

International Geographical Union Pre-Conference Symposium

**Transforming and Managing Destinations
Tourism and Leisure in a Time of Global
Change and Risks?**

22-25 August 2012 in Trier (Germany)

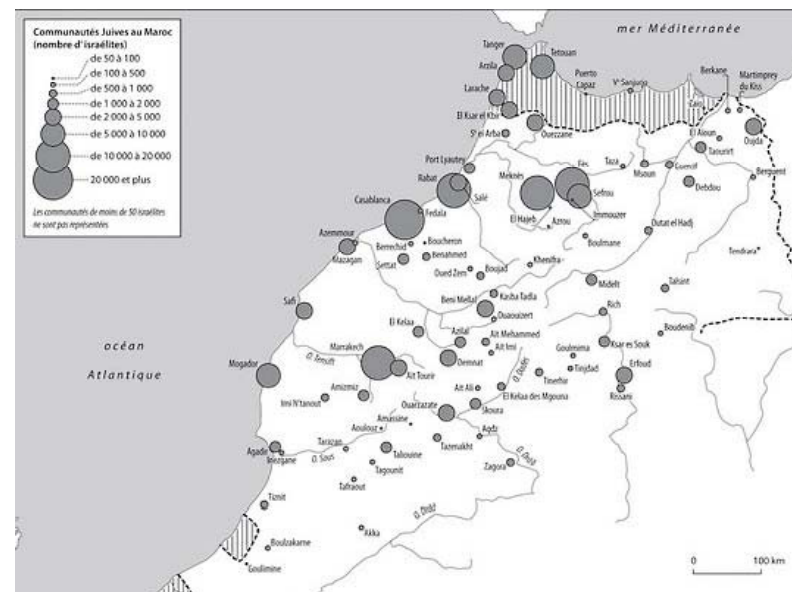
Jewish Hilulas and Pilgrimages : Essay about a less known form of religious tourism in Morocco.

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On a travel between Nurnberg and Casablanca I helped a man to carry his three or four heavy suitcases to the check point in the Casablanca airport. It happened that this man was my seat neighbor on the plane. My new friend Youssif is a Jew of Moroccan descent who lives in Paris and speaks Berber fluently. He told me he has just finished a two weeks **Hilula** in southern Morocco, and that is why he had a lot of suitcases full of gifts that he purchased from Agadir, Marrakech and Rabat. He explained that they were about 4000 Jews who participated in the same festival in a sanctuary. My friend Youssif also told me about the organization of these kind of events all over the Moroccan territory and about the expenses of pilgrims. Later I had the idea of doing research on the phenomenon of religious tourism that I did not know before: it is a research project that has bothered me since my trip, and that's why I decided to give this presentation and hopefully find interested partners to pursue a much deeper research.

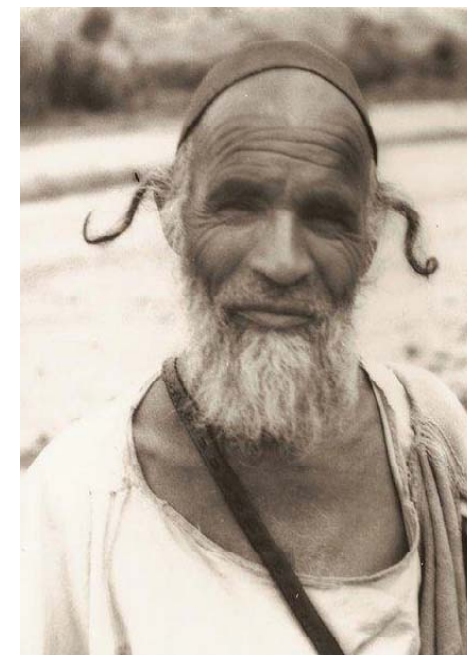
Moroccan Judaism : legends and history

- The Muslim West Judaism has its roots in the distant past. Historically, Jews are the first non Berber people who came to the Maghreb, and stayed until nowadays.
- The arrival date of Jews in Morocco varies from one reference to another, but there is a general agreement that the origins of Moroccan Judaism date back to over 2500 years. Leaving Jerusalem to escape from the Babylonian conquest, Jews scattered in communities throughout the Moroccan territory. The Arab conquest of Morocco, which began in the seventh century, and the conversion to Islam dispersed the Jewish presence among the Berber tribes rather than eradicating it. That is why mountains and oases in the desert are inhabited by numerous tribes of Jewish Berbers.



- These Jewish communities have lived among the Berbers since ancient times and are the subject of many legends. The Berbers had converted to Judaism several centuries before the arrival of Islam. After the Islamization of Morocco, Jews were forced to become protected **(dhimi)** and isolated themselves in neighborhoods called the **Mellah** until the mass emigrations to Israel and other Western countries.





- Although each group has kept distinct cultural traits and very strict religious limits, the socio-economic links between the two communities in the Berber regions were very close. Jews were integrated into the culture (Imazighen) of the rural Berbers, they shared the same customs, clothing, some food, speak the Berber (the experts call it the Judeo-Berber) and venerate the saints (the Muslims venerate some holy Jews and Jews pay homage to some Muslim saint) by participating in the same festivals.

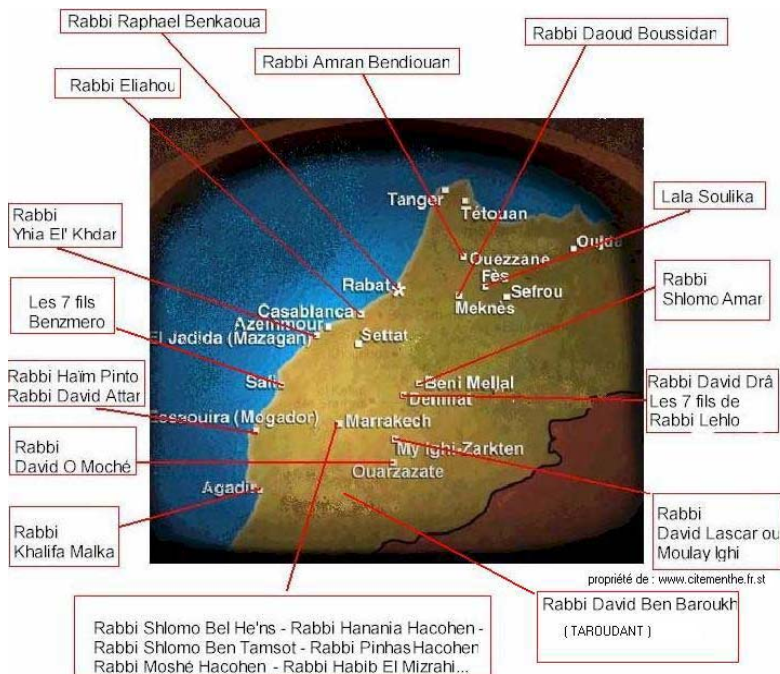
- The Jews left behind them a diverse cultural heritage: the silver jewelry in Tiznit owes its origins to the Jews for example.
- The holy tombs and magnificent synagogues represent cultural and religious elements of the significant history of Moroccan Judaism.
- The Moroccan Jewish Diaspora all over the world has never forgotten its native country where they are considered and still consider themselves full citizens.
- They have never cut their links to the country. Some come by thousands every year to celebrate **Hilulas** (veneration of Jewish saints) in all regions of Morocco. Others come by families or individually to visit a cemetery where a relative is buried.

What is the hilula?



- In **tzadikim** Jews varied powers are attributed:
- There is a day in the year, exactly the 33rd of Omer corresponding to the 13th of May of each year, when it is customary for Jews from Morocco to go and bow to the tombs of saints.
- Since the number of the holy graves exceeds **750**, each pilgrim has the habit (because of his belief in a specific rabbi's miracles) to go pray at the tomb of the saint of his choice, which is sometimes far away.
- These kind of festivals, called **Hilula**, are also known as **Lag Ba omer**:
- Its main purpose is to commemorate the anniversary of the famous Tanna Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohi, author of the Zohar (book of splendor)

Different holy tombs



- The holy sepulcher is the focal point and the center toward which not only all the lights are directed but also all consumers of the cult of saints. It is perpetuated thanks to visits and offerings.
- The number of sepulchers in Morocco (**around 750**) makes it that each village has its own and this creates a protected territorial continuity in which Jews can feel safe.
- In Morocco all the saints are celebrated
- From the testimonies I have collected on the ceremonial aspect of the cult, I was impressed by the considerable amount of resources invested in the pilgrimage: organization, preparing food, travel, shelter, building or renting a room, slaughter, lighting of the candles ...



Pilgrims to tourists?

Overall context of the pilgrimage-tourism

- Contemporary religious tourism can be characterized as follows: - part of the civilization of leisure, the pilgrim is primarily a tourist which includes all the expenses-dependent on market economy, it is a product like any other - religious tourism generates perverse effects (artificiality, triviality ...)
- Migrations of pilgrims, without considering the professional side, are a form of tourist travel. Therefore they are also the subject of research for the geography of tourism, especially in regard to forms and spatial aspects of pilgrimages.

Coming back to Morocco for tourism and pilgrimage

- Once a year, the family goes on a pilgrimage, often on horseback or by donkey or mule, access to certain shrines in the Atlas is very difficult and walking is sometimes necessary.
- It was only after the forties of the twentieth century, when the Jews of Morocco took the initiative to build roads allowing access to sanctuaries; therefore enjoying the comfort of "organized trips" in the car.
- Once inside the shrine, pilgrims began by organizing themselves in places where they will stay. The privileged are installed in private rooms that they had built for this purpose; the wealthier pilgrims rent rooms, but the majority of followers build heterogeneous tents and shelters. Designated officials regulate traffic and maintain the necessary order for the comfort of the pilgrim. Others take care of public services and resupply
- The Muslim peasants of the region are also waiting in impatience for this period of [Hilula](#). This is a good opportunity for them to extend their for profit activities: they rent animals for travel or transport and sell food or animals for ritual slaughter.

- **Religious and tourist motivations**

- In the book of the museum of Fez one can read these motivations
- "Place of life renewed, witness of a life of an entire community. A culture that continues to perpetuate itself in Paris, Israel and elsewhere»
- "I finally after 27 years come and pray at the grave of my grandfather and my father"
- "A very nice trip in childhood" " a pilgrimage to the sources of my family "

The Socio-political contexts of the phenomenon

- The Jewish religious tourism began to take concrete dimensions since the eighties. The Jewish community still living in the country or living elsewhere has made economic and politic efforts to highlight Jewish heritage in the country.
- To do this several organizations have set up such as: World Gathering of the Moroccan Judaism; Permanence of Moroccan Judaism; Israeli Association for the Preservation, Broadcasting of Moroccan Judaism; Moroccan Jewish Heritage Foundation
- Rehabilitation of synagogues and cemeteries,
- One important achievement of this community is the creation of the museums of Moroccan Judaism, including that of Casablanca and Fez that have become major destinations not only for Jewish pilgrims but also lots of other tourists.





Meusum of Fes



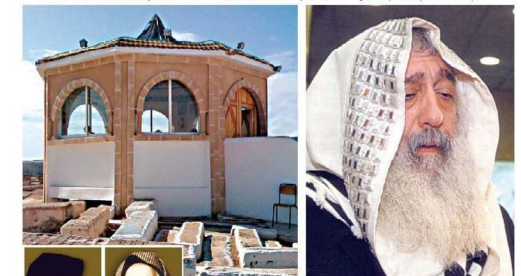
Official memorial of the Jewish presence in Morocco, the holy graves are used by officials of the state and the media as an attraction: it is a tourist capital for the regional and a capital for the Jewish Diaspora. But also a means to reconnect socially and politically with the Jewish community viewed as potential “ambassadors of Morocco abroad”



For Jews who still live in Morocco and for their families from abroad, it is a meeting and reunions chance for socialization and social glue. For Diaspora Jews who have no family in Morocco or for Israeli Jews, it is a place of memory. The pilgrimage has some other complex aspect, where many dynamics are popping up: The revered Jews saints have been invested these days in roles far from their traditional ones.

La Hevrat Pinto organise au départ de Lyon
la Hiloula du Tsadik
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4 jours All Inclusive dans un cadre prestigieux à Essaouira.
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Présence effective de Notre Maître **Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Chelita**, petit-fils du Saint et Vénéré Rabbi Haïm Pinto, qui bénira chacun individuellement sur le tombeau du Tsadik

« À la Hiloula d'un Tsadik, les Cieux s'ouvrent encore plus, alors venez et demandez tout ce dont vous avez besoin »

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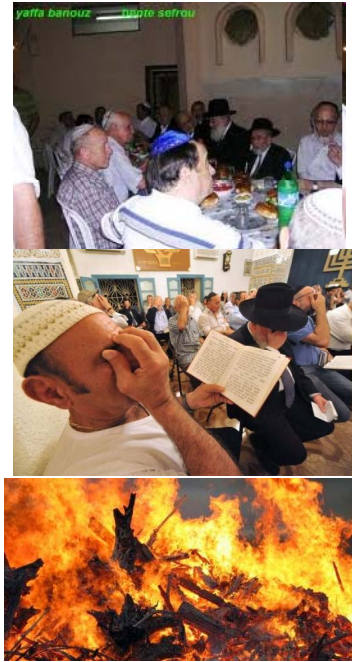
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- Despite the global economic crisis, diplomatic incidents, the threat of terrorism and especially the Arab-Israeli conflict, the attachment of the Jews to the kingdom seems very strong. The growing number of Jewish tourists visiting the country each year proves it. Focus on a special and even unique characteristic of this tourism in Morocco.

Characteristics of the Jewish pilgrimage-tourism in Morocco

- From all over Morocco and around the world, many Moroccan Jews arrive by car and by bus. The marginal phenomenon in the beginning has become more pronounced over time: Bruce Maddy-Weutzman stresses that since the Oslo Accords, **around 140,000 of which 90,000** Israeli tourists visit Morocco each year.
- During **hilulot**, airplanes are full of Jews from all over the world, and the buses travel from north to south Morocco in journeys that combine religion and tourism.
- Among those tourists, there are:

- The first category is composed of the Jews who remained in Morocco.
- A second quite similar to the first, made up of Jews who live abroad but has important family connections in Morocco.
- A third very different that has no "living" connections in Morocco (this is the case for many Israeli).

The hagiographic and touristic practices are different according to those three categories

- Those still living in Morocco and those abroad with family connections in the country, see the pilgrimage as a way to "strengthen the social connections", "return to worship at the graves of our saints"
- Israelis of Moroccan origin travel long distances not only to seek the help of the saint in personal matters, but are also driven by collective and political motivations (peace and conflict resolution in the Middle East) (political uses of religion). "reconnect with their roots."
- Moroccan **jews** from Canada, U.S., France or Israel does not usually spend the night in the sepulcher: they leave the same evening with buses that brought them to continue their journey to the other localities considered "places of Jewish memory in Morocco" according to Andrew Levy each of the tourists / pilgrims visit at least ten graves of **Tzadakim**.

(Muslims peasants from the surrounding mountains and villages offer their farm products: salted butter, milk, eggs, chickens, fruits and vegetables. Others come to sell their sheep, cows, and goat).

This is a small source of income that could turn into a major touristic and commercial enterprise

- It must be emphasized that the development of Jewish tourism in Morocco led many travel agencies, tour guides and other tourism businesses to become specialists in this field. The same for some artisans who specialized in the production of handicrafts for Jewish tourists. On these products, the Hebrew or the Star of David and other features of the heritage of Judaism are clearly visible with, of course, the artistic touch of Moroccan artisans. The restaurant industry is also involved. Indeed, many restaurants everywhere in Morocco offer an exclusive Jewish Moroccan cuisine. The city of Casablanca, alone, has over 40 restaurants specializing in Moroccan Jewish cuisine. Caterers, too, are part of. Thus, in Casablanca, two large companies are known for their expertise in the organization of parties and weddings of Jews.