

Special Feature: Holy Relics and Religious Commodities in Islam

Editor's Preface

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The title of the special feature in English is “Holy Relics and Religious Commodities in Islam.” It includes six articles; four of them are based on a paper with the same title, read at a joint seminar between the Center for Islamic Studies at Sophia University (SIAS), Center for Islamic Area Studies at Kyoto University (KIAS) and Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) at Toyo University’s Training Center in Atami in 2018, and the articles have been revised to reflect the questions and comments presented at the seminar.¹ We added two more papers by YASUDA Shin and Alexandre PAPAS & Ghulam SHAMS-UR-RAHMAN in this special feature. This joint seminar was organized by SIAS, KIAS, Kenan Rifai Center for Sufi Studies at Kyoto University, École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE), Groupe de Sociologie des religions et de la Laïcité (GSRL) and CNRS, and supported by the following projects; National Institutes for the Humanities (NIHU) for the Modern Middle East, Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A) “Structural Comprehension of Islamic Mysticism: Investigation into Sufism, Tariqa, Saint Cults Complex” (JSPS, Kyoto University), Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B) “Anthropological Studies on Veneration of Saints and Relics in the Mediterranean World” (JSPS, Sophia University), and Comparative Area Studies on Conflicts, Interactions, and Reconciliations between Islam and Other Religions Including Christianity (Sophia University Special Grant for Academic Research (Research in Priority Areas)). This is one of the activities of the research group studying “Sufism and Saint Veneration in Islam,” which was established in 1997 by AKAHORI Masayuki and TONAGA Yasushi. This group aims to focus on studies on Sufism, Tariqa, and Saint veneration (among other topics from adjacent fields such as Sayyid-sharif, popular Islam, Islamic studies, and Middle-Eastern studies) by conducting multidisciplinary research in fields such as Islamic thought, history, and anthropology. The six articles in this special feature also deal with different times and disciplines from the case of various area: India, Pakistan, Turkic and Indo-Persian Areas, Damascus and Cairo, Syria and Tunisia.

In my understanding, it has become essential for this group to focus on material objects such as relics and commodities in recent years for two reasons: first, as I mentioned in my paper in this special issue, studies on material objects, called “material turn” or “material-

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¹ Some of them have been revised to reflect the questions and comments presented at a session entitled “Religious Practices Using Commodities in Consumer Societies” and “Visits to Sainly Places in the Age of Globalization” in the World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies (WOCMES), held at Sevilla University in 2018.

cultural turn,” have become one of the major topics in human sciences in the past few decades. There is one thought that attention to material objects in religious anthropology has been inspired by discussions among anthropologists of Islam, such as Clifford Geertz, Talal Asad, and Saba Mahmood [cf. Hazard 2013]. Anthropological methods to understand the lives of ordinary Muslims have a strong affinity with these analytical perspectives focusing on materials, whether based on Geertz’ concept of the symbol of things or on Asad and Mahmood’s concept of disciplines such as habits of the body.

The second reason is that the idea and practice of Sufism and Saint veneration have a strong connection with material objects. Despite the fact that all Muslims practice with things from the perspective of the concept of discipline, practices of Sufism and Saint veneration bring clarity gained from various material objects such as relics, tombs, mausoleums, commodities and sometimes, natural objects such as trees and stones. As Akahori argued, the existence of an abstract and invisible transcendent can be understood by ordinary Muslims through visible and tangible things and events [Akahori 2003]. In this sense, one of the issues of anthropological works of Islam is to view how Muslims experience transcendental power through material environments and contexts. Not only anthropological works but in discussing Islamic thought as well, Sufism has a potential to tolerate polytheistic thoughts and practices [cf. Tonaga 2004]. Thus, Sufism and Saint veneration are tolerant of the practices toward material objects, and this leads to the understanding of the diversity of Islamic practices. There are important implications to studying them in that some Islamic extremists such as Salafism deny the practices with material objects, for example, numerous saint mausoleums in the Middle East have been destroyed after the Arab Spring in 2011 by these extremist groups.

This special feature, which also focuses on various material things such as relics and commodities, is composed of six articles by NINOMIYA Ayako, Alexandre PAPAS and Ghulam SHAMS-UR-REHMAN, Thierry ZARCONI, Pierre-Jean LUIZARD, YASUDA Shin, and FUTATSUYAMA Tatsuro. Let me present the outline of each article below by quoting abstracts written by each of the contributors.

The first article of the feature is “Tension, Emotion, and Devotion: Master-Disciple Relationships and Consolidation of a *Ṭarīqa* in Medieval India” by NINOMIYA Ayako. This article discusses the process of consolidation of the Chishti *ṭarīqa* during 13th and 14th centuries. *Ṭarīqa* is usually defined as a group following a particular way (methods/practices) to go through the mystical path, mostly attributed to a famous sufi master. However, the consolidation of the Chishtis was seemingly prompted not by the establishment of a distinct methods/practice but rather by common practices of sufism, that is, the concept of a lineage implemented in the *bay‘a* formula and the devotional master-disciple relationship exemplified by Niẓām al-Dīn Awliyā’ in his gatherings. The article also experimentally applies a set of “thinking tools” of the Bourdieusian theory of practice, as part of the larger project to analyze

the development of sufism as a composite of social institution during the Delhi Sultanate.

The second article is titled “Neo-Traditional Sufism: The Books, the Shrine and the Relics of Sufi Barkat Ali in Faisalabad, Pakistan” by Alexandre PAPAS and Ghulam SHAMS-UR-REHMAN. This article discusses the case of Sufi Barkat Ali and his Sufi community in Faisalabad, in Pakistan’s Punjab. After tracing the life of Barkat Ali (1911–1997) thanks to a hagiography, we describe the institution he established, the Dar-ul-Ehsan, on the basis of a recent fieldwork that we have conducted in Pakistan. A main aspect of the master’s activity was his constant involvement in writing, publishing, and spreading material about various religious and mystical topics. More striking, the Dar-ul-Ehsan is characterized by three features: the creation of Quran Mahals (special rooms to preserve and pay homage to thousands of volumes of the holy book), a type of permanent *dhikr* performed at the shrine complex of Barkat Ali, and a collection of relics (*tabarrukat*) which are duly preserved at the Camp Dar-ul-Ehsan. All these elements suggest that we are dealing with what we call a neo-traditional form of Sufism, that is, a form different from both traditional Islamic mysticism and New Age Sufism insofar as neo-traditional Sufis adapt and renew but also exclude or reintroduce certain practices and principles. We argue that neo-traditional Sufism emerges from specific causes, in this case the particular socio-religious history of Faisalabad.

The third article is Thierry ZARCONÉ’s “Shrines (*Qadamgāh*) and Relics Dedicated to Imam ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib in the Turkic and Indo-Persian Areas.” The aim of this article is to explore the role of shrines called *qadamgāhs* or *qadamjāys*, that is, stepping places, in the Turkic and Indo-Persian regions, primarily those dedicated to Imām ‘Alī, the son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad and, secondarily, to other Shi’i imams and Sufi saints. These shrines are places of pilgrimage and house many relics, among which the most important are, first, the footprints, handprints, or fingerprints of ‘Alī and others; second, the hoof prints of ‘Alī’s mule on stones or rocks; and, third, the rocks or stones touched by his sword or that have come into contact with some part of his body when he performed his prayers.

The fourth article is Pierre-Jean LUIZARD’s “Damascus and Cairo: Two Heads of Husayn for Two Kinds of Worship.” This paper discusses about the same relic of Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet of Islam, which is the object of two contrasting kinds of veneration from pilgrims and visitors in Damascus and Cairo. The head of Husayn in Damascus is within the Umayyad Mosque, whereas, in Cairo, it stands within the Imam Al-Husayn Mosque in front of Al-Azhar Islamic University. In Damascus, wailing Shi’a pilgrims from Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan mourn the martyr of their Imam killed at the Battle of Karbala that occurred in 680. In contrast, in Cairo, the mawlid commemorating the birth of Husayn depicts a huge and merry festival organized mainly by the Sufi brotherhoods.

The fifth article is YASUDA Shin’s “Divine Materiality of the Vanished *Ṣaḥāba*: Religious Commodification of Ḥujr b. ‘Adī al-Kindī in Syria.” The article examines the

materiality of the holy relics seen in the Islamic commodification of Ḥujr b. ‘Adī al-Kindī at ‘Adrā during the Syrian political crisis. The religious commodification of Ḥujr b. ‘Adī al-Kindī has been promoted through the development of religious tourism industry in the country. Ever since the political crisis occurred in Syria in 2011, some Islamic militias have been rapidly demolishing the holy relics and the elements representing the religious heritage within the country. The shrine of Ḥujr b. ‘Adī al-Kindī at ‘Adrā was also demolished, leading to the holy relics losing their materiality. In this situation, the materiality of Ḥujr b. ‘Adī al-Kindī was attested through the construction of a religious context embedded in the material in the form of narratives and interpretations of his imputrescible body in digital space, and which is referred to as Allāh’s *baraka* and *karāma*. With the digital space providing an opportunity for continuous production and consumption of the vanished *ṣaḥāba*, religious commodification has been promoted among the stakeholders, enhancing individual piety and faith in the process. In conclusion, therefore, the divine materiality of holy relics has been reconstructed through the process of their religious commodification involving mass production and consumption of holy relics in the field.

The sixth and last article is FUTATSUYAMA Tatsuro’s “Thinking Islam Through Things : From the Viewpoint of Materiality of the Qur’ān.” The aim of this article is to study several perspectives from which to consider Islam through material things, focusing on the Qur’ān, based on the cases introduced in some previous research and the cases I have experienced during my field research in Tunisia. This paper presents several points of view to consider the relationship between the Qur’ān and materiality; first, the issue of two opposing factors in the Qur’ān: text — material, in other words, immutable verses to recite and material things described. Second, various ways of handling the text of the Qur’ān properly. Third, things described in al-Qur’ān based on the cases of *baraka* and olive in Tunisia. These cases reveal importance of materiality of/in the Qur’ān and lead us to reconsider the connection between text and material things in Islam.

We hope that this special feature, focusing on material objects such as relics and commodities, will stimulate further discussions on the reconsideration of Sufism, Tariqa, Saint veneration, and Islamic studies. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to these organizations and to the members of the joint research group.

Reference

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