

Chapter I

HOLY SPACES AND HOLY CORPSES

DEFINING SANCTITY AND VENERATION OF THE DEAD FROM LATE ANTIQUITY TO THE MIDDLE AGES

Introduction

Recent scholarship on late antique Judaism and Christianity emphasizes that many varieties of Judaism and Christianity existed during this period, each claiming to have the “truth” in contradistinction to other “Jewish” or “Christian” groups, although with the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, a number of forms of Judaism, such as the Dead Sea community, disappeared.¹ Likewise, scholars of Roman religions other than Judaism or Christianity, point to the multiplicity of these religions, warning that substantial differences in interpretation and ritual existed even within the same cult within separate geographic areas of the empire or periods of time.² Often variations stemmed from influences from other local religions or practices.³

Within this atmosphere of frequent borrowing and porous boundaries, Jews, Christians, and adherents of many of the other religions from the Greco-Roman world from the first century BCE through the fourth century CE and beyond held or adopted similar rituals and attitudes relating to honouring the dead or requesting relief from environmental threats or illness. Sometimes the absorption of a particular ritual from one group or groups to another occurred seamlessly, with little comment. For example, Christians adopted *robegalia*, originally a supplication (and sacrifice) to keep crops free from blight, making it an integral part of the Church liturgy—the Major Rogation—in which God was asked to protect the harvest.⁴ Frequently, commonalities of attitude and ritual came about slowly, seemingly with little awareness of increasing rapprochement, laying the groundwork for explicitly shared holy spaces and practices, in which the presence of the religious other was desirable or even necessary by the Middle Ages. At other times, certain ideas, holy places, or rites were very consciously assumed and transformed to suit the ideological and ritual needs of the community adopting them.

1 Boyarin, *Border Lines*; Boyarin, *Dying for God*; Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*; Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*; Satlow, “Defining Judaism”; Lieu, *Christian Identity*; Fonrobert, “Jewish Christians”; North and Rajak, *Jews among Pagans and Christians*; Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*; Schiffman, *Who was a Jew?*

2 Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 6–7, 11–15; Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, 7–9; Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 1:48, 69–72, 75–76, 381–88; Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 440, 446; Chaniotis, “Ritual Dynamics.”

3 Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 1:69–72, 383; Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 97–197.

4 Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 1:45, 47; Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 186; Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies*, 108–9. The date of both the Roman and Christian festival was April 25.

Unfortunately, while many scholars have examined the influence of various forms of Christianity and Judaism on Islam and the ways in which Muslim law built upon or consciously deviated from pre-Islamic customs, only recently have researchers begun to address questions of porous boundaries between Muslims and other religious communities and whether one can speak of Judeo-Muslims, or Islamo-Christians in the same way that those focusing on early Jewish-Christian relations have done in their study of Judaism and Christianity.⁵ I will touch upon this subject; however, my primary intent is to examine the development of symbols that became a vocabulary of religious signs recognizable across denominational boundaries. I maintain that various types of Jews, Christians and Muslims assigned strong symbolic value to smell, light, and certain natural markers, such as trees, stones, sometimes water ways, etc. which established a basis for shared, or at least parallel, rituals relating to the holy dead across religious communal boundaries. Furthermore, the development of attitudes among the different communities toward the dead, holy or otherwise, and their ability to intercede for or communicate with the living, and the need on the part of the dead for the prayers of the living, had substantial points of mutual influence and/or intersection. Beliefs about the dead were not identical, but they were close enough to facilitate one group's borrowing from another or participating in another's rites relating to the holy dead. These commonalities, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, not only made shared rituals easier, they also fed the anxieties of some religious leaders that the boundaries between groups were too porous, and that too many "foreign" practices were being adopted, which corrupted the purity or truth of a given author's religion.

Shared Signs of Holiness

Jews, Christians, and participants in a number of the polytheistic religions in antiquity, and Muslims, Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages, held many markers of sanctity in common, although the specific beliefs about these signs—to what deity they belonged, or how a place became holy—often varied between groups and changed over time. Many of these symbols—fragrance, or lack of smell, freedom from rot, light, trees, stones,

5 Various scholars have tackled aspects of this problem. Thomas Sizgorich examined the intersections of late antique and early medieval Christian and Muslim asceticism and militancy in his *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity*; Patricia Crone and Michael Cook point out that early Christian communities perceived Islam as a heretical variation of Christianity not a new religion—*Hagarism*. Steven Wasserstrom examines selected areas of religious interchanges and borrowings between Muslims and Jews in the first few centuries of Islam. See his *Between Muslim and Jew*. Also see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*; Ohlig and Puin, *The Hidden Origins of Islam*; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers* suggests that Jews and Christians were part of the "community of believers" surrounding Muḥammad, even as their Jewish and Christian identity was also recognized. According to Donner, the requirement to believe in specific doctrines to the exclusion of others and become "Muslim" as the term came to be understood in subsequent centuries, was a gradual development. See 57–60, 68–77, 87–89, 101, 107–15, 125, 134, 203–4, 221–32. Earlier scholars took a more traditional approach and addressed questions of direct borrowing rather than fluid boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims. See Katsch, *Judaism in Islām*; Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qurʾān*; Goldziher, "Über jüdisch Sitten," 78–101; Goldziher, "Usages Juifs," 322–41.

sources of water and sometimes caves—continued to inform attitudes and practices of Jews, Christians, and Muslims of the late medieval and early modern Mediterranean.

Smell and Incorruptibility

Sweet or foul smell had long been indicators of holiness or evil respectively in ancient Greek culture and then in late antique Jewish and Christian culture.⁶ Heaven itself was imagined as a fragrant garden redolent with the scents of fruits, incense, and spices, as of course, was the garden of Eden.⁷ Romans of various religious persuasions, including Jews and Christians, ensured that the “regular” dead were anointed with perfumes to counteract the smell of decay.⁸ Having a naturally or miraculously fragrant corpse indicated that the person was above decay, and thus closely linked with the divine world. In both late antique Christianity and Judaism the corpses of rabbis, saints and martyrs were regularly portrayed as odourless or, more frequently, as emitting a pleasant fragrance.⁹ In one passage from the Babylonian Talmud, the scholar is compared to a flask of perfume, whose delightful scent compels even the angel of death to love him.¹⁰ Certainly Jesus’ own body and those objects associated with it were fragrant; in the sixth-century Syriac legend of the discovery of the true cross, one of the “proofs” which the Jew, Judas Kyriakos, stipulates that God provide to demonstrate the location and significance of the cross, is that a sweet smell of incense emanate from its burial place.¹¹ Similarly, in a tenth-century Latin version of the legend, Judas, who assists the Empress Helena, prays over the area where the cross is hidden and “at once the place shook and a great cloud of smoke, fragrant with sweet spices, ascended to the heavens.”¹² These tropes existed in Northern Europe as well as in the Maghrib, the Middle East, and lands along the European Mediterranean. The Merovingian, Dado of Rouen, writing in the sev-

6 Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 21–26, 35–39; Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*; Detienne, *The Gardens of Adonis*, especially 48–49; Classen, Howes, and Synott, *Aroma*, 45–47, 53–54.

7 1 Enoch 24: 4–6 in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:26; Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 49–53; Green, *The Aroma of Righteousness*, 119–22, 128.

8 Green, “Sweet Spices in the Tomb”; Classen, *Aroma*, 42–45, 52–55.

9 See for example BT Bava Mezia 83b–85a; Ephraem Syrus, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, hymn 22, stanza 28, p. 184 and the discussion of St. Stephen’s body: Lucian of Caphamargala, *Epistula Luciani*, PL 41, epistle 8, col. 815; Green, *The Aroma of Righteousness*, 187–201; Boyarin, “The Great Fat Massacre”; Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*, 200–12, 219–25; Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 76–77, 91–93; Brown, *The Body and Society*, 5–8, 26–28, 85–86, 92–102, 293–303; Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 11–13, 20–21 46–47, 227–29; Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, part 1. Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 35–39; Classen, Howes, and Synott, *Aroma*, 52–55. Thomas Sizgorich demonstrates, however, that the oozing, suffering, and even rotting bodies of martyrs and ascetics also became a theme in early Christian literature, serving in part to tie the sufferings of later ascetics with those of Christians martyred by the Roman empire. *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity*, 124–27.

10 BT Avodah Zara 35b, Green, *The Aroma of Righteousness*, 173–75.

11 Drijvers and Drijvers, *Finding of the True Cross*, Syriac, 46, Eng. 64.

12 *Inventio Sanctae Crucis*, para. 11, p. 90.

enth century, describes St. Eligius of Noyon diligently and for a long time, unsuccessfully, seeking the bodies of Christian martyrs. When his quest is at last rewarded:

Then filled with great joy, he opened the tomb with the hoe he held in his hand and a fragrant odor with a great light spread from it so that Eligius could barely sustain his strength in the power of that odor and that light. A globe of splendor proceeded from the tomb at the striking blow. It shed the strength of its brightness so much that it blinded the eyes of those who were standing around and changed night to day in the greater part of the region...Having found the holy body, Eligius kissed it with tears of joy and raising it from the depths of the ground he divided the desired relics into eleven parts. As he extracted the teeth from the jaws, a drop of blood flowed from the root of each tooth...And then he distributed the relics which he had taken from the saint's body to many places where they healed many invalids praying for help.¹³

The tremendous scent and overwhelming light underscore the great degree of holiness possessed by the martyr whose body Eligius finds. In case these are not enough, this long-dead body continues to bleed, something it should not be able to do.¹⁴ This very physical manifestation, as opposed to the more ethereal ones of light and smell, attests to the martyr's continued connection to life and its power to overcome the usual natural processes of its own decay and the sicknesses of the believers in search of healing.

Within early Islamic traditions, heaven was also imagined as a place fragrant with spices and perfume, where the inhabitants were free of pollution or bodily elimination.¹⁵ Sweet smell and freedom from excretion in the earthly realm were similarly signs of heavenly origin or human sanctity.¹⁶ Lack of decay likewise indicated holiness. Martyrs

13 "Tunc gaudio magno repletus, cum sarculo quem manu gestabat avidissime latus ferisset sepulcri confestim forato tumulo, tanta odoris fragrantia cum inmenso lumine ex eo manavit, ut etiam ipse sanctus Eligius fulgore luminis odoreque inenarrabili percussus vix subsistere potuisset. Nam et globus splendoris, qui ex tunulo ad ictum ferientis processit, tantam vim suae claritatis sparsit, ut cunctorum adstantium obtutibus oculorum retunsis, partem maximam regionis illius in diei claritatem mutaret...Tunc ergo sacrum inventum corpus Eligius cum gaudio lacrimabili exosculatur, ac de profunda tellure elevato, reliquias sibi undecumque concupivit segregavit, dentes etiam pro languentium medulla ex maxilla sancta abstulit, atque in radice dentis gutta sanguinis exivit. Ipse demum ex reliquiis, quae a sancto corpora sequestraverat, multa loca convivit multimodamque medalam diversis aegritudinum incomodis easdem inperiendo praeibuit"; Dado of Rouen, *Vitae Eligii Episcopi Noviomagensis*, Bk 2, para. 6, 699; English translation in Dado of Rouen, *Life of St. Eligius of Noyon*, 154. Compare with the transferred relics of St. Marcellinus which are so fragrant that their scent attracts a crowd of people from the surrounding area to the basilica in Aachen. Einhard, *Translatio et Miracula SS. Marcellini et Petri*, 247; Einhard, *Translation of the Relics of Sts. Marcellinus and Petery*, 217–18. An important difference, however, is that medieval Jews and Muslims did *not* generally dismember their holy dead in order to distribute their bodily relics.

14 On the paradox of bleeding corpse (and eucharist) miracles, albeit in a very later period see Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 107, 137, 145, 148, 167–72.

15 Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 17, 70–77, 84.

16 Houris, the women of paradise, are sweet-smelling and do not menstruate. Faṭīma is compared

and other holy individuals resisted decomposition and dismemberment whereas the opponents of Islam or insincere Muslims rotted quickly and smelled particularly foul or were deprived of the scent of paradise.¹⁷ Even those martyrs who had been mutilated in the course of battle resisted change or decomposition. According to some, their souls escaped the suffering that would normally stem from such an experience because they abandoned their old bodies and immediately obtained new ones in Paradise.¹⁸ A curious tale first recounted by the Muslim geographer al-Bakrī (ca. 1040–1094) and then, with some changes, in the anonymous twelfth-century geographic work, *Kitāb al-Istibṣār*, points to the widespread acceptance of these indicators of sanctity and the potential paths of transmission between religious traditions in the Mediterranean. Al-Bakrī describes the following:

On the way to Biskra is a mountain known as Zīghīzī. In the middle of it is a cave [and] in it a man [who was] killed who did not change with the passage of time. And [although] he grew old his wounds remained tender and bled as if he had been killed a couple of days ago. All the people said they did not know when he had been killed and bled. This people used to relocate the body and they buried him in their courtyard to be blessed by him. Then they did not prevent his being found in the cave in his (same) state.¹⁹

In this passage, the unchanging nature of the corpse is emphasized—indeed the man bleeds as if still living—placing the body in a kind of limbo between life and death. The local people seem to have taken the great age of the body, its failure to decompose, and its continual bleeding as both miraculous and evidence that the body could provide blessing by close proximity. The person/corpse's identity or religious affiliation is irrelevant in face of the obvious manifestations of holiness on the body itself. In *Kitāb al-Istibṣār*,

to them, and she and her grave are fragrant, as is the Prophet Muḥammad. Soufi, "Image of Fatima," 163–64, 166; Van Gelder, *God's Banquet*, 23.

17 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol. 1 bk. 4, no. 237, vol. 2, bk. 23, no. 1351, vol. 3, bk. 34, no. 2101, vol. 4, bk. 56, no. 2803, bk. 58, no. 3166, vol. 7, bk. 72 nos. 5533, 5534, vol. 9, bk. 87, no. 6914, bk. 93 no. 7150; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, vol. 5, bk. 40 (Kitāb al-Adab/Book of Etiquette), no. 4829; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, Kitāb al-Imārah (Book of Leadership), nos. 4859, 4862, 4863, vol. 7, Kitāb Ṣifāt al-Munāfiqīn wa Ahkāmihim (Book of the Characteristics of Hypocrites and Commands concerning them) no. 7036; Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-qubūr*, no. 93; Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 230, 233; Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, 65–67; Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 60; Eklund, *Life between Death and Resurrection*, 70, 99, 138–39.

18 Malik ibn Anas, *Muwattaʿa*, bk. 21, no. 21.21.50; Malik *Muwattaʿa* (Arabic; <http://archive.org/details/AlMuwattaImamMalikIbnAnas>) Kitāb al-Jihād, 215; Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 208; on the belief that the dead remained connected to the grave and experienced torture or pleasure there see 197–233 and the discussion below. Also see Eklund, *Life Between Death and Resurrection*, 16–20, 68–70, 102–4.

19 في الطريق إلى بسكرة جبل يعرف بزيجيزي في وسطه كهف فيه رجل قتل لم يغيره مر الزمان و تقادم الدهور تبصن جراحه دما كانما قتل منذ يومين وتخبر الكافة انهم لا يعلمون متى قتل قداما وقد نقله اهل تلك النواحي و دفنوه باقنيته تبركا به ثم لم ينشبو ان وجدوه في الكهف على حاله Bakrī, *Description de l'Afrique septentrionale*, Arabic 52–53, French transl. 113. On this passage in Bakrī see Speight, "Témoignage des sources musulmanes."

the author transmits a rumour that the body belongs to one of the apostles of Jesus.²⁰ Certainly the unchanging, bleeding body, able to miraculously transport itself back to its original resting place would not be out of place in medieval Christian hagiography, as we see from the story of St. Eligius of Noyon. In both cases, an anonymous body's preservation and ability to bleed "prove" its special sanctity. Ḥadīth about the bodies of martyrs also remark upon the unchanging (uncorrupted) state of martyrs' bodies, which resist the efforts of the living to rearrange the corpses.²¹ Marston Speight argues that al-Bakrī describes an older tradition and that the Christian origin of the body is a later addition.²² Even if his contention is correct, what is significant for our purposes is that Muslims clearly recognized a body's unchanging state as demonstrating its sanctity, and that this kind of piety or miracle was also associated with Christianity, yet not rejected as illegitimate as a result. Rather it was wilfully accepted as part of a shared language of signs.

Fragrance and lack of decomposition continued to mark the sanctity of the medieval holy dead from all three traditions throughout the Middle Ages and into the sixteenth century.²³ The Muslim, Abū l-Ṭāhir al-Fārisī, recounts about the Tunisian saint, Muḥriz al-Khalaf (d. 1022 CE), that a group from Kairouan sitting near Muḥriz's tomb were so delighted by the wonderful fragrance emanating it, that they were compelled to compose poetry about this miracle.²⁴ Ibn Shaddād (1217–1285 CE) describes the arguments of a Shi'i villager who asserted that the remains of a miscarried fetus had to be those of Husain's son because the body had not decomposed.²⁵ The Iberian Jewish poet, translator, and traveller, Judah al-Ḥarizi (ca. 1165–1125 CE) composed a poem regarding the grave of the Prophet Ezekiel, comparing it to a bundle of myrrh, the scent of which cannot be hidden.²⁶ Josef Meri notes that when Muslim or Jewish saints did not produce their own fragrance, their devotees provided it for them in the forms of incense and rosewater.²⁷ By contrast, in *Sefer Ḥasidim*, a book of Jewish moral tales and instructions by R. Judah ha-Ḥasid (ca. 1150–1217 CE) from Germany, a righteous man who had been buried next to a wicked one appears in a dream to everyone in the town and complains

20 *Kitāb al-istibṣār*, 173; Speight, "Témoignage des sources musulmanes."

21 Malik, *Muwaṭṭa*, bk. 21, no. 21.21.50; Malik *Muwaṭṭa* (Arabic) *Kitāb al-Jihād*, 215.

22 Speight, "Témoignage des sources musulmanes." Speight goes so far as to suggest a Mithraic origin of the cult based on the story's preoccupation with blood, however bulls' blood, not humans', was a focal point of the worship of Mithra, so this origin seems unlikely to me. On the cult of Mithra in the Roman empire see Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 1:279–80, 282–83, 285, 303; Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, 195–247.

23 Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, 65–67. Not everyone readily accepted the miraculously lovely aroma of saints, however. See Olesen's discussion of Ibn Taymiyya in his *Culte des Saints*, 121–23.

24 Abū-l-Ṭāhir al-Fārisī, *Manāqib d'Abū Ishāq*, Arabic, 93–94, French, 276.

25 Ibn Shaddād, *A'lāq*, 49. The child to whom the narrative refers is Muḥassin, a son of Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalib (thus, making him the short-lived great grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad) who was miscarried when opponents of the 'Alids attacked 'Alī's household. Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 159–69; Mulder, *The Shrines of the 'Alids*, 68–82.

26 Al-Ḥarizi, *Tahkemoni* 2:214–215 (English); 2: 56b. On Judah al-Ḥarizi in the context of Jewish pilgrimage and travel narratives see Jacobs, *Reorienting the East*, 47–48, 57, 150–52, 174–75.

27 Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 25–26.

that he cannot rest for the stench of his neighbour, which is like that of a latrine. To assuage him, the townspeople place a barrier between his grave and that of his wicked neighbour.²⁸ In a similar, but highly polemical move, the travel narrative of Petachia of Regensburg (1170–1187) suggests the wrongness of Islam by describing Muḥammad's grave as occupied by a putrid corpse whose reek drives away believers.²⁹ Thus, if the postmortem proof that someone was holy consisted of a lovely aroma, the testimony of evil equalled a stinking cadaver; olfactory symbolic poles that were understood equally by twelfth-century northern European Jews as by Muslims in early medieval Arabia. Their Christian counterparts, whether in Western Europe or in the Eastern Mediterranean, understood these signals equally well.³⁰

Some holy individuals did not even have to wait until death for fragrance to prove their sanctity. Constance Classen has demonstrated that wonderful fragrance often permeated the bodies of and objects which western Christian saints touched, not only in death, but also in life.³¹ The Andalusian Sufi, Ibn al-ʿArabī (1165–1240 CE), says that the tears of one of his teachers, Abū Aḥmad al-Salawī, smelled like musk and that he used to wipe his face with those that al-Salawī had shed upon the ground. People encountering Ibn ʿArabī would ask where he had purchased such a wonderful scent.³²

Shared expectations of fragrant saintliness and stinking immorality as markers of the status of the dead and the living in the eyes of God, along with customs that ensured that the stench of decay remained at bay for the “normal” dead, would have made the hagiographic traditions of each group comprehensible to members of other religious communities. Comprehensibility in turn established the basis for the appeal and potential transferability of saints across religious boundaries.

Light

Light was a special sign of sanctity for all three faiths. Prior to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the Jewish community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls characterized themselves as the “sons of light” in contrast to their enemies, “the sons of darkness,” and referred to the “lord of lights” or “angel of darkness”. The place where evildoers go is also characterized by darkness.³³ In early rabbinic sources, both the

28 *Sefer Ḥasidim*, ed. Margolioth, para. 705, 439.

29 Petachia of Regensburg, *Sivuv R. Petachia me-Regensburg*, 51; Petachia, in Adler, *Jewish Travellers*, 84; Jacobs, *Reorienting the East*, 152–53.

30 Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*; Harvey, “Olfactory Knowing”; Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 36, 67, 79, 133–34, 136–37, 143; Browning, “The ‘Low Level’ Saint’s Life”; Tolan, “Un cadaver mutilé”; Classen, *The Color of Angels*, 36–37, 39, 40–42, 45–47, 55–56; Duval, *Auprès des saints corps*, 59, 163–67.

31 Classen, *The Color of Angels*, 36–71, although she does note that occasionally saint’s bodies smelled bad, something for which authors need to account for theologically; see p. 50. Being foul smelling, especially while living (though frequently fragrant in death) was also a theme in Greek and Syriac Christian hagiographic traditions. See Harvey, “Olfactory Knowing”; Browning, “The ‘Low Level’ Saint’s Life.”

32 Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Risālat*, 127.

33 Charlesworth et al., *Dead Sea Scrolls*, vol. 1, *Rule of the Community*, 1QS, pp. 14/15, lines 19–21,

human soul and God's commandments are likened to a lamp, and the Torah is described as "light."³⁴ Somewhat more concretely, in *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* (fifth century CE), the wicked are described as dwelling in the darkness of the abyss. In another chapter of the same midrash, R. Simon b. Yoḥai (second century CE) is compared to a rainbow and its radiance, serving the same covenantal function for his generation as the original rainbow did for Noah and his descendants.³⁵ Living Jews also brought artificial light to the resting place of the dead in late antiquity. While rabbis prohibited blessing lamps and incense of non-Jews or of the dead, textual and archaeological evidence suggests that the custom of lighting lamps at graves was fairly common among late antique Jews.³⁶ The tenth-century Karaite author, Saḥl b. Maṣṣliaḥ castigated Rabbinite Jews for having had adopted the custom of lighting lamps and incense at the graves of the holy dead, and accused them of having borrowed these practices from non-Jewish cultures.³⁷ His complaint indicates simultaneously that for some early medieval Jews light as well as fragrance were essential markers of holiness on the one hand, but on the other, that these symbols and the customs surrounding them in relation to the dead were recognized as being among the practices of other religious groups, thus laying the Rabbinite Jews open to Saḥl b. Maṣṣliaḥ's polemic. In fact, light was indeed an important representation of sanctity for Christians, and, eventually, for Muslims.

For early medieval Christians, light, par excellence, symbolized the incorruptible nature of Jesus, able to pass untainted through all manner of filth.³⁸ In the Merovingian example cited earlier, abundant and overwhelming light, as much as fragrant scent, marked the sanctity of the tomb that Eligius found. Nor was this a peculiarity of Western European Christianity. Béatrice Chevallier Caseau has demonstrated that dreams or

QS3, pp. 16/17, col. 3, line 25, col. 4, lines 11, 13, QS11, pp. 48/49, l. 10, 4QS MSD pp. 80/81, frag. 3, line 12, 4QS MSF, pp. 90/91 frag. 1, col. 2, lines 1–2; Charlesworth et al., *Dead Sea Scrolls*, vol. 2, *Damascus Document, War Scroll and Related Documents: War Scroll* [1QM, 1Q33], pp. 96/97 col. 1, lines 1, 3, 7, 9–14, pp. 122/123, col. 13, lines. 11, 15, 16, pp. 126/127, col. 14, line 17, 4QM1, pp. 150/151 frags. 8–10, col. 1, line 14, 4QM6, pp. 178/179, frag. 3 l. 7; Charlesworth et al., *Dead Sea Scrolls*, vol. 3, *Damascus Document II: 4Q266 (2QDa)*, pp. 6/7, frag. 1a-b, line 1; Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, 101, 147, 165–66.

34 BT Shabbat 30b; BT Sotah 21a.

35 Wicked in darkness: *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* 9:1, ed. Buber, 73a; ed. Mandelbaum 1:147; English trans.: *Pesqta de Rab Kahana*, ed. Braude and Kapstein, 168–69. Simon b. Yoḥai as rainbow: *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* 11:15, in the Buber ed. *Pesiqta* 10, 87b; ed. Mandelbaum 1:190; English trans., Braude and Kapstein, 214–15. For the rainbow as sign of the covenant see Gen 9:8–17. Simon b. Yoḥai was known for his opposition to the Romans and for hiding in a cave with his disciples while being miraculously supported by God. Some of this legend is elaborated in this *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* 11.

36 Green, *The Aroma of Righteousness*, 36–37, 56, 58, 62, 138–39; Green, "Sweet Spices in the Tomb."

37 Saḥl b. Maṣṣliaḥ, *Sefer tokhaḥat* in *Liquṭei qadmonyot*, 2:32; Saḥl b. Maṣṣliaḥ, "Epistle to Jacob b. Samuel" para. 10, in *Karaite Anthology*, 115.

38 Hildefonsis of Toledo, *De Virginitate perpetua*, chap. 44, PL 96, col. 131; Leo I, Pope, *Sermoni*, vol. 2, *Sermoni del ciclo natalizio*, Sermo, 15 (XXXIV) "Item Alius de Epiphania," 15. 4.3, pp. 264/265; Leo I, Pope, *Epiphania*, Ser. XXXIV, PG 54, cols. 247–48.

other miraculous manifestations of light were common predictors of the future sanctity of children in Byzantine hagiographies.³⁹

A number of eighth-century Muslim tombstone inscriptions request that the deceased's grave be filled with light, and Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 894 CE), who recorded oral traditions and stories about the experiences of the dead within the grave, emphasized the need for the intercession of the living so that graves would be filled with light rather than darkness.⁴⁰ This concern over light or darkness of the tomb echoes the description in the Jewish midrash, *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana*, discussed above, although in this Muslim source, the author goes farther and uses these two contrasting possibilities as the foundation for exhorting believers to intercede on behalf of the dead. Elizabeth Fowden has demonstrated that the lamps which illuminated monasteries and churches fascinated Muslims and served as a source of inspiration for Arabic poetry both prior to and after the coming of Islam.⁴¹ Lamps and candles likewise marked the sanctity of the holy dead, though at times they produced their own light devoid of human aid.⁴²

Accounts of light emanating from the graves of Muslim saints become increasingly common from the twelfth century onwards. Such light allowed the believers to recognize a grave as that of a holy person, even when the name of the saint him or herself had been forgotten.⁴³ Light continued to be an important indicator of the sanctity of places and (dead) individuals, not merely in Islam, but also in various Christian and Jewish communities. For example, in the thirteenth-century Coptic narrative of the martyrdom of John of Phanijōit, the dead saint's indisputable righteousness is demonstrated by the descent of a heavenly lamp.⁴⁴ Likewise, the two twelfth-century Jewish travellers, al-Ḥarizi and Petachia of Regensburg, wrote that light or a pillar of fire descended upon the grave of Ezra the scribe in the eleventh hour.⁴⁵ The seventeenth-century Muslim, Yāsīn al-Biqā'i, indicates that light only ascends from the graves of the prophets, perhaps meaning to distinguish such graves from those of holy men and women lacking prophetic status.⁴⁶

39 Chevallier Caseau, "Childhood in Byzantine Saints' Lives."

40 Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-qubūr*, 72–73, nos. 8–10. In various ḥadīth, Muslims are urged to pray that the dead experience light and spaciousness in the grave. Light emanating from the grave also marked a holy person. See Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol. 2, *Kitāb al-Janā'iz* (Book of Funerals), nos. 2215, 2232, 2234, vol. 7, *Kitāb al-Janna wa-ṣifat na'imihā wa-ahlihā* (Book of Paradise and the Description of its Bliss and People) no. 7216; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, vol. 3, *Kitāb al-Jihād*, no. 2523, *Kitāb al-Janā'iz* (Book of Funerals), no. 3118, vol. 5, *Kitāb al-Sunnah* (Book of Law), no. 4753; Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 25, 31, 261n38; Eklund, *Life between Death and Resurrection*, 155–56.

41 Fowden, "The Lamp and Wine Flask."

42 See for example Rosenqvist, *Life and Conduct of Our Holy Mother Irene*, chap. 23. For additional examples of light marking the graves of the holy Christian dead see discussion above.

43 Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 55–56; Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 22–23; Meri, "Aspects of Baraka."

44 Zaborowski, *The Coptic Martyrdom of John of Phanijoit*, 120/121.

45 Ḥarizi, *Taḥkemoni*, Gate 35, English: 2:208–12; Hebrew 2:46aff; Petaḥiah of Regensburg, *Sivuv*, 20, Petaḥiah, *Sivuv*, in Eisenstein, *Oẓar masa'ot*, 53; Petaḥiah in Adler, *Jewish Travellers*, 79.

46 al-Biqā'i, *Nubdha al-Laṭīfa* MS Princeton Garrett 2307Y fol. 18b; MS Khalidi Library MS 1087 fol. 70a; MS Nashashibi Library, fol. 100r. Josef Meri, citing a different manuscript of the same work in

Some European Christians noted how fire descended from heaven to light the Easter candle at the Holy Sepulchre on Holy Saturday.⁴⁷ Miraculous light or fire over graves continued to be an indicator of special sanctity into the early modern and modern eras.⁴⁸ When light did not shine spontaneously from a holy place, be it a mosque, church, or the grave of a saint, people often brought lamps or candles.⁴⁹ This was an annual wonder and practice of local Christians, which remained both attractive to curious outsiders (Christian or other) and a source of criticism and disbelief.⁵⁰

While the appearance of miraculous light was open to accusations of falsification, Jews, Christians, and Muslims of all denominations and geographic origins understood that light, especially in relation to the dead, was a sign of special sanctity.⁵¹ For this reason, tales of light over particular saints' or prophets' graves could easily be shared and co-opted by members of multiple religious groups. Criticisms and denials of such manifestations should be understood as being at least in part derived from the importance of this otherworld sign and competition between communities.

Trees, Stones and Water

Individual trees, groves, stones, and springs had long held the potential for sanctity and were venerated for their association with a particular god, nymph, or holy person in antiquity; a practice which has continued into the modern era in North Africa,

Damascus (Maktabat al-Asad 11386) says that the author singles out Ezra's tomb as an exception, however, I was not able to find this passage in the manuscripts available to me. My thanks to Prof. Barbara Roggema of the University of Florence for identifying the manuscripts from the Khalidi and Nashashibi libraries, both of which are available digitally through Virtual Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (vhmml.org). and discussing their content with me. On this text and other examples of light on prophets' graves see Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 21–24.

47 Suriano, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, chap. xix, 30; Suriano, *Treatise on the Holy Land*, chap. xix, 47–48.

48 Ben Ami, *Saint Veneration among Jews*, 70, 76, 81, 101–2, 249, 258, 264, 286; Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 1:254, 2:456–57, 729.

49 Lamps were also used at the Holy Sepulchre. See Suriano, *Il trattato di Terra Santa*, chap. xix, Italian, 29–30; Suriano, *Treatise on the Holy Land*, 47. It is important to note that while Suriano was a Latin Christian he was describing the practices of indigenous Christians. The Muslim legalist, Ibn al-Ḥājj, writing in the fourteenth century, calls the donation of lamps and oil to mosques an innovation and a waste of money. While he protests the practice, his very objections testify to its prevalence. Ibn al-Ḥājj, *Al-Madkhal*, 1:293. All Jewish pilgrimage accounts mention Jews and Muslims lighting candles at graves or placing lamps there. See for example Moses b. Mordechai Bassola, *Mas'a R. Moshe Basulah*, 146. That Muslims also lit candles at graves, for example the graves of the biblical patriarchs and their wives (Adam, Eve, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, and Leah), is confirmed by the Muslim pilgrim, Ibn Baṭūta. Ibn Baṭūta *Voyages*, 1:232.

50 Armenios, *Coptic Christianity in Ottoman Egypt*, 110–13.

51 Miraculous light has continued to be an indication of sanctity, especially of the holy dead, for Muslims and Jews alike into the modern era. Ben Ami, *Saint Veneration among Jews*, 31; Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 159.

the Middle East, Greece, and Central Asia among Muslims, Jews, and/or Christians.⁵² In medieval Western Europe such practices do not seem to have endured on a large scale; however, instances such as the Christian St. Martin of Tours (316–97 CE) felling a tree sacred to the local religion, suggest that trees were part of the religious culture in these regions at one time.⁵³ Church leaders in early medieval Europe struggled to either eradicate the veneration of water sources, trees, and stones, or to co-opt them into a more Christianized context.⁵⁴ Caesarius of Arles (ca. 470–542 CE), for example, selected the first option, when he remonstrated with his parishioners to stop making vows or praying at fountains and trees, urging them instead to destroy Pagan shrines rather than defend or rebuild them.⁵⁵ Yet this was not necessarily the preferred course of action. Early in the Christianization process in Europe, it became policy to convert temples and shrines which had been consecrated to local deities into churches. The reasoning behind this approach is expressed quite clearly in a letter by Pope Gregory I (ca. 540–604 CE) to bishops Mellitus and Augustine in England. Gregory indicates that temples should not be destroyed but merely the “idols” within them.

For if the shrines are well built it is essential that they should be changed from the worship of devils to the service of the true God. When people see that their shrines are not destroyed they will be able to banish error from their hearts and be more ready to come to places they are familiar with, but now recognizing and worshipping the true God.⁵⁶

From a practical standpoint, Gregory seems to have been loath to waste materials and labour by destroying a solidly constructed building. More significantly for our purposes, Gregory supposes that local habit and association of a place with worship would facilitate the transition from the indigenous religion to Christianity, if the site were claimed by the Christians. Furthermore, Gregory goes on to outline how to sub-

52 Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 75, 89–92; R. Taylor, “River Raptures”; Kosso and Lawton, “Women at the Fountain and the Well”; Håland, ““Take, Skamandros, my Virginity;” Munn, “Earth and Water”; Meyers, “The Divine River”; Dunant, “Natural Water Resources and the Sacred”; Stephenson, “Villas and Aquatic Culture”; Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, 116–40; Ben Ami, *Saint Veneration among Jews*, 32, 75–83; Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 1: 98–118, 175–227, 238–40; Blackman, “Sacred Trees in Modern Egypt”; Halliday, “Cenotaphs and Sacred Localities”; Lymer, “Rags and Rock Art;” Dermenghem, *Le Culte des Saints*, 37, 42, 53, 109, 122–123, 130, 136–51, 195; Westermarck, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1:56–62, 68–73, 77–79, 84–89.

53 Severus, *Vita Martini*, chap. 13, 108/109–110/111 and Burton’s commentary, 213–15. Also see Stephenson, “Villas and Aquatic Culture.”

54 Squatriti, *Landscape and Change*, 1–6; Cusack, *The Sacred Tree*; Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 204–13, 254–68.

55 Caesarius, of Arles, *Sermones*, sermon 53. 233–234; Caesarius, *Saint Caesarius of Arles: Sermons*, vol. 1, sermon 53, 263–64.

56 “Quia si fana eadam bene constructa sunt, necesse est ut a cultu daemonum in obsequio ueri Dei debeant commutari, ut dum gens ipsa eadem fana sua non videt destrui, de corde errorem deponat, et Deum uerum cognoscens ac adorans, ad loca quae consuevit familiarius concurrat”; Bede, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, chap XXX, 106/107

stitute local sacrifices, celebrations, and festivals with Christian ones.⁵⁷ Likewise in the late antique Eastern Mediterranean, Christian leaders wavered between eradicating non-Christian temples and religious practices and co-opting them, in part because these sites and the customs attached to them were so central to the social and agricultural, as well as religious life of the region. Aram Mardirossian, in his analysis of the *Book of Armenian Canons* (*Kanonagirk' Hayoc'*) of Yovhannes Awjenc'i notes that Gregory the Illuminator (257–331 CE) is depicted as taking a similar approach in Armenia as Pope Gregory I in England; he constructed a martyrium in honour of John the Baptist in Bagawan, a town which had been known to be dedicated to idols, i.e. sacred to the local gods, seemingly to divert devotion from autochthonous deities to that of a Christian saint.⁵⁸ In Egypt of course, the focus was more frequently on water sources, specifically the Nile, than on trees.⁵⁹

Biblical prohibitions against high places and Asherah poles prompted lengthy discussions in the Babylonian Talmud about what constituted Asherah trees, what could or could not be used of a tree guarded or venerated by non-Jews.⁶⁰ The practice of revering mountains or hills was sometimes discussed in conjunction with holy trees, indicating that Jews were well aware of this custom among other peoples.⁶¹ While I have found no indication that Jews themselves thought of trees or other objects as holy in any way, or used them to mark graves during late antiquity, certain trees, such as fig, olive, and pomegranate, were considered good omens in dreams.⁶² Trees were also thought to house demons. Anyone urinating on or resting on such trees did so at considerable risk to his/her safety.⁶³ Thus, while in late antiquity, Jews seem to have eschewed direct reverence of trees, nevertheless, already, they linked trees with the supernatural world. Among medieval Jews, however, trees, especially fruit trees, or stones frequently marked the graves of the venerated dead. Sahl b. Maṣliaḥ complained that rabbinic Jews tie knots on palm trees marking the graves of holy people in hopes of having their prayers fulfilled.⁶⁴ His observation about rabbinic practice in the tenth century is similar to those in later medieval texts. The anonymous author of a Hebrew account from the fifteenth century noted that the graves of R. Eliezar b. Hurqanus and the graves of Ḥanina b. Dosa

57 Bede, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 108/109

58 Mardirossian, *Le livre des Canons arméniens*, 179–80.

59 Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity*, 108–10; Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 20–22, 27–33, 45–46.

60 Judges 3:7; 1 Kings 15:13, 18:19; 2 Kings 21:7, 23:4–7; 1 Chronicles 15:16, 2 Chronicles 33:3. BT Eruvin 78b–80a, BT Sanhedrin 7b, BT Avodah Zarah 20b, 45b–46a, 48a, 52a. In some of the biblical passages Asherah is portrayed as an image of a goddess. See for example 1 Kings 15:13, 2 Kings 21:7. On the veneration of Asherah in ancient Israel see Hadley, *The Cult of Asherah*; Frevel, *Aschera*; Frevel, “Die Elimination der Göttin.”

61 BT Avodah Zarah 45b–46a.

62 BT Berachot 57a.

63 BT Pesachim 111a–b.

64 Sahl b. Maṣliaḥ, *Sefer tokhaḥat in Liqutei qadmoniyot*, 2:32; Sahl b. Maṣliaḥ, “Epistle to Jacob b. Samuel” para. 10, in *Karaite Anthology*, 115–16.

have trees growing over them.⁶⁵ R. Moshe Basulah from the same period explained that the graves of R. Judah b. Il'a'i and R. Josi, his son, were shaded by an almond tree and that nearby is a grove of olive trees that "are holy to the saint". Other kinds of trees, such as carob and pistachio trees mark the graves of other rabbis' graves.⁶⁶

Whether the veneration of trees or sacred groves was a pre-Islamic practice among Arabs or a custom that they adopted later as the result of contact with other cultures after expansion, remains unclear. Some scholars seem to favour the idea that they adopted it from other cultures with which they had contact.⁶⁷ Others, often taking their cue from medieval (or modern) Islamic texts which condemn such practices as part of pre-Islamic "polytheism," assume that the veneration of trees or the use of trees to mark a sacred grave or other site must be a pre-Islamic holdover from Arabia.⁶⁸ Regardless of its origins, this practice became common within the Islamic world and a source of contention. The custom of praying near trees or stones was sufficiently widespread among Muslims for Ibn Taymiyya to complain in the fourteenth century:

On the other hand, retreat and cleaving near a tree or stone where there may or may not be an image, just as near a tomb or station of a prophet or non-prophet, is not part of Islamic religion, but is rather a variety of pagan cult.⁶⁹

Ibn Taymiyya's reference to trees, tombs, or "stations" (places marking the person's life) of prophets or "non-prophets" hints that Muslims visited the holy places of individuals not recognized as prophets, and, potentially, not even Muslim. Scholars examining Ottoman or late North African sources and customs confirm that such practices continued despite the protestations of Ibn Taymiyya and likeminded Muslim legal scholars.⁷⁰ For example, the Muslim traveller and author of a guide for those going on *ziyārāt* in and around Damascus, Ibn al-Ḥawrānī (d. 1596 CE), notes that one Shaykh Arṣlān dug a well with his bare hands at the mosque near his house. It became part of his "station," and at the time of al-Ḥawrānī's narrative, people drank from it to receive blessing and cures for stomach ache.⁷¹ Similarly, as late as the fifteenth century, Joan of Arc (ca. 1412–1431 CE) was accused, among other illicit activities, of going to a tree thought to attract fairies in

65 *Masa'ot 'Ereẓ Yisra'el*, ed. Ya'ari, 113.

66 *Masa'ot 'Ereẓ Yisra'el*, ed. Ya'ari, 139. The grave of Zebulon is marked by two pillars and a carob tree (p. 136) and a pistachio tree grows on R. Eleazar b. Azariah's grave (p. 141).

67 Santolli, "Harrar, the Holy City of Islam," esp. 632–33; Schöller, *The Living and the Dead in Islam*, 183–85; Dermenghem, *Le Culte des Saints*, 21–37.

68 Procházka-Eisl and Procházka, *The Plain of Saints and Prophets*, 163–66; Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 3; Zeitlin, *The Historical Muhammad*, 31; Ben-Ami, *Saint Veneration among Jews*, 75, 81n1.

69 فأما العكوف والمجاورة عند شجرة أو حجر، تمثل أو غير تمثل، أو العكوف والمجاورة عند قبر نبي أو غير نبي، أو مقام نبي أو غير نبي: فليس هذا من دين المسلمين. بل هو من جنس دين المشركين ... *Ibn Taymiyya, Kitāb iqtīḍa' Arabic*, 441, English translation, 320. Compare with Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'*, 27:113, 136–37, 250, 500, 501; Olesen, *Culte des Saints*, 45–48; Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 186.

70 Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, 116–40; Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam*, 1:98–112, 175–17, 238–20, 2:407; Dermenghem, *Le Culte des Saints*, 122–51.

71 Ibn al-Ḥawrānī *Al-Ishārāt*, 89, translated in Meri, "A Late Medieval Syrian Pilgrimage Guide," 51.

order to obtain visions. In her trial she describes the tree as also having fountain near it from which people would drink in hopes of being healed of fevers. This exchange suggests that trees and sources of water in Northern Europe also retained their association with the other world, albeit in an unofficial capacity.⁷²

While the treatment of trees, rocks, caves, and water sources as holy or as indicators of hallowed space, was contested periodically in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, these types of landmarks continued to be an integral part of a shared, sacred geography. The ancient origins of these practices—prior to the development of at least two of the religious traditions under consideration here—made them particular targets for condemnation as foreign hold-overs, inimical to “true” Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. Yet precisely because of their antiquity they also became an inherited, albeit transformed, custom for communities of Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. This is not to say that they were part of an unchanging Mediterranean religious culture—indeed, rituals and religious associations relating to trees, rocks, caves, and springs span far wider geographically than the Mediterranean—rather, it is to follow the observations of Frankfurter and other scholars of ritual who have emphasized the primacy of practice over belief.⁷³ While medieval authors would not have formulated this principle in the same terms as modern anthropologists or theorists of religion, they understood it. Some sites remained religiously important, despite the shift in religious (belief) systems, and were merely co-opted by the “newcomers.”⁷⁴ Other groves or stones came to be designated as holy and accorded similar powers and meanings because to venerate such places, or associate them with other-worldly power, whether from a god, a demon, or a saint, was already in the vocabulary and expectations of a given religious tradition; the groundwork for such attitudes and behaviour had already been established by those sites and rituals inherited from a more ancient period. Because they were part of a common “inheritance,” sacred trees, stones, etc. in turn became part of a mutual, though not always identical, religious symbolism which encouraged shared devotion.

Veneration of the Special Dead

Christian Borrowing from Greek and Roman Rituals

Parentalia (February 22) and *Lemuria* (May 9, 11, 13) were the two main Roman festivals of the dead. During *Parentalia* individuals honoured their ancestors; mourners would go out of the city to the cemeteries to visit family tombs, offering the dead garlands, corn, salt, wine-soaked bread, and loose violets.⁷⁵ *Lemuria*, on the other hand, seems to have been more about propitiating and protecting one’s family against the hostile dead that

⁷² Daniel Hobbins, transl., *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 62, 74, 126–17, 157.

⁷³ Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 404–11, 422, 423, 436–60; Chaniotis, “Ritual Dynamics”; Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 23–36.

⁷⁴ Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 47, 49–51, 64–65.

⁷⁵ Ovid *Fasti*, 2.537; Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 1:50; Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies*, 74, 118–19.

roamed free in the world of the living, rather than honouring the beloved dead.⁷⁶ The ancient Greek festival of the third day of Athesteria (day of the pots) addressed both concerns. The living provided an offering of vegetables to the god of the underworld on behalf of the dead, much as Romans did during *Parentalia*, however, the offering was for all the dead, and the day was associated with ill omen.⁷⁷

Much to the frustration of early Christian leaders, many Christians continued these “Pagan” practices, such as visiting the tombs of ancestors, eating or feasting at gravesites, or celebrating specific holidays relating to the dead. As Peter Brown points out, Christians often saw no contradiction between their affiliation to Christianity and the continuation of these customs.⁷⁸ Not surprisingly, aspects of these rituals for honouring the dead in general were incorporated into the veneration of the holy dead.⁷⁹

Body, Soul, and Intercession for and from the Grave: Convergences in Eastern Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Thought

A number of biblical injunctions would seem to preclude Jews’ visiting gravesites, interceding for the dead, and certainly, asking the dead for intercession. According to Lev. 11:24 and Num. 19:14–16 corpses were impure, an impurity which the *Mishnah* and Talmuds expanded upon, making corpse impurity the worst of all—the “father of the fathers of impurity” (אבי אבות הטומאה).⁸⁰ To go so far as to revere the dead or request favours of the deceased would also potentially violate Ex. 20:3–4 and Deut. 5:7–8 which prohibit the Israelites from worshiping any other gods, idols, or other (natural) objects. BT Mo’ed Qaṭan contains a lengthy discussion about how to identify gravesites and avoid them in order to circumvent the impurity that walking upon those graves would incur.⁸¹ The desire to avoid corpse pollution would certainly seem to be a likely deterrent against unnecessarily visiting a cemetery. David Kraemer, in his study of death rituals among Jews in late antiquity, points out that unlike their non-Jewish Roman counterparts, Rabbinic Jews hosted the funerary meal at the home of the mourner, rather

⁷⁶ Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies*, 118–19 Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.419–55.

⁷⁷ Nilsson, *Greek Folk Religion*, 30–31; Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*, 116.

⁷⁸ Augustine of Hippo, *Epistle* 29.9; Jerome, *Contra Vigilantium*, 4, PL 23, 357; Martin of Braga, *Capitula ex Orientalium*, nos. 68, 69, 71, 73 in *Opera Omnia*, 140; Hincmar of Rheims, *Capitula*, xiv, *Mansi*, XV, 478, in *Opera*; Burchard of Worms, *Decretum* X, XIX, PL 140, cols. 838, 964; Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 26–29, 31–36; Février, “Le Culte des morts,” 1:212–74; Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 213–14, 269–71; Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 32–33. However, see the cautionary remarks in Geary, *Living with the Dead*, 30–34, in which Geary questions whether one can neatly distinguish between “Christian” and “Pagan” burial practices and beliefs. He is mostly referring to Germanic practices but his observations hold for the intermingling of Greek, Roman, and Christian views of the dead as well.

⁷⁹ Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 269–20.

⁸⁰ M. Ohalot 1:1–3, 6:1; BT Shabbat 81a; Harrington, *The Impurity Systems*, 37–40, 69, 72–75, 143; D. Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death*, 19–20, 25, 28, 77; Cohn, “Sainthood on the Periphery.”

⁸¹ BT Mo’ed Qaṭan 5b.

than at the grave of the deceased.⁸² Given that Jews held many other practices relating to death in common with the Romans, the choice not to hold a meal at the gravesite may reflect discomfort with proximity to the dead and their impurity.⁸³

Within Hellenistic and Rabbinic Jewish texts, the living and the holy dead were needed to assist other, troubled dead, or they themselves required aid from the living. Already in 2 Maccabees 12:40–45 (written ca. 124 BCE) when Jews who had fallen in battle were found to have been carrying tokens of the idol of Jamnia, Judas Maccabeus prayed that their sin be blotted out and forgiven, and he sent a sin offering to Jerusalem. This text clearly indicates a belief that the prayers of the living could assist the dead, specifically, that they could expiate an individual's misdeeds even from the grave.⁸⁴ Sometimes such assistance could only be proffered by one dead person to another. For example, in a passage from BT Hagigah, when Aḥer, an individual recognized by his contemporaries as having sinned, but at the same time as being meritorious for having studied Torah, died, smoke came from his grave. R. Joḥanan laments his and his colleagues' inability to help Aḥer while he lived, but promises that when he himself dies, he will extinguish the fire. When R. Joḥanan dies the smoke does indeed cease to rise from Aḥer's grave.⁸⁵ Aḥer needs assistance because he is being punished in the grave. This story is one of several tales or discussions in the Talmud of the pains of the grave. These pains usually consisted of gnawing of the worms during decomposition, which atoned for sins, however, sometimes, when the sins were severe, additional punishments could be added as in the case of Aḥer.⁸⁶

The choices of the living in preparing and burying the corpse sometimes caused additional trouble to the dead. BT Sanhedrin 47a warns against interring a righteous person next to a wicked one, or even a moderately wicked person next to a very sinful one. In BT Berakoth 18b, a woman cannot join her companion in wandering the world of the living and listening to them because her body is not properly wrapped.⁸⁷

The beliefs about the dead expressed in the Talmud and earlier Hellenistic Jewish texts find parallels in early Muslim and Eastern Christian beliefs. Eastern, particularly Syriac-speaking, Christian views of the relationship between the body and the soul and the differentiation between the soul which either remained with the body or in separate resting place, and the spirit which went to God, probably developed alongside Jewish

82 Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death*, 32.

83 For a brief overview of commonalities between Roman and Jewish attitudes and practices relating to death see Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death*, 69–71.

84 For an overview of other early Jewish accounts of interactions between the living and the dead and the expectation that the living take care of the needs of the dead, who, on some level remained aware after death, see Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death*, 14–28, 65, 68, 97–98, 102–3, 113; LeGoff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 26–27, 30–33, 39–43.

85 BT Hagigah 15b. Compare with the tale of Judah b. Tabbari prostrating himself on the grave of an executed man in BT Hagigah 16b.

86 BT Sanhedrin 47b, BT Berakoth 18b; Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 255; Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death*, 24–27, 46–47, 97–98, 103–5; Gavin, "The Sleep of the Soul."

87 BT Berakoth 18b; Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death*, 108–10.

ones or were influenced by them.⁸⁸ Tatian (ca. 120–180 CE) maintained that the soul disintegrated with the body until resurrection, at which point the body and soul would be redeemed by the Spirit or punished.⁸⁹ The Christian author, Aphrahat, thought that the animating spirit (in contrast to the immortal soul) remained with the body after death. If the person had been righteous, s/he had pleasant dreams of what God held in store for the person at the final resurrection, whereas the unrighteous were tormented by unpleasant dreams.⁹⁰ Aphrahat's contemporary, Ephraim the Syrian (or his imitator) held that the soul slept with the body, waiting when both would be revived.⁹¹ As both Frank Gavin and Leor Halevi point out, an important difference between early Syrian Christian and Jewish belief is that Jews maintained that the person physically suffered in the grave, rather than the more intangible nightmares of the wicked in Aphrahat.⁹² Whether or not the soul was separated from the body, its location between death and the day of resurrection and the extent and manner of the soul's perceptions, punishments, or interactions with the living continued to be debated among Syrian Orthodox and the Church of the East, however, as one may see from the carefully outlined discussion of Moses bar Kepha (ca. 813–903 CE)⁹³

Examining both late antique Greek and Latin Christian sources, Yvette Duval has shown that many believed that the dead could feel pain and benefited from proximity to the holy dead, not merely in a distant end of times, but during the occupancy of the tomb. Presumption of a person's worthiness to be near a martyr or other holy person, could, however, result in the worsening of punishment after death rather than alleviation.⁹⁴ Not all agreed, as we shall see.

While scholars have speculated about the possible influence of Eastern Christian belief on Muslim concepts of the dead, various standard ḥadīth collections explicitly recognize Jewish influence regarding the soul's connection to the body in the grave, particularly its punishment, although other Jewish practices regarding the dead, such as standing until the body was placed in the grave, are rejected.⁹⁵ The dead suffered in the

88 Gavin, "The Sleep of the Soul."

89 Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*, chap. 25; Gavin, "The Sleep of the Soul."

90 Aphraates, "Des Membres de l'Ordre" and "De La Vivification des Morts," in Aphraates, *Exposés*, I/293, I/396–I/397; Gavin "The Sleep of the Soul"; Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 224; Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 73–75.

91 Ephraem Syrus, *Sancti Ephraemi Syri Carmina Nisibena*, XLVII; Gavin, "The Sleep of the Soul." More broadly on Ephraim and other early Eastern Christian authors' view of bodily resurrection and the meaning of death and corruption: Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 75–86.

92 Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 224; Gavin, "The Sleep of the Soul."

93 Moses bar Kepha, *Moses bar Kepha und sein Buch*, chaps. 32–39, pp. 100–124; Gavin, "The Sleep of the Soul."

94 Duval, *Auprès des saints corps*, 37–39, 51–168.

95 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 2, bk. 16, nos. 1049, 1050, 1055, 1056, bk. 23, nos. 1289, 1292, 1369, 1372, 1373, 1375, 1377, vol. 4, bk. 56, nos. 2822, 2823, vol. 5, bk. 64, no. 3978, vol. 6, bk. 65, no. 4707, vol. 8, bk. 78, nos. 6052, 6055, bk. 80, nos. 6364–6368, 6370, 6374–6377, 6390; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-masājīd wa mawāḍi' al-ṣalāt nos. 1319, 1320, 1321, 1322, 1324, 1325, 1326, 1328, 1329, 1332, 1333, Kitāb al-kusūf (Book of Eclipses) no. 2098, vol. 5, Kitāb al-imārah (Book of Leadership)

grave according to their sins, although that suffering could sometimes be alleviated by the actions or prayers of the living. Muslims, like Jews, maintained that being buried next to the holy dead could benefit an individual in the afterlife, although the righteous dead did not like being buried next to the wicked. The groans or stench of the wicked disturbed the holy dead, even as proximity to dead saints made the wicked uncomfortable, though even the “regular dead” were often rendered uncomfortable by the worms of the grave.⁹⁶

This concern about the fate and comfort of the dead in their graves continued in the Fatimid through the Mamluk periods and is evident among Jews in both Europe and the Middle East during the same time span. The Persian mystic and philosopher, al-Ghazālī (ca. 1058–1111 CE), maintained that the soul’s comfort or discomfort as it rested in the grave with its body depended on its ability to answer the questioning of the angels, Munkar and Nakīr; however, the first stages of the soul’s judgment and afterlife began in the grave.⁹⁷ Medieval Jews recounted tales of the righteous disturbing the wicked and *vice versa*, or warnings against burying those who had hated one another in life next to one another in death, as well as affirming the ability and importance of intercession for and by the dead.⁹⁸ We have already seen the example from *Sefer Ḥasidim* in which

no. 4938, vol. 7, Kitāb al-qadar, nos. 6770, 6771, 6772, 6871, 6873, Kitāb al-dhikr wa al-du ‘ā’, nos. 6907, 6908, Kitāb al-janna wa šifat na’imihā wa ahlihā, (Book of Paradise and description of its pleasures and people) nos. 7213, 7214, 7219, 7220; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ṭahārah (Book of Purity), no. 22, Kitāb al-ṣalāt (Book of Prayer), no. 880, 983, 984, vol. 2, Kitāb al-withr (Book of Softening), nos. 1539, 1540, 1542, vol. 3, Kitāb al-Janā’iz (Book of Funerals) nos. 3128, 3202, vol. 5, Kitāb al-sunnah (Book of law), nos. 4751, 4753, Kitāb al-adab (Book of Etiquette) no. 5070. Andrae, *Muhammad*, 89; Reynolds, “Medieval Islamic Polemic”; Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 224–25, 334n98. Muslim ideas about the potential impurity of corpses superficially resemble those of Jews and Zoroastrians. As Marion Holmes Katz, shows, however, Sunni Muslims were ambivalent about the impurity of corpses, especially those of Muslims. Corpses never conferred the degree of impurity attributed to them by either Jews or Zoroastrians. Katz, *Body of the Text*, 155–57, 171–74, 205–6.

96 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 1, bk. 3, no. 33, bk.4, nos. 216, 218, vol. 2, bk.23, no. 1378, vol. 5, bk.63, no. 3855, vol. 8, bk.78, no. 6052, 6055, bk.81, no. 6558, 6564, 6566, 6570, vol. 9, bk.97, nos. 7509–7510; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 2, Kitāb al-Janā’iz (Book of Funerals) nos. 2215, 2232, 2234, vol.6, Kitāb al-Faḍā’il (Book of Merits) no. 5940, vol. 7, Kitāb al-zuhd, (Book of Asceticism) no. 7518; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, vol. 1, Kitāb al-ṭahārah (Book of Purity), no. 20, vol. 3, Kitāb al-Janā’iz (Book of Funerals), no. 3203, 3221, vol. 5, Kitāb al-sunnah (Book of Law), no. 4673, 4740, Malik, *Muwatta’*, bk.12, no. 12.1.13, 12.2.4, bk.16, no. 16.6.18, 16.12.37; Malik, *Muwatta’* (Arabic) Kitāb Ṣalāt al-Kusūf, pp. 84–85, Kitāb al-Janā’iz, pp. 105, 107; Smith and Haddad, *Islamic Understanding of Death*, 31–61; Halevi, *Muhammad’s Grave*, 197–233; Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 5:130–31, 182–87; Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 10, 47–55; Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 17, 35–36, 65–66; Meri, “Aspects of Baraka”; Goldziher, “Veneration of the Saints in Islam”; Grunebaum, “The Sacred Character of Islamic Cities”; Eklund, *Life between Death and Resurrection*, 3–9, 14, 30–38, 41, 45–51, 53–55, 78, 104–5, 111, 120, 137–40, 148–53.

97 al-Ghazzālī, *Ihyā’ [Kitāb Dhikr al-mawt wa-mā ba’dahu]*, chaps.7–8] 5:97–120; al-Ghazzālī. *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife*, 121–169. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 209–10; Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 106.

98 “Zavva’at rabbeinu Yehudah ha-Ḥasid,” in *Sefer Ḥasidim*, ed. Margolioth, paras. 1, 12, pp. 10, 12, *Sefer Ḥasidim*, paras. 223, 241, 450, 452, 705, 710, pp. 202, 212–13, 310, 312–313, 439, 440;

the righteous dead complained about the stench of the wicked buried in the adjoining grave.⁹⁹ In another tale from the same work, the situation of BT Berakoth 18b is retold of a woman's soul restricted to her grave because of lack of proper clothing. The consequences are different in this medieval text from the Talmudic one, however. Rather than inhibiting her from wandering the earth and listening to the living, this woman is prevented from joining the other dead in interceding for the living.¹⁰⁰ This particular tale points to mutual relationship between the living and the dead. The living lose the benefit of the deceased young woman's prayers until they intervene to help her by clothing and burying her properly. Similarly, the poem attributed to Moses b. Mevorakh urges the protagonist to seek his dead mother's intercession, but also implies that his regular visits and attention are needed in return.¹⁰¹ Thus, the dead required from the living both the prayers and sometimes physical assistance for more practical matters, such as correct burial or company and remembrance.

Medieval Muslims were similarly anxious that their loved ones be buried next to the holy dead, and fearful of the discomfort that might be caused by proximity to evildoers' graves.¹⁰² Evidence from thirteenth-century Muslim epitaphs suggests that as for Jews and Christians from the period, living Muslims were expected to pray for comfort and divine mercy on behalf of the dead.¹⁰³ The Egyptian Shāfi'ī scholar, al-Subkī (d. 1355 CE), justified the practice of *ziyāra*, the visitation of graves or other holy sites besides Mecca, in order to pray for the dead and to pay respect to them. He further assured his readers that the dead were aware of the greetings of the living.¹⁰⁴ Individuals regularly requested that they be buried next to a holy person in order to benefit from his/her blessing, or *baraka*, as they waited in the grave for the final judgment.¹⁰⁵

Body, Soul, and the Intercession of the Dead in Latin Christendom

The relationship between the soul and body and the potential impact of both the dead on the living and the living on the dead, preoccupied early Latin-speaking Christians as well. Paulinus of Nola (d. 431 CE) asked Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) “whether it is

Horowitz, “Speaking to the Dead”; Shoham-Steiner, “For a Prayer in the Place Would Be Most Welcome”; Cuffel, “Between Reverence and Fear”.

99 *Sefer Ḥasidim*, ed. Margolioth, para. 705, p. 439. See above in the section on smell and incorruptibility.

100 *Sefer Ḥasidim*, ed. Margolioth para. 452, p. 311. Compare with *Sefer Ḥasidim*, ed. Wistinetzki and Freimann, para. 1543, p. 378.

101 Moses b. Mevorakh, “Ve-at haiti be’ozeri ke-mageni” (“And you were for my help like my shield”), in *Shirim ḥadashim min ha-genizah*, 101

102 Ibn Abī Ḥajalah, *Jiwār al-akhyār fī dār al-qarār*. MS Princeton, Garrett 1151Y, fol. 44a–b; Ibid. Landberg MS 110, fol. 63a. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 47–49.

103 Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 40–41.

104 al-Subkī, *Shifā’ al-saqām*, 86–88; Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 202–3.

105 Ibn al-Zayyāt, *Kitāb al-Kawākib*, 105, 125, 140, 157, 297–298; Al-Sakhāwī, *Tuhfat*, 231–33, 254, 263, 276, Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 48–51.

useful to anyone to have his body buried near the memorial of any saint.”¹⁰⁶ Augustine, in his point by point reply, insists that the body has no ability to sense after death.¹⁰⁷ Funerals aid the grieving and honour the dead—if done in a quiet manner—but the dead sense nothing if the graves are damaged. The location of the graves are important aides to memory and piety but are not in and of themselves important.¹⁰⁸ While the dead were generally unaware of and uninterested in the affairs of the living, martyrs knew of the situation of the living and interceded for them by a miracle of God. The place where one asked for such intercession was ultimately irrelevant since God was everywhere.¹⁰⁹

Here and in other writings, Augustine resembles some of the later (post fourth-century) Eastern Christian authors in separating the soul from the body after death, and maintaining that so separated, the souls could be punished for sins with the eventual aim of redemption. Unlike the early Syriac Christian Aphrahat or Ephraim the Syrian, discussed above, the place of waiting is not the body itself. Other early Christian authors such as Tertullian (ca. 160–220 CE) and Ambrose (ca. 337–397 CE) likewise imagined the soul to be punished and purged before the last judgment. For this reason, the living should pray for the dead.¹¹⁰ Thus, while Jews, early Christians, and Muslims lauded praying on behalf of the dead to alleviate punishments for sins, the basic pretext was different. For Jews and Muslims, the soul, the presence of the person, was inextricably linked to the body, and, by extension, to the grave which it occupied. To be near a person’s grave was to be near the person him/herself, even after death. To harm the corpse hurt the person. For this reason, perhaps, Jews and Muslims did not develop an extensive cult of corporeal relics of their holy dead.¹¹¹ For Byzantine Christians, the presence of the holy dead was evoked by their icons, although the burial place of a saint also drew supplicants.¹¹² Of course, if Western Christians felt free to divide the bodies of saints after their death, the better to distribute relics, because they believed the body to be insensate and unconnected with the soul, the question arises, why would such relics be important to the faithful? Paulinus’ questions hint at the answer. While Augustine worked hard to convince his co-religionist that physical proximity to the martyrs’ tombs

106 “...utrum prosit cuique post mortem quod corpus ejus apud sancti alicujus Memoriam sepelitur.” Augustine of Hippo, *De Cura Gerenda pro mortuis* I.1

107 Augustine of Hippo, *De Cura Gerenda pro mortuis* II, IV.6–VI.8; Augustine of Hippo, *De Civitate Dei*, bk. XXI, chap. 3; Binski, *Medieval Death*, 16.

108 Augustine of Hippo, *De Cura Gerenda pro mortuis* IV.6–V.7. Compare with Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, bk. I, chaps. 12–13; Rose, *Commentary*, xv, 31–33, 63–64, 98, 117, 177–78, 187, 216, 557–60.

109 Augustine of Hippo, *De Cura Gerenda pro mortuis* VI.8, XIII.16–XVI.19; Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*, 20–22; Rose, *Commentary*, 188–91, 206, 207. On the insensate status of the “normal” dead see references to Rose in the previous note.

110 Rose, *Commentary*, 26–29; Gavin, “The Sleep of the Soul”; LeGoff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 32–33, 46–48, 62–85.

111 Some relics in the form of “pieces” of the dead did/do exist in Islam: the heads of John the Baptist in Damascus and Aleppo; the head of Husayn in Damascus. Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 39, 200–201; Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus*, 108, 132.

112 Gerstel and Talbot, “The Culture of Lay Piety”; Binski, *Medieval Death*, 25–26; Brubaker, “Making and Breaking”; Miller, *Corporeal Imagination*, 6–9, 15, 113–33, 138–47, 155, 165–67.

afforded no particular blessing or efficacy in prayers, and he insisted that the dead were uninterested in the living and unable to haunt them, the fact that Paulinus, a high-ranking Christian in his own right, asked these questions suggests that Christians very much felt that the dead interacted with the living, and that the bodies of the holy dead served as a powerful locus of a saint's power. Indeed, Paula Rose, in her study and contextualization of Augustine's *De Cura pro mortuis gerenda ad Paulinum*, and before her, Yvette Duval, show that Paulinus and others of his circle felt very much that burying one's loved ones *ad sanctos*, "near" or "next to saints", would benefit the deceased family member or friend. Proximity to the holy dead was also seen as beneficial to the living. In *De Cura* and other writings, Augustine sought to refute such beliefs, although he did allow that martyrs—the holy dead—could intercede for the living.¹¹³ Nevertheless, the persistence of western Christian practices such as incubation, pilgrimage, and relic gathering indicate that most Christians continued to believe in the connection between the holy (and even not so holy) dead and their bodies.¹¹⁴ Such attitudes approximate those of the Jews, Muslims, and some Eastern Christians, however, the focus on the body parts of saints as objects of devotion remained a distinguishing feature. Expressions of abhorrence and mockery for Christians' veneration of saints by European Jews, despite their own practices of praying at the graves of the holy dead, need, perhaps, to be understood in light of Jewish rejection of the veneration of the bodies of Christian saints, rather than to an objection to the belief that the dead could intercede for the living.¹¹⁵

Nuances distinguished not merely interreligious but also intra-religious belief among the various communities about the dead. Nevertheless, the shared impulse

113 Rose, *Commentary*, 13–16, 19, 21–22, 30–43, 48–51, 60–65, 68–71, 78, 83, 95–96, 98, 104, 117, 438–40; Duval, *Auprès des morts*, 3–21, 51–191.

114 Binski, *Medieval Death*, 22–28, 71, 74, 93–94, 115–16; Schmitt, *Ghosts in the Middle Ages*; Geary, *Furta Sacra*.

115 On this seeming contradiction and Jewish objections to Christians' veneration of the dead while they themselves visited the graves of martyrs and other holy dead see: Shoham-Steiner, "For a Prayer in the Place Would Be Most Welcome." In fact European Jewish rejections of Christian veneration of Jesus or the dead often specifically single out corpses in their polemic. Yannai, *Mahazor*, vol. 2, poem 109, line 22, p. 38, poem 119, line 78, p. 87, poem 135, line 46, 48, p. 127, poem for Yom Kippur, lines 145–46, p. 221; Joseph ben Nathan Official, *Yosef ha-mekane*, paras. 119, 125, pp. 110, 114; *Nizzahon Yashan*, para. 125, Heb., p. 82, Engl. p. 134, para. 145, Heb., 96, Engl. 153, para. 176, Heb., 123–24, Engl. 185–87, para. 202, Heb. 141, Engl., 202; "Mainz Anonymous" in Habermann, *Sefer Gezirot*, 62, 92, 93, 98, 101, English in Chazan, *European Jewry*, 225, 229, 234, 237, 238; *Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson* in *Sefer Gezirot*, 29, 31, 34–36, 39, 43, 47–48, English in Chazan, *European Jewry*, 251, 255, 258, 260, 261, 266, 272, 280; *Chronicle of Eliezar ben Nathan* in Habermann, *Sefer Gezirot*, 74, 79, 80, English in Eidelberg, *Jews and the Crusaders*, 82, 86, 90; Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust*, 5, 82, 132–34. Also see the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition, in which Jesus' ignominious death and the status of his corpse is emphasized. The *Toledot Yeshu* narrative circulated in both Europe and the Middle East. See Meerson and Schäfer, ed. and transl., *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*; Barbu and Deutsch, *Toledoth Yeshu in Context*; Deutsch, "New Evidence"; Goldstein, "A Polemical Tale"; Goldstein, "Judeo-Arabic Versions." To say that European Jewish customs of asking intercessions at the graves of the dead are primarily due to Christian influence, as Shoham-Steiner seems to argue, is incorrect. These practices were as widespread in the Middle East as they were in Europe.

toward pilgrimage coupled with strong similarities in expectations of mutual assistance between the living and the holy dead and in the continued connection of the soul of the dead with his/her body, were concepts that were comprehensible to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, whether from Western Europe, Byzantium, or the Muslim world. Whether or not each of these beliefs was accepted by religious leaders varied. Their prevalence, again, ensured common ground between religious communities which fostered hybrid or shared practice.

The Dead Benefiting the Living: Intersections between Muslim and Jewish Rituals, Expectations and Anxieties

According to Muslims and Jews of both the Middle East and Western Europe, not only could the living intercede for the dead, the dead, especially the holy dead, could intercede on behalf of the living and benefit the other dead.¹¹⁶ Gravesites served as major loci for living Jews to seek guidance and aid, sometimes directly from the dead themselves, or from articles associated with a particular holy dead person, and sometimes from God via the intercession of the dead. Scattered references in Hellenistic and early Roman Jewish sources suggest that the tombs of the prophets were destinations for pilgrimage.¹¹⁷ In the Talmud, the rabbis argued for the antiquity of the practice of praying at gravesites, citing Num. 13:22 according to which Caleb visits Hebron, where the Patriarchs and Matriarchs were buried. BT Sotah 34b elaborates on the biblical passage suggesting that Caleb prostrated himself on the graves of the Patriarchs in order to request the prayers of his ancestors on his behalf.¹¹⁸ Indications become more numerous and detailed during the rabbinic and medieval periods.¹¹⁹ For example, BT Sahnhedrin indicates that sometimes quasi magical practices, such as taking dirt from the grave of a rabbi and using it as a remedy against fever, were condoned and legal justifications developed to allow their continuation.¹²⁰ Conjuring or consulting with the dead by fasting and sleeping in a cemetery were less acceptable, however, discussions of such customs in the Talmud indicate that they were, nevertheless, practised by some.¹²¹

Travelling to cemeteries, sleeping in them, and attempting to consult the dead remained a source of concern in medieval Jewish communities in Northern Europe and in the Muslim world. Karaite and Rabbinite Jews in the Middle East disagreed about the valid-

116 Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 5:180–85; Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 40–41, 71–76; Meri, *The Cult of Saints*, 59–119; Horowitz, “Speaking to the Dead.”

117 Kerkeslager, “Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Identity.”

118 Horowitz, “Speaking to the Dead”; Shoham-Steiner, “For a Prayer in the Place Would Be Most Welcome.”

119 Horowitz, “Speaking for the Dead.”

120 BT Sanhedrin 47b.

121 BT Sanhedrin 65b. Kraemer underscores that early rabbinic texts indicate mourning and approaching the dead involved speaking *of* the dead, but not *to* the dead despite evidence that the dead were thought to be aware of their fate and the actions of the living on their behalf. Kraemer, *The Meanings of Death*, 99–103.

ity of such customs.¹²² These practices were popular, however, and Jews sought to reshape Talmudic and biblical injunctions against such customs in the medieval and early modern eras.¹²³ For example, Maimonides, the Jewish philosopher, community leader, and law commentator of the twelfth century who emigrated from al-Andalus to Cairo, described the practice of fasting and going to the cemetery in order that the dead may visit the (living) person in a dream or dress in a particular way and burn incense and sleep along to encourage the dead to speak in the person's dreams.¹²⁴ In the *Zohar*, one of the primary Jewish mystical works of thirteenth-century Iberia, those buried at Hebron serve as ultimate intercessors before God during the world's distress and the conduit for God's mercy, a view that continued to be echoed by European Jews into the eighteenth century.¹²⁵

The mutual intercession between the living and the dead was so significant within the Muslim context, that cemeteries frequently had a substantial population of living Muslims, who either dwelt near a particular holy person's grave more-or-less permanently or chose to remain for a period of time the better to benefit from the *baraka* of one or more saints buried there. This function of cemeteries to house those seeking intercession, at least temporarily, even affected the architecture of tombs, at least in Egypt.¹²⁶ Hagiographic texts and pilgrimage guides abound with accounts of miracles on behalf of the living by the dead or as a result of their intercession to God.¹²⁷ Yet, both Muslim and Jewish thinkers were concerned with the correct way to seek the assistance of the dead, and some questioned its legality altogether. Many Muslims, such as Ibn Taymiyya, simply condemned pilgrimage to the graves of the dead in order to seek their intercession as a blatant imitation of *dhimmi* practice that no Muslim should adopt.¹²⁸ Others presented a more gradated argument. Al-Subkī, responding to Ibn Taymiyya's objections to *ziyāra*,

122 Sahl b. Maṣliḥ, *Sefer tokhaḥat in Liqṭei qadmoniyot*, 32; Sahl b. Maṣliḥ, "Epistle to Jacob b. Samuel" para. 10, in *Karaite Anthology*, 115–16; Horowitz, "Speaking for the Dead."

123 Rashi (R. Shlomo Yiṣḥaq of Troyes) on BT Sanhedrin 75b; Eliezer b. Samuel of Metz, *Sefer Yere'im*, no. 335; Moses b. Maimon, *Mishnah Torah*, "Hilkhot 'avodat kokhavim" (laws regarding the worship of stars) chap. 11, law 13. Horowitz, "Speaking to the Dead"; Giller, "Recovering the Sanctity of the Galilee"; Shoham-Steiner, "For a Prayer in the Place Would Be Most Welcome" (my thanks to Prof. Caroline Walker Bynum of the Institute of Advanced Studies in Princeton and Prof. William Chester Jordan (Princeton University) for this reference); Cuffel, "Between Reverence and Fear." On the consultation of the dead as problematic within a biblical context see 1 Sam. 28:7–25.

124 Moses b. Maimon, *Mishnah Torah*, "hilkhot 'avodat kokhavim" chap. 11, law 13. Rashi, the French biblical commentator and tosaphist describes a similar practice in his commentary on BT Sanhedrin 65b, but is less neutral. He states that anyone who spends the night in a cemetery after fasting does so to invite an unclean spirit to rest on him, thus making the practice closer to a kind of necromancy. Horowitz, "Speaking to the Dead."

125 *Zohar* I:225b. See the prayers of Sarah bat Mordecai of Satanov translated and discussed in Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs*, 126–46; Weissler, "Measuring Graves and Laying Wicks." For these prayers in the context of Ashkenazi Jewish women's veneration of the dead, see Cuffel, "Between Reverence and Fear."

126 Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 26–37.

127 Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 50–55. For examples see following chapters.

128 See Chapter 5.

argued for the legality and benefits of the practice. Even he, however, objected to Muslims directing their requests for aid directly to the saint, or assuming that the saint him or herself performed miracles.¹²⁹

Likewise, some Jews remained scrupulous about the distinction between directly asking the help of the dead, and the expectation that praying in their vicinity would increase the chances of the prayer being fulfilled, however. In the fourteenth century, R. Judah b. Asher, who was born in northern Europe but spent most of his life in Spain, wrote an ethical will containing important clues regarding European Jewish customs relating to holy dead. Before quoting his customary prayer at gravesites, R. Judah states, "And this I have prayed constantly [lit.: "all the days"] over the graves of the righteous and perfect."¹³⁰ As Elliot Horowitz points out, R. Judah is careful not to address the dead directly in his prayer, but expresses his hope that the dead will also pray on his behalf.¹³¹ R. Judah seems to have assumed that his own prayer to God would be enhanced because it was offered at the grave of a righteous person for he says: "May you (God) hear my prayer in this place."¹³² R. Judah's choice of words "all the days" suggests that he performed this ritual often, either according to his own timing, or, perhaps, on days known to be propitious for requesting intercession from the dead.

Living in a Christian-dominated milieu, in which the veneration of saints (the holy dead) and the assertion that God himself had taken human form and died, added a level of anxiety and urgency to European Jewish efforts to justify their customs relating to the holy dead. They sought to distinguish between what they saw as the Christian practice of worshipping humans in the persons of Jesus and Christian saints, as opposed to requesting intercession from God at the graves of holy people. Medieval Jewish polemicists directly condemned the Christian practice of venerating the dead.¹³³ Despite such censures, Ephraim Shoham-Steiner has demonstrated that Jews were attracted to Christian healing shrines, a practice that prompted considerable apprehension and counter-rhetoric on the part of the Jewish leaders and polemicists.¹³⁴ When the author(s) of the *Zohar* mentioned the practice visiting graves, they carefully distinguished the motivations of the non-Jews—to perform sorcery—from those of Jews, which was to request intercession on the part of the dead before God.¹³⁵ The need on the part of the author(s) of the *Zohar* to denigrate non-Jewish visitation of gravesites, coupled with the strong counter-efforts on the part of Jewish polemicists, suggest that Jews recognized the par-

129 al-Subkī, *Shifā' al-saqām*, 127–31; Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 201–8

130 וזאת תפילתי כל הימים על קברי הצדיקים והתמומים; Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, 183. The prayer itself continues on 184. My translation is slightly different than that of Abrahams.

131 Horowitz, "Speaking to the Dead"; Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, 184.

132 ותשמע תפילתי במקום הזה; Abrahams, *Hebrew Ethical Wills*, 184.

133 Joseph b. Nathan Official, *Sefer ha-Meqane*, no. 85 p. 82; [Nizzahon Yashan] *The Jewish Christian Debate*, no. 217, Hebrew 147–48, English 210–12 Horowitz, "Speaking to the Dead."

134 Shoham-Steiner, "Jews and Healing."

135 *Sefer ha-Zohar*, ed. Margolies; Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, *Zohar* III. 71b. Compare with *Zohar* I. 225b and III. 70b; Horowitz, "Speaking to the Dead"; Giller, "Recovering the Sanctity of the Galilee." On the structure and authorship of the *Zohar* see: Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*.

allels between their own customs of requesting intercession from the dead and those of the Christians. They sought, sometimes in vain, to differentiate themselves from their Christian neighbours and to prevent their fellow Jews from being drawn into Christian saint veneration, and thereby, to Christianity itself. This evidence in conjunction with the admonitions of Jewish leaders to refrain from directly addressing the dead also indicates that some Jews did not differentiate clearly between asking the holy dead for intercession on behalf of the living and asking God in the vicinity of the saint.¹³⁶

Thus, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim practices and attitudes toward the dead were becoming increasingly similar in the Middle Ages. This rapprochement was aided by long-standing commonalities, even as it prompted considerable anxiety among those seeking to delineate clear boundaries between religious communities. Jewish and Muslim beliefs and practices regarding the sacred dead converged even more in the Levant and possibly North Africa during the later Middle Ages and into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Brian Ogren has demonstrated that the idea of the soul's possible transmigration and the problems that such a phenomenon posed in the realms of religion, philosophy, and physics became the focus of various early modern Jewish and Christian thinkers. The earlier Muslim and Jewish debates, along with Greek philosophical discussions about the transmigration of the soul, or *gilgul*, as it was known in Jewish texts, were at the heart of early modern European Christian and Jewish debates on this topic.¹³⁷ This convergence between Muslim and Jewish beliefs and practices regarding transmigration, possession by the spirits of the dead, whether friendly or otherwise, and visiting gravesites to draw the souls of the holy dead to or into oneself, began earlier than the sixteenth century, however.

By the ninth century a new element appears in some Jews' understanding of death and the ability of the dead to interact with the living; the transmigration of souls. Anan b. David, sometimes accredited with founding the Karaite movement within Judaism, is described as having espoused this concept, and to have written an entire book, now lost, on the subject.¹³⁸ Rejected by Saadia Gaon (d. 942 CE), this belief that souls were reborn into the world nevertheless gained increasing currency in Jewish mystical writing from the twelfth-century onwards.¹³⁹ This concept was also well known to Muslims, both from their knowledge of Indian religions, and from Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Pythagorean philosophy from ancient Greece. Individuals such as the eleventh-century polymath, al-Bīrūnī and Muḥammad al-Shahrastānī (b. 1086 CE) both from Central Asia, who attempted to catalogue the various religious belief systems both within Islam and outside of it, describe the beliefs in *tanāsūkh* (transmigration of souls/metempsychosis).

136 Haim Paltiel of Magdeburg—see in Meir b. Baruch of Rothenberg, *Responsa*, (Lvov, 1860), no. 164; Mintz, *She 'elot ve Teshuvot*, no. 79 (both accessed from "Bar Ilan Database" version 18); Horowitz, "Speaking to the Dead"; Shoham-Steiner, "For a Prayer in the Place Would Be Most Welcome"; Reiner, "Overt Falsehood and Covert Truth."

137 Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*; Ogren, "Circularity." Scholem, "Gilgul."

138 Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, 12–13.

139 Sa'adia ben Joseph, *The Books of Beliefs and Opinions*, Treatise VI, chap. VIII, pp. 259–63; Ogren, *Renaissance and Rebirth*, 11–21; Scholem, "Gilgul."

sis) from various regions and groups, and, additionally attribute the view to Manī and his followers.¹⁴⁰ Multiple theories regarding *tanāsūkh* were adopted and expanded by a number of Muslim thinkers, especially within Shi'a circles, although these theories were also hotly contested, and often treated as marginal by others.¹⁴¹ Likewise, Saadia Gaon's brief description, suggests that there were multiple concepts of metempsychosis circulating at that time, both among non-Jews and Jews. However, his assertion that some Jews believed that souls could even migrate into the bodies of animals, and that this process was part of a system of reward and punishment, parallels views attributed to the Shi'a known as the Rāwandīyya, from Khorsan, in the anonymous chronicle, *Kitāb al-Uyūn*, which covers events approximately contemporaneous with Saadia Gaon.¹⁴² Later Muslim as well as Jewish texts also attest to Jewish adherence to some form doctrine of reincarnation of souls, suggesting that there continued to be considerable interplay between Jewish and Muslim conceptualizations of the afterlife of the soul, and its enduring existence and interaction with the realm of the living.¹⁴³

If souls could move from one body to the next in a series of lives, they were also able to come at the beckoning of the living, if the correct rituals were performed. Some authors, both Jewish and Muslim, associated this practice with polytheism and magic, although even in these cases, the calling of a spirit to bind with one's own, whether celestial/angelic, astral, or the souls of former prophets, were also associated with prophecy.¹⁴⁴ These and others drew their information and the theory of the process of drawing down spirits from *Ghāyat al-Hakīm* (*Goal of the Wise*), by the eleventh-century Andalusian mathematician and chemist, al-Majrīṭī, or rather, the later pseudonymous

140 El, "Tanāsukh"; al-Bīrūnī, *Āthār*, 206, 237; al-Bīrūnī, *Chronology*, transl. Sachau, 189, 225; Lawrence, *Shahrastānī on the Indian Religions*, 46–47, 126–42; al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Milāl*, 8, 42–43, 113–15, 133–34, 185, 197–98, 249–50, 425, 433, 449–50; al-Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions*, 1:119, 223, 448–49, 453–54, 511–12, 641, 671–72, 2:169, 480, 499, 535–37; Jackson, "Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Manicheanism."

141 El, "Tanāsukh"; Crone, *The Nativist Prophets*, 129, 192, 224–26, 233–22; Abdullah, "Ibn Sīnā and Abū Barakāt al-Baghdādī"; Alexandrin, "Rāzī and his Medieval Opponents"; Kamada, "Transmigration of Soul (*tanāsukh*)"; Kamada, "Metempsychosis (*tanāsukh*) in Mullā Ṣadrā's Thought"; Schmidtke, "Doctrine of the Transmigration of the Soul According to Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī"; Dietrich, "Die Lehre von der Reinkarnation im Islam"; Mirza, "The Syrian Isma'ilis"; Smith, "Transmigration and the Sufis"; Eklund, *Life between Death and Resurrection*, 100, 109–10.

142 Sa'adia ben Joseph, *The Books of Beliefs and Opinions*, Treatise VI, chap. VIII, pp. 259–63; *Kitāb al-Uyūn* 227; Crone, *The Nativist Prophets*, 233.

143 Crone, *The Nativist Prophets*, 242; Sack, "Some Remarks," This seemingly persistent exchange, or commonality between Jewish and Muslim ideas about the fate of the soul should be understood in light of Jewish interest in and borrowing from Shi'a ideas as well. On this see Krinis, *God's Chosen People*, although he does not address *tanāsukh* and *gilgul* directly. Nevertheless, many of the authors he identifies as potential sources for Jewish adaptations of Shi'a belief in al-Andalus, such as the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* or the writings of al-Shahrastānī, also describe systems of *tanāsukh*.

144 Moses b. Maimon, *Guide*, 1:153–54 (I.63, fol. 81a–82a) 2:518–19 (III.29 fol. 64b–65b); Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, transl. Rosenthal 3:157–161; Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, ed. al-Darawish, 2:273–281 (chap. 27); Fenton, "The Ritual Visualization"; Coulon, *La Magie en terre d'islam*, 117, 151–153, 238–256, 287–289.

al-Majrīṭī, who described the calling down of *rūḥāniyya*, spirits, in some detail. He was rather less condemnatory of such techniques than some later Jewish and Muslim thinkers who followed him on the one hand, and his text, at least in part, seems to have been the foundation for the development of calling *rūḥāniyya* within mystical contexts.¹⁴⁵

The ritual of prostrating oneself on the graves of the dead was common to certain Sufis and, eventually, Lurianic kabbalists in sixteenth and seventeenth century Palestine.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, as Paul Fenton has demonstrated, a number of Sufi thinkers combined beliefs about drawing down angelic or astral *rūḥāniyya*, with the expectation that the *rūḥāniyya* of prophets or saints could assist the living and developed rituals to be conducted at the gravesites of the holy dead in order to facilitate the bonding between the living mystic and the prophets and saints of former times, thus accelerating the living mystic's spiritual progress.¹⁴⁷ Given many Jews' fascination with Sufis in Egypt and surrounding regions from the Nagid Abraham b. Maimon (1186–1237) into the late fourteenth century at least, borrowing between Jewish and Muslim (at least some Jews' and Muslims') views of the holy dead is not surprising.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, scholars have long posited close connections between Jewish and Muslim mystical thought in medieval Iberia, identifying the Sufi, Ibn al-'Arabī, mentioned earlier, as one potentially significant source for Jewish knowledge of and borrowing from Sufi thought in the region, although clear evidence for a direct connection has often eluded them.¹⁴⁹ In his *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, Ibn al-'Arabī presents *rūḥāniyya* as being that of a deceased *walī*, i.e. friend of God/Sufi, who would come to assist the aspiring (living) mystic or disciple.¹⁵⁰ This idea is very similar to the one which eventually develops in Lurianic kabbalah; however, there is no clear indication that visiting the grave of the *walī* in question was necessary for the process. By contrast, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya describes the process in some detail even while adamantly opposing it:

As for the associationist pilgrimage (*al-ziyārah al-shirkiyyah*), its origin comes from the worship of idols.

They said: the great dead, whose spirit (*rūḥ*) has nearness, dwelling (or: "status," "distinction") and merit before God the exalted, continues to receive kindnesses from God the exalted, and blessings flow upon his soul. If the visitor connected (*'allaqa*) his (own) spirit to it (the spirit of the great dead) and drew near to it, a share of the kindnesses flow ed from the spirit of the visited to the spirit of the pilgrim (visitor) as a mediation for it (the spirit of the visitor) like rays of light are reflected from a clear mirror and water onto a facing surface.

145 (Pseudo-) al-Majrīṭī, *Picatrix*, 85, 90–91, 182; Fenton, "The Ritual Visualization"; *El*, "*Rūḥāniyya*."

146 Fenton, "Influences soufies"; Fenton, "La 'hitbodedut'" Fenton, "Hashpa'ot Zufiot."

147 Fenton, "The Ritual Visualization."

148 Russ-Fishbane, *Judaism, Sufism, and Pietests*; Goitein, "A Jewish Addict to Sufism."

149 Krinis, *God's Chosen People*; Hames, "A Seal within a Seal"; McGaha, "The 'Sefer ha-Bahir' and Andalusian Sufism"; Kramer, "The Andalusian Mystic," Kiener, "Ibn 'Arabī and the Qabbalah."

150 Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, 4:296–98, chap. 268; Fenton, "The Ritual Visualization."

They said: the perfection of the pilgrimage (*al-ziyārah*) is that the pilgrim applies (*yatawajjah*) with his spirit and heart to the dead and exerts his ardour upon him (the dead one) and turns all of his purpose and attention toward him (the dead one) so that he gives his concentration to nothing else. The greater the joining of his (the pilgrim's) ardour and heart was [focussed] on him (the deceased), the more likely he was to derive benefit from him.

Ibn Sīna, al-Farābī, and others besides these two mentioned this pilgrimage for this goal and the star-worshippers have spoken about it. If the rational soul connected (*ta'allaqat*) with the supernal spirits (*al-arwāḥ al-'ulwiyya*), light emanating from them flowed upon it (the rational soul).

On account of this mystery the stars were worshipped, sanctuaries (*hayākil*) were dedicated to them, prayers were addressed to them, and corporeal idols were dedicated to them.

This is exactly what was enjoined for those who venerate tombs, to dedicate festivals to them, draping them with covers, kindling lamps upon them and building mosques over them...

And this is what these associationists mean by pilgrimage to graves: it is the intercession through which they believe their god helps them, and intercedes for them to God the exalted. They say: for the worshipper, if his spirit was bound to the spirit of an individual favoured by God the exalted, and his ardour turned toward him and his heart devoted to him/it, the connection between them begins to increase [and] with it a part of what comes to him (the individual favoured by God) from God the exalted he (the worshipper) receives.¹⁵¹

On the one hand, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's critique parallels that of figures such as Maimonides and Ibn Khaldūn or even the authors of the *Zohar*, who associated the practices of calling down spirits or sleeping in graveyards in order to receive instructions from

151 أما الزيارة الشريكة: فأصلها مأخوذ عن عُباد الأصنام

قالوا: الميت المعظم، الذي لروحه قربٌ ومنزلةٌ ومزيةٌ عند الله تعالى، لا يزال تأتيه الألطاف من الله تعالى، وتفيض على روحه الخيرات، فإذا علّق الزائر روحه به، وأدناها منه، فاض من روح المزمور على روح الزائر من تلك الألطاف بواسطتها، كما ينعكس الشعاع من المرأة الصافية والماء ونحوه على الجسم المقابل به.

قالوا: فتمام الزيارة أن يتوجه الزائر بروحه وقلبه إلى الميت، ويعكف بهيمته عليه، ويوجه قصده كله وإقباله عليه، بحيث لا يبقى فيه التفات إلى غيره. وكلما كان جمع الهمة والقلب عليه أعظم، كان أقرب إلى انتفاعه به.

وقد ذكر هذه الزيارة على هذا الوجه ابن سينا والغرابي وغيرهما، وصرح به عباد الكواكب في عبادتها، وقالوا: إذا تعلقت النفس الناطقة بالارواح العلوية فاض عليها منها النور.

وبهذا السر عبدت الكواكب، واتخذت لها الهياكل، وصنفت لها الدعوات واتخذت الأصنام المجسدة لها.

وهذا بعينه هو الذي أوجب لعباد القبور اتخاذها أعياداً، وتعليق الستور عليها، وإيقاد السرج عليها، ومناء المساجد عليها...

وهذا الذي ذكره هؤلاء المشركون في زيارة القبور: هو الشفاعة التي ظنوا أن ألهمتهم تتفعم بها، وتشفع لهم عند الله تعالى، قالوا: فإن العبد إذا تعلقت روحه بروح الوجه المقرب عند الله، وتوجه بهيمته إليه، وعكف بقلبه عليه، صار بينه وبينه اتصال بفيض به عليه؛ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ighāthat al-lahfān*, 221–222. Compare with Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ighāthat al-lahfān* 527; Fenton "The Ritual Visualization"; Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*, 189–90. My thanks to Ms. Rania Aḥmed for working through this passage with me. All errors are my own.

the dead, with paganism. Yet in this passage visiting graves is clearly connected to pilgrimage/*ziyāra* and part of a profound spiritual encounter designed to bind the spirits of the holy dead with the living who prayed at the gravesites and showed reverence to the occupant(s) of the tomb. The attribution of these practices to star-worshippers, polytheists, and certain Muslim philosophical thinkers, echoes earlier traditions, such as that of (Pseudo) al-Majrīṭī, however, it is also a polemical strategy to discredit fellow Muslims who indulged in such behaviours, much like the accusations of Sahl b. Maṣṣliḥ or the writers of the *Zohar*, discussed earlier.¹⁵² However, the overall impression from both Muslim and Jewish sources portraying such rituals favourably, neutrally, or negatively, is that they were common Jews and Muslims in the Middle East, and, probably Iberia.

By the sixteenth century in Lurianic kabbalah, transmigration, or “reincarnation,” of souls became a central part not only of these kabbalists understanding of the world of the dead, but of their own journey to spiritual perfection. They sought the ability to induce “benevolent possession” (*yihud*) by the righteous dead, and to communicate with the dead by prostrating themselves on the graves of the righteous. With the need on the part of some souls to wander the earth and possess animals or people (*‘ibbur*), communication with the dead took on new meaning, both as a danger but also as a mode of communication with the spiritual world.¹⁵³ The “benevolent possession” resembles the rituals and expectations described and condemned by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya already in the fourteenth century.

Such similarities between motivations and practices, and the protective, guiding relationship assigned to the saintly deceased in relation to the living, and finally, the intersections between forms of possession, communication with the dead, and transmigration of souls attributed to Jewish and Muslim visitors to the graves of the holy dead during the Middle Ages and early modern period, would have provided ground for common understanding and rituals at least between Jews and Muslims throughout the Mediterranean as regards the holy dead. The attitudes of Jews coming from Western Europe were close enough to their Mizraḥī counterparts and European Jewish communities in the Middle East, Byzantium and Western Europe were in sufficient degrees of contact that much of what European Jews encountered in the Middle East would have accorded with their own world view. Christians of various denominations may not have accepted prostration on graves for the sake of possession/bonding with a saint, or in the case of Catholics from the Latin West, believed souls to be bound and punished or rewarded in the grave. Nevertheless, the expectation that saints would intervene for the sake of the living, and that one gained benefit by contact with their relics and grave sites would have provided enough common ground that certain behaviours toward the dead overlapped, and it would have provided a sense of familiarity among all participants.

152 Coulon, *La Magie en terre d’islam*, 85–89, 242–50.

153 Chajes, *Between Two Worlds*; Chajes, “City of the Dead”; Chajes, “Jewish Exorcism” Faierstein, “*Maggidim*, Spirits, and Women”; Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 259–358; Fine, “Benevolent Spirit Possession”; Fine, “Pietistic Customs in Safed”; Fenton, “Influences soufies,” Fenton, “La ‘hitbodedut’” Giller, “Recovering the Sanctity of the Galilee”; Kallus, “Pneumatic Mystical Possession”; Lenowitz, “A Spirit Possession Tale,” Wolfson, “Weeping, Death, and Spiritual Ascent.”

Conclusions

Taken together, the power of the dead to hear and intercede, the fragrance of the holy dead, and the presence of sacred trees and supernatural light all affirmed vitality of the special dead; they had powers that the living did not, they had overcome the bodily processes of death, fruit-bearing trees marked their graves as sites of fertility and growth, and finally, they were illumined by heavenly, supernatural light indicating their connection with the divine world. The holy dead were themselves liminal beings because they remained profoundly and continually connected with earthly life while simultaneously embodying proof of certain humans' ability to overcome the life of the body in favour of heavenly sanction. As a result, they served as an ideal bridge between living humans and the divine world.

The religious and historical development of each one of the topics touched upon in this chapter in any single religious tradition could occupy a chapter in its own right, or potentially fill a monograph. Indeed, in some instances, these topics, in specific geographical and chronological contexts, have become the focus of a book-length, scholarly study.¹⁵⁴ The point of this chapter, therefore, is not to provide a comprehensive history of these practices or attitudes within a given tradition or branch of a tradition, let alone within all Roman religions and, later, within medieval Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in all of their particular permutations. Rather, I seek to outline and underscore certain symbols, like light or smell, or beliefs, such as concerns about the needs and capabilities of the dead, that had enough commonalities within the various religious communities, to make the rituals and beliefs of other communities both attractive and comprehensible. Sometimes, the similarities were relatively superficial, as in the comparison between the Western Christian cult of the dead, and that in Judaism or Islam. At others, they seem virtually indistinguishable. For example, foul or pleasant scent, or a corpse's failure to rot seem to have been strongly analogous in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and to have remained so throughout the period examined in this study. Yet even in the case of superficial similarities, they were close enough to create common ground between communities that in turn facilitated shared practice. Light, smell, the meaning of trees, the needs of the dead, and the expectation on the part of the living that the dead could somehow hear and help the living were the connecting knots in a web of inter-related, but not identical meanings that encouraged rapprochement across the boundaries of religious communities, even, as we shall see, to the point of blurring or transforming allegiances. As such they were also instances of "difficult difference" and thus sometimes the focus of sharp criticism on the part of religious leaders who sought to delineate clearly between religious identities. In other instances, especially when these symbols were outside the context of interreligious encounter, they remained unproblematic. In either case, they are central to the understanding of religious symbolism and practice in the late antique and medieval Mediterranean broadly speaking, and especially when examining shared saint cults and festivals.

154 For example, Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*.