

Ouachita Baptist University

Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

Honors Theses

Carl Goodson Honors Program

2005

Islam "Saint-ified": A Description of Islamic Saint-Worship Practiced by Middle Atlas Berbers

Alaina Cates

Ouachita Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [African History Commons](#), [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), and the [Sociology of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cates, Alaina, "Islam "Saint-ified": A Description of Islamic Saint-Worship Practiced by Middle Atlas Berbers" (2005). *Honors Theses*. 34.

https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses/34

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Carl Goodson Honors Program at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact mortensona@obu.edu.

cc 601
2005 6359 i

SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

**Islam “Saint-ified”: A Description of Islamic Saint-Worship
Practiced by Middle Atlas Berbers.**

written by

Alaina Cates

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for completion of the
Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

Susan Zlomke, thesis director

Trey Berry, second reader

Barbara Pemberton, third reader

George Keck, honors program director

April 19, 2005

Man has ever invaded, pushing aside previous owners to claim possession. Thus history tells us: of nations conquered, peoples displaced, and foreigners that become inhabitants, who will in turn be conquered, displaced, and replaced. In this telling of history, however, a position exists for those whose story knows no previous inhabitants. These people are called indigenous. The shore of North Africa is a vast land that has known countless invasions and times of foreign rule. It has also known the continuation of a single people group, indigenous to its soil for as long as history can recall. These people are known as the Berbers.

How the Berbers of North Africa acquired the agnomen that serves them today is a disputed segment of their history. Some regard the name as derivative from the Roman term "*Barbare*" meaning barbarian. Others, like Ibn Khaldun, the Arab historian, record the name Berber as coming from an Arab. The Berber language is "highly distinct from any other language spoken of in the Mediterranean," and Khaldun relates the tale of Ifriqish, an Arab conqueror, who calls the Berber tongue "barbara" when he first encounters it.¹ Title, however, is of little consequence to a people who have endured many names under many rulers. Such is the case of the Berbers who have been known as Libyans or Garamantes to the Egyptians, Numidians to the Carthaginians, and finally Berbers in both Roman and Arab tongues, and to the world after them.²

A Berber then is a member of an indigenous people group in North Africa. While such a statement is true, it is also unsatisfactory. Having persevered through numerous outside invasions, Berbers can not be identified as an "ethnically homogenous race."³ Intermarriage, adoption of cultural preferences, in regards to physical features, and many other influences from outside nations have marred the purity of distinctly Berber physical features, if any even existed. Archeologists have depicted Berbers as "white, most frequently dark-eyed, with a liberal

¹ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. *The Berbers*. Blackwell Publishing; Oxford: 1997. p 4.

² Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 22 – 25.

³ Brace, Richard M. *Morocco. Algeria. Tunisia*. Prentice-Hall, Inc. New Jersey: 1964. p 8.

sprinkling of blue-eyed and green-eyed types who usually have blondish or reddish hair.”⁴ If the flexibility in that description is not evidence enough against a homogenous ethnicity, the intermarriage between Berbers and dark, swarthy Arabs for over 1300 years frustrates all further attempts for a definitive Berber appearance. Furthermore, the commonality of this North African populace is found in their inhabitation, not necessarily in their unity of either physical feature, or governmental construction. The Berber people never developed an organized Berber kingdom; rather they accepted the government of the current conquering people.⁵ Structured in nomadic tribal groups, the people of North Africa tended to form intimate groups and to guard the integrity of those groups zealously. Thus physical features found among tribes who roamed the Sahara desert could easily be unknown to groups settled along the Mediterranean coast. What then can provide a better understanding of who is a Berber? Scholars today define a Berber as an indigenous occupant of North Africa who speaks the Berber language.⁶ Of utmost importance is the Berber tongue which has survived the test of time, foreign rule, and obscurity.

Morocco is a country with a uniquely Berber heritage. During the reign of the Roman Empire, Berber client kings ruled the land of Mauritania (Morocco). One such king of Mauritania was Juba II, son of “Juba I who had been brought up in Rome by Augustus and married off to Cleopatra Selene, daughter of Cleopatra and Mark Anthony.”⁷ The Berbers accepted the Roman form of government, and ruled according to their system. In the same way, Berber leaders rose to power from within the Arab system. By 681 AD the final Arab conquest of Morocco was at hand, only one major uprising later challenged Arab rule which solidified in 800 AD.⁸ The legendary cry of Uqba ibn Nafi’ as he rode into the Atlantic marked the entrance of a transforming government and religion: “Oh Allah! If the sea had not prevented me, I would have coursed on

⁴ Brace, Richard M. p 8.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Nickerson, Jane Soames. *A Short History of North Africa from PreRoman Times to the Present*. Biblio and Tannen; New York: 1961. p 13.

⁷ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 43.

⁸ Eickelman, Dale F. *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center*. University of Texas Press; Austin, Texas, 1976. p 3.

forever like Alexander the Great, upholding your faith and fighting all who disbelieved.”⁹

Embracing this Arab government, the Berbers continued in their previous pattern of accepting but not assimilating. All of the major dynasties which ruled Morocco after the Arab conquest developed under Berber leadership. These Berber kingdoms claimed Arab descent, and the majority of them used Islam as a means to legitimize their rule.¹⁰

Mountains are normally understood to be the strongholds of Berbers across North Africa. As the Arab invaders swept through Morocco, the indigenous people took refuge in the wild heights of the mountainous regions. The remoteness of these mountain strongholds maintained the Berber peoples in the preservation of language and culture. The areas where Berbers reside today "are best described as mountainous islands in a vast sea of Arabic" language and culture.¹¹ Although surrounded by the Arab invaders, residence in the mountains created a barrier between the Arab and the Berber, and, as shall be shown, a barrier between Berber and Berber. Arab subjugation of the Berbers faced an enormous difficulty in the arena of geography. Battles might be staged, and even won in the mountains, but no consistent form of government could be forced upon the nomadic mountain dwellers.¹² The Berbers could never be completely assimilated, as a captain of Rome noted years before the Arabs invaded, "these people can be conquered but not subjugated."¹³

The term Berber does not sufficiently denote a unified people, but rather depicts a group of people who reside in a general area and speak a similar language. Within the kingdom of Morocco, a distinction can be made between Arab and Berber Moroccans. Those who today fall under the Berber heading can also be separated into various subsets of Berbers. All Berbers are similar in their distinction from Arabs, yet a close look at the Berber population of Morocco

⁹ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 82.

¹⁰ Eickelman, Dale F. Ch 1.

¹¹ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 1.

¹² Brace, Richard M. p 8.

¹³ Cohen, Mark I and Hahn, Lorna. *Morocco: Old Land, New Nation*. Frederick A Prager; New York: 1966. p 7.

reveals a minority group with distinctions of its own. These subsets are distinguishable through geographical locations, language differences, and unique religious practices.

Three mountain ranges surround Morocco, creating borders with Algeria, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Sahara Desert. As Berber people fled the Arab invasion they were separated from one another by these natural, geographical boundaries. To the north lies the Riff Mountain Range, home of the northern Berbers who take the name of their location - Riffians. Stretching across central Morocco, parallel to the Algerian border, rise the mountains of the Central, or Middle Atlas. In this region resides the Berbers known by the name of their Berber dialect, Tamazight. The final mountain range meets Morocco on its northern edge and the Sahara Desert on its southern, and is known as the High, Anti - Atlas or Suss Valley. Shallul or Chleuh Berbers reside in this mountain range.¹⁴ In this manner are the Berbers of Morocco geographically divided, the very regions which offered them protection also serving to distinguish them from one another.

The Berber language is an important medium through which the Berbers have been unified. Today's definition of one who is a Berber leans heavily on one's ability to speak the Berber language. The Berber language, nevertheless, contains a variety of dialects, rather than one universal tongue. Berbers who occupy remote regions have retained the most pure form of their language.¹⁵ Those Berber speakers who interact with other languages on a regular basis speak a dialect influenced by these other tongues. Such is the case in Morocco, and such a case differentiates the three main groups of Berbers. Before the differences between the dialects are aired, it needs to be noted that these differences, although observable, are not so great as to prohibit comprehension among the groups.

All Berbers of Morocco speak the Berber language, and can be understood by any other

¹⁴ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 3.

¹⁵ Gellner, Ernest. *Saints of the Atlas*. University of Chicago Press; Chicago: 1969, Ch 1.

Berber speaker.¹⁶ This comprehension is hard to come by in certain situations, yet it remains achievable. The largest concentration of Berber speakers is found in the Middle or Central Atlas Mountains. Due to this, the most common name given to the Berber tongue is the same name by which the Middle Atlas dialect is known: Tamazight. With these two similarities in mind, let us now inquire as to the distinction found among the three Berber subsets. In the Riff Mountains of Northern Morocco, the dialect spoken is called Dhamazighth. Tamazight has already been attributed to the Middle Atlas Berbers, and those who live in the Suss speak a dialect termed, Tashilit. This distinction in speech commands as formidable a barrier as the geographic mountain barrier, and can be partially attributed to that barrier. While a Tashilit speaker can communicate with a Tamazight speaker, each is instantly aware of the difference between them, a distinction in language.

A distinction in physical location and in a spoken dialect is easily discernable. Less obvious matters of distinction are religious customs practiced among the Moroccan Berbers. Berber kingdoms and tribal groups were eager to demonstrate their legitimacy as Muslims during the early years of Arab occupation. The individuals who rose to power did so by means of religious fervor, calling the followers of Allah to spiritual reform. Holy warriors became known as “men of the *ribat*” – *ribat* being the Arabic term for a wall or fortification used in a holy war – a title which evolved into *muribat*.¹⁷ Berber holy men took this Arabic name, along with the Berber term *agurram*, to signify their militant zeal for the worship of Allah. Transliterated into French as *marabout*, these terms denote a spiritual guide: a holy man or saint.¹⁸ Eventually the holy men of the Berbers would shift away from the war-like *muribat* agnomen, preferring the more pacific *marabout* or *agurram* title. Distinctions between individual *marabout* and the *baraka* (blessing) that granted them power are as numerous as the sands of the Sahara.¹⁹ Here,

¹⁶ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 4.

¹⁷ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 142.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ See vocabulary page in the index for further definition of “*baraka*.”

however, our concern lies in the general distinctions of *marabout* according to their particular Moroccan Berber group.²⁰

A holy man's strength, in most cases, was limited to the territories nearest them. A powerful holy man in the Anti-Atlas may develop immense prestige and claim political leadership over the territories nearest them, yet this power would not automatically be recognized in the far north among the Riff Mountains.²¹ The first distinction in religious practices then, is that religious leaders were recognized only locally. During their lifetime, a *marabout* with strong *baraka* could stay in one place and people would sustain him (or her – holy women were rare, but not unknown) with gifts brought in order to receive a blessing. After the death of a powerful holy man a tomb would be raised to maintain his honor, and grant people a place to receive his *baraka*, even after his death.²² As this was the most common lifestyle for a *marabout* in Morocco, the distinction between Moroccan Berbers is obvious. A *marabout* whose residence was in the Middle Atlas might never be heard of in the Anti-Atlas, thus his teachings and practice of Islam, would also be different than those taught by the *marabout* in the Anti-Atlas.

Hence, a second distinction develops. Religious doctrines can often be shaped by the circumstances of people. The situations of Berber people who resided in different regions, plagued with different needs, required religious doctrines specific to those needs. Mediation between nomadic and sedentary tribes was a big part of the holy man's responsibility in the Middle and Anti-Atlas, while those tribes of the Riff Mountains did not require mediation. Although religious practices may have been manifested differently, every Berber holy man

²⁰ The term *marabout* (of which the plural is *marabouts* as well) is one often used in French ethnographic work regarding the Berbers, and is thus deemed most appropriate for use in this paper. Although *marabout* has been translated into English as "saint," holy man is a rendition the author prefers. *Marabout* and holy man will be used interchangeably throughout the paper.

See the vocabulary page in the index for more information on the terms "*marabout*" and "*igurramen*."

²¹ Gellner, Ernest. Ch 1.

²² Hart, David Montgomery. *The Aith Waryaghar of the Moroccan Rif, An Ethnography and History*. Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc., University of Arizona Press; Arizona: 1976. p 188.

ultimately followed Islam, for it was Islam that granted them legitimacy.²³ Thus, the festivals and holidays of Islam are an important part of the religious practices across Berber population. These celebrations are also a point of distinction, for the manner in which they are held is relevant to the teachings of the *marabout*, which can vary from region to region, and to the climate or custom particular to that region. Even in similarities, the religious practices of Moroccan Berbers distinguish them from one another.

Approximately forty percent of the population in Morocco is Berber speakers. The majority, of these Berber speakers, resides in the Middle Atlas Mountains, and communicates by use of the dialect which also provides their name: Tamazight. Geography, Language, and Religious Practices have already shown the distinctions between Berber speakers in Morocco. A unique saint-worship can also be distinguished by considering religious practices specific to the Tamazight Berbers.

Worship in the Middle Atlas, similar to that in the High Atlas and Riff Mountains, consists of *marabout*, and the *zawiyas* that honor them.²⁴ Unique to the Tamazight Berbers is the emergence and practice of specific holy men, along with the reverence given these holy men by Berbers. The distinction of religious practices has already been determined; the individual practices of Tamazight Berbers are now the focus. What influences and circumstances created unique Tamazight practices? Who are these *marabout*, and how did they obtain power in the Middle Atlas? How did the people respond to *marabout*, and how has that response varied since its inception? All of these queries, among others, are the object of our discussion.

A legend is told in the Middle Atlas that names the Berbers descendants of the third son of Noah. After the flood, this son traveled far from his family to reside in North Africa, and from his seed sprung the people of that land - the Berbers.²⁵ Another legend concerns a visier of Ancient Egypt who quarreled with his Pharaoh. The visier left Egypt for North Africa, and to his

²³ Eickelman, Dale F. Ch 1.

²⁴ See the vocabulary page in the index for further definition of “*zawiya*.”

²⁵ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 83.

lineage the Berbers belong - granting them Arab descent. Authenticity of either tale proves irrelevant. Using tales to reinvent a heritage conducive to the prevailing custom or creed is extremely relevant. Before North Africa was conquered by the Vandals, during the time of Augustine of Hippo, the Berbers were subject to Roman rule. Displaying a Christian heritage proved advantageous. Byzantine rule, as well as the short-lived Vandal nation, in North Africa presented a deteriorating Church, weakening Christianity's hold on the Berbers. The Arabization of North Africa occurred before Islam arrived; bringing privileges of Arab descent with it. When Islam arrived in prestige, of both custom and creed, the Berber acceptance of this new religion was shown in the development of *marabout* and *igurramen*.²⁶ Prior to Islam, *marabout* did not exist, and without Islam, the role of a saint is not required in Berber government or religion.

Immediately prior to Arab rule, the religion claimed among the Berbers was Christianity. This religion had not been theirs by choice, but rather had been brought by previous invasions, that of Rome and Byzantium. As ties to these authorities weakened, so did ties to Christianity, allowing tribalism and spiritualism a strong foothold. The arrival of Islam in 681 AD, however, demanded religious conversion or persecution.²⁷ In Islamic tradition, Christians are considered "*dhimmi*" or "protected peoples" (along with Jews and Zoroastrians), and were allowed to practice their own religion without discrimination.²⁸ Thus, the Berbers would appear to be safe in their ties to Christianity. Berber tribalism and spiritualism, however, was prevalent enough that the Arabs considered them Pagan rather than Christian, demanding their conversion. Easily shedding one religion for the other, the Berbers maintained a degree of spiritualism later understood as a harbinger of mysticism and saint-worship. Berbers adopted the religion of their conquerors yet preserved a practice of spiritualism that would set them apart.

Saint-worship among the Tamazight legitimized their practice of Islam. Situated just

²⁶ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 142; see vocabulary page in the index for further definition of "*marabout*" and "*igurramen*".

²⁷ Eickelman – Ch. 1

²⁸ *A History of World Societies to 1715 – Fifth Edition, Volume 1*. Houghton Mifflin Company; New York: 2000. ; see vocabulary page in the index for further definition of "*dhimmi*".

beyond the foothills of the Middle Atlas, are the imperial cities of Fez and Meknes, ruled by followers of Islam who claimed *sharifian* status²⁹. The proximity of these cities played an important role in the Middle Atlas's development of saint-worship. Berbers of the Anti-Atlas did at times contend with the royal city of Marrakech, yet distance and dangerous territory kept the impact of kings upon *marabout*, and *marabout* upon kings, to a minimum. In the North, holy men of the Riff Mountains flourished without the direct opposition of an Islamic Monarch. Saint-worship of the Middle Atlas, however, grew in the shadow of imperial government.

Studies of the political relationship between Berbers and the Arab-Islamic governments of Morocco divide the land into two zones.³⁰ Berber people sought refuge from the Arab invasion in the mountains as the invaders situated themselves in the plains. The Islamic governments of Morocco ruled over areas called "*bled mahkzan*" - places of obedience to the government.³¹ The other realm in Morocco, usually inhabited by Berber tribes under the authority of the *marabout*, was called "*bled siba*" - or "land of dissidence."³² Berbers of the High Atlas and Rif Mountains were deep in the *bled siba*, whereas the Tamazight in the Middle Atlas straddled the *mahkzan-siba* line. A cycle of power linked *marabout* of the Middle Atlas to Sultan of the imperial cities, and Sultan to *marabout*. A Sultan's power could be enhanced or diminished according to support from Allah - determined in part by the *marabout*. Some tribes of the Middle Atlas, while withholding political allegiance from the Sultan, considered him their spiritual leader.³³ In these cases, a *marabout's* relationship with the Sultan increased his stature among his tribe. Arab rule in the plains did not often garner close relationships with the tribal governments in the mountains, yet the Islamic saints of the Tamazight and Sultans of the cities enjoyed mutually beneficial ties.

²⁹ Montagne, Robert. *The Berbers: Their Social and Political Organization*. Trans. David Seddon. Frank Cass; London: 1931. Ch. 5; see vocabulary page in the index for further definition of "*sharifian*".

³⁰ Particularly the studies of Robert Montagne.

³¹ Most of the governments established in this time period were actually Berber governments. However, great pains were taken to prove Arab descent, with Islam being the crowning argument for control.

³² Eickelmann, Dale F. Ch 1. See vocabulary page in the index for further definition of "*bled mahkzan*" and "*bled siba*"

³³ There is an interesting story told of a Berber tribe who defeated a Sultan, yet did not harm him, but honored him and sent him back to his city - because of his status as spiritual leader.

Who are these holy men, and how did they obtain power in the Middle Atlas? *Marabout*, were persons of intense spirituality and a relationship with Allah that resulted in *baraka*. *Baraka* can be loosely translated in English to mean "blessing," but the wealth of meaning behind *baraka* for a Tamazight speaker far exceeds that found in "blessing" for an English speaker. The evidence of a holy man's *baraka* expressed itself in a myriad of ways, but was most importantly noted as visual or physical expression of heavenly power in the earthly realm.³⁴ Another definition of *baraka* calls it a "mysterious wonder-working force."³⁵ *Baraka* of the Middle Atlas holy man manifested itself in miracles, second sight, fertile land, and protection. To have *baraka* was not the same as having training in and understanding of Islam - *baraka* was the supernatural exhibition of a holy man's relationship with Allah.³⁶ The closer a friend to Allah that the *marabout* was, the more impressive his *baraka* became. As long as the *baraka* of a *marabout* was heralded as powerful, the *marabout* himself was held in high regard - his advice considered and followed.

The advice of a holy man usually took the form of mediation. Intertribal warfare, clashes with the Imperial government, and a helpless dependence on the weather for survival required a mediator with great *baraka*. Both nomadic and sedentary tribes call the Middle Atlas home - sometimes exacting violent land disputes. In the nature of nomadic peoples, certain tribes of Tamazight Berbers left choice grazing lands for lengthy periods of time. These valleys and water sources, during the absence of nomads, became the possession of tribes who desired to remain stationary, growing crops and raising smaller herds of animals. Claims of earlier rights by the nomadic tribes clashed with the possession of sedentary tribes.³⁷ *Marabout* with the *baraka* necessary to settle disputes, mediated between tribes. *Marabout*, as highly respected friends of

³⁴ Gellner, Ernest. Ch 3.

³⁵ Eickelman, Dale F. Ch 6.

³⁶ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 226.

³⁷ Gellner, Ernest. Ch 6.

Allah, claimed neutrality in these disputes, and enforced a zone of neutrality around them.³⁸

Tribes in conflict could thus be brought together peacefully to hear the mediation of the holy man. Tribes on either side accepted the decision of the holy man, so long as he was supported by strong *baraka*.

Previously, this inquiry established the relationship between *marabout* and Sultan. The more powerful a *marabout*, the less intervention from the state occurred. This was helpful in protecting the Tamazight from sporadic attempts to fill the Sultan's coffers. As the imperial treasury decreased, "taxes raids" increased among the tribes just beyond the *bled mahkzan* line.³⁹ Having a *marabout* in good standing with the government either prevented raids completely, or decreased the requirements of the raid. Protection from human aggression, however, was not the only mediation type required. The elements were also frightful to the Berbers. Snow storms, dry rivers, forest fires, and many other natural disasters plagued the vast Middle Atlas mountain range. Holy men had the capacity to assert heavenly power in the earthly realm, a helpful ability in the midst of earthly upheaval. A holy man's *baraka* would enable him, on one hand, to find fertile valleys with stable water sources, and, on the other, to dry up a water source, issuing curses against the ground. Power over the elements gave the *marabout* the facility to protect and punish the tribes. The elements, the imperial government, and the conflict between tribes were all subject to mediation by *marabout*.

A holy man, however, could lose his high position with Allah, the Sultan, and the Berbers. Reputation stood as a bulwark of a *marabout*; while good standing remained, the *marabout* held power. In the same manner, should the holy man fall from his high regard, through deed or rumor, his *baraka* was no longer deemed effective. The *marabout* wielded only the power given to him by those upon whom that power was exacted. Ernest Gellner, philosopher and anthropologist who worked extensively with the Moroccan Berbers, calls this the "circular

³⁸ An enforced neutral zone paradoxically relates the immense spiritual power attributed to the *marabout*. Warlike tribes did not dare dishonor a *marabout* from fear of miraculous vengeance.

³⁹ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 156.

definition" of a holy man.⁴⁰ One must have certain characteristics to be considered a *marabout*, and one has these characteristics because one is a *marabout*.⁴¹ The same holds for the power of a holy man's *baraka*. To be effective, powerful *baraka* is required, and powerful *baraka* is attributed only after one has been proven effective.⁴² *Marabout* of the Tamazight were dependant upon the reputation of their *baraka*. If the Berbers understood a holy man's *baraka* to be powerful, then the holy man would be treated as one harnessing great power. The loss of *baraka* or the *baraka's* reputation ended the power granted the *marabout*.

How did the Tamazight people respond to *marabout*? Initially, the *marabout* evoked fear and awe. The use of the term *marabout* as a holy man who separated himself from society, continued to carry the connotation of religious fervor and power. The relationship between Berber and *marabout* is demonstrated as one of mutual benefit, a *quid pro quo* system. *Marabout* provided good weather, an acceptable treaty, or tax relief. In return the Berbers gave gifts to their holy men such as money, power, land, and power. The Middle Atlas Berbers responded to the holy men with fearful awe and material gifts.

The saintly role of the *marabout* was fulfilled in various fashions. It has already been determined that to be considered a *marabout*, one must have confirmed *baraka*, powers of mediation, and an association with the religious fervor inherent in the name. Ernest Gellner and Robert Montagne further develop the definition of *marabout* in their respective works, *Saints of the Atlas*, and *The Berbers: Their Social and Political Organization*. To gain holy man status, one must be the benevolent, and pacific, protector of Berber mountain republics. As this protector, skills of persuasion and maneuvering are required, along with the ability to "bring the curse of Allah upon the insubordinate."⁴³ Furthermore, the saint is expected to be "uncalculating

⁴⁰ Gellner, Ernest. Ch 3.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Montagne, Robert. p 11

generous," hospitable, rich and a respecter of tradition.⁴⁴ It is no wonder that the role of a holy man could be fulfilled in a variety of methodologies.

Three broad categories of saints can be distinguished in the Middle Atlas. The first type is found as a city's own, personal holy man. The renown of this holy man results in an invitation to dwell among a tribe, or in a city. The Berbers of the tribe or city are required to care for the holy man, and receive his *baraka* in return. Secondly, there exists a wandering *marabout* that travels among the Berbers giving blessing, and settling disputes; essentially providing all the services of a *marabout*. Such a holy man resides in isolation, but is compelled to take his gift to the surrounding villages.⁴⁵ A final, broad stereotype is that of a holy man who has the renown of the first, and the manner of the second. In this case, the *marabout* desires isolation, but is intruded upon by seekers of his *baraka* and a village grows around him.⁴⁶ A variety of power is achieved by each category, yet one common bond is shared by all - that of death.

At the death of a holy man, a tomb is built to honor his memory. This provides an actual location for Berbers to receive the *marabout's* blessing and bring offerings of respect. As *awilya*, a friend of Allah, a holy man has the ability to bless, curse, and advise even after death.⁴⁷ The tomb exists as a medium through which blessings, curses, and pieces of advice are transmitted from *marabout* to Berber.⁴⁸ In the case of a married holy man who also has a family, the tomb is maintained by his family. Gifts left at the tomb are taken by and used to support the *marabout's* lineage.⁴⁹ *Baraka* is often, but not necessarily, passed down through a *maraboutic* line. Children, or even grandchildren, of the holy man may grow up with the saintly abilities of their ancestor. Should this occur, the *maraboutic* line may obtain a reputation resulting in a group of devout Berbers who make pilgrimages to the holy man's tomb in order to acquire the piety and wisdom

⁴⁴ Gellner, Ernest. Ch 6.

⁴⁵ Depending on the Berber telling the story of the holy man, this compulsion to travel from village to village is either from need (of money or goods), or from the purity of the heart.

⁴⁶ Gellner, Ernest. Ch 5.

⁴⁷ See vocabulary page in the index for further definition of "*awilya*."

⁴⁸ Hart, David Montgomery. p 188.

⁴⁹ Eickelman, Dale F. Ch 6.

attributed to the *marabout*. This instance calls for the construction of a *zawiya*, a lodge for spiritual seekers.⁵⁰

Ultimately, the construction of a *zawiya* increases the importance of the holy man, even though he is no longer living. Described as a "brotherhood lodge," a *zawiya* is connected to a specific holy man, and serves to promote his personal reputation. In this lodge, seekers gather to learn of the *marabout's* relationship with Allah.⁵¹ The *marabout's* interpretation of Islam, his actions in mediation, and his teachings are studied and perpetuated by this group of followers. Along with the distinction of a religious center, the *zawiya* also becomes a destination for pilgrims. People travel across the Middle Atlas to request *baraka* from the shrine of a holy man whose reputation is remembered. The people who benefited from the *marabout's baraka* while he lived maintain his reputation - the nature of a *zawiya* allowing for a higher level of perpetuity. Not only did a *zawiya* cause the name of the marabout to flourish, it also provided travelers and pilgrims a place to stay.

A *zawiya's* central feature is the tomb of the holy man. No particular plan is required when building the *zawiya*, therefore, any construction which best exhibits the tomb is accepted. In some cases, the tomb is enclosed in a large building, made accommodating through carpet and the provision of sheep skins.⁵² Other structures of a *zawiya* place the tomb in a center room that is flanked by rooms for lodging.⁵³ These rooms cater to disciples and pilgrims; residence in the *zawiya* is allowable only for a specific length of time. *Zawiyas* also emphasize the location which was chosen for the *marabout's* tomb. Normal sites for shrines include those on a hill top, by a spring, or immediately outside of the city. The additional size of a *zawiya* draws attention to the shrine even more than a mere tomb atop a hill. A *zawiya* is set apart by the colors most often used

⁵⁰ See vocabulary page in index for further definition of "zawiya."

⁵¹ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 226.

⁵² As can be seen in Sidi Amhawsh's *zawiya*.

⁵³ As can be seen in Sidi Abdesaalem's *zawiya*.

in its decoration. Green and yellow are known as the colors of peace and of Islam.⁵⁴ Door frames, window shutters, even whole walls are painted green and yellow in a *zawiya*, denoting their association with both peace and Islam. Qur'anic script usually adorns prominent places within a *zawiya*, linking the *marabout* with Allah.

In time, a *zawiya* enhances, or hinders the reputation of the *marabout* it extols. Just as the colors of the *zawiya* symbolize peace, its continuous vicinity also denotes peace. The activities of a *zawiya*, hospitality, religious instruction, and mediation, can cause fluctuation in territorial boundaries considered under its authority.⁵⁵ As the *zawiya*'s activities extend, so do the lands considered part of its possession. Also, a *marabout's baraka*, if considered strong, can grant others prominence through association with the *zawiya*. Homes built close to the *zawiya* receive an overflow of the *zawiya's* blessing.⁵⁶ The "blessed zone" surrounding the *zawiya* expands in direct proportion to the growth of that *zawiya's* reputation, similar to the correlation between activities and land possession. In these ways can a *zawiya* increase, or decrease, the stature of the holy man, and consequently of itself.

Most of the religious practices shown here depict historical actions and thoughts, some of which persist among Tamazight Berbers today. Mohammed Benghrib, a Berber man residing in the heart of the Middle Atlas describes his interpretation of a *marabout*. "Holy men prefer to live isolated, simple lives. After [the holy man's] death, a tomb is built, people come to get *baraka*, they stay, and then a village or town emerges." The majority of these villages or towns lack the presence of an effective *maraboutic* line, or even a living *marabout*. Mohammed supported his opinion with examples of various *zawiyas* and tombs in the region of Azrou (his home), even though not all the *zawiyas* of the Middle Atlas can fit comfortably in this description.⁵⁷ On the other hand, larger *zawiyas* in the Middle Atlas and the majority of those *zawiyas* written about in

⁵⁴ Native Berber in interview with author at *Zawiya Sidi Said*.

⁵⁵ Gellner, Ernest. Ch 5.

⁵⁶ As can be seen in the village of *Beni Smwi*.

⁵⁷ See vocabulary page in index for further definition of "*Azrou*

the High Atlas and Riff Mountains became places of power during the *marabout's* lifetime, or shortly after his death.⁵⁸ In those cases, a holy man's *baraka*, rather than the memory of the holy man, provided a neutral zone in which towns and villages could emerge - protected from warlike tribesmen to either side of the holy man's territory.

A holy man, in Mohammed's understanding, begins his life as a good man with an active spiritual life. This spiritual life includes studying the Qu'ran, contemplating religious matters, knowing the history of the Islamic faith from Ishmael to his present day, and mirroring the actions of the prophets, saints, and Allah. As this good man's spiritual life deepens, he is able to make benedictions. These benedictions include curing diseases and producing miracles, but never resulted in "special messages - [holy men] are merely Muslims who can do these spiritual things."⁵⁹ Ability to heal is important to current definitions of a *marabout*, whereas miracles and a special relationship with Allah are not. The power of *baraka* continues to occur after the death of this good man - providing that he had been deemed a *marabout* while still living.⁶⁰ Holy man status is bestowed during a man's lifetime, not after his death.

The death of one known as a *marabout* results in a tomb, bestowing upon the followers an eternal image of the *marabout*. Respect, visits, and gifts are showered upon this tomb in hopes of receiving *baraka*. Historically, it was common for a holy man to possess a trademark form of healing: this *marabout* able to heal the blind, that one a surety for safe travel.⁶¹ According to Mohammed, each *marabout* in the Middle Atlas, however, is able to bless a pregnancy and correct male sterility. Thus, gifts are given to local tombs in hopes of, and in thankfulness for a pregnancy. In the past, diseased and mad relatives were brought to the tomb and left there, along

⁵⁸ Vinogradov, Amal R. "The Socio-Political Organization of a Berber 'Tarf' Tribe: Pre-Protectorate Morocco," *Arabs and Berbers. From Tribe to Nation in North Africa*. Eds. Ernest Gellner and Charles Micaud, Lexington Books - D.C. Heath and Company: Lexington; 1972.

⁵⁹ Mohammed Benghrib, in an interview with the author in Azrou, Morocco. July 2004.

⁶⁰ Since these holy men were of a different, and probably lesser, status than those whose *zawiyas* gained imminence during the life of the *marabout*, it seems that the initial rise to power would have been less charismatic and ambitious in the case of the isolated holy men. This was also probably rather dependant on the character of the holy man.

⁶¹ Mohammed Benghrib.

with provisions for their welfare.⁶² This was done in hopes that the *baraka* which resided in the vicinity of the holy man's tomb would cure the poor relative suffering from *shour* (black magic).⁶³ The tomb of a holy man represents a link between the holy man and Allah, lasting through eternity. Since the eternality of a *marabout* is symbolized in the construction of a tomb, the tomb is a place of both immense blessing and consecrated ground.

Now that our initial questions concerning the creation of *maraboutism*, the requirements and practices of *maraboutism*, and the evolution of those practices, have been addressed, our gaze can be focused on specific *zawiyas* in the Middle Atlas. *Zawiya Oued Ifrane* presents a town whose history is found in the untidy oral traditions of two shrines. An interesting development of marabout-worship allows for the inclusion of *Beni Smwi*, a small Middle Atlas town, just as the isolation of *Zawiya Sidi Said* does. *Zawiya Si Abdesalaam* provides a picture of modern *maraboutism* at work, and the last *zawiya*, that of the *Sidi Amhawsh*, portrays the continuation of *maraboutic* importance.

Zawiya Oued Ifrane

Tales are plentiful in the mountain town where *Zawiya Oued Ifrane* is situated. Rich in oral history, the region's stories are important to "any pure Middle Atlas Berber," having been "past down from fathers and grandfathers."⁶⁴ An immense limestone plateau, replete with waterfalls and grotesquely eroded rocks, draws attention. The town of *Zawiya Oued Ifrane* is nestled at the base of this plateau - an important landmark in the village's history. The origin of *Zawiya Oued Ifrane* presented here is based upon two sources. The first source is Michael

⁶² This mad relative was usually bound with cords to keep them from harming themselves and others, and to keep them from running away. Information from Mohammed Benghrib.

⁶³ See vocabulary page in index for further definition of "*shour*."

⁶⁴ Mohammed Benghrib

Peyron, professor of Berber History and Culture at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco, and a fluent Berber speaker. The second source is Mohammed Benghrib, a Middle Atlas Berber and guide. Both are intelligent men, well-versed in the culture and history of the region. Their dependence on oral history, nevertheless, creates an interesting dichotomy of truth. Oral histories, recited to both Mohammed and Peyron, tell of a thriving city that sprang from the *baraka* of a local *marabout*. The *marabout*'s legacy remains a vibrant part of the current village, although the extent and nature of that legacy is prone to change with the storyteller.

In days past a holy man of the Middle Atlas was known by a certain type of barraka, that of fresh springs, fertile land, prosperous herds, and fair weather. One such holy man settled in the Middle Atlas at the foot of a limestone cliff. His great barraka attracted many, and soon a village grew in the shadow of the limestone cliff. The barraka of this holy man included a healthy lineage, and upon his death five sons of his son were graced with his baraka. Four of these sons traveled into the mountains surrounding the village and cliff, settling in lovely valleys and living happily with great barraka. The fifth son, Moulay Immahed Ben Abdesalam, determined to have adventure and left the village of his father's father.

The adventures of a young son far from home are not important to our tale, but rather his homecoming. For Moulay Immahed Ben Abdesalam returned one day to the simple village in the shadow of the limestone cliff. Soon after the village had welcomed the sight of this traveled one, Ben Abdesalam desired to climb the limestone cliff. This desire seemed good in his sight and he ventured to the top of the cliff. Fertile soil, wild herds of animals, and a clear spring bubbling up from beneath the roots of an olive tree met the gaze of Ben Abdesalam. Fascinated with the beauty of the cliff's plateau top, Ben Abdesalam ventured to the spring beneath the olive tree and exclaimed the virtues of the land before him. "How magnificent does this land appear to my eyes! I would be glad to live out my days in a land such as this." Just then he turned and noticed a small dwelling a mere five minute walk from the spring. "Gladly would I visit with one whose

eyes have the honor of this blest site daily." And so Ben Abdesalam began the walk toward the humble abode.

Ben Abdesalam's movement down the path was soon heralded by a sweet voice. "Welcome, weary traveler!" This salutation floated from a thin window whose intricate iron working hid the face of the one who spoke. "I bid you come and take refreshment," the voice continued, "only the door you must open for yourself, this I am unable to accomplish." The courage of Ben Abdesalam was great, and so he entered the small dwelling willingly. There in the simple house sat a woman, the most beautiful and virtuous of women ever to grace Ben Abdesalam's presence. Although she had not risen at his entrance, her hospitality was genuine and soon ample refreshment was set before Ben Abdesalam. As the two ate, conversation came easily and the companionship seemed good in both their eyes.

Long before either was ready, the Sun began his farewells to the earth, and the time for Ben Abdesalam's departure grew nigh. "O most gracious hostess, full has my heart been these few hours in your presence." Ben Abdesalam stood at the entrance of the lady's dwelling, silhouetted in the splendor of the Sun's parting comments. "Please virtuous lady, grant me the honor of your regard, stand and bid me farewell." The one to whom this was addressed turned a deathly pale and looked down, "Forgive me, but I cannot." Great did this hurt Ben Abdesalam, and he turned in anger to leave her, intending to forever rid his heart of this insolent hostess who would not even bid him farewell. Then the memory of their companionship returned to him, and Ben Abdesalam's anger became sadness. "Why do you dishonor me in this way?" he inquired. In answer, the lady drew up the bottom portion of the blanket which covered her, revealing crippled feet and legs. "I speak truth, O Master, for I am not able to stand and bid anyone farewell." Immediately, Ben Abdesalam was shamed for his anger.

Humbly did Ben Abdesalam repent of his earlier words. Moving close to the lady, he spoke "The barraka of my grandfather has become my own since his death. Although I have scorned home and family, I have remained a friend of Allah. Should he find it favorable to his

sight, I will heal you and make you my wife to live happily with all the days decreed for us." Such a desire was favorable in the eyes of Allah, and soon after the lady's legs were healed, the two were married in a joyous occasion. From that day forward, the adventurous grandson knew devotion for a place and remained all his days in the land atop the limestone cliff. Many were the people who came to seek his barraka while he lived, and many still seek it at his tomb. For the barraka of the grandson was like the barraka of old: prosperity in land, animals, and family.

An orange-tiled shrine sits atop the plateau, just below the hills that roll up and beyond. Various accounts regarding to whom the shrine commemorates exist. The story related above is a conglomerate of various aspects within the many stories told in *Zawiya Oued Ifrane*. Some tell a slightly different story of a wandering *marabout* who healed a local, crippled girl through his *baraka*, married her, and had many children. The *marabout* and his bride settled on the plateau, and it flourished into a city according to his great *baraka*.⁶⁵ In this "grandfather" telling, Ben Abdesalam is not the grandson of the first *marabout*, but rather that initial *marabout* himself. There are two versions of the "grandfather" story.

In one, the *marabout* settles on top of the plateau, and lives out his life there - the orange-tiled shrine being a tribute to his *baraka*. Eventually, the city either moved completely down to the foot of the plateau, or the city expanded down into the valley, and the inhabitants on the plateau moved, or died out. In the second version, the *marabout* lives on top the plateau for a time, but then moves down to the site where the city stands today. This *marabout's* shrine is built in the present day city, and the orange-tiled shrine on top the plateau honors one of his *baraka* filled descendants, perhaps a grandson.

Others site a similar but markedly different story. A wandering *marabout*, Sidi Abdlkader, appeared in the area, healed a crippled girl and settled down with her - below the plateau rather than above it. A city then sprang up below the plateau, and here the stories diverge.

⁶⁵ Peyron, Michael. Professor at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco.

One version states that, for a time Sidi Abdlkader lived below the plateau in the city, but eventually he moved to the top of the plateau and a portion of the city went with him. Another version says that, out of Sidi Abdlkader four grandsons grew, each possessing the *baraka* of their grandfather, and the greatest, Moulay Immahmed ben Abdlkader, eventually surpassed his grandfather. Moving up to the top of the plateau, the grandson's *baraka* proved more powerful, and the city moved up to the top of the plateau. Within this one story, the orange-tiled shrine honors two different *marabout*.

An interesting note about all of these versions is their ability to be categorized into two camps. The *marabout* initially settles either below the plateau or on top of it, and then the city moves from this initial founding to the other location. The stories can be categorized as those who present the *marabout's* home below the plateau, and those who claim the top of the plateau as his dwelling. The various stories can be frustrating attempts to understand a village's beginning, but certain facts about *Zawiya Oued Ifrane* can be found. A city did once stand on top of the plateau, and an orange-tiled shrine still resides there. The village below the plateau exists, and within it is located a shrine to another holy man, apart from the shrine on top the plateau.

Each story regarding *Zawiya Oued Ifrane's* beginnings has advocates and factual references, revealing a frustrating element of oral history. The simple clarity of a tale concerning a town's beginning is lost in multiple versions. History related "from fathers and grandfathers" can become clouded through personal bias, political power, correctness, or even religious motives. Speculation alone is able to concoct circumstances affecting the tale. *Zawiya Oued Ifrane's* birth is told through stories rife with glaring discrepancies: exhibiting a strong *maraboutic* lineage in some versions, while others tell only of one *marabout*. Perhaps one story is an extension of the other, or only recapitulates a segment of the whole story. Again, determining the amount of truth gleaned from either story can not be achieved. An important ingredient is found in both stories - the village always results from a *marabout's baraka*.

The *marabout's* role in *Zawiya Oued Ifrane's* creation is important in any of the oral

histories. Previously, mention was made of three broad categories into which holy men can be placed. *Zawiya Oued Ifrane* owes existence to the third type broadly categorized: the holy man whose isolation is intruded upon by seekers of *baraka*, resulting in the growth of a village around him. Thus do textbook definitions come to life. A holy man proves his *baraka* by healing the crippled legs of a local woman. He then settles in a place that, as shall soon be discussed, allows his *baraka* to be displayed in a physical manner. Through whatever means: word of mouth, regional festivals, traveling markets; the *baraka* of this holy man is discussed and people flock near to him. The land is good, the *marabout's baraka* is proven, and his reputation is secure - resulting in security for those under his care. *Zawiya Oued Ifrane* emerges.

A climb to the vantage point of the orange-tiled shrine reveals the "*baraka* of the holy man." The view looks out across a fertile, spring-fed piece of land, surrounded by mountains. Cattle graze along the stream, depicting prosperity, evidence of the *marabout's baraka*. Such a scene presents a visual example of *baraka*, an enticing one to those who look to the land for life. The physical representation of the *marabout's baraka* results in plenty and abundance from the earth itself. Fresh, reliable water sources, fertile soil, and temperate climates are undeniable claims of *awilya*, friendship with Allah.

An orange-tiled shrine sits atop the plateau, just below the hills that roll up and beyond. A green-tiled shrine holds a position of honor in the mosque standing in the middle of *Zawiya Oued Ifrane's* present location at the base of the plateau. Green and yellow are touted as the colors of both peace and Islam, and both are used in the decorations of most tombs or *zawiyas*. Mohammed Benghrib, however, asserted that "color is not as important as *baraka*," proving this statement by later claiming the orange-tiled shrine of Moulay Immahed Ben Abdlkader as "most important." According to Mohammed, the shrines are tributes to the same *maraboutic* family. Sidi Abdelkader's shrine, now housed in the mosque, appears in only one of the two stories regarding *Zawiya Oued Ifrane's* development, and the *baraka* of the holy man is contained to miraculous deeds he has done. Atop the plateau, however, the shrine is mentioned in both stories and has the

added element of *baraka* expressed not only through deeds, but is also in physical representation. More emphasis seems to be placed upon the orange-tiled shrine, according to: the opinion of Mohammed, the existence of the shrine in both tales, and the more extensive *baraka* associated with that shrine.

Oral histories grant the present town an old background. The tales are different in some ways, yet strikingly similar in others. *Baraka* holds an important position in all the tales, and has retained that importance through the ages. What does the presence of *baraka* mean to these Middle Atlas Berbers today? Perhaps any suggested answer to that question is as speculative as reasons why oral histories change, yet evidence of an answer in this case exists. Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress note that the emergence of *marabout* among the Berbers was considered a status symbol, or qualification of the village's Islamic faith.⁶⁶ To have a *marabout* connected to the village granted that village status as devout Muslims. Brett and Fentress have also observed the reversal of this notion among Berber societies. The Islam surrounding the Berbers no longer encourages mediators between Allah and man; the *marabout* is a shameful rather than qualifying figure.⁶⁷ Although a deeply *marabout*-oriented village like *Zawiya Oued Ifrane* would consciously refrain from belittling the memory of their founding member, evolving customs prove the validity of Brett and Fentress' observation.

Zawiya Oued Ifrane's shift in custom can be seen overall as a distinction that has been drawn between religion and culture. Previously all *marabout* were religiously affiliated, yet today the reverence toward these *marabout* appears to have been shuffled, either into a more politically correct form of Islam, or an expression of Berber culture. While this remains a hypothesis, conditions in the village and concerning religious and cultural practice appear to support it.

The first support for this view shows itself in the placement of the two shrines in *Zawiya Oued Ifrane*. Nestled inside a large mosque, the shrine in the center of the village maintains a co-

⁶⁶ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 229.

⁶⁷ Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. p 229 – 230.

opted position within Islam's holy place of worship. Sidi Abdelkader does not draw people to his shrine so that his *baraka* may bless them; rather, the villagers recognize his close relationship with Allah, and then go about their own prayers - prayers and offerings to Allah directly, rather than indirectly through the holy man. The orange-tiled shrine at the top of the plateau is vastly different. Although managed in a way that concentration is required for comprehension, a graveyard has developed around the shrine. The headstones are slight and can be mistaken for random rock formations, yet the shrine does sit in an area where others are resting. Shrines of the Middle Atlas, which reside in graveyards, usually denote a *marabout* without a *baraka*-filled lineage.⁶⁸ This particular shrine can claim a *maraboutic* lineage according to both oral histories, yet has never been incorporated into a decidedly Islamic structure - such as a mosque. Visitation still occurs at the shrine, as does the practice of leaving offerings. This can be seen, however, as a cultural expression rather than a religious one.

The second manner in which this distinction between religion and culture develops revolves around the use of the two shrines. It seems that celebrations specifically Berber in nature, or ones that are local in origin, are held atop the plateau at Moulay Immahed's shrine. Mohammed Benghrib also mentioned that long-lasting celebrations have been held atop the plateau, as more room exists there for tents and portable lodgings. Important Islamic festivals observed by Middle Atlas Berbers have long included *marabout*, thus granting grounds for deeming them cultural as well as religious celebrations. To further support this observation, the use of the shrine in the mosque is introduced. Mosques are normally places of prayer during the week with a special "service" held on Friday, the holy day. While exact information regarding the specific use of *Zawiya Oued Ifrane's* mosque was not obtained, there seems no inclination of odd practices. Outside the mosque, a fountain for ablutions runs easily, and near dusk people can be seen preparing to enter the mosque for prayer time. From the outside the mosque appears well kept, and, although speculation, appears to entertain normal Islamic worship practices. In this

⁶⁸ Mohammed Benghrib

way has the worship of *marabout* evolved from that of a holy man prayed directly to for intercession, to 1) a segment of rigidly Islamic worship or 2) an acceptable form of cultural expression.

Zawiya Oued Ifrane stands as a Berber town of *maraboutic* lineage, marked with shrines of past *marabout*. The tales of its history and the life of its present are connected in the worship of *marabout* - regardless of expression of that worship. Local holy men in the past legitimized the Muslim faith necessary for survival, whereas the reverence of local holy men in the present may be regarded as legitimizing the Berber culture that is slowly dissipating.

Beni Smwi

Beni Smwi, a small town in the foothills of the Middle Atlas, does not have a *zawiya*. Yet the village owes its existence to the holy man whose tomb now resides in the local mosque. Although bereft of a *zawiya* (the only village studied here lacking one), *Beni Smwi* is worth mentioning. Evidence of both a historical and a modern form of *maraboutism* is available throughout the village.

Earlier depictions of three types of *marabout* included that of a *marabout* whose *baraka* drew people to him, eventually producing a city centered on his presence and *baraka*. The *marabout* whose tomb marks the center of *Beni Smwi* settled in the region many years ago, hoping for isolation. As the reputation of his *baraka* grew, so did the number of people journeying his way. The poorest of these sojourners did not have the means or motivation to return home; therefore, they stayed near the *marabout*, hoping to profit from his relationship with Allah. Other pilgrims were perhaps enticed by the protection and prestige of this *marabout*, and determined to relocate closer to his *baraka*. Eventually the city of *Beni Smwi* developed, all devoted to the holy figure that had drawn them there.

Today a green tiled shrine marks the *marabout's* final resting place. Unlike other villages mentioned in this manuscript, *Beni Smwi* has neither a *zawiya* built around the tomb, nor is the shrine an independent facility. In a more recent age, the mosque of Beni Smwi was built around the shrine, to honor "both Allah, and the memory of a man close to Allah" - the *marabout*. This interesting integration of *maraboutism* with a more traditional expression of Islam perhaps marks a new methodology of religious practice. A similar incorporation has been noted in *Zawiya Oued Ifrane*; however, *Beni Smwi* differs as its only representation of a marabout is found in a mosque. By placing the shrine (an example of past piety currently relegated to a lower position), in the mosque (a recent expression of correct religious practice), the two buildings of worship share a mutual enhancement. In *Moroccan Islam*, Dale F. Eickelman asserts that although, "the power attributed to individual marabout has markedly declined, [. . .] *maraboutism* continues to hold its ground among the majority of the population."⁶⁹ The continuation of religious practices concerning the shrine is legitimized by the mosque structure now surrounding it. In turn, the mosque shares in (rather than competing with) the popularity of the shrine among the people. It appears that *maraboutism*, no longer acceptable as the singular form of Muslim practice, has evolved into a legitimate periphery practice. More research is necessary to present the emergence of a new religious methodology, nonetheless, the implications of practices at *Beni Smwi* are intriguing.

While no *zawiya* exists to house the *maraboutic* line and faithful pilgrims, the mosque of Beni Smwi is used in a fashion similar to a *zawiya*. Descendents of the *marabout* still live in the village, and their dwelling place is next to the shrine, practically inside the mosque. The family of the *marabout* maintains and protects both the shrine and the mosque, a responsibility also held by the *marabout's* descendants in a *zawiya*. Pilgrims and travelers can find lodging in the mosque, and usually bring offerings to the shrine. These practices seem identical to those described in a *zawiya*, yet the mosque is different in both presentation and practice of Islam. Worshipers at a

⁶⁹ Eickelman, Dale F. p 236. Italics mine

mosque are usually local townspeople, while a *zawiya* claims the allegiance over a much larger area. In *Beni Smwi*, regular visitors to the mosque/shrine are local townspeople. Festivals and religious occasions, however, do bring outside worshipers to the shrine, reminiscent of past religious practices compelled by *marabout baraka*. Tamazight Berbers, who live in the nearby hills, travel to *Beni Smwi* for important events: the Prophet Mohammed's birthday and the month-long fast of Ramadan. During the Eid celebrations, the meat sacrificed in accordance with the holiday is usually offered to the shrine. These events seem designated as times to visit the *marabout's* tomb and ask for his *baraka*. On the other hand, daily practices of religion and regular Friday services are held in the mosque, rather than being practiced for the blessing of the *marabout*. The inclusion of the shrine in the mosque alters the use of both.

The mosque and shrine sit on a level surface of a hill overlooking a fertile valley. Space is provided immediately around the mosque, but beyond a few feet crowds a myriad of dwellings. Strikingly similar to practices of the High Atlas, personal esteem is directly related with proximity to the shrine. Even the poorest and most humble villager can be proud, and obtain stature by living near the shrine. Ernest Gellner, in his work *Saints of the Atlas*, depicts a system of hierarchy in a village of the High Atlas that places the *zawiya* at the top and the building furthest away from the *zawiya* at the bottom. There are exceptions noted in this hierarchy, but as a general rule, those physically closest to the *zawiya* gain prestige from that position. In *Beni Smwi*, Mohammed Benghrib pointed out a ramshackle dwelling built near the mosque to illustrate this system. The ground immediately around the shrine and mosque is left clear, but as close as is acceptable, the buildings begin. The home Mohammed singled out is a poor one, but the family that lives there helps clean and maintain the mosque. Proximity to and relationship with the *marabout's* shrine gives this family a higher status. An important aspect of the villager's perception toward the shrine and mosque is seen in the relevance given to the space around them.

From its inception, the village of *Beni Smwi* looked to a *marabout* for protection, prominence, and religious practices. The structure of the village and of the *marabout's* shrine has

undergone changes since that beginning. Berber people, nevertheless, still make offerings to the saint for his *baraka*, and still acknowledge the position of those associated with his memory. *Maraboutism* has acquired newer, more modern forms of expression, practices that have continued in *Beni Smwi*.

Zawiya Sidi Said

The small dirt road which cuts across fields and small rivers is hard to see from the main road. Finding this road is the first step towards reaching the *zawiya* of *Sidi Said*. Previously, both *Zawiya Oued Ifrane* and the mosque at *Beni Smwi* have been shown as located in villages - *Zawiya Sidi Said* has no village around it. Deep in the mountains of the Middle Atlas, in the vicinity known historically as Ma'ammar, *Zawiya Sidi Said* retains a spirit of *maraboutism* unlike any other *zawiya* mentioned here. Isolated in location, free from village politics, and with historically validated *baraka*, the *zawiya's* power lies almost exclusively in the *marabout* family that lives there. The manifestation of that exclusive power is a major factor in the maintenance and practices of the *zawiya*.

After locating the small dirt road off the main one, visitors to *Zawiya Sidi Said* travel slowly and consistently upward, on roads winding into the mountains. Skirting deep gulleys and often missing pieces of road, the path to *Zawiya Sidi Said* is subject to flash flooding. There are no villages along the road to *Zawiya Sidi Said*. Independent complexes of families, however, dot the landscape - few in number and far from one another. *Zawiya Sidi Said* resides in a similar, but larger complex and is set apart by the appearance of a few green windows. The isolation of this holy man's final resting place agrees with the three depicted *marabout* types given earlier, and with the practices of this particular region.

Upon arrival, the *maraboutic* family and various keepers of the *zawiya* are on hand to

greet visitors. The influence and prestige of this *zawiya* is assumed to be such that, the decedents of Sidi Said do not have to travel the area and to ask for offerings. Ernest Gellner describes this as "effectiveness": *marabout* who have obtained recognition and esteem can then sit and allow that esteem to bring worshipers to them.⁷⁰ Apparently Sidi Said's legacy, and that of his *marabout* lineage, is effective enough to sustain the *zawiya*. Although isolated, *Zawiya Sidi Said* stands as an important structure to the life and society of the Berbers living in those mountains.

Not only is the structure important, it is also rather interesting. Unlike the other *zawiyas* described, the shrine is not the central focus of the building. Two courtyards sit in a northern line, separated by a roofed hallway of dirt running east to west. In this hallway are entrances to either courtyard, one leading to the north courtyard and the other to the southern one. At the western end of each courtyard are buildings of like design, running the length of the courtyards from north to south. In the southern courtyard this western-end building houses the shrine, while the building in the northern courtyard serves as lodging for pilgrims and travelers. A natural spring quietly bubbles in a fountain found on the eastern end of the northern courtyard, pointed out as evidence of Sidi Said's *baraka*.⁷¹ Although the traveler's lodge, an important expression of *baraka*, and the Sidi's tomb, the essential expression of *baraka*, are all located in the courtyards, these areas are rather run-down.

Southeast of the courtyards sits a house with a shaded carport and green yard kept vibrantly so by means of a well. House and yard are surrounded by a wooden fence. Here, visitors are entertained, and here the family and *zawiya* keepers spend most of their time. From this arrangement, it seems that the focus is upon the living occupants of the *zawiya*, rather than the memory of one who lived long ago. While the memory of a good, pious, and powerful *marabout* is kept alive, tales praising his miraculous deeds of *baraka* are lacking. Dale F. Eickelman asserts this as a pattern for other Middle Atlas Berbers, the Sherqawa, who "play down the idea that their

⁷⁰ Gellner, Ernest. Ch 5.

⁷¹ The men who were conducting our tour of the *zawiya* were particularly pleased with the fountain and made sure we all tasted its water.

ancestors and certain of their living relatives had a special relationship with God [...now] they maintain that the leading Sherqawa of the past were men like any others; the only difference was that they were distinguished for their piety, scholarship, and prestigious descent." The emphasis on a holy man is shifted from the magical powers associated with a previous age, to a more acceptable view of a religious and peaceful mediator whose descendants deserve respect.

Zawiya Sidi Said is also distinctive in its arrangement of the Sidi's tomb. A green shiny cloth covers the tomb, and green window-shutters grace a wall which is painted half in yellow and half in white. This is all normal in a shrine of a Middle Atlas *marabout*, the difference is found in the company present. Other graves of family members with lesser but still *maraboutic* status are seen in the Sidi's tomb, marked by colorful and raised cement casements. The courtyard outside the shrine has also been converted into a cemetery, likely restricted to descendants. Shrines without family lineages often become centers of cemeteries, as has before been noted. The occurrence of a "graveyard" inside a *zawiya* however, is, among the *zawiyas* here discussed, unique to *Zawiya Sidi Said*.

The most elementary definition of a Berber given thus far involves the Berber language. One is a Berber if one can speak Tamazight, Tashilhit, Chelluh, or any other Berber dialect. It should be further noted, that the second language in Morocco (the first being Arabic) is French; any Moroccan educated by the state learns French, including all Berbers. All of this noted to say, while French may be known, not many Berbers residing in the Middle Atlas Mountains have also learned English. *Zawiya Sidi Said* is not only unique in the use of the shrine, and in structure, it is also unique in having an English-speaker among the *zawiya* helpers. No other *zawiya* mentioned had, at the time of research, an English speaker. According to the English speaker, *Zawiya Sidi Said* dates back to 1717 AD, no other *zawiya* offered an actual building date. Although mere numbers given by a man encouraging the memory of his *marabout*, all oral history is subject to the motives of the teller. Such is the dependent nature of each *zawiya* upon oral tradition. Another aspect considered important enough for the English speaker to stress, is color use. No tales were

told of Sidi Said, yet broad generalizations were given connecting color to a *marabout's* role. Green and yellow are colors representative of Islam, and of peace. Therefore, the use of green and yellow for a *marabout's* shrine, tomb, or even place of residence best represents the most prominent features of a *marabout* - Islam and peace. Each *zawiya* mentioned, save one, designates itself as a holy place through a prevalent display of green and yellow.

The history of Sidi Said may be tainted with present ambitions, yet many aspects of *maraboutism* remain. The lineage of Sidi Said, which retains *maraboutic baraka*, wears white - a trace of historical *maraboutism*. Hospitality shines forth in physical form: coffee, tea, bread, oil, and jam, to all visitors. The memory of Sidi Said is kept, although perhaps not considered to be at the extreme vanguard. The facility is reminiscent of an earlier age of *marabout*, and maintains a working *zawiya* of offerings, festivals, and *baraka*.

Zawiya Si Abdesaalem

Nearly everyone in the village is related to Si Abdesaalem, or so the rumor goes. Si Abdesalaam, according to oral history, warrants praise as the founder of this village. In a tale strikingly similar to that of *Zawiya Oued Ifrane*, Si Abdesalaam moves into the area, his great *baraka* draws people, and a village forms. With *Zawiya Oued Ifrane*, the stories of origin, shrines, and general evolution of saint worship are the focal point. Modern expression of *maraboutism*, however, is the angle presented in *Zawiya Si Abdesalaam*.

The village has two main roads, and nearly all the houses are under construction. Beautiful Berber rugs hang out of windows, explosions of color against the rather plain buildings of the village that “always seem to be under construction.” The *zawiya* is set apart from the village, both in location and in structure. Atop a gentle slope sits the *zawiya* of Si Abdesalaam, surrounded by a stone wall and shaded by large trees. As previously shown in the mosque at *Beni*

Smwi, the *zawiya* attains personal space, distinctive in a village where houses tumble into one another. Not only does the *zawiya* attain space, the land given is good, and representative of the *marabout's baraka*: grass, a couple of trees, and nearby access to the river. Green tiles cover the roof, and the green window-shutters stand out from the white-washed walls; the gate of the stone wall is built in similar fashion - white washed pillars and a green tiled roof. Unlike the majority of the town, the *zawiya* of Si Abdesalaam is completed, colorful and well preserved.

Observing the responses of various villagers to the *zawiya* seems to set the building apart not only in location and structure, but also in the minds of the townspeople. A trip to the *zawiya* for a young mother with two small children requires a dress code outside the norm. The mother dons a nice dress and a head scarf, and the youngest girl, also put into a dress, is given a white, lacey hat with a strap for firm placement. Even a spontaneous trip to show the *zawiya* to foreigners involves dressing up one's self, and one's children. At the *zawiya* two men lay sunbathing inside the wall, enjoying the *zawiya's* benefit of peace and quiet. Two women at the *zawiya*, dressed nicely with head coverings, emerge from the *zawiya* having just left offerings, and petitions, for the *marabout's baraka*. From the dress code observed and the use of the *zawiya* by different people, for different purposes, it can be assumed that the *zawiya* is more than a historical building. Although history grants the *zawiya* status, the building is not a museum. The Berber people of *Zawiya Si Abdesalaam* continue to remember the life of their *marabout*, and incorporate his *baraka* into their lives.

The doors to the *zawiya* open to an unroofed hallway, with two rooms directly to the right. On the left is an entrance to a roofed hallway leading perpendicular to the first. On either side of this hallway are two rooms - lodging for pilgrims - at the end is the tomb-occupied shrine. The rooms at the immediate entrance house men of the *marabout* line, responsible for *zawiya* maintenance, and available for instruction, offering - taking, and the telling of Si Abdesalaam's tale.

Green dominates the shrine of Si Abdesalaam: bright green doors lead into the shrine and

a throw of velvet green material drapes the tomb. Blue and green mosaic tiles line the sides of the *zawiya*, interrupted by a strand of Qu'ranic script, lettered in green. Berber carpets introduce various colors from the floor, while comfortable sheepskins litter the ground. The men of the *zawiya* normally sit in the two rooms immediately inside the *zawiya's* entrance. As people enter, they are greeted by the keepers, and shown around the *zawiya*, the shrine saved for last. Once in the shrine, sheepskin rugs are provided, and the tale of the holy man begins. Gestures, facial expressions, voice inflections, and spiritual fervor provide as much of the tale as the story itself. For this do these men inhabit the *zawiya*; repair, upkeep, and protection are important, but their residence in the *zawiya* is to keep the memory and story of the saint alive.

This is a tale of how the Saint Si Abdesaalem, descendant of Moulay Idriss, descendant of the Prophet, recovered for his Sultan the purity of the Sultan's fifth wife. Abdesaalem, before he was known as Si Abdesaalem, traveled far from his home, in the southlands of the Cheluh people, to a snow-capped mountain in the Middle Atlas Mountains. Endowed with virtue, Abdesaalem dwelt among the people of Ifrane, bestowing knowledge of Allah to all who cared to learn. Then Winter came, and with his frigid breath sent snow and ice, making miserable the wife and children of Abdesaalem. This condition was sorrowful in the eyes of Abdesaalem, who was greatly concerned for the care of his wife and children. When Spring arose, she invited Abdesaalem to follow the swiftly flowing river out of the harsh Ifrane to a sheltered valley of caves. Content were Abdesaalem and his family in this valley, with its helpful river, fertile land, and comfortable caves.

It came about that the Sultan took another wife. This was a joyous occasion for the Sultan and his wife, but murmurs of discontent were heard, for this was the Sultan's fifth wife, and tradition only allowed blessings for four virtuous wives. Flagrantly did the Sultan love his fifth wife, and jealously did he guard her virtue, for a time all was well. Then, one day, in a frivolous mind, the young wife desired to dance naked in the palace garden. Her desire grew until she

could no longer hold it back, and as she danced naked in the palace garden Allah was displeased. The young wife instantly knew her shame and desired to hide her unseemliness. She climbed a tree in the courtyard of the garden and refused to come down until the eyes of Allah looked down on her with pleasure, making her pure again. The Sultan was enraged with the folly of his wife, but her condition was sorrowful to his eyes, for he greatly loved her and desired her purity.

People from all over the Sultan's kingdom came to help. Men of great renown, saints with great knowledge of Allah, merchants whose wits had made them rich, foreign ambassadors and dignitaries, all who might help restore the purity of the Sultan's wife attempted to do so, but to no avail. None knew how to make the young wife pure again, and so she remained in the tree, made dark in the eyes of Allah because of her foolish deed. Word of the Sultan's despair reached the valley of Abdesaalem. What Allah, in his wisdom, had hidden from the entreaties of great men dressed in finery and acknowledged with great aplomb, Allah, in his mercy, had revealed to Abdesaalem. Abdesaalem bid his wife and children farewell and began his journey to the royal palace. Abdesaalem's entrance to the royal city was unlike the entrance of all the others who had pleaded for the purity of the Sultan's wife. No loud trumpets interrupted children playing, but rather Abdesaalem smiled gently at their games. No flashing jewelry reflected the Sun's brilliance, but brilliant love from Abdesaalem's caring eyes warmed all who saw them. No entourage accompanied the friend of Allah from the mountains, and his sandals were worn and dirty from carrying their master over many miles. Abdesaalem stood humbly at the palace gates and begged entrance to the royal garden.

Swiftly flew the news that another had come attempting to restore the young wife's purity. A crowd appeared those who had previously been acclaimed for their abilities. Murmurs arose over the appearance of this humble man; did he of dirty sandals and outdated garments hope to find better favor with Allah than they had great in praise and appearance? Many began to openly scoff at him, laughing and speaking disparagingly of his simple ways. Abdesaalem heard them, but left them to Allah and continued on his path to the royal garden. As Abdesaalem passed by

the men in the crowd, their laughing and jeering turned to coughing. All who had spoken badly of Abdesaalem began to cough up blood. These men quickly turned away, and out of this the fame of Abdesaalem's friendship with Allah began to spread.

It had become custom that the Sultan took lunch in the royal palace, to be near his wife and to welcome all who came to plead with Allah on her behalf. Thus the Sultan himself received Abdesaalem at the entrance to the royal garden, "O humble servant of Allah, it is my deepest wish to obtain forgiveness for my foolish and reckless wife. I and my house are honored to receive you, may Allah favor you with his smile." Abdesaalem bowed low to his Sultan, but kept silent and motioned to the large tree at the center of the garden. Swift in comprehension, the Sultan led the way to the tree and the lady, who upon those branches rested. Abdesaalem bowed his head in meditation, and soon after addressed his Sultan. "Allah will send your wife clothes upon the wings of night, and at the sun's rising she shall descend dressed in garments from the hand of Allah, pure in his eyes." Recognizing Abdesaalem's friendship with Allah, the Sultan fully believed in this message and rejoiced in the immanent return of his wife.

In the very manner that Abdesaalem had proclaimed, the wife of the Sultan descended from her tree the following day, alongside the first rays of the dawn, clothed in garments of divine beauty. The Sultan was overjoyed with the return of his wife's purity and proclaimed honor and blessing upon Abdesaalem. "O most wise servant of Allah, today is made blessed in our eyes because of the fulfillment of your prophecy. Speak now, O saint of Allah, and whatever your heart desires shall be granted according to my ability. Nothing is too much for one who has brought such joy, what will you have Si Abdesaalem - riches, the finest of clothes, or a great residence in the royal city?" Eagerly the Sultan and all who had gathered to welcome the newly purified wife looked to Abdesaalem. Quietly, yet in a voice that betrayed his passion, Abdesaalem spoke, "Enlightened ruler, meritorious descendant of the Prophet, I reside quite happily in a small valley with my wife and children. The winds dance upon the leaves of trees, sunlight whimsically plays upon the clear waters of a gurgling mountain stream, caves are found in a variety of sizes, and I

love this valley. My only desire is to return to that place, and to reside there in peace until I have reached the end of days numbered for me by Allah." The court of the Sultan knew a moment of silence. Deeply moved, the Sultan declared loudly that Abdesaalem's desires were to be met. "So long as Allah allows one of my lineage to sit upon the throne, the valley you speak of Si Abdesaalem shall be yours and your descendants." Thus the joy found in the return of the Sultan's wife was doubled with the joy of Si Abdesaalem.

Generous in his gifts, the Sultan entertained Si Abdesaalem and then sent him home with a monetary gift which was to be renewed every year. And so, Si Abdesaalem happily returned home to his valley, and his wife and children. Allah smiled upon Si Abdesaalem the rest of his days, bringing honor and riches to the humble servant. Every year the Sultan remembered the friend of Allah with the promised monetary gift. Si Abdesaalem reached the end of days numbered for him by Allah and was remembered in death by the construction of a modest zawiya. The family of Si Abdesaalem enshrined him in this zawiya, draping his tomb with a finely woven green cloth. To this day people honor the life of Si Abdesaalem by visiting the white-washed, green tiled zawiya that houses the tomb of this great saint.

For as long as a descendant of that grateful Sultan has been seated upon the throne, the valley of Si Abdesaalem is protected as the residence of his children. And, the relationship between the Sultan and Saint is remembered through the monetary gift given yearly from the descendants of the first to those of the second. Thus the tale of how Si Abdesaalem, before he was known as Si Abdesaalem, recovered the purity of the Sultan's fifth wife is remembered, and will perhaps continue to be remembered as a lesson to all until the days numbered for the earth by Allah have come to a close.

Religious practices, which include the *marabout*, have remained throughout the Middle Atlas. In the past, the responsibilities of the *marabout* included mediation between tribes, expression of *baraka* through miraculous deeds, observance of festivals, and the teaching of

Islam. Most of the *marabout's* power in the area of politics and disputes, such as mediation, has been transferred to the state, and miraculous deeds are not as common as before. Schools are normally responsible for the instruction of Islam, yet festivals are often celebrated under the auspices of a marabout, with one's family. Keepers of the *maraboutic zawiyas* today, however, concern themselves with more than festivals. The day to day practices of religion are an important part of shrines and zawiyas, in places like *Zawiya Si Abdesalaam*, which function today. *Zawiya Si Abdesalaam* provides an example of the modern role played by *marabout* in the Middle Atlas.

The assertion has been made that the role of the *marabout* in Si Abdesalaam's *zawiya* is both the immortalization of the life and *baraka* of the holy man, and the continuation of his power. The *zawiya* is not an empty, dedicated building, but a structure used by people of the village. Offerings are made at Si Abdesalaam's shrine, a carton of milk and a sack of food can be seen at the foot of his tomb, examples of modern holy man-worship. Men lay peacefully and quietly in the *zawiya's* shadow, a structure of peace both in ancient times and today. Keepers of the *zawiya* entertain visitors with renditions of the marabout's *baraka* and miracles. In this particular *zawiya*, for this particular village, the memory of the *marabout* is extremely important and influential.

According to the *marabout* in the *zawiya*, a certain number of Si Abdesalaam's descendants receive aid from the Kingdom of Morocco yearly. These funds are a part of the gift given to Si Abdesalaam, which included ownership of the valley now inhabited, when his *baraka* helped the Sultan, years ago. In keeping alive stories of and homage to Si Abdesalaam, the memory of gifts and rights are also kept alive. The *zawiya*, and all who participate in its functions, are thus living records of history. The Berbers are a people many times conquered, and even now exist as a Moroccan subculture. Maintaining stories of the past maintains who they are, and also, in this case, their livelihood. Of all the *zawiyas* discussed here, *Zawiya Si Abdesalaam* is not the largest, oldest, or most influential, yet it is the best preserved and kept. The village relies on Si Abdesalaam as more than a founder, he is their past and present - where they came from

defines who they are today.

Zawiya Amhawsh

The old adage speaks truth, "the more things change, the more things stay the same." Various *zawiyas* have been mentioned, and their evolution of religious practices examined. This last *zawiya*, the *Zawiya Amhawsh*, is an old *zawiya* situated far outside the city of Khenifra, visited by the Berbers who dwell in the nearby mountains. A simple description of the facility, its heritage, and modern day operation appears an adequate finale to the journey through various Middle Atlas *zawiyas*.

A small building sits on the side of the road, amidst red, arid hills rolling outward from the city of Khenifra. The existence of this structure has no apparent reason; the shelves inside hold only a few items for sale and, while the appearance of broken chairs and tilting tables are reminiscent of a cafe, no one lingers over mint tea. This cafe-shop resides on the furthest point accessible by public road to the *Zawiya Amhawsh*, which sits high in the hills behind the cafe. Along the path to *Zawiya Amhawsh* ancient and modern cultures merge. Near the path's steepest grade, sheep can be seen traipsing merrily to a natural spring, built into a trough. Just past this water hole a whitewashed building, marked by the drawing of a blue telephone, indicates an available phone. *Zawiya Amhawsh* commands a point higher than any other structure around, gazing onto olive groves, fields of wheat and the hills which roll northward to Khenifra. The vantage point of *Zawiya Amhawsh* sets it apart almost as much as its structure and appearance.

Three green, ornately barred windows face the path leading down to the road and cafe. Like other buildings in the area, the primary color of the *zawiya* is white, yet below the windows a distinguishing yellow is seen. Structurally, the *zawiya* has no thatched, overhanging roof like those seen on the buildings around it, but a concrete roof. Claiming four-hundred years of

existence, *Zawiya Amhawsh* maintains authority and prestige, manifested in prime location and originality. Approximately 15 meters from the *zawiya's* entrance grow a series of long needed bushes on either side of the path. Knots are tied in these bushes, an anonymous guestbook of all who venture forth in hopes of *maraboutic baraka*. Berber people still revere the power of a "friend of Allah," evidenced by the visitors to and emphasis on *Zawiya Amhawsh's* care.

Berber holy men in the Middle Atlas frequently dealt with the legitimate "Arab" governments in the Moroccan plains; Sidi Amhawsh and his descendents are no exception. Family history, related to anyone willing to listen, records Amhawsh's descendants as privileged to provide one person per family as a *qaid*, or governor with authority from the "Arab" or "French" government.⁷² Sidi Amhawsh himself, also served the people of this region in this manner. The responsibilities of the *qaid*, also known as a *moqadem*, are similar to that of a *marabout*, but primarily different in the source of power.⁷³ A *marabout*, as has been seen, is revered for his *baraka*. A *qaid*, or *moqadem*, is feared because of his authority from the government. Under French colonial rule each authority figure sat in mediation for the tribes immediately around them. *Qaids* mediated as official judges, responsible for a designated area. *Marabout*, according to the fame of their *baraka*, settled any dispute brought to them - regardless of the territory represented. The family of Sidi Amhawsh emphasized the connection between their *qaid-ship* and Morocco's present dynasty, the Alawids, as well as Sidi Amhawsh's status of *marabout*.

Since the 2003 bombings in Casablanca, extra security is provided for the shrine. The shrine to Sidi Amhawsh, saint honored by the *zawiya*, is one of importance to all Morocco (so asserted by the saintly family which resides there). Sidi Amhawsh left his home, near the present day *zawiya* site, to study at Tamghrat, near the town of Ouarzazate. There in Tamghrat, Sidi Amhawsh studied under Hamid ben Asher, fulfilling the scholarly requirements to be a *marabout*,

⁷² See vocabulary page in index for further definition of "*qaid*."

⁷³ See vocabulary page in index for further definition of "*moqadem*."

and returned home. Sidi Amhawsh acquired *maraboutic* acclaim from the expression of his *baraka*, and pride from the siring of six sons, and, consequently six saintly families. According to legend, Sidi Amhawsh did not die in the area where his tomb, shrine, and *zawiya* now stand, but upon his death immediately transferred his saintly *baraka* to that specific location. Thus the *zawiya* is not only a position of authority - through the *qaid-ship* of *maraboutic* families, but also of *maraboutic* power, as the final resting place of a revered holy man. Three to four men of this expansive family are required to spend the night in the *zawiya*, to keep watch over it. Visitors, pilgrims, and those in need of healing are also welcome to take hospitality. In other, smaller *zawiya*'s this policy would be physically impossible; *Zawiya Amhawsh*, however boasts an impressively larger structure.

The building that houses Sidi Amhawsh's shrine is all that can first be seen of the *zawiya*. Behind this central building other dwellings can be seen, as well as a constant flux of men, women, and children moving between these structures. Steps lead up into the shrine, protected by a sturdy wood door and set apart by a mosaic border of blue and white. Large Berber rugs carpet the floor, and smaller rugs of sheepskin are stacked next to the door as opportunities for further comfort. Bags and boxes of gifts are heaped haphazardly against a wall, left perhaps by modern-day seekers of *maraboutic baraka*. Thick, white, square pillars formed a lane down the middle of the building; Sidi Amhawsh's tomb occupies a space between, and perpendicular to these pillars. The tomb, covered in a beautiful green cloth, rises up as the prominent focus of the room. Centered on the wall behind the tomb is a large picture of the present King of Morocco. Women and children sit grouped in the middle of the room, sipping mint tea and occasionally whispering to a neighbor. The men lay sprawled against sheepskin mounds along the edges of the room, gazing out the windows. All are segregated and reverent in the shrine.

Outside the shrine hosting Sidi Amhawsh, children play and run, old men argue and wildly gesture to make points and all visitors are heartily welcomed. Sheepskins rugs are displayed for visitors to rest on, and mint tea with bread, sweetened by butter or honey, is served

while the Amhawsh family, friends, and visitors converse. Offerings for prayers by the saint are common, and usually take the form of a live chicken. A meal of this chicken is made, the *marabout* family and the pilgrim who provided the chicken enjoy the meal together. Such an offering secures both the prayers of Sidi Amhawsh's living descendants and the blessings of *baraka* from the saint himself. The reputation of Sidi Amhawsh, and his *zawiya*, results in a steady stream of worshipers with offerings.

Dusk falls each night over the valley into which *Zawiya Amhawsh* peers. People come daily to pay their respects to the marabout, and ask for his *baraka*. Men guard the *zawiya* nightly, perpetuating the ties of family and heritage. *Zawiya Amhawsh* is representative of a people's past, and an expression of that same people's present. This is the picture of a *zawiya* in the Middle Atlas today.

Other Individual Holy Man Stories

These stories were garnered during a few weeks of travel across the Middle Atlas and are treasured pieces of oral history.

The Khenifra Holy Man

Tale as told to me by Samira, the employee of Stephanie ----- who also served as the translator.

Sidi B ----- as a boy was known simply as a thief, yet he had, as this tale shall show, great *baraka*. One day, in the region of Khenifra, a woman great with child came near to where men were sacrificing. A cow had been sacrificed to Allah and was just ready to be cut and distributed among the men. The woman with child thought of how good it would be for the child she carried if she ate some of the meat sacrificed to Allah. With humility and down-cast eyes the lady requested a small portion of the cow's meat. Now, everyone in that region is taught that a woman great with child should have whatever she asks for, should it prove obtainable. These men, however, knew that giving this woman meat would mean less for them, and they refused to grant her request.

A young boy, at that time known only as a thief, had witnessed the entire exchange and grew righteously angry. In quiet authority, the boy-thief addressed the men, "You who have refused to grant this honored woman's request should repent of this wrong and share what you have with her." The men laughed at the boy-thief and again refused to share any meat from the cow. Once more the boy-thief addressed the men, "I see one more chance for you to wash away the darkness with which Allah beholds your selfishness. If you do not share this meat your sacrifice will not be accepted and no one will partake from the cow's meat." Only seeing an ill-reputed young boy the men again laughed and refused to part with any of the cow's meat. At this

reaction the boy-thief walked to the sacrificed cow and slapped it with his hand. Immediately the cow was restored to life and sauntered away - giving its meat to no one. The men who had refused to share were shamed before Allah, and the woman great with child, although deprived of cow's meat, was restored in honor.

Even to this day Sidi B ---- is remembered and honored as a boy-thief with great *baraka* and compassion. People travel to the shrine of this thief-saint in order to pray to Allah, and to honor the memory of one who had a close friendship with Allah, Sidi B -----.

The Tufstalt Holy Man

As told to me by Samira, employee of Stephanie ----, who also served as translator.

Hear, O listener of the courage found in one most favored by Allah himself. Regard, O man, woman, and child, the virtuous nature of Sidi -----, humble holy man of Tufstalt and Ain Leuh. This is the tale of how Sidi ---- ended a dishonorable war and brought peace to the people in the Middle Atlas Mountains. Back in the days long before our fathers were children, War feasted on the people of the Middle Atlas. Its hungry gaze constantly pursued new places to devour, and, O unlucky ones!, came to rest on the peaceful mountain slopes near the towns of Tufstalt and Ain Leuh. Long had the small mountain tribes been peaceful, too long. No longer did the men of Ain Leuh and Tufstalt remember the dance of War.

War, nonetheless, came to the simple villages and demanded notice. Unable to ignore the drums and chants of War, the men of Tufstalt and Ain Leuh came together. Though courage and virtue abounded among the peaceful farmers and artisans assembled for the defense of their homes, the force was small. Barely weapons enough to outfit half of those gathered had been procured. Despite so terrible a situation, the men of Tufstalt and Ain Leuh stood together in

bravery against the ravages of War. The day of battle dawned. Those with horses swung astride. Towards an enormous enemy marched the combined strength of Tufstalt and Ain Leuh.

The mass of War had barely become discernable faces and figures when Sidi ---- broke ahead of the main force. Sidi ---- and his faithful steed swiftly outdistanced the men of Tufstalt and Ain Leuh, rapidly approaching the enemy. Alone did Sidi ---- and his horse face the destruction of War, no sword, knife, or stone accompanied them. Yet they were not completely alone, for the great *baraka* of Sidi ---- rode with him. As the devouring hordes of War looked to this simple man of Allah racing toward them his *baraka* filled them with indescribable terror. Made mighty because of his humility before Allah, Sidi ---- single-handedly caused the entire force of War to turn and flee. The people of Tufstalt and Ain Leuh were saved.

Great rejoicing followed the victory of the holy man, and at his death a tomb was erected in his memory. To this day Sidi ---- is revered for staving off War and maintaining Peace. Many give honor to him and his great *baraka* at his final resting place.

The Holy Man of Zawiya Oued Ifrane

Tale as told to me by Mohammed Benghrib, Berber resident of Azrou, Morocco.

Long ago, far longer than even our fathers might recall, lived a humble servant of Allah. This Sidi made his dwelling in the shadow of a limestone cliff, and gave his life and lineage to the people who also dwelt in that region. Great was his *baraka*, and well was he remembered in the times following his death. One certain family was held dearly in his debt for a kindness no longer remembered, except in its great virtue. This family did not linger in the shadow of the limestone cliff, but as generations past moved to the great city of Fez. It was not to be forgotten, however, the great kindness of the holy man. Long after the people who continued to dwell in the shadow

of the limestone cliff had forgotten the deeds of Allah's friend, this family in Fez honored his name.

A day came when the fortunes of this family in Fez were greatly increased, and it seemed good in their eyes to honor the holy man of Allah who had been so kind to them. Plans were made for the construction of a large mosque for the village in the shadow of the limestone cliff. This mosque was to be constructed with the tomb of the holy man positioned prominently in the courtyard, honoring both Allah and his humble servant. Many men of the village were given the honor of constructing the mosque, yet the memory of the holy man had grown dim in their eyes, and they were careless in building the mosque to honor him and Allah. A wall of the holy man's shrine was torn down in the haste of workers who held no regard for the memory of Allah's friend. Great displeasure did this bring to the eyes of Allah who loved his saints and desired their honor.

A furious storm, unlike any told of in stories before or since, came upon the inhabitants of the village in the shadow of the limestone cliff. Great was the ruin which befell the inhabitants who had forgotten the memory of the Sidi. He who had labored so long on their behalf would no longer be forgotten. Not until half the village was destroyed and a full third of its people killed did the storm abate. As soon as the villagers were able the mosque to honor Allah and his holy man was reverently finished. To this day, the mosque and shrine stand in the shadow of the limestone cliff, a reminder to all who see it. Gracious is Allah to those who give him and his friends honor. Terrible is the wrath which disciplines forgetfulness and dishonor.

Index

Vocabulary

Agurram –

Agurram is the Tamazight word for a holy man. The plural of this word is *igurramen* and the feminine form (which is also the diminutive) is *tigurramt*. A holy man in the Tamazight tradition is extremely important and holds a revered place in society. (For further definition see *marabout*)

Awilya –

Usually translated as “friend of Allah.” According to David Montgomery Hart’s study among the Aith Waryaghar, *awilya* is a term that denotes much more than a man who is a “friend of Allah’s.” Hart found that among the Aith Waryaghar, *awilya* existed as a certain type of saint who had completed a rather impressive list of feats. First, the holy man who gained *awilya* status was a foreigner, he was above arbitrating disputes, he found springs, rode horses up the sides of cliffs, and he had flown to Mecca and back. According to the research examined thus far, there is no indication that the Middle Atlas Berbers developed an *awilya* category of *marabout*.

Azrou –

This town in the heart of the Middle Atlas is one of the oldest establishments in Morocco. Berber in origin, the town is named after a large rock formation in the middle of the town, *azrou* is the Tamagizht word for “rock.”

Baraka –

Sometimes translated as “blessing,” *baraka* is a word with no equivalent English translation. The term defines the physical, and magical, manifestation of a holy man’s relationship with Allah. A *marabout’s baraka* encompasses the holy man’s reputation, his miraculous deeds and powerful curses, his arbitration of disputes, his generosity and hospitality, and his piety. The *baraka* of a holy man can be seen, the healing of the blind, or merely felt, the protection from evil spirits. *Baraka* is pivotal to becoming a *marabout*, one will not be considered holy unless *baraka* is present.

Bled Mahkzan –

Most scholars of ethnographical bent use of this term (along with its counterpart – *bled siba*) in their study of the Berbers. Robert Montagne, Ernest Gellner, and Michael Brett are only a few examples who fall into this category. *Mahkzan* is described by Montagne as the “central government” (*bled* is a term simply denoting “place” or “land”). When *mahkzan* is used opposite of *siba* (a term that denotes dissidence – see *bled siba* for further definition), it gains all the people or tribes who are loyal or obedient to the central government.

Bled Siba –

Most scholars of ethnographical bent use of this term (along with its counterpart – *bled mahkzan*) in their study of the Berbers. Robert Montagne, Ernest Gellner, and Michael Brett are only a few examples who fall into this category. Gellner describes *siba* as the “outer circle” in Morocco’s political structure, composed of people or tribes who

refused to pay taxes, could never be contained, and constantly fought against the central government, or *bled mahkzan*. The term *siba* itself denotes dissidence or disobedience, and *bled* is the word for “place” or “land.”

Dhimmis –

This term *dhimmis*, or “protected peoples,” denotes a group of people who are Jewish, Zoroastrian, or Christian, and live in a Muslim held territory or nation. Islam regards adherents to these religions as “People of the Book” and often allowed them to continue their religious practices. In the cases where these religions were permissible, the Islamic government usually also exempted them from heavy taxes imposed on non-Muslims.

Marabout (agurram in Tamazight)–

Transliterated from the Arabic *muribat* (which means “men of the *ribat*” – *ribat* is the word for a wall or fortification specifically used in a holy war), *marabout* denotes a religious leader, set apart by holiness and spiritual power. In the Middle Atlas, *marabout* are the holy men upon which much of society hinges. The plural of *marabout* is *marabout*.

Moqadem –

In the High Atlas, the *moqadem* is one who has been elected leader of the area and is responsible for the peace of the region. When the French colonized Morocco, many Berber leaders, usually the *marabout*, took the position of *qaid* – a French governor

for a region. This position blended into the elected *moqadem* job, thus the two terms began to be used interchangeably. A *moqadem* of the Middle Atlas usually came from a *maraboutic* family, and usually filled the same job description, only as an official of the secular government rather than a holy man.

Qaid –

French governor of a region in Morocco under the Protectorate. The *qaid* was responsible for keeping peace and maintaining French rule in their particular region. Local leaders, such as *marabout*, were often recruited for this position. In some cases, *qaid*s such as the Glawi in the High Atlas overthrew French authority, but kept their position, ruling as dictators among their own people.

Sharifian –

Under Arab rule, it became important for rulers to prove their descent from the prophet. *Sharifs* (or *shurfa*) were those rulers (usually Berbers) who had legitimized their descent from the prophet. Whether from marrying into the lineage, or employing writers skilled in producing *sharifian* lineages, Moroccans who claimed *sharifian* status gained immediate power. The current dynasty in Morocco claims *sharifian* status, and used that status to displace the dynasty previous to them.

Shour –

The only encounter the author had with this term was during an interview in Morocco. According to Mohammed Benghrib, *shour* denotes black magic, and can only be cured by the *baraka* of a holy man.

Zawiya –

“A *zawiya* is a non-celibate monastery where a local holy man resides with his next of kin. Wayfarers may put up for the night, and it is also a place where the *Qu'ran* is explained to illiterate Berbers; may become a seat of learning in Arabic. A *zawiya* gradually develops into a settlement and focal point as prestige and power of the *marabout* and his lineage grow.” Definition by professor Micheal Peyron.

Works Cited

A History of World Societies to 1715 – Fifth Edition, Volume 1. Houghton Mifflin Company; New York: 2000.

Benghrib, Mohammed. In an interview with the author in Azrou, Morocco during July, 2004.

Brace, Richard M. *Morocco. Algeria. Tunisia.* Prentice–Hall, Inc.; New Jersey: 1964.

Brett, Michael, and Fentress, Elizabeth. *The Berbers.* Blackwell Publishing; Oxford: 1997.

Cohen, Mark I and Hahn, Lorna. *Morocco: Old Land, New Nation.* Frederick A. Prager; New York: 1966.

Eickelman, Dale F. *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center.* University of Texas Press; Austin: 1976.

Gellner, Ernest. *Saints of the Atlas.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson University of Chicago Press; Chicago: 1969

Hart, David Montgomery. *The Aith Waraghar of the Moroccan Rif: An Ethnography and History.* Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Inc.; The University of Arizona Press; Tucson, Arizona: 1976.

Montagne, Robert. *The Berbers, Their Social and Political Organization.* Trans. David Seddon, Frank Cass; London: 1931.

Nickerson, Jane Soames. *A Short History of North Africa from PreRoman Times to the Present.* Biblo and Tannen; New York: 1961.

Peyron, Michael. Professor at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco. Berber History and Culture Professor during Spring semester 2003.

Vinogradov, Amal R. “The Socio-Political Organization of a Berber ‘Taraf’ Tribe: Pre-Protectorate Morocco.” *Arab and Bebers. From Tribe to Nation in North Africa.* Eds. Ernest Gellner and Charles Micaud, Lexington Books – D.C. Heath and Company; Lexington: 1972.