither did I. One day I heard that he had committed suicide by injecting black sugar into his vein. He died. I often come to al Batiyeh. Not to pray but to see if I will be able to see an *Andha* eel. It is possible to see them in the waters of Batiyeh. *Andha* is a mythological animal in Sri Lankan folklore. It is believed seeing a white alive andha brings good luck and fortune to the one who sees it first. And the black one or a white dead one on the contrary brings catastrophes⁴¹³.

⁴¹² <http://biodiversityofsrilanka.blogspot.com/> - Phytomedicine and ...

⁴¹³ Strangely, I had seen a dead white Andha on the first day of my arrival in Sarba. I was the one who took it out from the grotto with the help of a long stick. When I told that to her, she got scared and worried and she said that it might be a signal of the unfortunate events that might occur around Sarba. After a few days when the robbery happened at Batiyeh, she found me in the cathedral of Saint George in order to remind me of what she had told me about the dead eel and the bad luck that it brought, associating the death of the Andha with the robbery in the sacred site



Picture 95 A Buddhist domestic worker in front of the icon of St George. Photo by the author 2017

4.8.2. Black Veils and a Military Saint: Coincidental Encounters

We are originally from Sarba but running this kiosk for 9 years only. Batiyeh hosts hundreds of visitors every week especially Shia tourists From Iraq and south of Lebanon. They buy big bottles of water from us. This is the only profit that Batiyeh gives us. And they also buy popcorns to feed the ducks and the fish in the pool⁴¹⁴.

Lebanon has also become a religious tourism destination for the Shia Muslims from Syria, Iran, Gulf States and other Islamic countries. The main attraction is a tomb shrine which is adjacent to Baalbek and dedicated to “Sayyida Khawla”, the daughter of Imam Hussein and great granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad. Approximately, 100,000 worshipers assemble near the shrine each year, marking the 40th day commemoration of Al-Hussein's death, to start Ashura march. The shrine also receives thousands of devotees each day who commemorate this occasion. They also come to visit and be blessed, or even attend lectures and seminars.

⁴¹⁴ A kiosk owner next to Al Batiyeh, 02.07.2017



Picture 96 Iraqi woman in front of Mar Jirjes photo by the author 22.04.2016

However the pilgrims also wish to see the main tourist attraction once they are in Lebanon. Tourism agencies take them to Beirut, Byblos and then to Harissa, the basilica of our lady of Lebanon which also gives a magnificent view of Jounieh bay, where al Batiyeh is located. They end the daily tour with a short boat trip as sea experience is a nice attraction for the ones coming from landlocked cities of Iraq. The boats depart from the shore just opposite al Batiyeh. The ones who fear from seasickness (*mal de mer*) or who prefer to stretch their legs and have some fresh air, are left to wait for their fellows Al Batiyeh by their tourist guides. These women found themselves unexpectedly and unintentionally in a shrine of Mar Jirjes.

Al Batiyeh gives them a space for respiration. They watch and feed the fish and ducks in the pond, take pictures, sometimes sit on the benches or on the floor to take a short nap. Some of them want to have a small picnic with the food they bring but swiftly warned by the warden as the eating is not permitted. While exploring the shrine, they end up in the sacred grotto. During my fieldwork, as soon as I saw an Iraqi group coming, I dashed to the grotto and to closely observe their behaviors. The most curious ones were trying to figure out the bizarreness of the womb-like cave, and gazing at the icon of this “strange”

knight killing a dragon namely St George, guessing and asking each other who he might be.

4.9. We cannot say “No” to them: Discourse of the clerics

My goal here is not to celebrate these settings for their promotion of an alternative route to religiosity, as many have done before me, but rather to consider the ways in which the very popular attachments to shrines offer a window onto the plasticity and porosity, beyond political, religious, and social boundaries in a world area. In their much-quoted introduction to the book “Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage” John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow (1991)⁴¹⁵ state that a shrine is a spiritual space capable of accommodating diverse meanings and practices. These meanings ascribed to local sacred places are constructed and transmitted by groups and institutions, which have control over a shrine.

Probably, this diversity of religious discourses recognizable at Aya Yorgi and Al Batiyeh could be explained as the result of weak control by the institution (the Church) of how its folk practices religion. People believe that the locus they venerate is sacred. It is the task of the church (in Aya Yorgi case) dress the sacred in a proper style. They accommodate folk religiosity to official religion. Thus, an ordinary believer tries to turn a stone with some “St George’s horse footprint” on, into one among the many stones at al Batiyeh. The priests interpret the sacred place according to the rules of religious discourse they share. So do other visitors of the shrine. They attach different meanings to it using their own strategies of interpretation. For some reason, the Church’s control over a shrine is weak, different groups of visitors attach meanings of their own to it. In this case a situation of competing religious discourses arises that can be observed both on the level of religious practices and narratives related to the sacred place.

“This custom in Batiyeh has been alive for long generations. If the child is sick (makbous), they take him/her here. After the takdis, they used to dip the clothes of the kid into the water of al Batiyeh or they used to steem the clothes with the smoke of the insence blessed by the priest. I remember it very well”. Upon the question of Muslim attendance: “We can’t say ‘don’t come’. We should respect them. We can no way deny the existence of other religious groups. After all we believe in the same God. We have the holy spirit and they have Mohammad. We have Mariam and they have Maryam and Zeinab or Fatima. We can’t criticize them. It is the issue of taqwa (piety). They have taqwa. They believe that Mar Jirjes cures the illnesses. All is

⁴¹⁵ Ibid

related with your intentions. As clergy, We must respect the beliefs of the ordinary people”—Abouna Efraim, a priest in the St George cathedral/Sarba)⁴¹⁶

Concerning Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh there are two reasons why sacred space is contested: because its spatial quality means that there will always be issues about how it is organized and controlled, and because its sacredness leaves it open to many claims about its significance. This is particularly so because such sites supposedly exude “spiritual magnetism” which develops at shrines for a variety of reasons. However, spiritual magnetism does not reside in the shrine alone but in the people who attend it, the journey to it, and the village or town that sends and receives pilgrims.

The first public declaration of the clergy of Aya Yorgi concerning the shared aspects of AyamYorgi was given by a prominent priest of the church 2015 within the framework of a rich exhibition called *Lieux Saints Partagés* that focuses on the sacred sites of the Mediterranean, shared between people of different religions. (Shared Sacred Sites) Based on anthropological field research, different versions of this exhibition were first held at the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations (MuCEM) in Marseille (2015), then at the Bardo Museum in Tunis (2016), Thessaloniki (2017) and Paris (2017). In a face to face interview which was recorded the priest states:

Most of the people that come here are not Christians. They light candle. They don't plan to come and pray but they do kind of pray or wish something. We sometimes hear very simple things like: “May God help my children pass their exams at university” until very serious things like “heal my child who has cancer!” sometimes children ask for their parents to quit drinking or come together because they are separated... they certainly know where they go that is a Christian church, a place of God. Many of them also know that that is a church of St George this is a place where different people from different religions come but we don't have discussions about theological beliefs or dogma. We just meet here ⁴¹⁷

However during my fieldwork both in the daily basis and on the feast day, it was very complicated to set up a communication with the clergy of the church. They tend to be invisible during the feast day as most female pilgrims can act in an over demanding way, asking the priest constantly to recite prayers on and bless them. But even on ordinary days, as a researcher, I found it very difficult to contact them. Despite my insistence, the wardens of the church (mostly Arab Orthodox from Antakya) often

⁴¹⁶ Personal interview with abouna Efraim, 01.07.2017 Sarba

⁴¹⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MB_WrIjoIoU

created various excuses, claiming that the priests were not available to talk, at the meetings in the Patriarchate or on vacation in Greece. In one of the rare occasions that I caught the priest, he reacted in a dubious and skeptical way to me although I showed him my student identity card of EHESS. Upon my questions concerning the Muslim participation in the pilgrimage day and the Muslim presence as visitors in the church he stated:

“First keep in mind that this is an Orthodox church!! Not anything else!! People (Muslims) have been coming to us for a long time: almost thirty years or more. What shall I say to them?? Shall I tell them that they shouldn’t come? They just come. We cannot say “No” to them.”⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁸ Personal interview with priest Ezekiel, 05,09,2016 Büyükada

Discussion and Conclusion

In their far reaching book called “*Sharing the Sacred Spaces in the Mediterranean*” edited by Albera and Couroucli (2012)⁴¹⁹, Maria Couroucli wrote a section on Aya Yorgi dwelling on the ethnographic field work that she carried out in early 90s and 2000s. I agree with Maria Couroucli’s assumption that Aya Yorgi shrine gradually has lost its privileged ties with its community of origin namely Rums, but became part of the heritage of old Istanbul. However I am skeptical about her attribution of the St George’s pilgrimage to an increasing nostalgia for the Pax Ottomana among Turkish citizens nowadays. She states that:

In Istanbul today the urban/rural gap divides those who 'know' from those who possess no memory of the local tradition. Descendants of the old Istanbul-born urban Muslim elites share a common memory of the multicultural society of Ottoman times, not possessed by recent migrants from the Anatolian provinces. Pilgrims to Prinkipo on 23rd April can be said to partake in the imagined community of the natives of Istanbul, those who "remember" the times when the city was home to Turks, Greeks, Armenians and Jews alike. These memories are nourishing a kind of "structural nostalgia", present-day representations and discourses about the past as a lost Eden.

As mentioned in the section related with the participants in Aya Yorgi pilgrimage, vast majority of the visitors and pilgrims coming to the shrine are secular Muslims and mostly “Atatürkist” (*Atatürkçü*) who still follow the modernist ideas of Mustafa Kemal, founder of modern Turkish Republic. All secular figures who aimed to the secularization of Turkey, so far have emerged opposed the all Ottoman conditions. For much of the 20th century, the term Ottoman carried a negative connotation. The Ottoman Empire had been the "sick man of Europe" demolished by the Kemalists in order to build the modern Turkish state. Concerning Aya Yorgi participants the Ottoman State or restoring historical Ottoman influence as a leader of the Islamic world is nothing more than a nightmare or an ideology that must be fought against. Ottoman state is far from evoking the idea of “Pax” or “multicultural existence” but an authoritarian rule in the form of a sultan. Contrary to what Couroucli stated, for the secular Muslims at Aya Yorgi the Ottoman Empire is also a type of nationalism with a heavy dose of Islam, and it appeals more to religious conservatives. Another point is, based on the testimonies of the local Greeks (Rums) of Büyükkada that I interviewed in Athens and the journals of the travelers who visited the island during the Ottoman era I have not ascertained a clear historical proof that Aya Yorgi was visited by

⁴¹⁹ Ibid

Muslims in big numbers as it is today. Noting that the first Muslim elites settled in the island towards the end of 19th century and the Ottoman Empire collapsed in the second decade of 20th century. There was obviously short period of time left to “cherish” coexistence and shared participation in a possible St George day pilgrimage. One of the informants, at the age of 87, in Athens said to me that “the golden days of the Büyükada in terms of coexistence and brotherhood in the island were between 1923 and 1955, not Ottoman era as almost all the residents of island were non-Muslims. Republican era passed “peacefully enough” until the brutal incidents of 6-7 September 1955”

As my research shows, Aya Yorgi has become a site where ‘power and resistance find expression’. I found out that through Aya Yorgi visits and pilgrimages, secular women resist the power of the authorities determining how to practice Islam. Although informants were from different confessions of Christianity and expressed their diverse and sometimes contradictory views and rituals, Aya Yorgi offers a space where their worlds can converge. Against the disciplining presence of the Diyanet or ‘official’ Islam at the shrines and mosques by saying what is acceptable and what is not, women appeared to enjoy the greater sense of freedom of expression and the possibilities inherent in conducting their ‘internal’ worship or prayer in an environment free from the somewhat ‘threatening’ presence of males and the often judgmental male gaze. My fieldwork confirms that ‘whatever the vagaries of official positions, women’s worlds of custom and ritual have a vitality and resilience that continues to be fueled by their participants’ search for self-expression and autonomy’ (Kandiyoti and Azimova 2003, p. 344)⁴²⁰.

Aya Yorgi also turned into a ‘sacred’ space through rituals carried out by people who separate themselves from daily routine tasks albeit briefly. Given women’s manifold approaches and expectations from shrines and the variety and range of rationalizations that emerged from their accounts of Aya Yorgi, it was useful in this thesis to regard shrines as places of ‘social memory’ constructed not through hagiographic texts but more importantly by oral narratives circulating about the marvels of the saint or the space (Louw 2007⁴²¹). In positing their own visits in contrast to men’s mosque attendance, many Muslim women seemed to suggest that shrines are ‘female’ spaces, thus bringing to bear a gendered understanding on the subject of religiosity while allowing women to express their personal

⁴²⁰ Kandiyoti, Deniz., Azimova, N. (2003). The communal and the sacred: women's worlds of ritual in Uzbekistan. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* Vol. 10, No 2: 327-349, London, 2004

⁴²¹ Louw, M. (2007) *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* London: Routledge, 2007 https://dokupdf.com/download/louw-maria-2007-everyday-islam-in-post-soviet-central-asia-routledge-london-5a01919ad64ab2b9bd551612_pdf

understanding of Islam. From group discussions and observations of women during Aya Yorgi pilgrimage, it was possible to learn of the impact of shrine on other aspects of women's lives. How women channelize their experiences at shrines to open up spaces for greater spiritual and personal growth was evident in the accounts of women. Deriving from the rich personal narratives of some selected women, through Aya Yorgi pilgrimage women imparted greater self-confidence, while also inducing a rethinking of gender relations, connectivity with other women with similar interests and a striving for greater fulfillment in their roles as mothers, daughters, wives and professionals. I also found altered consciousness and deeper engagement spilling over into every domain of the women's lives, defying all stereotypes of women as passive recipients of religious discourses instead of being its creators.

In the case of Lebanon the co-existence in common sphere, explains why it is quite possible that a pious (or not) Muslim may come to pray at the Christian places of worship. There, Christians and Muslims live side by side with similar intentions. I would, however, hesitate to speak of sharing. There is a real but limited sharing: everyone remains what he/she is and acts in accordance with his own tradition. At al Batiyeh there is, however, a juxtaposition of the two beliefs. It goes much further than the neighborhood in places of pilgrimage. But even here the lines of demarcation are present and felt by all. Precisely this common background of popular devotion has entered into the very heart of the faith of one and the other. I have pointed out throughout the thesis that the interest in places or persons considered sacred is directed at the power of the sacred without regard to the personality and life of the person thus invoked. It then looks very much like an occult force, without face or identity. It is easy to recognize many elements of magic in the religious practices at the shrine. These are the "occult forces," which threaten a human being - any one - and against which man defends himself by mechanical practices, which are supposed to always act, whatever the individual who undertakes them. In several stories of devotion I have met both trust and fear. When someone is placed under the protection of Saint George, for example, he considers that this saint is capable of removing the evil spirits, to take the defense of that person in all circumstances, provided, however, that he remains faithful. The force invoked may be beneficial, provided that the ritual is scrupulously respected; otherwise it turns against the one who invoked it. Thus a certain religious indifference becomes possible: every element of religion is good to use, provided that it yields the appeasement sought. But in these extreme cases one may wonder whether it is still

Christianity or Islam. And the resulting mixture does not invite me to talk about sharing, even if there are no compartments.

I have tried to demonstrate from examples that there exists a popular religiosity which crosses the lines between religions. I have limited myself to examples of practices of Christians and Muslims. I am convinced that if we broaden the scope, we will find the same elements. This substratum of religiosity which ignores differences makes possible to explain why, in certain circumstances, the believer can go to places of worship of another religion or address holiness of figures belonging to a tradition that is not his own. The fact that different people come to seek in the same place what they need establishes nothing but a form of neighborhood. Customers who come to shop in the same store share practically nothing. But they can meet, greet each other, and perhaps create friendly human relationships. The fact that such neighborhoods are possible and can be observed quite frequently does not mean that the rituals of a popular religion always lead to this type of encounter. The opposite hypothesis can also be verified: popular rituals can be constructed against the other, and serve widely for the construction of a group identity to better distinguish one from the other. In this case the ritual becomes a powerful factor of partitioning. It is not because what happens on both sides of a border has similar elements that the boundary will be less impermeable. I only want to show why a certain mixture can occur, especially in a country like Lebanon where the various traditions are known to all.

Intersecting vs Diverging Axes of Aya Yorgi and Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh

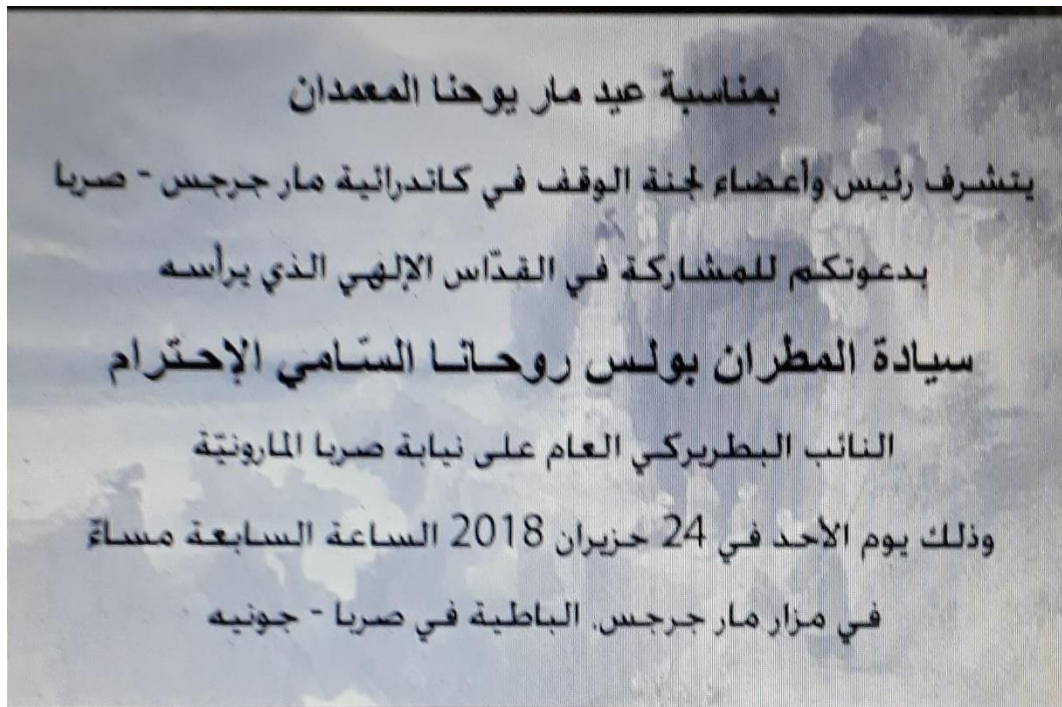
According to Tweed (2006)⁴²², religious practice comes down to basically two forces: crossing and dwelling on space and place. Crossing refers to physical movement, such as pilgrimage, certain spatial rituals, and spiritual travel indicating a movement across time and place. The most prominently distinctive features of Aya Yorgi and Mar Jirjes al Batiyeh lie in their geographical locations and morphological characteristics. Aya Yorgi is situated on the summit of a hill on an island however al Batiyeh is located on the shore by the Mediterranean Sea. Despite the fact that they are both dedicated to the same saint (St George) Aya Yorgi is a monastery which has historical and architectural significance whereas al Batiyeh is a natural grotto (cave) surrounded by a relatively new public park. Due to its challenging location Aya Yorgi is not easily accessible and requires a series of modern and traditional means of transportation. Al Batiyeh on the other hand, can be

⁴²² Tweed Thomas A (2006) *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006. ix+278 pp.

reached much more easily thanks to its convenience of location. Yet, Aya Yorgi hosts much higher number of visitors and pilgrims because of its popularity both in daily basis and temporal pilgrimages compared to Mar Jiryes al Batiyeh.

Water is an important ritual element both at al Batiyeh and Aya Yogi. In contrast to the self-perpetuating waters of al Batiyeh which can be obtained by the visitors by themselves without any official intervention, access to the *ayazma* (holy water) of Aya Yorgi is restricted by the church authorities due to the security regulations. Sacred water is brought by the warden in bottles, from the *ayazma* which is situated beneath the monastery upon the request of the pilgrims-visitors. As it has already been shown in this study, the cult of Saint George as another major world spread hierophany includes the symbolism of water in itself. St. George is related to the beginning of summer, to rains and fertility. Also he carries the fame of being the savior of the maiden and the one who gave the water back to people killing the dragon. A connection between St George and the masculine principle of water which falls from the skies and comes as an active principle fertilizing the soil wouldn't be therefore too exaggerated. If water has been seen as a masculine and feminine principle as well, then the patronage of St George over the oratory cave of al Batiyeh offers a complex approach upon people's beliefs enhancing the power of the two symbols.

As mentioned in the thesis, water plays crucial role in sacralization and popularity of Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh. Once open to public visitation, Aya Yorgi long ago closed the doors of its *ayazma* due to the security reasons. The priest of the monastery claimed that visitors either intentionally or not gave harm to the icons and the walls of *ayazma*, While Aya Yorgi restricts the access to holy water, al Batiyeh is enriching and layering its popularity by providing portable water for the visitors and others. There is a drinking fountain which anybody can benefit regardless of their visit motivations. On the 24th of June in 2018 on Mar Youhanna (St John) feast day, Al Batiyeh hosted a mass again after long years of silence to revive one of the oldest customs of the village, under the presidency of the bishop Father Paul Rohanna, with the collaboration of Jounieh Municipality and the wakef of Al Batiyeh. "The choir of Marian Movement- Jawkat al Harakat al Maryamiyeh-Sarba" chanted hymns and liturgical songs on the podium.



Picture 97 Invitation card⁴²³

Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh diverge in confessional terms. Aya Yorgi is an Orthodox monastery under the auspices of Ecumenical Patriarchate of Istanbul. Whereas, Al Batiyeh, in pastoral terms, is a shrine that belongs to Maronite (Catholic) Patriarchal Parish of Sarba and it is directed by the charitable foundation (waqf). Aya Yorgi is an official church where the clerics are visible and present in ordinary days but almost invisible throughout the feast day which provides the pilgrims a relatively free space and time away from clerical gaze on condition that they obey certain regulations and codes of conduct. On the other hand, unlike Aya Yorgi, Al Batiyeh is more like a non-official spiritual space, a natural shrine grotto surrounded by a public park but the shrine, likewise to Aya Yorgi, enables the visitors behave rather freely (within certain regulations that protects the aura of the shrine) compared to a religious institution directed by clerics.

Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh are pilgrimage shrines with strong emphasis on religious devotions, but with a number of characteristics to attract secular tourists. They both function as devotional centers and religious tourism attractions because of various combinations of historical, artistic, and scenic site characteristics, and places where religious festivals are the principal attraction as in the case of Aya Yorgi. On Büyükada

⁴²³ This invitation. On the occasion of the feast of Saint John Baptist, the waqf committee of the Saint George Cathedral in Sarba We have the honor of inviting you to attend the mass presided over by Bishop Paul Rouhana Patriarchal Vicar for the Maronite Vicariate of Sarba. Sunday, June 24, 2018 at 7 pm At the Mazar of St. George Battiye, Sarba - Jounieh

and in Sarba I observed a transition from traditional St George's day celebration into modern multifaceted festivals. Pilgrimage day of Aya Yorgi transforms into a lively carnival through the parodies and morality play performances of evangelical drama groups. Evangelical missionaries attain liberty for manifestation in public space despite the minor conflicts between Orthodox Church authorities. In Sabra, saint's day is "festivalized" by a local civil society association through melting the old customs of the village in a modern feast format. However both festivals obviously carry carnivalesque nature marked by displays of excess and grotesqueness and where certain groups can exist briefly beyond the control of the state and the church.



Picture 98 Evangelist groups on the feast day of Aya Yorgi at Büyükada



Picture 99 Prophet Abraham and his wife Sarah are dancing with the song “DomdomKurşunu” by Ibrahim Tatlıses on AyaYorgi feast day

Their contemporary cultural and economic contexts are somewhat ambiguous as the perceived boundaries are unclear. They both receive spiritual or heritage tourists whose motivations are curiosity, cultural interest, and the quest for a new meaning in life and also traditional visitors, who believe in the power of the shrine. It should be noted, however, that this belief on the part of traditional visitors is anchored not in religious faith but in personal outlook, as reflected in their tendency to make specific requests rather than to engage in formal prayer. For the secular tourists observed at Aya Yorgi their trip is a form of entertainment not unlike cinema, theater⁴²⁴, or television. This kind of visitor enjoys his/her trip because it restores physical and mental powers and provides a general sense of well-being. It also provides them with an authentic “other” experience distinct from their everyday life and normal social reality. Indeed, the beauty of the garden of Al Batiyeh and the scenic beauty of Aya Yorgi make the experience one that, for many visitors, goes well beyond their everyday life experience. It also demonstrates how differing visitor motives can shape different visitor activities and the activity-space they define.

⁴²⁴ Many Muslim visitors of Aya Yorgi ask the warden to show them where the confession booth is as they see it frequently in the movies

For Turner, the ultimate goal of pilgrim is the achievement of *communitas*. *Communitas* is the 'direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities, which, when it happens, tends to make those experiencing it think of mankind as a homogeneous, unstructured, and free community' (Turner, 1973, p. 193)⁴²⁵, a strong and sudden feeling of being a unique yet equal part of the human race. *Communitas* is the feeling that an individual and his fellow pilgrim companions temporarily transcend the hierarchical social roles that often serve to divide them in their everyday life—as well as the arrangements of these positions and statuses that we call 'social structure'. It is in this ambiguous phase when traditional social conventions are suspended (if not inverted), that the fleeting sensation of *communitas* emerges. It is a feeling of unity and comradeship that bonds the group of initiates, irrespective of their previous social status, political or economic power, or class affiliation; recognition that despite social differences, all are the same. However I have not found a support for the theory of Turner neither during Aya Yorgi case which is a temporal collective pilgrimage nor in the case of Al Batiyeh which can be regarded as daily individual visitation; on the contrary, I have seen, in many instances, the reinforcement of social boundaries and distinctions in the pilgrimage context, rather than their attenuation or dissolution. But of course, I do not mean that the notion of *communitas* cannot be found in some partial cases.

But at Aya Yorgi I suggest to use a term called “constrained *communitas*” during the silent walk towards the shrine on the slope as there is no other way or means of transport to reach the summit except for the vehicle service for the disabled ones. Everybody regardless of their status must use their feet to climb up the path. But this constrained *communitas* might dissolve if a cable car system is constructed in the near future⁴²⁶. During the pilgrimage, at Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh as well, different groups (seculars, Muslims, Christians and new participants) do not mix with others and deliberately distance themselves from other groups and this led to factionalism though not competition. In sum, “the concept of *communitas* is of little value in explaining the essentially divisive quality of Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh pilgrimage and I suggest that in such circumstances it is better to see *community*, not *communitas*, as the hallmark of

⁴²⁵ Ibid

⁴²⁶ “Will the Büyükada cable car save the phaeton horses?

Prince Islands (Adalar), the closest holiday point of Istanbul, is getting to the cable car line ... Büyükada cableway project which is one of the metro projects of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality will provide transportation, from beach to Aya Yorgi Church “ <http://www.adagazetesi.com.tr/buyukada-ve-kinaliada-teleferik-projesi-ne-zaman-acilacak.html>

pilgrimage. I certainly do not deny that some people communicate with each other, call one another; brother or sister, but these are minor, even exceptional.

As I have illustrated in the thesis the votive offerings (*ex votos*) at Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh can be grouped into two different types including: (a) votives consisting of actions or material things that are vowed to divine power or to St George for his intercession with the divine, in return for a hoped-for miracle; (b) votives offered in thanksgiving for already-answered prayers. At Aya Yorgi alongside with traditional Orthodox votive offerings, we observe juxtaposition of relatively new and invented objects (*dilekliks*) and symbolic ones which carry the residues of Anatolian shrine traditions due to the internal migration to Istanbul. On the other hand at al Batiyeh the votive offerings consist mostly of realia. Besides the material *ex votos* al Batiyeh receives behavioral or performative offerings such as servicing for the shrine as *ndr* and blood sacrifice even if it is rare.

The prayers of Aya Yorgi can be documented as they are written on the papers and apart from the ones accumulated in the “wish box” many others can be found scattered around the shrine. However at al Batiyeh such documentation has not been possible due to the fact that prayers are mostly muted or oral. Yet it is not impossible to come across with some written forms of prayers tucked in the hollows of the shrine. I mainly dwelled on the oral testimonies that I gathered during the fieldwork. It wouldn’t be wrong if I suggest that at Aya Yorgi the aim of the prayers are generally to fulfill material needs such as money, house and so on. As shown in the related chapter, marriage and finding a spouse is another frequent demand of the female pilgrims. They not only pray for their own good but also for the sake of others thus prayers consists both petitionary and intercessory motifs. According to the pilgrims there is nothing wrong in seeking some material gain through their prayers as some others argue that it is a “selfish” and “inferior” way of praying. The prayer examples at al Batiyeh on the other hand seems to be more health related quality of life and mostly comes from the desperate cries of the believers who feel themselves “trapped” into insurmountable problems: sickness, the hardships of dislocation etc.

Given all these mixed practices to the both sites, to what extent could one talk about syncretism and what would be the point of talking about syncretism in these two cases? The traditional definition of syncretism⁴²⁷ is related to the concept that culture, religion and ethnicity are homogenous elements, which might be mixed when they come in contact with another culture, religion and ethnic groups (Leopold and Jensen 2004: 2)⁴²⁸. Baird (2004: 48)⁴²⁹ also states that the term syncretism is hardly ever clearly defined even if it is usually considered to be clear enough. Pye (1971: 93)⁴³⁰ defines syncretism as a temporary ambiguous coexistence of elements from diverse religious and other contexts within a coherent religious pattern. For Vroom (2004: 110)⁴³¹, syncretism is an act of incorporating or trying to incorporate elements that are hitherto uncommon and unusual to the basic belief systems of a specific religious tradition. Syncretism involves the negotiation and interfaces of a new element into a different group. The concept of syncretism is related to the diffusion of religion. The elements transmitting into a certain religion can originate from other religious or secular sources. The causes and consequences of syncretism are greatly affected by the existing cultural, historical, social and political conditions (Leopold and Jensen 2004:3-4)⁴³². In effect, syncretism involves the coexistence of elements of varied background intermingling dubiously and it is a natural and continuous character of all religious systems. Pye (1971: 92)⁴³³ writes that: It is part of the dynamics of these religious traditions from one cultural context to another whether geographically or in time. But since the traditions are moving all the time, and since the meaning are continually being refashioned, any particular case of syncretism is necessarily temporary. It is not a must for all elements involved in syncretistic religious circumstances to be of a religious nature. Some of these elements can be political, philosophical or other nonreligious substances (Pye 1971: 93). It involves a process in which “beliefs and practices from one

⁴²⁷ By way of definition, see for instance, Stewart Charles and Shaw Rosalind (ed.), *Syncretism/Antisyncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*, London: Routledge (1994), 1. In the introduction, it is stated that: ‘the term ‘syncretism’ is a contentious term often taken to imply ‘inauthenticity’ or ‘contamination’, the infiltration of a supposedly ‘pure’ tradition, by symbols and meanings seen as belonging to other, incompatible traditions’. He claims further that ‘Syncretism is also a reconciliation of disparate or contradictory beliefs’. The New Dictionary of Theology sees it as ‘... the process of borrowing elements by one religion from another so much so that the receiving religion basic character will not be changed’

⁴²⁸ Leopold, A M., Jensen S (eds. (2004). *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*. London: Equinox

⁴²⁹ Baird, Robert. (2004) “Syncretism and the History of Religions.” In *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader*. Edited by Anita M. Leopold and Jeppe S. Jensen 48-58. London: Equinox, 2004.

⁴³⁰ Pye, Micheal. (1971) “Syncretism and Ambiguity.” *Brill 18, no. 2*, 1971: 83-93.

⁴³¹ Vroom Hendrik, (2004) "Syncretism and Dialogue. A Philosophical Analysis," in *Dialogue and Syncretism. An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Jerald Gort, et al. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.), 27, 29.

⁴³² Ibid

⁴³³ Ibid

religious current or world and life view are adopted by certain people in another religious current, and subsequently assimilated or repudiated.” (Vroom 2004: 104)⁴³⁴. Departing from the elements I gathered, I want to once again emphasize the question of authority at Aya Yorgi and al Al Batiyeh. Massive Christian pilgrimage sites in Europe such as Lourdes in France, all pilgrimage is under the control of the ecclesiastic authority and there is no sharing of authority with non-Christian powers, with merchants, or with authorities of other religions. For that, pilgrims, their schedule, their gestures, the objects they take with them, are under control without a real contestation, in a context of cooperation between the Church and the civil authorities. The merchants are strictly squared out of the perimeter of the pilgrimage, in the city. However at Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh the pilgrimage, the souvenir economy, exvoto market etc are usually less controlled entities compared to other institution driven pilgrimages Lourdes, Fatima (Portugal) or even Muslim hajj to Saudi Arabia. The relation of the shrine to the local parish and diocese is not very strict and disputes are not common.

I profoundly agree with the view of Pye in terms of “temporal syncretism” concerning the ritual practices at Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh. At Aya Yorgi a Muslim woman’s reciting prayers from Quran in a muted way can be considered a subtle form of syncretism for a temporal time. Elements of Islam (Surats) and Christianity (the church) meet for a short period of time but they do not mingle or melt enough into each other in order to create new form of religiosity. One of the wardens of the shrine reported that he witnessed, though very rarely, veiled Muslim women doing “namaz” in the church as they had no time to go to the mosque which is located downtown which might be a proof for a certain syncretic behavior. However the fact he ignores is that Islam permits the believers to do “namaz” in any setting⁴³⁵ even without ablution if the conditions do not permit. When the time for the obligatory prayer is too short and one cannot fulfill the conditions, then doing the prayer on time takes precedence over the conditions: Whether it is a desert or a top of a mountain or a church. Another point to take into consideration is the votive offerings like strings and rags which are thought to have Islamic connotation. These offerings are mistakenly considered as Islamic by others because in textual official Islam such objects do not carry any value and rather they are perceived as superstitions. Therefore Muslims do not unreel

⁴³⁴ Ibid

⁴³⁵islamo- conservative former president of Turkis Republic Abdullah Gül reported that he did namaz in a church when he was a student in London <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kiliseye-girip-namaz-kildim-4717734>

the threads as it is an ordered Islamic ritual but more precisely magical. They do not justify it being a religious act but a type of magic that they are even unconscious of.

At al Batiyeh similarly the non-Christians visit the shrine to obtain *baraka* or find a cure not from Jesus Christ or St George nor from Khodr but from the sacred water. As water is a neutral primordial element and doesn't belong to a specific belief system we cannot link the Muslim presence at al Batiyeh with syncretism but rather we can talk about hybrid transition from water cults to a monotheistic religion. All in all, instead of using the terms like syncretism or diffusion of religions I suggest to apply the term "bricolage" where the pattern is not braid or interwoven but constructed with randomly assembled things. Bricolage would be more appropriate in my opinion when comparing these two places as this term reflects better the variety and incongruence of elements which construct the whole assembly of these two phenomena.

Büyükkada has manifold economic benefits where high level of economic activity is taking place during pilgrimage day. The church (from donations), local residents, shops, coffee houses, restaurants, transportation companies, hotels, pensions, people who provide transportation (phaitons) facilities receive invaluable economic values from the pilgrimage day. The day offers an exclusive occasion to local vendors (and vendors coming from different parts of Istanbul) to acquire all financial benefits after a calm winter season. Stationary street vendors are among the most ubiquitous souvenir sellers, with varying degrees of legality and different levels of interaction with pilgrim tourists. The retailers face unique challenges in determining consumer demand and sustaining operations. One-time shoppers, only one day pilgrimage, undifferentiated product lines, highly-concentrated direct competition, and other factors influence potential for success. As I stated in the related chapter "misguided" pilgrims are persuaded to buy the invented objects. Apart from that handicrafts and ethnic art as commodified products are put on the market for the pilgrim-tourist. Some products like *dilekliks* are regarded as tangible magical, sentimental, and cherished objects of a memorable experience; by the same token, some pilgrims on the other hand find them as cheap, insubstantial, mass-produced and kitsch. Souvenir retailers are not homogeneous in size, location, or management structure. The most obvious souvenir vendors are the frontline merchants whose primary objective is to sell souvenirs. Majority of the souvenirs are profane objects that have no direct bond with the essence of the pilgrimage. It has always surprised me not to see any icon of St

George on the market stalls on a day dedicated to him as one may expect to find a boom out in iconography retail similar to the other Orthodox pilgrimage sites in Balkan region. Nor have I seen any souvenirs that have Islamic connotation (Allah calligraphies etc). Objects with religiously symbolic meaning seem to be ignored and instead, the whole market is strived to sell the magic objects like colorful candles, threads and *dilekliks*. One also may find it interesting to see a big collection of souvenir magnets of heroic secular figures such as *Atatürk*, *CheGuavera* and *Deniz Gezmiş*⁴³⁶. Concerning Sarba as the pilgrimage is a small scale and not popularized like Aya Yorgi, I can certainly say that the economic benefit that Sarba village and Al Batiyeh get from the votive visits cannot be comparable with Aya Yorgi. The only value that the *wakef* gets is the small scale donations in the donation box and a small amount of profit from the candle sales.

Christian culture, as well as many other religions, is quite familiar with the phenomenon of the invocation of saints, motivated by the belief that they are able to cure diseases. Saints even “specialize” for some diseases, particular ailments or body parts, and earthy problems while others, such as the Virgin Mary, have more general capabilities and may be called upon for all sorts of ills according to certain hagiographies. As I pointed out in the chapters on the history of the church and the hagiography of St George (Aya Yorgi) he was believed to cure the mental disorders. Many travel writers of 19th and early 20th centuries who visited the island talk about the mentally ill people who were shackled and left for incubation in the church. I came across with the similar practice of shackling in the churches dedicated to St George in Israel and Palestine. The specialization of St George Büyükada seems to have transformed from the “mad healer” to the “matchmaker” or “financial consultant” as the wish papers and the in depth interviews have illustrated. Many of the single female pilgrims have also reported that they also visit the shrine of “Telli Baba” who is an acclaimed “spouse finder” located in Sarıyer district of Istanbul and “Ayn Biri/Panayia” a small Greek Orthodox Church in Vefa which has a healing effect on “broken hearts”. Al Batiyeh on the other hand was in the past and still is associated with fertility and children. The combination personage of the saint and the sacred water is believed to cure the barren couples and the ailing children. Late 19th century baptism

⁴³⁶ Deniz Gezmiş was a Turkish Marxist-Leninist revolutionary, student leader, and political activist in Turkey in the late 1960s and was hanged on May 6, 1972 at the Ulucanlar Prison in Ankara after the March 12, 1971 military coup.

records and the testimonies of the local people prove that the shrine has always welcomed the ones who are “trapped” in the fecundity and children issues.

Saint George and Khidr are seen as two counterparts. Their relation with each other has been frequently questioned by a number of academics or clerics since the beginning of 20th century as in the example of Husluck, Kanaan and Ocak. The attempts to understand the connections between these two holy figures and the ritual practices around the shrines dedicated to “two saints in one body” have not been concluded yet: Khidr who has drunk of the Water of Life and teaches hidden knowledge to the prophet Moses according to the hadith literature, St George, Christian martyr and a dragon slayer. They seem to be standing in the opposite poles of a continuum. Ambiguous identification of such different personages with each other still causes confusion in the hearts and minds of researchers and the ordinary believers. No matter what was said before, in modern times defenders of “religious dialogue” and “coexistence” frequently refer to the common aspects of these two saints and embrace such unification as a symbol of common way. Others who are cautious about religious overlapping reject this commonality. To be precise, in contemporary Middle East and Anatolian context, in reality, not many people know much about these saints once considered being the same figures with different names. Many people even do not have slight idea about what do they stand for. Whereas it is somehow true that in Lebanon there are some people who still link al Khidr with George. Yet when asked about Saint George and Khidr my informants referred to the textual theology (Koran, hadith and hagiographies) and official declarations of the clerics more than the oral narratives. A Shiite woman that I interviewed said to me that she had better ask a sheikh to verify if the connection with these saints is a true fact. Similarly a Christian lady advised me to ask a priest who “knows everything better than ordinary people”. Despite this ambiguity it is possible to encounter with people who gives more importance to esoteric knowledge than theological one. A Christian orthodox man I talked to at al Batiyeh stated that it was futile to search for “information” of these mutual saints through a church or a mosque as it is a matter of esoteric beliefs: “Saint George and Khidr are the same, that’s it”

What I experienced in Lebanon and more specifically at the shrine of al Batiyeh, the cult of Saint George-Khodr is perceived as hierophany that includes the symbolism of water in itself. At Aya Yorgi in Istanbul on the other hand, though the name of the saint is known and articulated (Aya Yorgi), the hagiographic character of Saint George is not a shared

issue. Christians know the details about the life story and the powers attributed to him whereas, Muslims (with all subdivisions) visit the church and attend the pilgrimage with a complete unawareness and they are not interested in gaining a possible consciousness. According to the Muslims that I interviewed, Aya Yorgi (Saint George) might be “a priest”, “a companion of a king”, “the lover of an ancient princess”, “a doctor”, or “a disciple of Jesus who visited Büyükada” “a beloved uncle” and so on. Hızır (Khidr), notwithstanding, is totally absent from the context. He doesn’t have a place in the spiritual geography of Aya Yorgi pilgrimage and the pilgrims both Christians and others do not have a notion of a possible Hızır- Aya Yorgi uniformity. Moreover folkloric vitality of Hıdırellez celebrations (6th of May, see the related section in the thesis) seems to be very weak among the Muslim pilgrims of Aya Yorgi. Modern day pilgrimage at the shrine and it is mostly based on a hierophany around an ambiguous shrine more than veneration to a specific holy person or following a cultic saint.

Aya Yorgi is, quite often, portrayed in mass media organs like television, newspapers and also more individual sense in social media accounts of the people who visited the shrine. In television as shown in the related chapter in this thesis, the interpretation of the shrine differs according to the ideologies of the TV media channels. Some approach it in a secularly neutral sense equating it to a festive event, others, on the other hand, harshly criticize the “superstitious ritual practices” observed around the shrine. Despite the criticism, Muslim presence in a Christian space is object of interest for the audience and the television channels benefit from that and it seems to be clear fact that Aya Yorgi owes its popularity partly to the “unintended advertisement” made in the mass media. Al Batiyeh however, is totally invisible in the Lebanese mass media. Shrines such as Our Lady of Lebanon, Mar Charbel or Rafka are treated frequently in several Christian oriented TV channels as well as the relatively secular channels like MBC. I watched a small documentary on St George Church in Bthegrine where miraculous relics of a dead priest whose undecomposed body is displayed. But al Batiyeh had never been a focus of interest by TV makers until March 2018 when it was filmed by a TV channel called OTV. Surprisingly, in a country like Lebanon where the people are so much into sharing visuals on social media apps, al Batiyeh is poorly represented on Instagram apart from a couple of hashtags and posts.

Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh differ from each other in terms of number of pilgrims and the distribution of the number according to their religious backgrounds. Turkey’s population

consists mainly of Muslims and Christian minorities are declining each day. This imbalance in the religious percentages seems to be the main and the basic reason why Muslim visitors are more than the others. Lebanon on the other hand is still home to a considerable number of various Christian sects and furthermore Sarba where al Batiyeh is located are overwhelmingly inhabited by Maronite Christians. Though Christians visit al Batiyeh, obviously more Muslims attendance cannot be denied. Despite the confessional differences in the participants between Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh there is a common point of convergence that is domestic workers. Lebanon and Turkey (Lebanon more) are two countries that host immigrant workers that are employed in domestic labor sector. Turkish domestic labor market consists mainly of the women from post-Soviet countries like Moldavia, Georgia, Russia and Armenia, but Lebanon mostly hires the ones from Ethiopia, India, Sri Lanka, Philippines, and Ghana. Lately Ethiopians have become visible in maid services in Istanbul as well. These sites dedicated to Saint George: Aya Yorgi and al Batiyeh serve as settings of manifestation for these female migrants' religion in their transnational migration process, providing them a significant space to live their spirituality, get together via their networks and socialize away from their homelands in the host countries. These women, mostly Orthodox Christians often have certain expectations from Saint George, a heroic rescuer who is also the patron of the countries of almost all of them.

In an attempt to draw final conclusions and to answer precisely the initially pointed out questions of this work, what would be the major things that stir the interest of so many people belonging to so various types of beliefs, what precisely yields sacredness to these places: a set of certain traits of places, political and historical background of the countries these places are situated in or maybe all these exterior facts reflected in people's consciousness, behavior, tradition, customs and beliefs? Obviously, the beauty of the locations is a matter of interest for the touristic trips as I showed in chapters above but it is more than that. As in any act of perceiving the sacredness there must be the awareness of its existence and, if not that, then a belief in magic and in unexplainable by reason events. It is not a syncretism, as I showed above, but a bricolage of religious and unreligious attitudes corresponding to the human belief and hope that our life must not be only what we see with our eyes, what we get by our limited senses, what we understand with our limited knowledge. There must be something more as the first cause and the last effect remain unknown to the human mind. And in the search for that something more people follow paths that sometimes intersect with the paths of different others.

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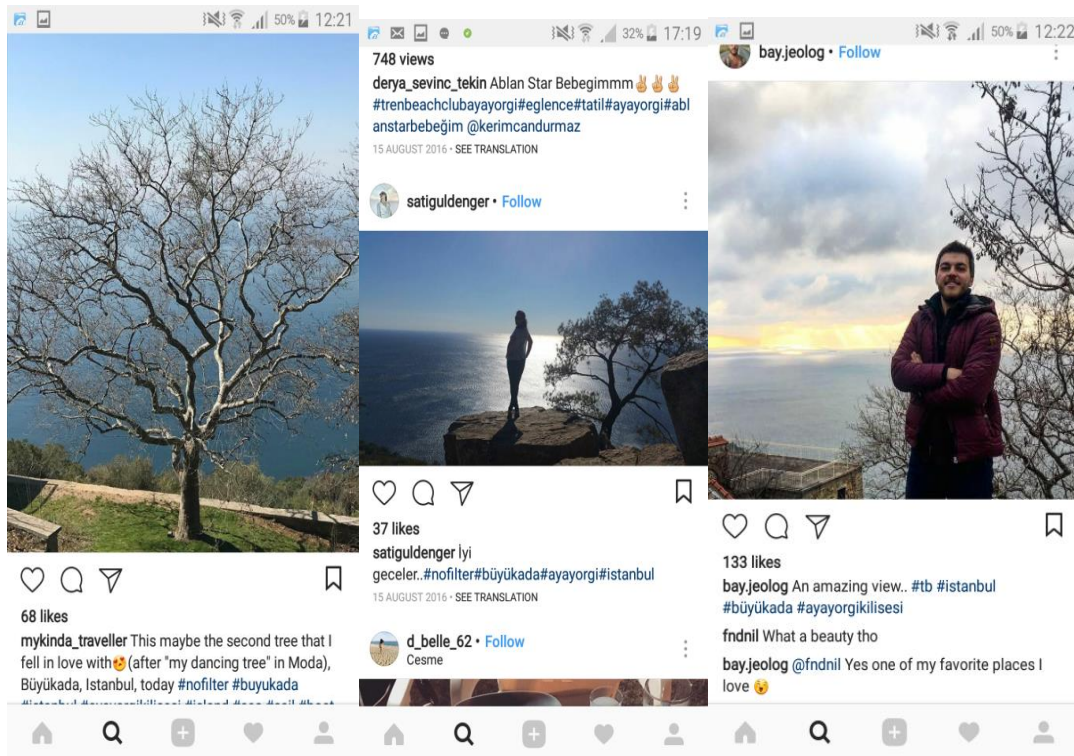
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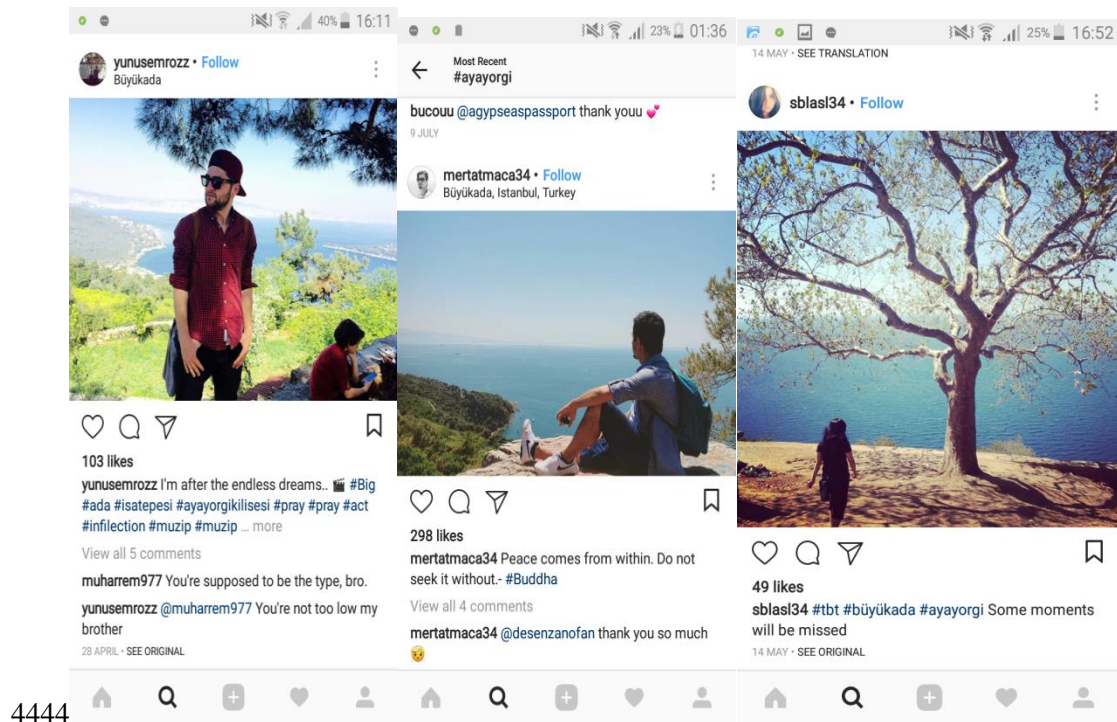
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ANNEX

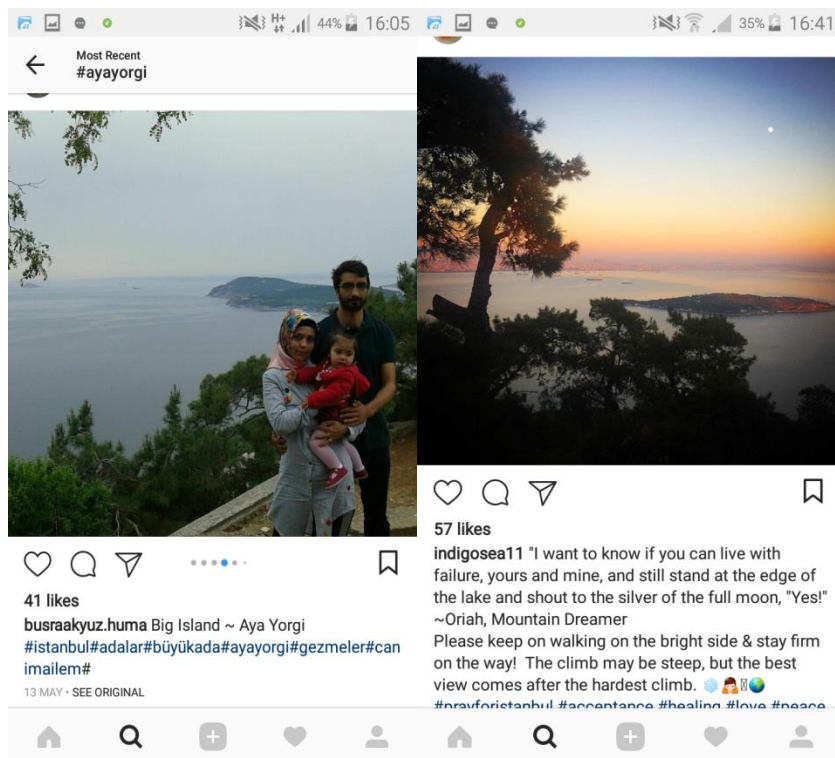
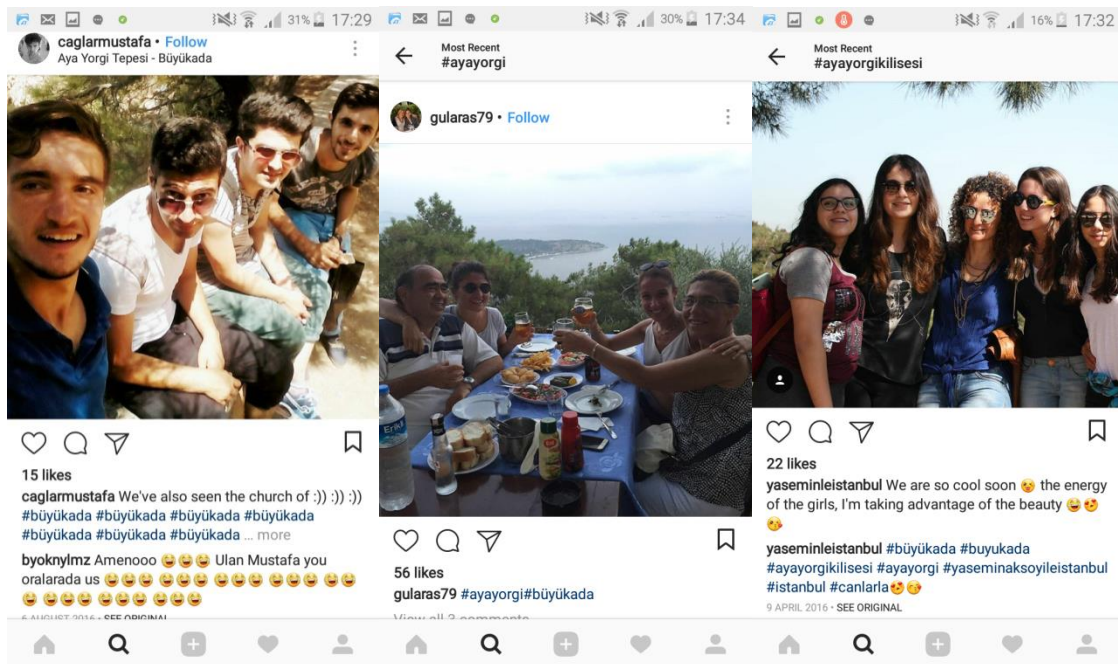
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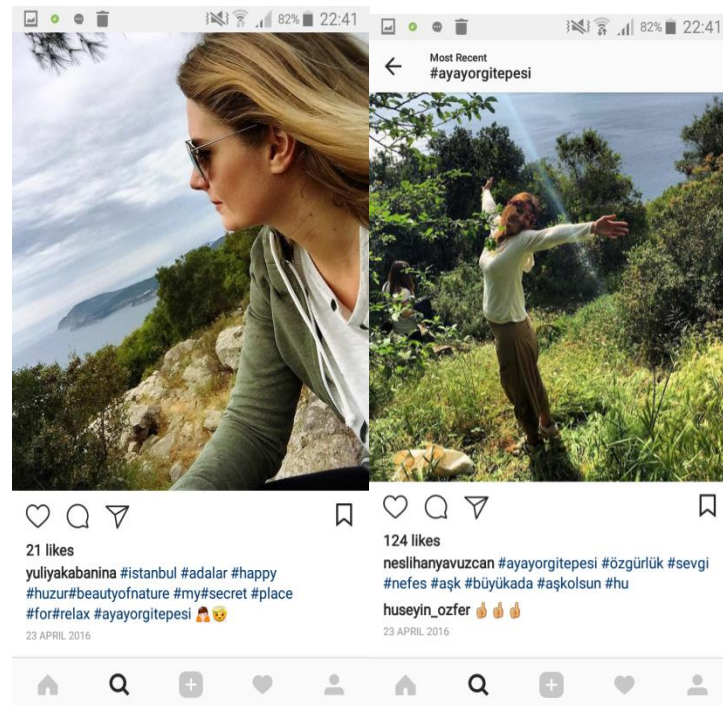
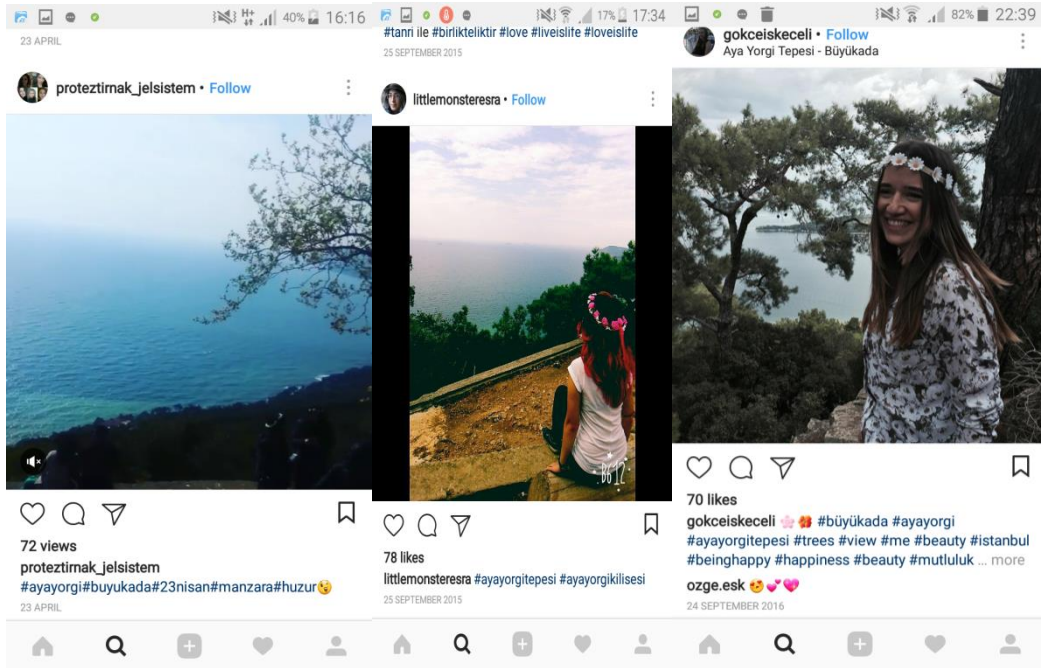


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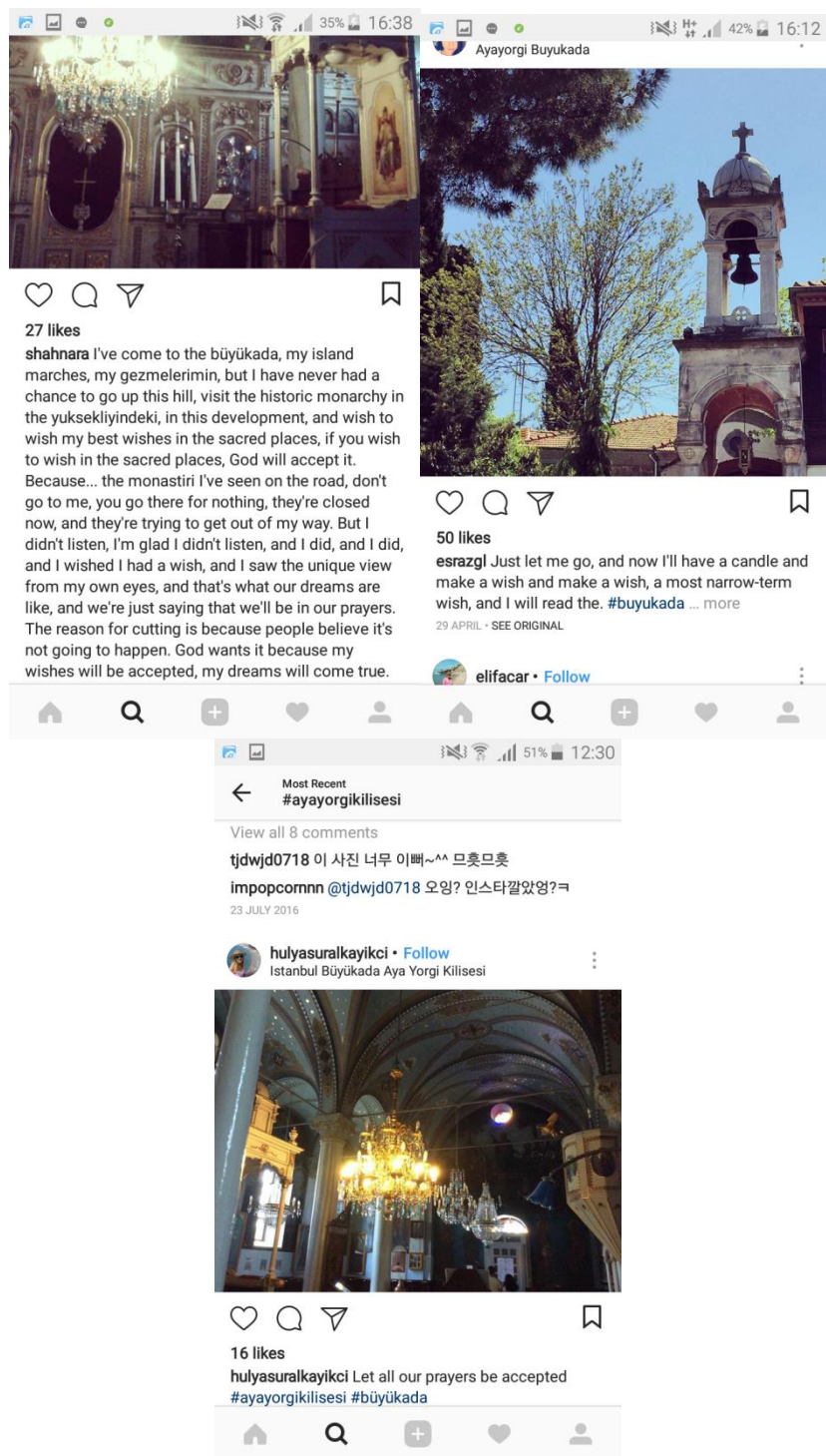


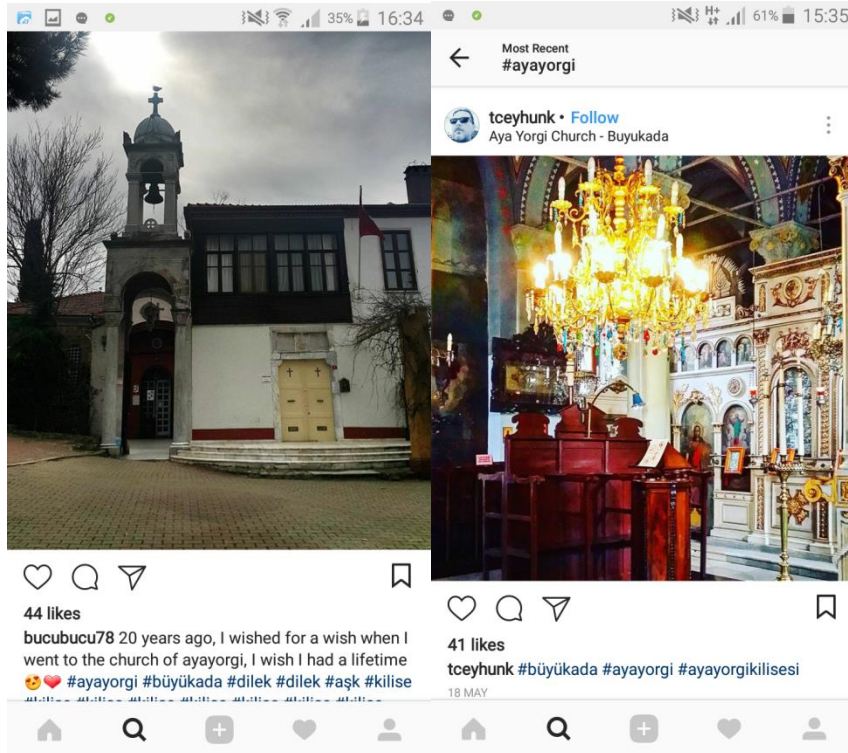
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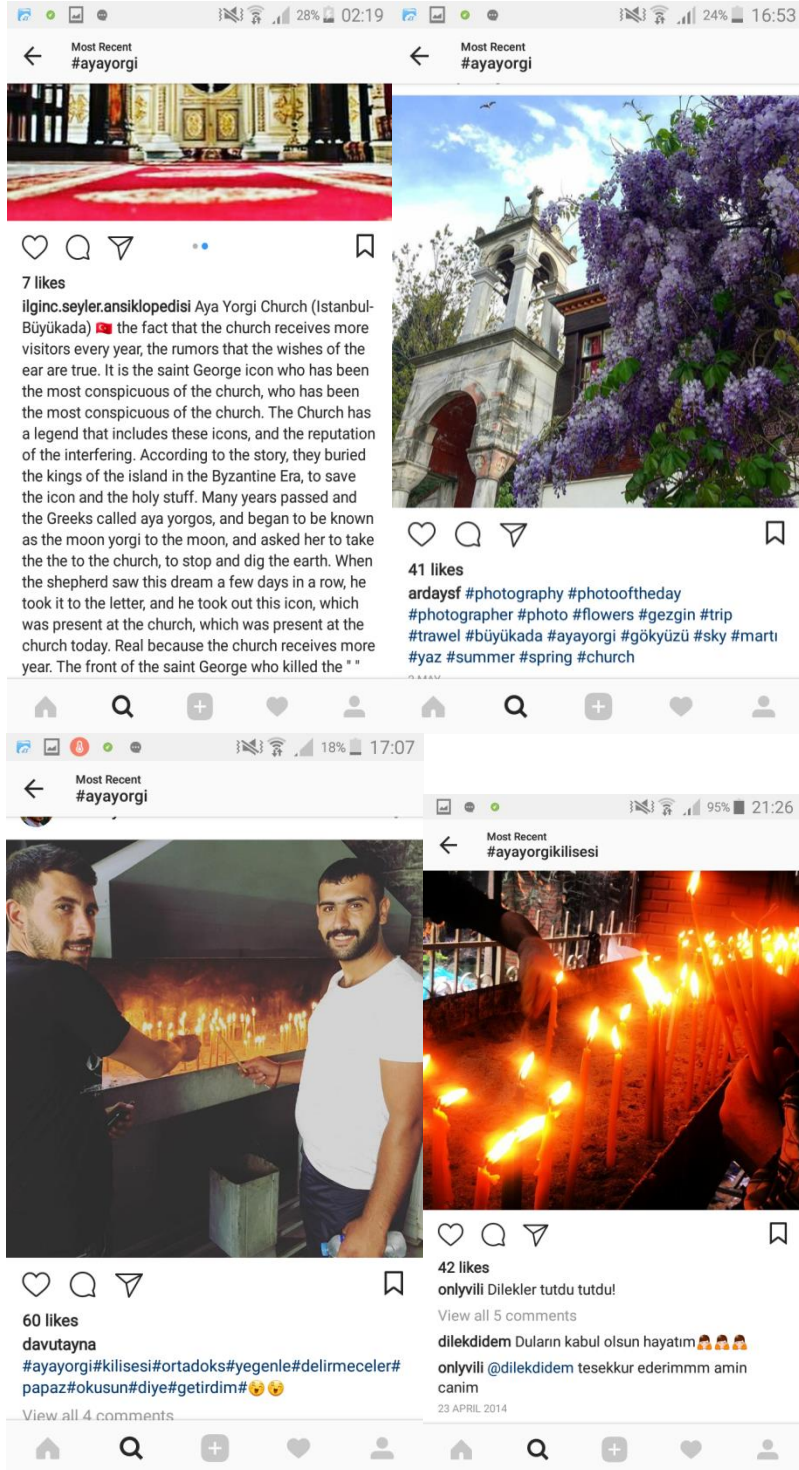
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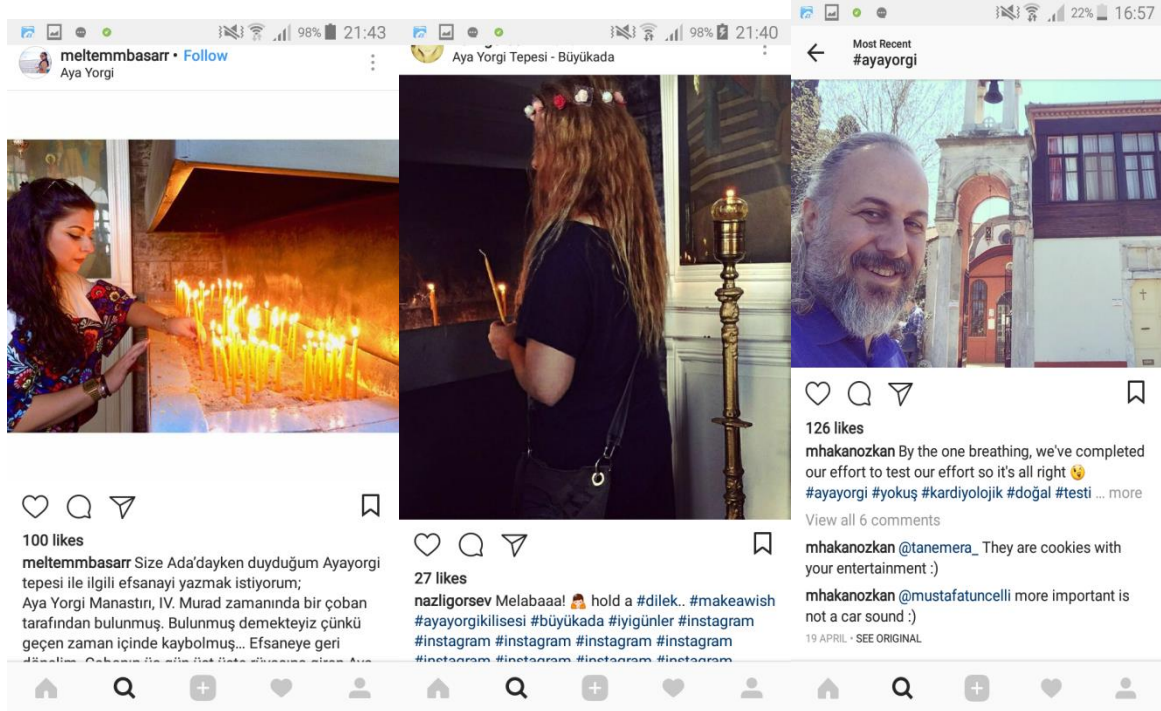


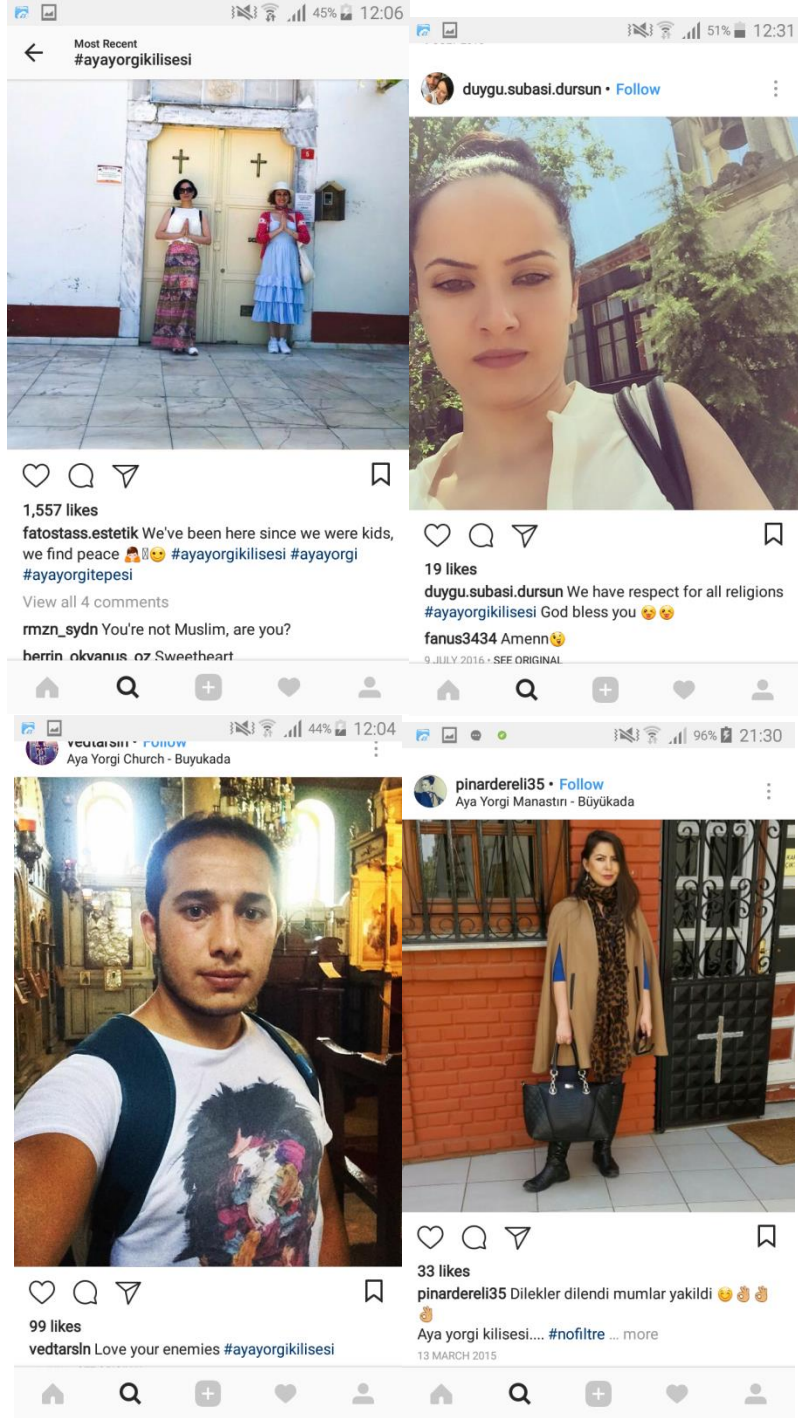
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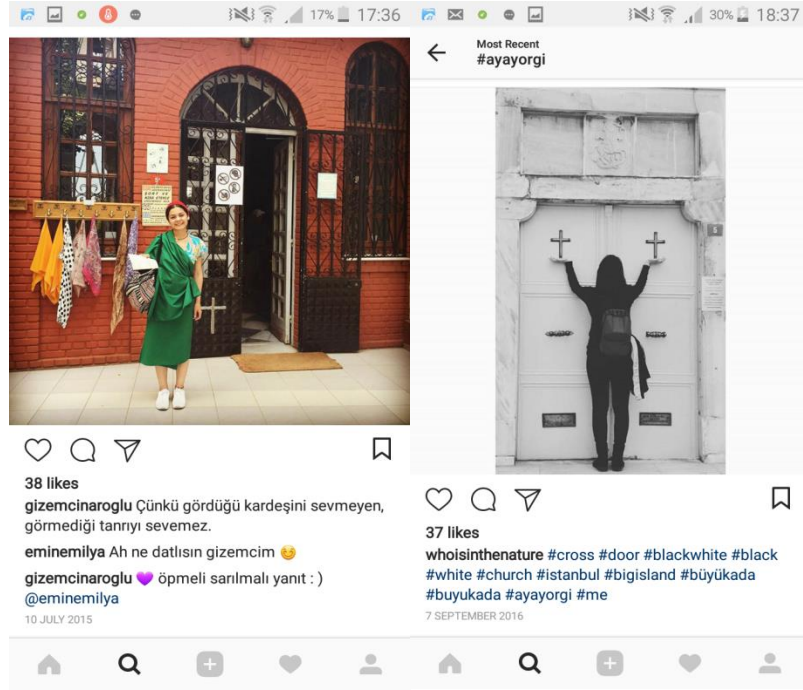




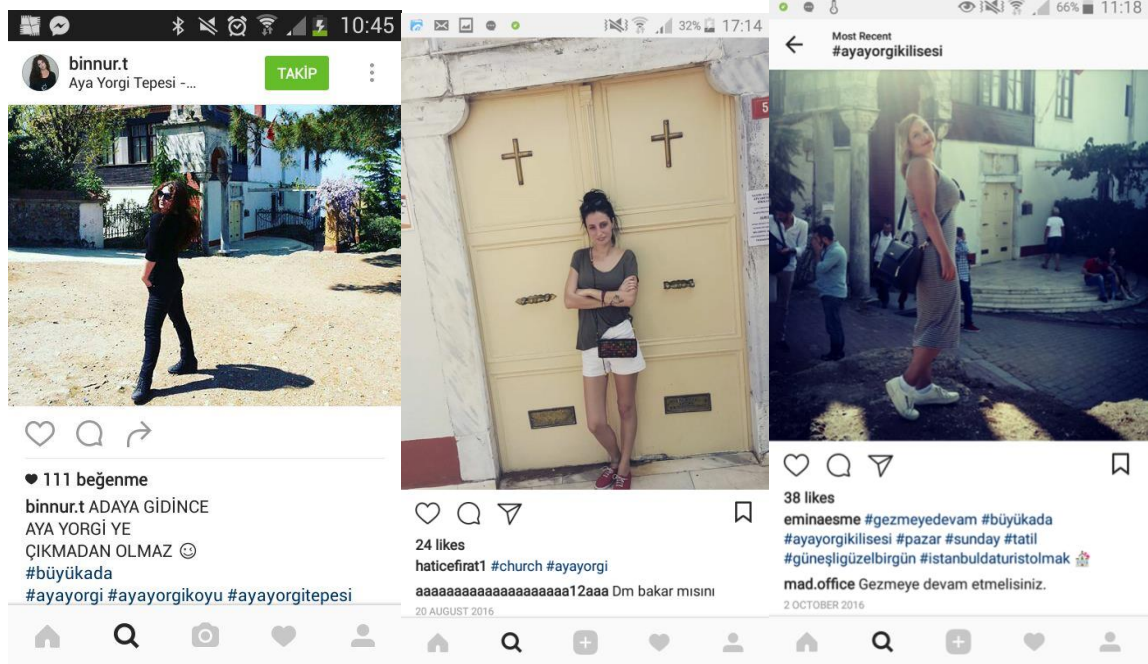


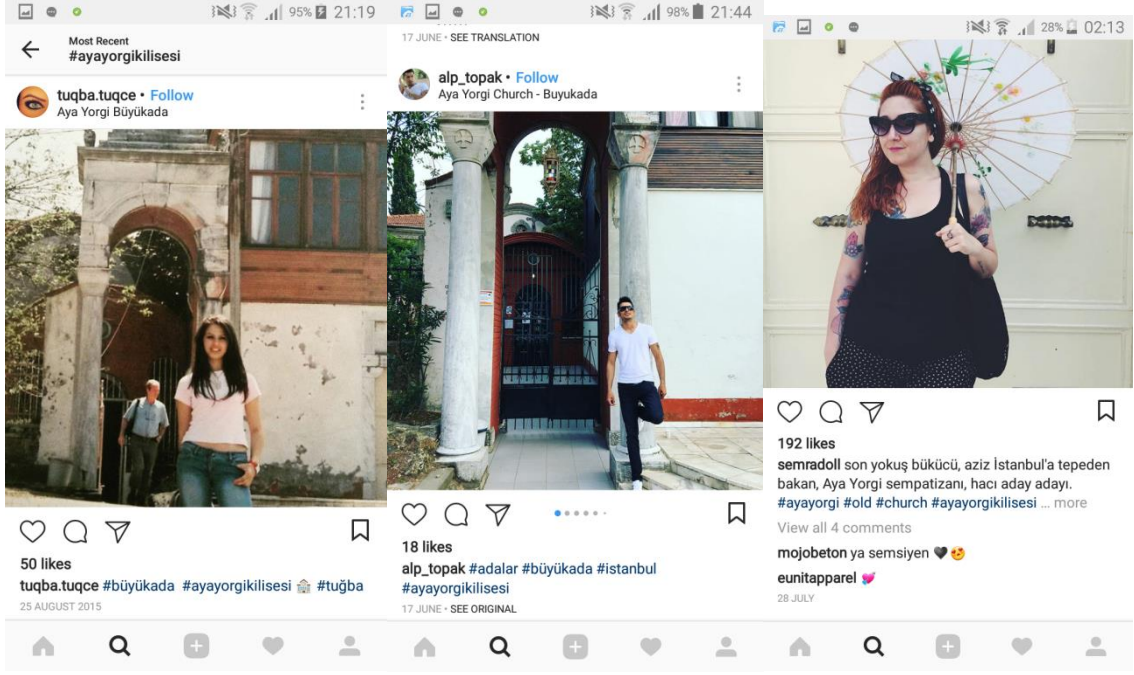




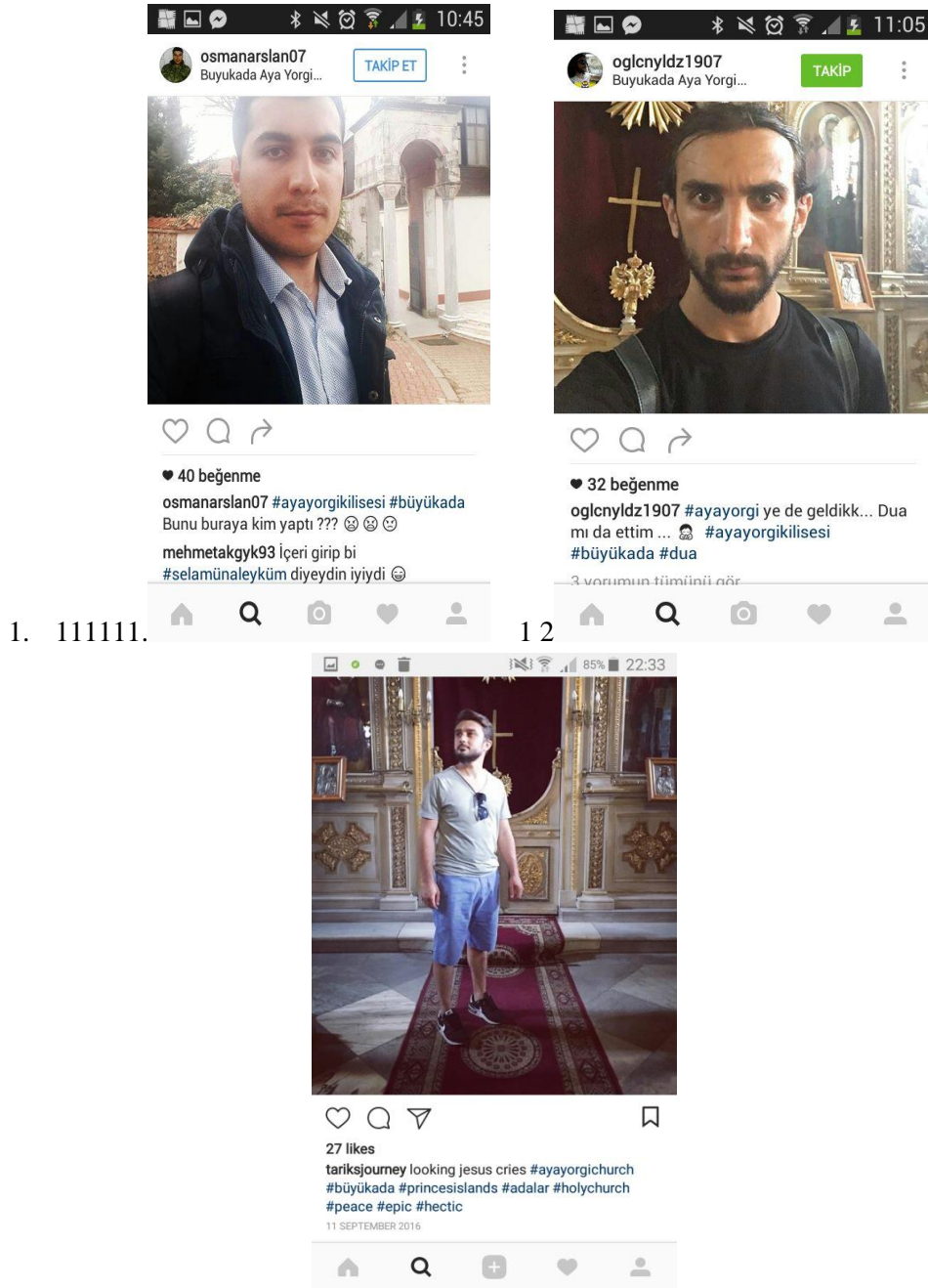


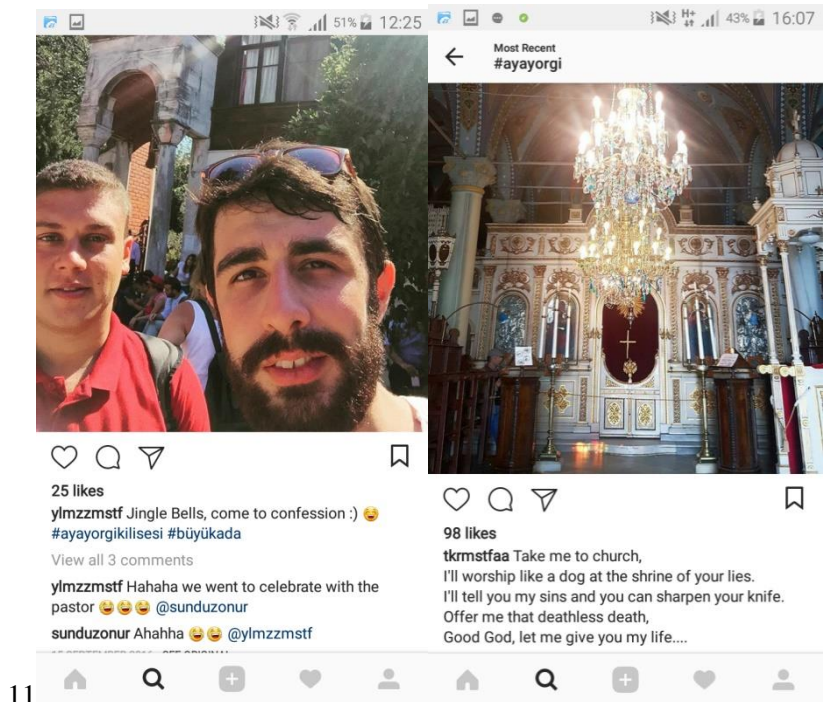
Annex 5. (6 pictures)

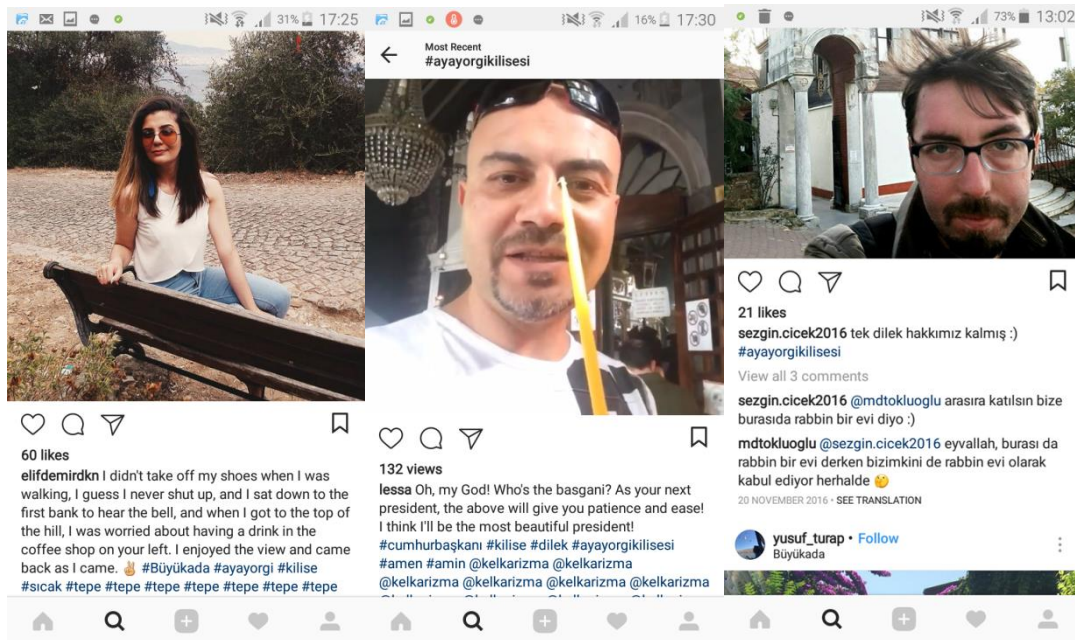




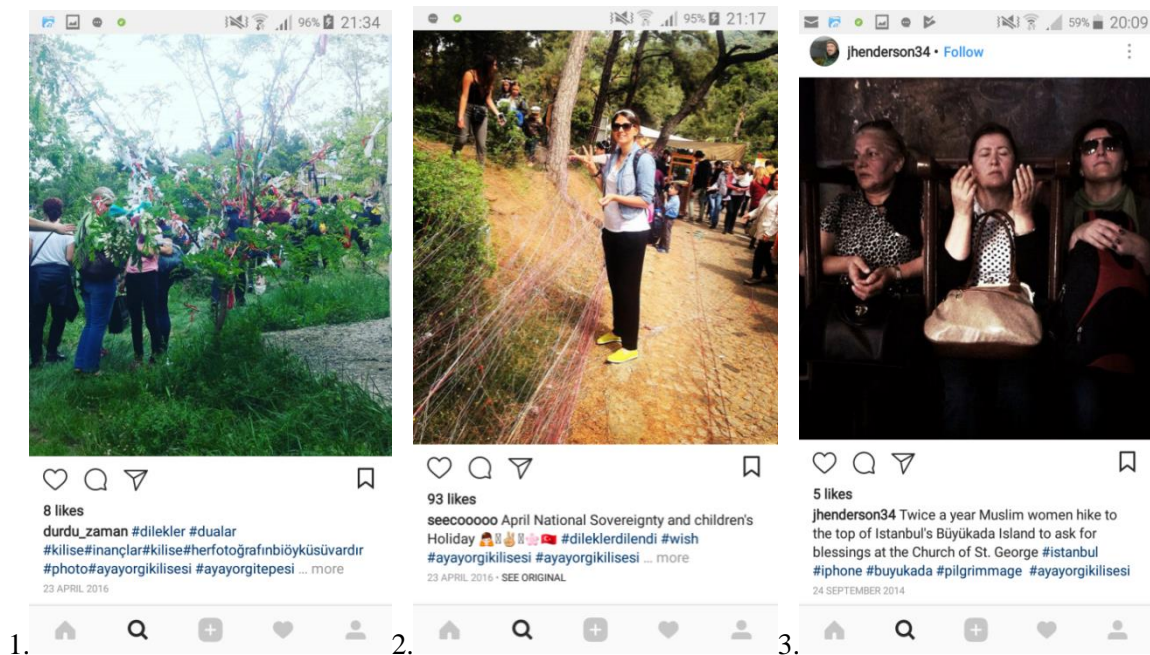
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Annex 7.(26 pictures)



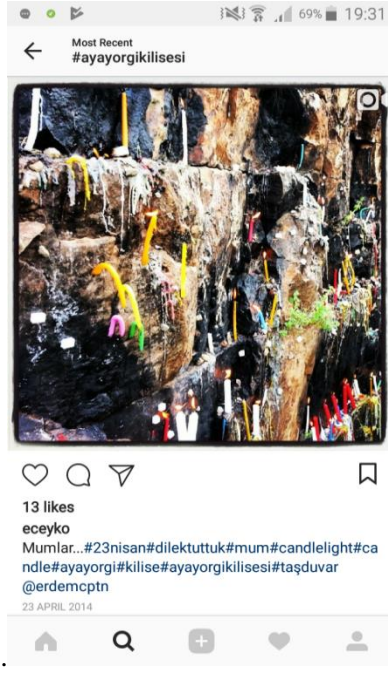


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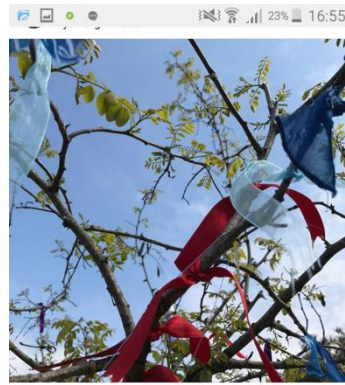
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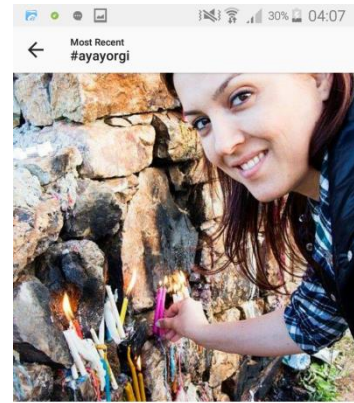
42 likes
crlcgla Wishing for the moon yorgi 🙏 #dilek #wish #princessisland #princessisland #büyükada #spring2016 #ayayorgitepesi #iphonesia ... more
23 APRIL 2016 · SEE ORIGINAL

13.



72 likes
lilivevecim What a beautiful day today 🌞 23 April National Sovereignty and children's day to make wishes to the church of lamp and ayayorgi. All... more
selmakii 🙏
alsafy 🙏🙏🙏🙏
23 APRIL · SEE ORIGINAL

14.



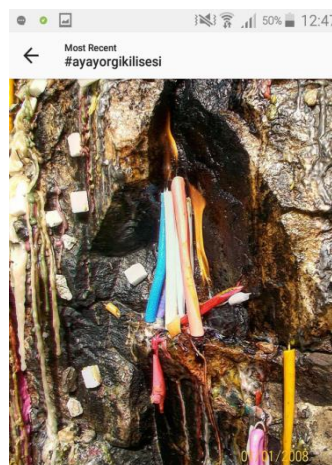
120 likes
aslisahinx Let's put a candle in there for the light tomorrow, let's have faith. Come from the büyükadada this tbt... #Büyükadada #Ayayorgi... more
trknshn Summer come i 🙏
5 JANUARY · SEE ORIGINAL

15.



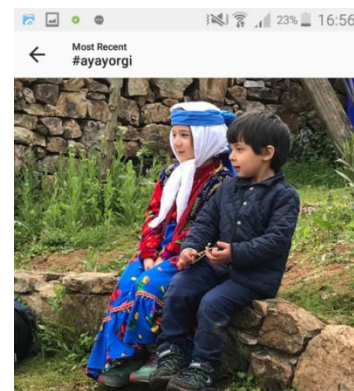
49 likes
seerapyilmaz It was believed that the Christian Orthodox had a wishes in this church. Especially on April 23th and 24th, people come to wish for a wish. That's what we saw on the road, take your pen, and ask for your wish, and I just felt like it was a different aura when I walked into it. But you have to walk around 2 miles to reach it. And this is a very nice one we ask for directions in there, "the path to God is soul" #dilekagaci #ayayorgi #büyükada #büyükada #büyükada #büyükada #büyükada #büyükada #büyükada #büyükada #büyükada ... more
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16.



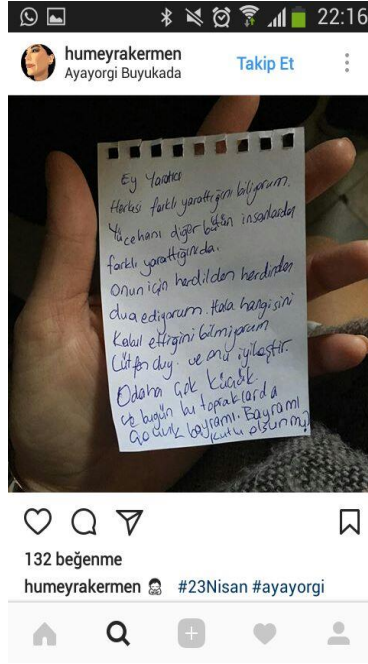
27 likes
kursatcandan Faith Sugar Candle Stone Stone...
Fotograf:Kursat sincere... #ayayorgikilisesei #büyükada #istanbul ... more
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17.



72 likes
lilivevecim What a beautiful day today 🌞 23 April National Sovereignty and children's day to make wishes to the church of lamp and ayayorgi. All... more
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 #ayayorgi
 23 APRIL

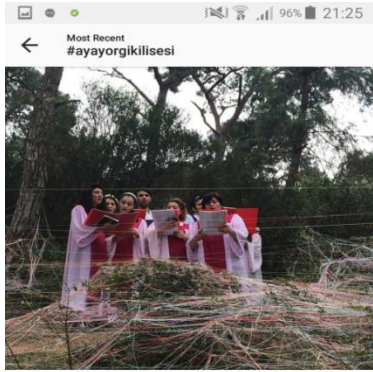
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 #haleluyakorusu #buyukada #büyükada #ayayorgi
 #ayayorgi #ayayorgikilisesi #23nisan ... more
 25 APRIL 2016 · SEE ORIGINAL

23.

24.



18 likes
 muziself 🌟🌟 #princesislands #buyukada #istanbul
 #ipler #renkler #rengarenk #koro #din #religion
 #ayayorgi #ayayorgikilisesi #church ... more
 muziself Teşekkürler, hepimizin inşallah 🙏
 @barissenn
 24 APRIL 2014



15.

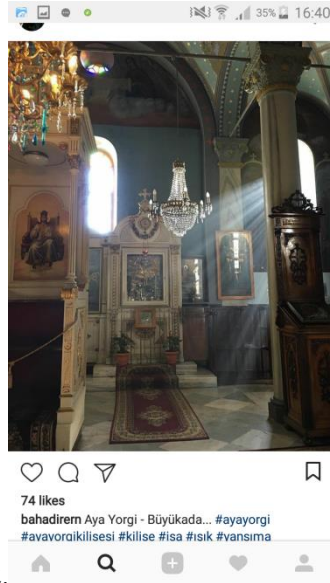


26.

Annex 8.(6 pictures)



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3.

9 JULY 27% 16:45

sedartis • Follow
Aya Yorgi Church - Buyukada



33 likes
sedartis #AyaYorgi #Büyükada #İstanbul #Turkey
mayatso it says in Georgian💖🙏
9 JULY • SEE ORIGINAL

4.

23% 16:56

Most Recent
#ayayorgi



72 likes
lilivevecim What a beautiful day today 🌞 23 April
National Sovereignty and children's day to make
wishes to the church of lamp and ayayorgi. All... more
selmakii 🙏💖💖💖🙏
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5.

24% 16:53

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#ayayorgi



61 likes
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#slowtravel #buyukada #bvzantine

6.